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When US, China 'dreams' diverge

While Trump's doctrine appears to mimic Xi's moves, key differences mean cooperation is vital between both countries

By WENSHAN JIA

US President Donald Trump stated in his keynote address at the closing session of the 2018 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last month that his "America First" strategy did not mean "America Alone".

Yet despite this, just four days later in his State of the Union address on Jan 30, he repeated his customary nationalistic and isolationist stance and the United States' zero-sum mentality, reiterating the message of both the National Security Strategy issued in December and the National Defense Strategy issued by the Pentagon in January, saying rivals like China and Russia challenge the US' interests and economy.

When he talked about rebuilding American infrastructure, he precluded any outside involvement, asserting "we will do it with American heart, American hands, and American grit".

He stated his own presidency is the "new American moment", claiming: "There has never been a better time to start living the American Dream."

While the "America First" doctrine has been part of the US political rhetoric for almost 80 years since the America First Committee was founded in 1940, it has never been instrumental in making America great, let alone being able to make America great again. The reason is that "America Alone" and an isolationist strategy and mentality usually accompanies the "America First" doctrine.

Trump's speech reminds me of Chinese President Xi Jinping's political remarks when he took office in 2013. When Xi became president, he first articulated the Chinese Dream for a well-off society and a strong Chinese nation-state and proposed the Belt and Road Initiative to the world as a collaborative trade and infrastructure project for win-win results.

He then called for self-confidence in China's political system and culture and championed the creative revival of traditional culture as well as the integration of the revolutionary legacy and socialist thought and traditional Chinese culture with Western science and technology.

In his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October, he formally

outlined the course for China's development over the next 35 years. By 2035, the end of 16th Five-Year Plan (2031-35), China is expected to have realized basic modernization.

By 2050, China is expected to have achieved comprehensive modernization and realized its rejuvenation. In the meantime, Xi has had the Belt and Road Initiative and presented his vision of a community of shared future for humankind. All these and more constitute some core elements of Xi Jinping thought.

Both Trump and Xi have attempted to demarcate and brand a new era of politics. The Trump doctrine, outlined in his State of the Union Address, appears to mimic Xi's rhetorical structure and strategic thinking.

Xi first articulated the Chinese Dream, then proposed the four self-confidences (self-confidence in the socialist institutions, road, theory, and culture), and then proposed the Belt and Road Initiative as a major instrument for globalization around the world.

Like Xi, Trump used the "dream" as a rallying call to the people, appealed to the self-confidence of his constituents and their confidence in the American Way, their

oneness and sameness. Furthermore, Trump recalled the once "successful" American Way of the old days to consolidate a shared single American destiny, and chart the future for all Americans.

However, there are some fundamental differences between the two.

First of all, while Trump embraces protectionism, Xi champions two-way neo-globalization. Second, while Trump celebrates nationalism, Xi celebrates a hybrid of nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

Third, in international politics, while Trump celebrates realism and bilateralism, Xi believes in idealism and multilateralism. Fourth, in terms of security, while Trump believes in a zero-sum concept of security, Xi believes in positive-sum and common security.

In terms of culture, while Trump believes in a monotheistic, Anglo-Saxon and Judeo-Christian culture of white male dominance, Xi believes in atheistic, universalistic multiculturalism or neoglobalization.

Last but not most important, while Trump believes in creating or reconstructing the American community of a shared destiny, Xi is most interested in contributing to the creation

of a community of shared future for humankind in which both China and the US can be made great again.

So in a way, Trump can be styled as a US national head of state trying to maintain the American status quo, but Xi is increasingly seen as a Chinese global leader attempting to modernize China and transform the world for more peace and prosperity for all.

While Trump's doctrine is seen as being both less and less American and less and less global, Xi's thought appears to be seen not only as being more and more Chinese, but also more and more global.

Therefore, to deal with China headed by Xi as a rival of the US seems to be quixotic at best. To isolate or contain China would be not only futile, but also self-damaging.

In conclusion, cooperation is the only means for both the US and China to make America and China great again respectively, resulting in making humanity great again.

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Iran nuclear deal must be upheld

By HE WENPING

US President Donald Trump announced last month that Washington would continue to honor the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, and waived sanctions against Teheran once again. But he also issued an "ultimatum": The agreement must be revised or the United States will withdraw from it.

As such, the future of the agreement remains uncertain. Will it be scrapped by the US after three months or retained with revisions?

Trump has been quite firm in demanding revisions of what he describes as the "worst" accord in American history. The revisions he wants reportedly include permanent restrictions on Iran's nuclear enrichment activities and ballistic missile program, and inclusion of its military operations in the Middle East in the nuclear negotiations.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a statement, emphasizing that Teheran does not and will not accept any revision to the agreement and that Iran will not implement any measures outside of the agreement.

Iran is firm in its attitude for two reasons. First, Iran has met its obligations under the nuclear agreement, which has been supported by International Atomic Energy Agency reports. Even the Trump administration, reporting to Congress, has found it hard to pinpoint flaws with Iran's implementation.

Second, the Iranian nuclear deal is a multilateral agreement concluded after tough negotiations between Iran and the US, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom and Germany, and endorsed by the UN Security Council. And only the US seeks its modification and has threatened to withdraw from it.

Trump is firm in his attitude also for two reasons. The first is the

promise he made during his presidential campaign. Right from the beginning of his campaign, he criticized the Iran deal and threatened to withdraw from it if elected US president. The Iranian nuclear deal is former president Barack Obama's diplomatic legacy. But since taking office, Trump has made several decisions to erase Obama's legacies, including "Obamacare" healthcare reforms, and withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership multilateral trade agreement and the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

Second, the Trump administration makes no secret of viewing Iran as its main adversary in the Middle East. Trump has strengthened strategic ties with Israel and Saudi Arabia, its two important allies in the region. These two countries are Iran's strategic competitors and are unhappy with the Iranian nuclear deal.

But what the agreement needs most is protection and continued

implementation. The US' withdrawal will hurt not only Iran but also the US and its Middle East partners Saudi Arabia and Israel, and deal a heavy blow to the international nuclear nonproliferation regime.

In Iran, scrapping the deal could trigger another wave of anti-Americanism, which in turn could prompt Teheran to reactivate its uranium enrichment and other nuclear research and development activities, halt its nascent efforts to open up to the outside world, and further compromise its relations with the West.

For Israel and Saudi Arabia, Iran restarting its nuclear research program will heighten their strategic misgivings and sense of insecurity, and stimulate them to do the same, thus triggering a new arms race and destabilizing the Middle East further.

For the US, unilaterally scrapping a multilateral agreement will seriously undermine its international

reputation and soft power.

For international peace and security, the historic nuclear agreement is a win-win deal for all, a victory for multilateralism, pacifism and rationalism, and a precedent for resolving tough nuclear issues through negotiations. By unilaterally scrapping the agreement, Trump will turn years of global cooperation into dust.

At present, the five other countries involved in the agreement have emphasized they want to continue honoring the Iranian nuclear deal. The question of Iran developing ballistic missiles, raised by the US, has nothing to do with the nuclear issue and should not be brought in to complicate the situation. Instead, it should be addressed through negotiations in external mechanisms.

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