

## **The View from Beijing: A Conversation with Ambassador of China to the U.S. Cui Tiankai**

**scribie**

Audio Transcription, Perfected

<https://scribie.com/files/209a5e07a33343eda3c34c7cc9ead13f14fe0897>

**0:00:00:** It's a real pleasure to see my friend, Andrea Mitchell. We've known each other an awfully long time, I just wanted to say to this audience, she has been one of the most knowledgeable, skillful expert foreign correspondents of her time. We've known each other a long time. We have traveled on presidential missions together, she as a journalist, me as an assistant to a president, and I've always admired you, Andrea. This is a tough subject to talk about today, US-China relations.

**0:00:30:** Indeed it is. At any time, it's always... There are always ups and down. This is a difficult time, both sides acknowledge that, and that's why we're so eager to hear from the Ambassador. Nick, you as a diplomat, former NATO Ambassador, and when I first met you, you were the Russia expert at the NSC in the Reagan White House, I believe.

**0:00:49:** Bush, George HW, yeah.

**0:00:51:** Was it? Bush White House. And then, of course, over at the State Department working with Madeleine Albright, and all those years, all those travels as well. So it's great to be with you. It's great to be back at Aspen, even virtually, because the Aspen Security is always one of the highlights of the year for me and for NBC News as your media partners, and we've had some dramatic moments at the Aspen Security Conference.

**0:01:18:** We have, and this gives me the opportunity to say, Andrea, we're so thankful that NBC News is our strategic partner. I know you're live streaming this event. You're live streaming most of the three days that we have. It's the most internationally... It's the most international focus we've ever had because we have prime ministers, foreign ministers, economic and trade ministers, and we've got representatives of the Trump administration. We have Secretary Mark Esper tomorrow. I remember last year, you interviewed our mutual friend, Ambassador Susan Rice, that was a memorable interview.

**0:01:54:** That was a memorable interview in so many ways. She has such a wide range of experience at the UN, at the National Security Council, and now of course, she's on the shortlist, we all understand, for vice president, so running mate for Vice President Joe Biden. So we all, of course, are interested to seeing who turns out to be the person chosen, but she has vast foreign policy experience. The others all have elective experience, and the vice president, as we understand, is weighing those issues and doing interviews, most likely virtually as well.

**0:02:34:** And the subject today, Andrea, and I'm sure the Ambassador is gonna return to us, he was with us in the Green Room, the virtual Green Room...

**0:02:42:** Just got it.

**0:02:43:** The subject today, I was gonna say to you introducing it, but I'll just ask this of you, I

think we may be at the lowest point in the US-China relationship in half a century. I think you have to go back before Nixon's opening to China, before Henry Kissinger's secret trip in 1971 to find a time when the mistrust between Beijing and Washington has been so profoundly deep and palpable. And in the US, as you well know, and you're on television daily with your terrific noon broadcast, Democrats and Republicans seem to be a little bit united in competition, and here is the Ambassador... He's back, Ambassador, welcome.

**0:03:26:** Thank you. I'm sorry for the technical problem.

**0:03:29:** No, I'm sure they were not your fault. It may be the weather, it may just be the vicissitudes of technology, but Ambassador, Andrea and I were just... What we say in the United States, we were filibustering. We were waiting for you to come and just beginning to talk about the US-China relationship. I've introduced Andrea, Ambassador, Andrea Mitchell as chief foreign affairs correspondent for NBC News. Let me just say to our audience, Ambassador Cui Tiankai is a distinguished ambassador, distinguished diplomat of the People's Republic of China. He's been the ambassador in our country, the United States, since 2013. Prior to that, he was Vice Foreign Minister of China. He was ambassador to Japan. The Ambassador and I met, I think it was... Ambassador Cui, 25 years ago when he was the foreign affairs spokesperson of the China foreign ministry, and I was the US State Department spokesperson. We met in Beijing, in Washington at the United Nations, all around the world. And you're most welcome here, Ambassador.

