

PANELISTS DEBATE

Thomas Gomart, Director of Ifri

To continue, I would like to ask the panelists two questions, because there is this disagreement between Mr. Akita and Renaud Girard about China. For Mr. Akita, China is in a better position, while Renaud thinks that in a sense, China is in a worse position. My first question is for the three other panelists, after AUKUS how do you assess the Chinese position; is it better or worse? The second question is addressed to Mr. Akita and Renaud Girard. In line with the last words from Professor Wang Jisi about Taiwan. You did not elaborate on Taiwan in your comments and I would be interested to know your views on that. Maybe we could start with you, Ambassador Lee, on your assessment of China's position.

Lee Hye Min, Senior Advisor of KIM & CHANG, former G20 Sherpa, former Deputy Minister for Trade of Korea, former Chief Negotiator for the Korea-EU FTA

In my opinion, I do not think there is a change of policy of China and it is a kind of anticipated path. Biden stressed the importance of enlisting partners and allies in its combat against China, even before he took office, so that is what we anticipated. What I find interesting is the dramatic change in the United Kingdom's position. The UK was the first European country to support AIDB a month ahead of France, Germany and Italy. However, they have now joined the United States' camp in dealing with China and I think that is because of the Hong Kong issue. I think that China is now trying to avoid isolation and one way of doing this is to apply to the CPTPP, even knowing that it will not be possible for China to join because it requires unanimous consent for new members. At this moment it is impossible that the TPP-11 countries would give a unanimous support to China. However, China has nothing to lose by applying for the CPTPP because if it is denied, it is the fault of the CPTPP that refuses China's efforts to join the international work on further liberalization of trade. With regard to AUKUS, China will continue its efforts to get out of isolation.

Thomas Gomart

Thank you very much. Mr. Narayanan, in your opinion, on the first question, do you think China's position is better at the moment?

Mayankote Kelath Narayanan, Executive Chairman of CyQureX Systems Pvt. Ltd., former Senior Advisor and National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India

I have a rather conflicted position. China is strong but I also think it is at one of its peak moments. I do not think that the United States or the rest of the world are going to be the problem for China, but rather certain inner tensions within the Chinese Communist Party that are not yet apparent. In some ways, I see Xi Jinping's position as being like Mao's in 1958,

1959. There are tensions and many things that Xi is doing are seen as difficult by the democratic world. However, there are also many in the Chinese Communist Party who feel that in a bid to run through all sort of ideas, plans for his own position for the future, his own thoughts for the future, if I may say so, there are tensions. I think it would be worth the democratic world seeing that rather than AUKUS, the Quad and all the trade tensions. If we can widen the fault lines within the Chinese Communist Party, which are not too apparent and there are more detailed scholars than me, how do we use that and exploit it? I think that is probably far better than sending five squadrons of planes, etc. I think there is something that I have not seen – I live in India. I do not see much scholarly discussion on the inner workings of the Chinese Communist Party tensions. We used to get much more in the past but from what I see there is something there and I think it is well worth, and maybe this could be the theme for a future session of the World Policy Conference.

Thomas Gomart

I return to Professor Wang Jisi for your assessment on this question of whether China is in a better or more difficult position?

Wang Jisi, President of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies at Peking University

I think China is in a difficult position to expand its influence, although its material power is very strong.

Thomas Gomart

Thank you. Moving to my second question, which is about Taiwan. Renaud, could you go first?

Renaud Girard, Senior reporter and war correspondent at *Le Figaro*

At one point, we thought that the Sino-American rivalry was simply due to Trump. However, we ultimately see that Biden is pursuing Trump's policy towards China to the full. This is hence a rivalry that is part of a great historical movement. I think, in fact, that in this great historical match, especially with the signing of this AUKUS treaty, China has lost the first set. But this it is a game of tennis played over at least five sets, like at Wimbledon. And China has not lost the match.

