

“US foreign policy might draw China into catastrophic military action,” Interview with Ararat Kostanian

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“We believe that the Chinese and American people have the wisdom, the opportunity and capability to find a way for peaceful coexistence. But China will not allow others to bully it and the historic process of China's national rejuvenation cannot be held back by anyone or any force,” said Sun Yeli, a Communist Party spokesman in Beijing on October 15.

The US has been committed to providing Taiwan with the means of defending itself, although it does not officially recognize the island as a country, while the US maintains diplomatic relations with Beijing.

With increased US rhetoric, including high level Congressional delegations visiting Taiwan, the tensions between the two superpowers is at fever-pitch. Steven Sahiounie of MidEastDiscourse interviewed Ararat Kostanian to gain insight into the pressing issues between the US and China.

Ararat Kostanian is an expert on Middle Eastern studies and International Relations. He currently works as a Junior Fellow and a PhD candidate at the Institute of Oriental Studies, National Academy of Science of Armenia, and has published essays and articles on Political Islam, Turkey, the Syrian War, and the emergence of multipolar world and on Armenian foreign policy.

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Steven Sahiounie (SS): Chinese President Xi Jinping has addressed the Chinese Communist Party Congress, and is seeking his third term as leader. When he restated the opposition to Taiwan independence he received a great deal of applause in support of the position. The Biden administration has continued to support Taiwan in an increasingly threatening display of antagonism. In your opinion, how far will China go to prevent Taiwan independence?

Ararat Kostanian (AK): The Chinese officials and the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping have mentioned repeatedly that China sees the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland as an evolutionary process that must be achieved under peaceful manners. And that concept does not belong to the Chinese government or country's elite per se, but also a belief rooted in the Chinese population entirely. Moreover, it is necessary that the U.S. administration is performing a double standard on the Taiwan issue as well. While the U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and other senior officials have affirmed that the U.S. does not support Taiwan's independence; conversely, an American senior official with a long history of anti-China rhetoric such as Nancy Pelosi, pays a visit to Taiwan that not only fueled the tension between the United States and China, but also the visit was meant to provoke China and drive the Chinese government to take military action by using force against Taiwan. Thus, Taiwan in the eyes of the American policy makers is a card to not only contain China and alienate its regional influence, but also a territory where a great conflict with China could occur.

The scenario played by the United States on the Taiwan is very similar to what is happening in Ukraine currently. Unfortunately, the United States is not acting as a mature and responsible superpower in such an uncertain global condition where pandemics and its negative impacts are not vanished, the social paranoias are rising, and the economic crisis is targeting the global middle class. The United States is continuing its old realist game by prioritizing to win the battle only by using military force and ignite wars in different parts of the world. It seems that for the United States it is preferable to be engaged or to create situations for catastrophic wars that will not benefit any side, rather than a peaceful emergence of a multipolar world which could bring an atmosphere of fair competition, peace, and institutional global order.

SS: Security was a major theme of the conference. President Xi Jinping put great emphasis of keeping China secure from threats. In an increasingly unpredictable world, what are the main threats China faces, and are they mainly foreign, or domestic?

AK: One of the core elements for China in its path of development has been maintaining stability inside the country. For that reason, the Chinese officials has been repeating that China must have and perform harmony within the country and with the outside world, in order to achieve the modernization plan, set to bring China as one of the most advanced countries globally in many spheres. Currently, the security issue becomes more relevant as I have mentioned above, when the United States is willing to keep its supremacy and hegemony at all costs and the problem is that the United States will never tolerate a more powerful China that could have its influence over Asia in general and globally in particular. Reuters mentioned that Xi Jinping has used the world security 89 times in his report-speech this year, whereas it was 55 in 2017. Indeed, China is highly concerned about the accelerated tension by the Taiwanese from one side in urging to go for a full Independence and the provocative American foreign policy to draw in China into a military action that could be catastrophic for all countries in the region.

At the same time, the Chinese president had mentioned in his speech that China is ready for all scenarios, and they will respond if there will be any threat against China's territorial integrity and any action against the reunification of Taiwan. Moreover, the People's Liberation Army is in command. There is no domestic conflict in China, since in the last two decades China continues to provide rights to the ethnic and religious minorities and they have been fully integrated in the Han society. The only concern for Chinese government is

the Uyghurs of Xinjiang that is being fueled by the United States again to create inner conflict in China and to reduce China's development. Since the Chinese governments have done tremendous work in improving the Xinjiang province,

I believe that issue could be solved when Uyghurs give up their terror actions and reach to a conclusion with the Chinese authorities, instead of allying themselves with the United States or Turkey. Thus, as we can see, even some domestic issues have geopolitical implications.

SS: President Xi Jinping spoke about the Chinese socialist economy, but also the need to develop the private sector, along with public ownership and encouraging the markets to play a role. What is your take on the near future of the Chinese economic developments?

AK: It is indeed a unique case where China did not only maintain the socialist ideology, but also it has been able cautiously to implement some elements from liberal market system. In fact, that was the key component of China's success. I believe the role in economy will be given further to the private sector, simply because the innovations and startups today are mainly managed and run by the private enterprises and in this sense the advancement in the private sector could be achieved in a faster mode. Moreover, giving opportunities to the private sector means that the middle class will have a greater chance to perform. In terms of China, the majority are in middle class category, and we all know well that the current crisis harmed the middle class at most. In general, although nearly all the countries are affected from the situation created since the pandemic such as the bankruptcy of companies, the shift in petrol prices, the collapse of the healthcare systems etc., China is one of the few countries that maintained its economic growth. Furthermore, the current economic crises affected the One Belt One Road Initiative as well, since countries started to run a strategy that is based on national or local products. Although these obstacles have global shape. I believe China is capable of pursuing its development plan and generating its global megaproject to the end.

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