**0:04:31:** I'm gonna turn this interview over to Andrea Mitchell, but I just make one point that I was beginning to make with Andrea when we were waiting. Ambassador, I think that US-China relations may be at their lowest point since before President Nixon's opening to China in 1971-72. There is great concern in the United States about the Chinese government abrogating its commitments to the people of Hong Kong, concern about the conflict along the border between India and China and the Himalayas, concern about Chinese activities in the South China Sea. And you and I have been part of this relationship from a government perspective for many, many decades. It seems to me that we're turning away from the cooperation, the large-scale cooperation of the last 40 years decidedly towards competition in the military sense, over economic issues on 5G. And the question I have for Andrea and you and for your interview is, as we compete with each other and we're certainly competing, can we find a way to cooperate on climate change, on the pandemic and other big global issues? So I welcome you, I welcome my friend, Andrea Mitchell and Andrea, I turn this interview over to you.

**0:05:54:** Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. It's a great privilege, it's an honor to have you joining us today. And I wanna pick up where Ambassador Burns set the table, which is that most people do believe, in both of our countries, that this is the most difficult time. I was going to say since 1979, but certainly Nick Burns just said, really since Henry Kissinger's trip in 1971. So is there a way... Well, first, do you agree that this is a perilous situation? And how would you correct it or do you think it needs to be corrected?

**0:06:40:** Well, first of all, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to have this conversation. And I certainly agree with Nick that we are at a very critical moment for our relation, relation between China and the United States. And in a way, I think we can say it's unprecedented, since Dr. Henry Kissinger's visit, almost half a century ago. So the choices we're making today will

really shape, not on only relation between our two great countries, but also the future of the world. So we have to make the right choices. We have to base ourselves on the long-term interests of our two peoples and of the world.

**0:07:30:** A big source of the current tension from the US perspective and others around the world is the pandemic. The President blaming China for not alerting the World Health Organization soon enough to the human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 and doing more to contain it. How would you respond to that criticism?

**0:07:52:** Actually, I think I would have to base ourselves on real facts. And the fact is very clear, the timeline is very clear. China is one of the countries that reported such cases first. But now, of course, there's increasing reports and information about possible earlier cases elsewhere in the world. So scientists all over the world are still working very hard on this particular pandemic, on the virus. But we identified a few cases in Wuhan in late December last year. And even for the doctors, people like to call them whistleblowers, they say they have encountered some cases of pneumonia of unknown cause, which means at the time, little was known about this new virus. Very few people, I think nobody in the world, knew anything about the new virus. But as soon as we had these cases, we reported to the World Health Organization. The first report was done on January the 3rd, right after the New Year's Day. So it's just a couple of days.

**0:09:12:** Then the next day, the CDC, China CDC and US CDC, had their first communication on this particular virus, even before people could give a name to this COVID-19 virus. People were still calling it pneumonia of unknown cause. Then on January the 12th, as soon as we discovered the genome sequence of this virus, we shared it with the WHO and the international community. So everything was done very quickly. Of course, people are still learning more, still trying to learn more about this virus. I don't think we already know everything about this virus, this is a fact. But as soon as we discover something, we share it with the international community, this is a fact. And at that time, when we first reported to the WHO, when we first shared all this information, whatever we learned, with the international community, I think you still have a single-digit number of cases here in the United States.

**0:10:20:** That is certainly correct. But did you report human-to-human transmission is the question. Because you did share the DNA, the sequencing, but did you share human-to-human transmission in the most timely way that you could have?

**0:10:36:** Yeah, indeed. I think that this is extremely important for our response to the virus. So that's why we sent our national experts to Wuhan to determine whether this is transmitted among human beings. And once they determined that this is transmitted among human beings, we have the Wuhan lockdown. Within a couple of days, we locked the whole city of about 12 million people, so everybody knew that this is transmittable among human being. And within two or three days, United States evacuated its consulate from Wuhan. So everybody knew this is very dangerous.

**0:11:26:** I mean, just a few months ago, when this all started, President Trump was praising President Xi's response. Now, it's very different. Are they communicating at all?

**0:11:36:** Well, actually, I think that they have had a couple of phone calls in the last few months. And also people at the lower level, lower than the president level, have also had their communication. And of course, the two economic teams has been in touch more frequently. And what is even more important is that a single scientists of our two countries are working together. Some of the American experts, very well-known professors or public health specialists, they went to China in very early days. And they also joined the team sent by WHO to China in February. So I think it's very fortunate. Our scientists are still working together.

**0:12:30:** Now, more recently, the US has filed charges against a number of researchers and academics for, it says, trying to steal COVID vaccine information from US technology companies or universities. And they say it's part of a broader pattern of intellectual theft. Can you respond to that?

