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Are China and the U.S. Missing Opportunities?

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Editor's Note: As more and more countries become aware that China is starting to assume more global responsibilities, they are adjusting their policies accordingly, since they can also find tremendous potential for partnership with China. What can China offer to help solve global problems and contribute to balanced growth? How can more countries benefit from China's development and therefore work with China in sincerity? Fu Ying, Chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, addressed the future of China's relationship with the world at the Sanya Forum 2015 in south China's Hainan Province on December 12, 2015. The following is an edited translation of her speech:

Some describe today's China as in an era of "trivial matters," where people have deeper pockets and more leisure time. From online debates, one may find that what worries young people are things like: Should I risk being extorted to help up an elderly person who fell on the ground? Or, for the Chinese lunar New Year (Spring Festival), should I visit my own mother or my mother-in-law?

Surely, we have even bigger issues to tackle. At the conference held in late November 2015 by the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee on poverty alleviation, discussions were centered on how to lift the over 70 million Chinese who are living below the country's current poverty line of 2,300 yuan (\$355) in annual income out of poverty over the next five years. To this end, the CPC Central Committee has developed comprehensive arrangements,

which includes, among other things, production facilitation and more medical and educational resources for the poverty-stricken population.

Meanwhile, we can see from television that there is chaos in parts of today's world. There are countries torn by conflicts and wars and refugees driven out of their homes. Major terrorist attacks have stricken fear into people's hearts. We understand that peace and stability can never be overvalued. The rapid growth China has enjoyed over the last three decades and the well-being of the Chinese people today are essentially the results of the sound political and security environments we have managed to maintain.

The year 2015 marked the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. It is also the first year of the second century since the beginning of the World War I. Humankind witnessed over the past century two global hot wars and one cold one, and the endless conflicts and wars have taught us deep lessons. Standing at the doorstep of another historic chapter, we need to reevaluate our options: to reaffirm our worldwide commitment to peace and development, or allow conflicts and turmoil to reign and spell doom for humankind?

The year 2015 saw much tension, presenting the world with signs of change. Perhaps, the word "divergence" can best portray current international politics as confrontational factors are either emerging or reappearing.

First, the threat of terrorism to the civilized world has commanded global attention. With non-conventional security risks becoming the primary concern, people across the world are getting a clearer view of the situation.



Senior officials attend the Seventh China-U.S. Strategic and Economic Dialogue and the Sixth China-U.S. High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange in Washington, D.C., on June 23, 2015 (XINHUA)

I remember when 9/11 took place in 2001, we described terrorism with a Taoist quote, "a semblance great, the shadow of a shade" (*daxiang wuxing*). Now, terrorism has moved out of the shadows, challenging the civilized world in stronger and more visible ways. However, in terms of response, the international community has yet to forge effective solutions.

The Syrian crisis, for one, is a grave outcome resulting from too many complicated and entangled factors, such as big power rivalry, religious conflicts and sectarian feuds, all mixing together and making it next to impossible to even try to solve.

Recently, the most asked question is whether the international community is countering terrorism in the right way. Within China, debates are also taking place as to whether China should get involved and if yes, how? As a matter of fact, China has put in significant diplomatic efforts in helping untie the knot through a political solution. For example, the UN-backed Geneva Conference on Syria was first proposed by China.

The more important question is, can the international community recognize and acknowledge the real political changes underway and agree on collective efforts to ensure global common security?

Second, as traditional geopolitical rivalry manifests itself again, the world's major powers see more diverging than converging interests among themselves. For instance, the tension caused by geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the United States as well as its European allies was demonstrated in the Ukrainian crisis, even leading some to ask whether a new cold war had started.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the United States intends to fuel another geopolitical contest by entangling itself in regional disputes in the South China Sea and enhancing its military alignment. The United States' biggest concern in the Asia-Pacific is the so-called "power shift," or the possibility of being "pushed out" of the region by China. Such a mindset has been interpreted as the U.S. meddling in the problems China has with its neighbors, which risks elevating territorial disputes into strategic rivalry.

One example is of the U.S. warships coming near to and aircraft flying over the Chinese islands in the South China Sea. Such testing of China's resolve and tolerance will significantly increase the risk of accidental confrontation, which is against the two countries' common interest in maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea. If this does not constitute a security hazard, what does? When entangled this way, how could the two countries confront together the bigger and real challenges the world faces?

I believe that today's major power rivalries are, to a large extent, part of a prolonged ending of the Cold War. Though the world has moved on, there will always be those who cling to old ways and pretend that all new problems were just variations of those of the past.



Visiting Chinese naval sailors are greeted by their U.S. counterparts upon their arrival in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 13, 2015 (XINHUA)

Third, on the economic front, we found divergence in both growth and cooperation. In 2015, the U.S. economy picked up significantly. As the United States registered a quarterly growth rate of 2-3 percent, it brought down unemployment and maintained its lead in innovation. Such a performance stood out in the Western world where other economies did not fare so well. However, it has been generally noted that the momentum gained by the world's largest economy has done little to boost global recovery. On the other hand, people have been worried about the possible "spillover" effect of the U.S. Federal Reserve's interest rate hike, waiting for the other boot to drop. (The U.S. Federal Reserve decided on December 16, 2015, to raise benchmark interest rate by 25 basis points, the first in nine years since 2006.) Some have described the U.S. recovery as "sucking vitality from the rest of the world" as is seen is happening at the cost of capital reversal and market decline in Europe and emerging economies, and could actually weaken the prospects of a global recovery.