I don't know if Xi Jinping will want to stay in power beyond 2027. I think if he does, he will have to change the Chinese Communist Party's statutes. But that won't really bother him as he has already changed the constitution. I think his main goal – his legacy to China from his time in power – is getting back Taiwan. I even think his attitude towards this borders on obsession. Otherwise, his aerial manoeuvres, this fairly frequent breach of Taiwanese airspace by Chinese fighter jets, would make no sense at all.

However, I do not think that China wants to fight in this conflict. Since Sun Tzu, China has wanted to win wars without fighting. So I cannot imagine a Battle of the Coral Sea or a Battle

of the Midway for control of Taiwan. Instead, I see a strategy with two focal points. The first of these is obviously a “fifth column” inside Taiwan thanks to the Kuomintang party, which is weakening against Ms. Tsai's party but nevertheless highly present – I believe Mainland China has a genuine policy towards the Kuomintang party in Taiwan. The second is a policy of patience: “We Chinese will wait for the Americans to get tired. We saw them tire in Indochina and then finally abandon it, after arriving in 1955”, as told in the novel *A Quiet American*. “They left in 1975 and dropped everything. We Chinese saw them get tired in Mesopotamia and Afghanistan. Finally, we saw the Americans give Iraq to Iran, after the invasion of Iraq. And we thank them, as they just gave us Afghanistan on a silver platter, with all its rare metals and lithium, which will allow us to carve out our own Silk Road through Afghanistan.”

I think that the Chinese tactic is simply to show some strategic patience and wait for the Americans to withdraw for one reason or another, which may be related to American domestic politics. The Taiwanese will then understand that they have no option but to join China and negotiate as much independence as they can. China has built an extremely strong navy, whose aim is to intimidate. And its cyber warfare is ongoing: the Chinese are engaged in a permanent cyber war, not only against Australia at the moment but also to spy in France and the United States. However, this is a strategy concerned with the balance of power. And I do not think that we are heading towards a “hot war” – the type of naval warfare that we saw during the first Pacific war. This second Pacific war, which has already begun, is a war of the balance of power; a war of intimidation that uses cyber warfare and whose goal is for the Taiwanese to hand themselves over to China, simply due to this balance of power.

Thomas Gomart

Mr. Akita, what are your views on Taiwan?

Hiroyuki Akita, Commentator of *Nikkei*, Japan

Before I go to Taiwan, let me briefly elaborate on why I think China is in a favorable position. If China were a person, it has big muscles, a lot of money and it lives in a more favorable location, so I think Beijing is in a favorable position. However, China has also a full of problems in its own family. As someone said, there is a shortage of energy and food, water and a lack of a social welfare system. I think that, in the long run, China will become a declining empire and there will be instability caused by its fragile social system. Then, China will lose its favorability against the US. Therefore, China tries to do everything to achieve its goal before it will decline.

On Taiwan, I do not think that China has enough guaranteed capabilities to win a full-scale war. China can destroy Taipei or land on Taiwan soil, but it does not have sufficient military power to take over Taiwan, by resisting all kinds of counterattacks from the US or other allies. I think that there are two likely scenarios. First scenario is a similar to the Russian hybrid war against Crimea in 2014. Under this scenario, China would conduct massive cyberattacks or cut undersea cables to cause disruption in Taiwan. Or they could spread fake news so that they can gradually weaken the Taiwanese political entity and find a chance to annex Taiwan in the future.



Another scenario is an equivalent to a war-break between Japan and China in 1937. Japan and China did not intend to fight a full-scale war initially. But, some conflict occurred near the Marco Polo Bridge, a suburb of Beijing, and being triggered by it, both countries gradually engaged in a full-scale war. There is a risk that the US and China could enter a war without intending to do so, due to miscalculations.

Thomas Gomart

Thank you very much. We have come to the end of this session and I would like to thank all the panelists for their contributions. I think it was very substantive because we had a view from Europe, Japan, Korea, India, the US and China.