**0:12:52:** I think that the problem nowadays is that very often allegations are made without giving any hard evidence. I think, actually, international community should really cooperate with each other to develop, as soon as possible, an effective vaccine, and which should be shared by the entire world. That's why President Xi Jinping declared at the special conference of the WHO that if China could develop this vaccine first, we will make it global public good.

**0:13:27:** Now, although Moderna, one of the leading research companies that is testing vaccines in phase three, has said that the Chinese government-linked hackers, have targeted them to steal data.

**0:13:43:** The fact is, I think as early as in March, some of the American companies even came to see me. They asked for cooperation with a Chinese counterpart to develop drugs or vaccines. I think that we should encourage scientists of our two countries and other countries to cooperate. And if people want to make allegations, they have to show the evidence.

**0:14:10:** There, of course, is in the cause...

**0:14:15:** It's quite possible hackers from other countries are trying to infiltrate or attack our research institutions, this is also possible.

**0:14:28:** Let's talk about the Houston consulate where, as you know, it was the first consulate opened back in 1979 by China, by the People's Republic in our country, so it's a very important, foundational consulate. And China has responded by closing the US consulate in Chengdu. Do you think that this will escalate?

**0:14:47:** Well, we did not start the whole thing. This is very clear. We certainly want to maintain both consulates. I think, as you said, our consulate in Houston was the first Chinese one in America. It was the outcome of Mr. Deng Xiaoping's visit in early 1979. And you see, people just like Texas, like Houston, they like the basketball, Rockets, Yao Ming, everything, and Texas steak, everything. So the consulate has been doing a lot of these things to facilitate exchanges between the country, people-to-people contact and cultural, sports exchanges, educational exchanges, a lot of good things for both countries. So it's really unfortunate. It's really so bad for the US side to decide to close our consulate in Houston. Then you see, in diplomacy, the principle of reciprocity is always followed.

So we have to respond, but we certainly don't want to have all this from the very beginning. We certainly don't want to see any escalation.

**0:16:03:** I do have to ask you, though, about the allegation, that on a broader scale, of US officials claim that the Houston consulate was a haven for spying, for intellectual property theft. They say that 80% of espionage cases end in China and 60% of trade secret cases end in China, of all the countries in the world. So they are saying that China is more responsible than any other country by far, for trade and intellectual property theft.

**0:16:40:** I think that these allegations against our consulate or any of our diplomatic mission here are totally groundless, are totally groundless. People cannot assume other people are doing all these things because maybe themselves they are doing exactly the same thing in other countries. This is the problem, you see. Some of the people, they are doing all these things in other countries, but now they're blaming other countries doing similar things. We never do these things.

**0:17:15:** Let me ask you about our top diplomat, the Secretary of State, whom you know well. Because he gave a speech at the Nixon Library, which is highly symbolic since President Nixon opened the door to our opening with China, with the People's Republic. And he said some very harsh things. He said, "If we bend the knee now, our children's children may be at the mercy of the Chinese Communist Party whose actions are the primary challenge today in the free world." He went on to say, "General Secretary Xi is not destined to tyrannize inside and outside of China forever unless we allow it." How do you view this? Is this a challenge to... Direct challenge to the government of China?

**0:18:01:** You see, I have been to the Nixon Library more than once. And a few years ago, when they had the renovation, they invited me for the reopening. I was there together with Dr. Henry Kissinger and a number of other people. I was very impressed by the Nixon Library. By the way, I've been to a number of presidential libraries here. They are all of them are very unique. I think, if we have a close look at the history of our relation, since Nixon's visit to China or since Dr. Kissinger's visit to China, several things are quite clear. First, so normalization of the relation between our two countries and the growth of this relationship over the decades has served the interests of both countries and the world very well.

**0:19:02:** It's quite clear all of us are still enjoying the positive outcome, the benefits of this closer relationship. Nobody can really deny this. Number two, our two countries, of course, are very different in terms of historical heritage, culture, economic development and political system, and so on and so forth. These differences will be there maybe for quite a long time to come, but they should not be seen as barriers for closer relation between us. They should be seen as opportunities, possibilities for mutual learning, for cooperation. And to be fair, I think over the last few decades, we have learned many things from the United States. We have learned a lot of things from the United States.