At the same time, the Doha round of the World Trade Organization's multilateral trade negotiations appears to exist in name only. The United States, in order to maintain dominance in global economic affairs, has pushed harder on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreements to set new rules without

including all the major economies. One cannot help but suspect that the United States, instead of tearing walls down, is building new ones. Does that mean that in the future the global economic order will again move toward exclusive blocs?

Fourth, on the cultural front, while globalization has enabled the free, open and convenient flow of people, the results of such openness are now being examined. It seems that the trends of cultural divergence and cultural convergence are struggling with each other. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourists around the world make more than 1.1 billion visits every year across global destination. In 2014, the Chinese people alone made over 100 million overseas visits. With so many globetrotters, how to keep them safe is a big challenge for every government.

Developed countries have long upheld the banner of human rights, which are also the core principle of their refugee and immigration policies. However, such values are being challenged when confronting terrorism and extremism. European countries are reflecting upon whether they are able to deliver on what they have preached. However, if we shut the doors of communication among different regions and groups and allow "deglobalization" to become the mainstream of this era, will the world be divided again? And how is that a safer world?

Globalization gained full speed following the end of the Cold War. Capital, technology, talents and labor have been flowing from the developed centers of Western countries to other areas. China is a beneficiary of this trend as it has enjoyed its reform and opening-up goals on the back of globalization and has established itself as a crucial part of global wealth accumulation.

At the same time, we are also witnessing the impact of globalization on traditional structures. Fragmentation has been observed in international relations, such as in the distribution of hotspot issues, communication and people's perceptions. How to respond to the "crisis of fragmentation" has become a major concern for the international community.

Reasons run deep behind such fragmentations. Although the Western-centered world order greatly contributed to progress and growth, it failed to make timely adjustments as emerging economies rose and the old and new challenges became entrenched. It has not only failed to provide an interest distribution scheme that is complete and balanced while also reflecting new economic realities, but also lacks effective ways to manage or solve ongoing problems. It is like an adult in children's clothes; no wonder all the uneasiness.

The United States, as the leading power of the existing world order, made one major strategic mistake after another. Its invasion into Iraq in 2003 left the country in chaos. In 2010, the West embraced the so-called "Arab Spring" after the political upheaval in Tunisia. But the Arab Spring opened a Pandora's box, with old orders breaking down, but new orders not yet in place to provide peace and security to citizens. With social and economic unrest still rampant in many countries throughout the Middle East, in most cases the situation has yet to be resolved.

What is more, the financial crisis of 2008 wreaked havoc on Western countries and created a global recession. Some within America refer to the crisis as a "strategic disaster."

Now, the United States is trying to get out of the mess by proposing a "pivot to Asia." However, by suddenly making China a larger focus of their foreign policy, the United States has fueled distrust between the two countries. Will it turn out to be another strategic mistake on the part of the United States? Will it cost the two countries the chances to work together in addressing global problems?

The principal challenge of our time may be a deficit in responsibility. We live in an era of shared risks, when major problems demand global solutions.

But there is no need to get overly pessimistic, as the international community has already started to explore solutions. The G20, for one, has played a crucial role in combating financial crises. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank both approved a major realignment of voting shares to developing countries. And recently the IMF decided to bring the Chinese currency, the yuan, into its Special Drawing Rights basket.

At the same time, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank initiated by China is aimed at compensating for insufficiencies in existing international financing mechanisms. Moreover, negotiations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership free trade agreement, involving China and other 15 countries, are also well under way. The bilateral agreement between China and the United States on climate change has laid a solid foundation for the success of the UN climate change conference in Paris. All these efforts bring home the relevance and vision of the "community of common destiny" proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping and promise a brighter future of global governance with a stronger presence of the developing world.

Now, China, as one of the most important variables in the world today, should assume more international responsibilities as we have outgrown the period when we could focus only on our own growth. We should take initiatives to develop a sound international environment. In particular, we need to seriously consider how to safeguard world peace and stability with the rest of the world.

When Dr. Henry Kissinger was in Beijing recently, I arranged a meeting for him with some young Chinese citizens. When talking about the changing world order, many attendees criticized the United States. Dr. Kissinger listened to them with great patience, and then asked, "If you were given the chance to run the world now, what kind of international structure would you have in mind?" There was no answer. Obviously, we are still at the stage of feeling dissatisfied and more ready to criticize, than proposing, a new design.

We need more specific ideas. As more and more international responsibilities fall on our shoulders earlier than we have anticipated, and as more countries have come to the understanding that China offers great opportunities now and in the future, what ideas and public goods does China have to offer to address global issues and ensure balanced world development? How can we reassure other countries of the benefits that China's development can bring about and persuade them to work with us in sincerity and with mutual trust?

While interacting with the rest of the world, China also needs to find a way to make itself better understood. What we are doing now in international communications is far from enough, and it ultimately comes upon ourselves to convey to the world what our country's purpose is and what the Chinese people's dream is. The world is now very interested in listening to China's stories and the window is open for us, we need to raise awareness and improve our ability in better communicating with the world.