**The US-China summit**

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After signing the largest $1 trillion infrastructure bill for the US in a decade, US President Joe Biden joined Chinese President Xi Jinping in a virtual meeting to talk on issues of common interests. This virtual meeting – held on November 16 – was the focus of world attention to gauge whether it triggers cooperation or conflict between the two largest economies of the world. US Secretary of State Antony Blinkin has already called managing US-China relations “the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century.”

President Biden addressed President Xi by saying “You are a major world leader and so is the United States … None of this is a favor to either of our countries – what we do for one another – but it is just responsible leadership.”

The issues between the two global powers and largest economies range from Taiwan, navigation in the South China Sea, and climate change to conquering outer space, cyberspace, hypersonic missiles, modern nuclear weapons, technology, trade, and human rights. Both disagree on how to manage the economies and govern the people of their countries. Both leaders agree to avoid conflicts and the possible cold war and prefer dialogue to resolve the conflicting issues.

Both Biden and Xi agree that climate change is a challenge and threat to this planet and the human race. Yet there are a number of issues that do generate competition, hostility, cold war and conflict between China and the US. Both powers can neither afford nor desire a cold war or an armed conflict. Both prefer to engage each other until the ‘right opportunity’.

Currently, US consumers need the supply line of Chinese goods to remain flowing and functional in these days of high inflation and price hikes. And China needs the American market open to its products to support its economy and manufacturing industry. Thus despite conflicting ambitions and rival strategies, both are bound to avoid any clash or collusion.

The more than 220-minute-long virtual meeting between President Biden and President Xi took place in search of common grounds for cooperation over any conflict. The meeting lasted longer than expected. There was no joint statement, readout or press briefing at the conclusion of this longest virtual meeting between the two world leaders who talked on a variety of bilateral, regional and global issues – including issues related to North Korea, Iran and Afghanistan.

The Chinese state media called this meeting “frank, constructive, substantive and fruitful.” The White House has called this virtual meeting “respectful, straightforward and open”.

Independent scholars say there was no substantive progress and both sides reiterated their policies on different issues without any progress. Neither side softened or changed its position on any issue that caused tensions between the two countries. Both leaders “talked about everything under the sun; but announced no position or policy steps”, Scott Kennedy, an expert at the Washington-based think-tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) said.

Both sides agree to build some safety net to avoid conflict and reduce tensions, but they do not prescribe the course of action. Chinese President took a stern stand on Taiwan and also asked the US to return to a “practical and rational” policy towards China, without offering any incentive for that change. Similarly, on US-China trade, neither side made any proposal or policy step to cause any change or improvement.

It is important to mention that President Biden has announced the BBB3– Build Back Better – plan as part of his $1.75 trillion infrastructure plan to restore the US economy, as compared to China’s Belt and Road policy that involves around 70 countries.

One can raise a question about the purpose and goals achieved through the over three-hour-long meeting without any progress on the bilateral issues. It took 10 months for the Biden Administration to ease tensions and the tough trade measures taken by the Trump administration against China. Measures were taken to rectify the mistakes made during the Trump era, especially the accusations that were made against China for the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conciliatory statements and gestures from both sides gradually created a non-hostile environment. Climate change is a common concern of the two leaders. The Glasgow summit was a good venue for the two biggest carbon emitters of the world – China and the US – to deal with an issue of common concern. Ten years ago, when the two leaders met each other for negotiations, both of them were serving as vice-presidents of their countries.

Europe and the US are dependent on China’s supply lines of both consumer and non-consumer goods. In this pandemic-stricken world and era of high inflation and price hikes, China can be neither isolated nor confronted or ignored for its role in today’s global situation.

The only way is to engage China in dialogue, avoid conflict and defer tensions, without changing national positions on various contentious issues. China’s advancement in nuclear weapons, outer space, industry and emergence as a superpower and a giant economy has shifted the power balance to Asia. Both the US and China need to adopt the policy of detente. Tensions and conflicting issues need to be deferred through dialogue. More China-US meetings should happen. Nuclear countries can follow a similar policy of dialogue to defer the threat of conflict, tensions and mutual destruction.

The writer is a journalist based in the US.