**0:20:05:** Of course, there are still things we have not learned from the US and things, I think we should never learn from the United States such as obsession with global dominance. But still we are two different countries but we have to work together. We have to understand we are living in the same world, we are living in this small global village. There are so many global challenges we

share. Neither of our country can really handle all these things all by itself. Nick just mentioned climate change and also terrorism and so many natural disasters. I think both our people have aspiration for better life. If our two countries can cooperate with each other, it will enable us to meet our people's needs even better. So this a choice we have to make, cooperation rather than confrontation.

**0:21:05:** A leading Chinese foreign policy expert in Beijing, a professor called Pompeo's speech a new cold war declaration of the United States. Is that your view that this is a declaration of a new cold war by the Secretary of State?

**0:21:22:** I don't know why people like the term cold war so much. I think the correct lesson which we learned from past history is that such a cold war serves nobody a real interest. And today, we are in the 21st century. Why should we allow history to repeat? Why we should repeat what happened in the last century when we are faced with so many new challenges emerging and global challenges? I don't think a new cold war would serve anybody's interest or will give us any solution to the problems.

**0:22:07:** Is there a way to dial down the rhetoric as long as you speak of global dominance? The president speaks of the China flu. Those are harsh words.

**0:22:21:** Well, it's certainly wrong to have such stigma and the virus as defined by the World Health Organization is COVID-19. And the WHO has ruled that the name of any such virus should not be linked with any particular place, people or ethnic group or even particular animal. This is an international rule, I think all of us should follow. As for global dominance, China certainly has no intention to seek global dominance, but people here in this country talk about this so often. It seemed to me there is such an obsession with it.

**0:23:08:** How do you interpret global dominance? Is it the phrase America First or what is your sense of what global dominance means as you see the United States?

**0:23:19:** I think that this is a very good question, so those who are seeking global dominance should give us an interpretation. I don't think anybody should try to do that.

**0:23:31:** I wanna ask you about the new law in Hong Kong, which the United States and British officials have criticized as well as others. China is now delaying Hong Kong's election that was to be held on September 6th for a year. Couldn't the election be held safely despite the pandemic? Why delay the election for a year? And can you assure residents of Hong Kong and the world that there will be elections, democratic elections in Hong Kong?

**0:24:06:** Well, the decision to delay election in Hong Kong was made by the Hong Kong government. And the reason is the pandemic because in recent days, people see a significant resurgence of the confirmed cases. This is very alarming. So the Hong Kong SAR government decided that if the election goes as planned, the risk, the danger of the pandemic spreading even wider would be very serious. And actually, in other parts of the world, I think maybe over dozens of countries or regions have decided to somehow postpone their election or events like this. And for

the new law, the National Security Law in Hong Kong, by definition, it is about national security. And actually Hong Kong should have enacted its own law for national security as provided for by the basic law of Hong Kong.

**0:25:22:** But you see, 23 years have passed since Hong Kong returned to China and this law of the national security is still not there. So the absence of Hong Kong's own law about national security has led to a lot of serious consequences. People see rising violence in Hong Kong. The city is quite destabilized. People feel it's no longer a very safe place to live or do business. And of course, the absence of this law has hurt China's national security interests, but also has hurt the safety and security of the people both in the mainland and in Hong Kong of China, and it is also hurting the interests of Hong Kong's international economic partners. So in a sense, we were forced to enact this law so as there's a better guarantee for Hong Kong's stability. So the rising violence in Hong Kong could be stopped. Everybody could have a safer environment, a safer place to live. Hong Kong could continue to be an international financial trading and transportation center. And the system, the policy of one country, two systems would continue.

**0:26:58:** Of course, the Hong Kong government delayed the election of... It's hardly independent from Beijing. The people who are invested in democracy in Hong Kong wanted the election and the people who want a stable economic base in Hong Kong around the world want elections and a stable democracy. Today, China has issued arrest warrants for six pro-democracy activists, including one who is an American citizen and of course, the well-known Nathan Law who is already in the UK. What actions were they taking that threatened the stability in Hong Kong?

**0:27:45:** I don't think that people should make the distinction between what they call democracy or anti-democracy. Actually, all these law enforcement actions are taken according to the law. Anybody, if they violate the law, they should be punished. That's it. It doesn't matter what kind of a political view they might have. The law, nobody should violate the law.

**0:28:18:** I want to ask you about TikTok, the president was talking about banning it. Now it is apparently possibly going to be purchased by Microsoft, the American entity of TikTok. Given China's law and China's ability, Beijing's ability to demand that Chinese corporations can retrieve data from any of these companies, can you understand why President Trump and the US government wants to make sure that if TikTok operates here in the US, that Beijing will not be able to reach in and get any data from US citizens?

**0:29:02:** I don't think there's any evidence that any company is giving such information to the Chinese government. People make these allegations but they never show us any evidence. And very often we hear complaints here that we don't give a level playing field to American companies, but more and more I believe, we should complain. Chinese companies are not having a level playing field here. There is such a degree of political intervention, government intervention into the market. There's such a discrimination against Chinese companies and these companies are just private companies. So I think it's not fair to make such allegations without giving any evidence and to accuse China of not giving American companies a level playing field, while at the same time they themselves are denying Chinese companies such a level playing field. This is extremely unfair.

**0:30:11:** Despite all of these tensions, you alluded to the fact that there are still conversations at



lower levels on economic issues, is the trade deal going to go forward? Do you still see that as in China's interest in... Obviously, we have to see whether it is still in the US interest, or do you think that is now also in peril?

**0:30:35:** Yeah. You see, we signed this, what they call Phase One Trade Deal in January. And as far as I know, the two economic teams have been in contact with each other at various levels, of course, and we are making good progress. For instance, what China committed to do in the first four months for the implementation of this trade agreement. We agreed to do 50 items. We have done all of them in the last four months and we are still purchasing American products, including agricultural products. Of course, the pandemic is hindering the normal trade flows. This is also a reality, but I think we're doing our best to overcome the current difficulty to keep the trade flow and to implement this trade agreement as effectively as possible.

**0:31:39:** And I wanna ask you about military tensions. The US says China is being aggressive by claiming areas in the South China Sea that are international waters. Do you see the US and China moving more closely to some kind of a military confrontation?

**0:31:58:** You see, there's a long history behind the situation in South China Sea. Before the 1970s or 1960s, actually there was no territory dispute in the region, and some of the claimant countries put forward their claims starting from late 1960s or 1970s. We have our historical claims and we have strong historic and legal support for our claims, but still we are ready to negotiate with other countries concerned for a peaceful solution to the disputes. That's why we are working with the ASEAN countries over the years. I myself worked for quite a few years with the ASEAN countries on drawing up a declaration of conduct for the parties concerned. Now we are working on the code of conduct, I mean China and the ASEAN countries, and we are making good progress. And we always believe that any territorial disputes should be resolved through negotiations by the parties directly concerned, and we certainly aim to have a diplomatic solution, a negotiated solution.

**0:33:23:** This is our commitment, it has not changed. And in the meantime, we should really work together to maintain stability of the region. And all these sea lanes, they are extremely important for the Chinese economy. A large portion of our imports and exports have to go through these sea lanes, so we really have high stakes in the safety and security of navigation. So if these things are left to the country concerned to work out, I think the situation would be much better. The problem is the intensifying US military activities in the region. The US is sending more and more warships, military airplanes and more frequently to the region. This is really raising the risk of any conflict or confrontation.

**0:34:27:** The President and Secretary Pompeo talk about trying to engage China in a trilateral arms control agreement with Russia and the United States. It's one of the reasons they say they withdrew from the INF treaty, that Russia was cheating and that it was more important to negotiate with China as well. Is there any sense that China would be interested in negotiating missile limits in an agreement with Russia and the United States?

**0:34:57:** I think that there are now very important negotiations between US and Russia on some of the existing treaties between the two countries. And these treaties are extremely important for international strategic stability. We hope these treaties could continue, but I don't know what is

happening between US and Russia, maybe we should... I do hope we could have reason to be optimistic, but I don't know. We just pray that they will continue these treaties and keep the international strategic stability. So you see all over the world, United States and Russia have the largest nuclear arsenal. This is known by everybody. This is an international consensus, so they should take the lead in international nuclear disarmament. Hopefully, they could show us leadership. China has a very small amount of nuclear weapon. It's not at the same level. We're by far behind US and Russia. So I still remember some of my colleagues who are dealing with disarmament issues, they asked a very good question. They want to know whether the US is ready to reduce its arsenal to the size of China's, then we can start real negotiation. I hope we could be given a very convincing answer.

**0:36:35:** I wanna also ask you about the situation with the Uyghurs because we hear devastating reports of what has happened with the people there. And tell the world why China feels threatened by this Muslim minority who have been imprisoned, tortured, slaughtered in large numbers, according to reliable human rights activists.

**0:37:03:** The fact is the people there... I know you are referring to Xinjiang. The people in Xinjiang, all the ethnic group people, no matter what ethnic group they belong, the people there were threatened by rising terrorist and extremist activities. In recent years, until quite recently, there were hundreds, even thousands of such terrorist attacks in Xinjiang and hundreds of thousands of innocent people were hurt or even killed, so the people there were really threatened. We have to take measures to stop the spread and the threat of terrorist activities. Some of these groups are linked to ISIS and they were also trying to spread extremist ideas, so people's safety and security were really threatened. For the last three years and more, there have been no such cases of terrorist attacks in Xinjiang, so people are living in a much safer environment and people can really enjoy a good life there. This is happening to all the people there without any distinction between the ethnic groups.

**0:38:36:** According to the United Nations, more than two million people there, Ambassador, are held in detention camps.

**0:38:41:** No, this is not the United Nations figure. This figure is fabricated by somebody else. Certainly, not the United Nation. It's very clear. We have emerged over the last year... We have emerged UN officials, foreign diplomats, journalists, many of them from muslim countries, and none of them supported such claims.

**0:39:06:** So, you are saying there are not millions of people in detention camps?

**0:39:10:** There's no such a thing. I was there last year, April, last year. I had a personal visit there. I even visited one of these training centers, met people, talked to people there. So Uyghur people... I even met a young Uyghur couple who opened a restaurant in one of these training centers and are making good money.

**0:39:33:** Well, obviously, we'll have to do more work on that, but I know that this is a almost universally held criticism of China, and it's something that the world really needs to have more

answers to.

**0:39:53:** Well, madam, with all due respect, I very often hear people in this country say this is something universal. But when they say universal, it's mainly, maybe United States, a couple of European countries. If you talk about anything universal, you have to consider China itself has 20% of the global population. If you're counting countries like India, Africa, Latin American countries, the majority of the global population is very often not included in this universality.

**0:40:30:** I wanna get back to the relationship between President Trump and President Xi, because we saw them at Mar-a-Lago, we saw the President's grandchildren singing in Mandarin to him back in 2017. It's a relationship that even through January and February of this year, the President was praising President Xi. How did we get to the point of him talking with racial epithets like Kung flu and also talking about the China flu. Why do you think he is blaming all of this on China?

**0:41:07:** Well, I don't think it is something for me to explain, but I can tell you, I have been present at most of their meetings. Mar-a-Lago, and you see, Beijing, and Argentina, Buenos Aires and Osaka last year. I think the meetings between the presidents has provided important guidance to the overall relations. As there have been... All these meetings were quite positive. I would certainly look forward to more interactions like this and effective working relationship between the two governments, between the two leaders.

**0:41:54:** Is there any chance of an overture? Would there be any outreach from China to Washington, or should Washington reach out to China? Who will take the first step at the head of state level?

**0:42:07:** Well, I think that this is a job we diplomats really have to do. My good friend, Ambassador Branstad in Beijing, I myself, here in Washington, we'll continue to do our best.

**0:42:19:** Nick Burns raised the issue of cooperation on global warming and climate change, perhaps the greatest threat facing the world. Certainly, the greatest threat facing the world. Can that progress be made as long as the United States does not rejoin the Paris Accord?

**0:42:41:** Well, whether the US will come back to the Paris Accord, this is decision up to the US to make. But it's quite clear, climate change is a very good example that we are living in a very different world. We are living in what we call globalized world. Whether you like it or not, this is a reality. And we have to work together to respond to all these global challenges. No country can handle all these things all by itself, we have to work together. But for China and the United States, since we are the two largest economies in the world, since we are permanent members of the UN Security Council, I think we do share special responsibility, not only to our own people, but also to the international community, that we should take the lead in promoting international corporation, to confront all these challenges. We are certainly willing and ready to do all this.

**0:43:41:** Returning to Hong Kong for a moment, I just wanted to ask you, will you commit to holding an election in Hong Kong a year from now?

**0:43:53:** I think that this decision has to be made by the Hong Kong SAR government in accordance with the basic law and its own laws. It's not up for me to say.

**0:44:08:** Are they really able to make that decision without Beijing's approval?

**0:44:13:** You see, Hong Kong has high degree of autonomy.

**0:44:18:** Well, it did but it no longer does, according to most people in your...

**0:44:21:** Yeah. See, the people have to be careful. High degree of autonomy is different from total independence. Hong Kong is not a sovereign country. It's part of China. It's a special administrative region of China. So, Hong Kong's governance is based on, first of all, the constitution of China, then also under the basic law of Hong Kong. And actually, the constitution of China and the basic law of Hong Kong, they provide the real guarantee for this one country and two system.

**0:44:56:** But under one country, two systems, which we understand, can the Hong Kong government go ahead and hold an election, if it does not have independence, if Beijing does not want it to?

**0:45:13:** I think the decision to delay it was based on the assessment of the situation of the pandemic. This is the only reason. They cannot take the risk, then more and more people would be affected and things could get out of control. The risk is just too high for them.

**0:45:36:** I know that there are a lot of people who wanna ask questions as well of you, and I don't wanna take all of your time, Ambassador. You've been very, very generous with your time with us today. I think the first person who has raised his hand in the chatroom is Steven Shapiro. We'll wait a few moments to see whether Stephen Shapiro can open his mic.

**0:46:06:** Oh.

**0:46:11:** Steven, you need to unmute, please.

**0:46:13:** Yeah.

**0:46:14:** Click that. Okay, thank you very much, Nick, and thank you Miss Mitchell, and Mr. Ambassador. Unrelated to the discussion so far, I'd like to talk to you about the Arctic. And I'd like to ask you about China's interest in the Arctic, such that China has felt the need to declare itself without an Arctic border, to declare itself a near Arctic power. But my question for you is, what is the impetus for this great interest in the Arctic? Is it mineral acquisition? Is it transportation ease? Is it strategic with respect to the movement of potential military assets? Is it to go... Is it to keep up with your friends, the Russians or even with us? So I put this to you as an open question. Thank you very much.

**0:47:10:** Well, I have to say, at the beginning, I am not expert on these issues. But you see China is the second largest economy in the world. We certainly have a lot of interests in the world, and we

certainly want to make contribution to the preservation and utilization of any part of the Arctic. And we want to make our contribution, we want to work with other countries. We have no military intentions for these places. We want to contribute to peaceful use and preservation of the environment there, and we're ready to talk with other countries. We know United States and country like Russia, you also have a strong interest, then we should all talk to each other and should work together to make sure nothing wrong is done to that part of the globe.

**0:48:16:** Okay, the next question is John Mallory, Mr Ambassador. Can John Mallory unmute?

**0:48:25:** Well, thank you very much. So my question is with regards to the policy of engagement. So the discussion in the United States holds essentially that engaged when it's dying. And seems to me that, in lieu of an explicit policy between the two countries, we will see the security issues dominating in security there and then we see the downward spiral. So my question to you is, what do you see as an engagement 2.0 policy? What kind of steps would China be willing to take? What kind of steps do you think the US would need to take? And I think if we look at the USTR, the trade agreement and we have phase one already completed, it seems to me that phase two might be a big step in the right direction. What are your thoughts on that? Thank you.

**0:49:20:** Well, I'm sorry, sir. So your question about the engagements between the countries for trade or in other areas?

**0:49:34:** Across the board, it was a general engagement policy dating since the Nixon and Kissinger, reinforced under the Clinton administration, and again with the ascension of China to WTO.

**0:49:46:** I think that there's clear need for our two countries to have all around engagement with each other on trade, finance, environment, security issues, international regional conflicts, all these issues, because we are the two largest economies in the world. We are permanent members of the UN Security Council. We do share interests and responsibilities, but I think what we have to do more and better now is to build mutual confidence, is to aim at a much better mutual understanding of each other's intentions, and not allow any miscalculation or misperceptions to hijack the relation. Without such a mutual understanding, our cooperation or engagement or coordination in any area would be very difficult, even for the trade agreement. If we really want to make progress in the implementation of the trade agreement, we have to enhance mutual understanding and we have to enhance mutual respect, try to have mutual accommodation. You see, between two countries, it's a very similar to relation between two person. If you don't respect each other, if you don't understand each other, how can you work with each other? Before you could have that basis, then the possibility and the prosperity... I mean, the possibility and the opportunities for our two countries to cooperate on so many issues, is just there.

**0:51:39:** Our next question is from Will Mauldin. Will Will Mauldin unmute?

**0:51:52:** Just follow up a little bit on the previous question. Is there going to be specifically a meeting in mid-August, August 15th? My colleagues are reporting at the Wall Street Journal to re-evaluate the trade agreement. And if so, what is China's position on that? Thank you very much.

**0:52:14:** Well, thank you for your question. Yes, the original plan was for the two teams to meet six months from the starting of the implementation of this phase one trade agreement. I think that the two teams are still talking to each other, but probably they would not be able to have a face to face meeting. They have to have something like what we are having now, have a meeting online, but I think if they have reached a decision, it could be announced. If they do have such a meeting, I guess it would be very positive.

**0:52:58:** And we have a question from Steven Keenan. Steven Keenan, unmute. Wanna give him another minute.

**0:53:17:** Hello, Ambassador. Thank you so much for a very kind and informative conversation. It's conversations like this that will hopefully bring our countries back together to be the friends that we wanna be for a very long time. I personally feel that China is just going to the thousands of years where China was an equal in the world community. What do you feel the symbolic things America and China could be doing to get our relationship back to where it was not too long ago? And let's remember, during our 2008 financial crisis, it was China that spent an enormous amount of money that helped the entire world financially. What do you feel that we should be doing to help right the ship of good relations with the two most powerful countries in the world? Thank you.

**0:54:16:** Thank you very much, sir. Thank you for your very encouraging words, and I do share your hope. I totally share your hope. You are right. If we look at the three major international crises since the beginning of this century, the 9/11 terrorist attack, the international financial crisis, and now the pandemic, it's quite clear the global challenges we're faced with today are global in nature and it requires global cooperation and especially cooperation between our two great countries. Otherwise, we will not be able... None of us will be able to really solve these issues to overcome such difficulties and really make our future much better. And we are also working together on many of the international regional issues, from the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula to the Iranian nuclear issue, from Afghanistan to the Middle East. All these issues also require multilateral collaboration and cooperation between our two countries. And a very good example would be where we just talk about climate change.

**0:55:43:** And another example would be the current pandemic. I don't think any country can really handle this pandemic all by itself. Of course, now we are faced with somehow different situation in various countries because conditions vary in different countries. But still, I don't think that any country can say, "I'm 100% safe from the pandemic," while other countries are still struggling. We have to help each other. We have to make sure that the pandemic is contained and hopefully overcome and effective vaccine is developed, effective medicines are developed and lives are saved, people can have a better assurance for their health. And this has to be done by the entire international community, and hopefully our two countries can really take a lead in this.

**0:56:42:** Mr. Ambassador, I know Nick Burns is gonna ask you the final question, but I just wanna say, I wanna thank you for making yourself available. It's very important for the Aspen Security Forum and of course...

**0:56:57:** Very good questions. Thank you very much.

**0:57:00:** And Nick?

**0:57:01:** Andrea, thank you very much. Ambassador, thank you for the interview. Ambassador, I wanted to ask one final question if Andrea would permit me, maybe Andrea can be the umpire. The Ambassador and I met in Grand Rapids, Michigan, 18 months ago. We spoke at a conference in front of 500 business people to mark the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the US-China relationship by Jimmy Carter and Deng Xiaoping. There was a little bit of a celebratory mood then that the United States and China had done a lot, accomplished a lot together. But Ambassador, as you know, the mood has shifted quite dramatically in the United States. There is widespread disappointment, I would say even anger in the United States about China's actions, anti-democratic actions to snuff out the democracy in Hong-Kong. There is a sense that in the South China Sea, the People's Liberation Army moving out against both the Philippines and Vietnam, acting illegally, an extravagant legal claim that China has. Widespread opposition to what's happened in the PLA, assertive against India on the very long border in the Himalayas, and Andrea asked you a question about the Uyghurs.

**0:58:16:** In this country, there's a lot of evidence. And we believe that the Uyghur population, maybe up to as many as one million people, have been subjugated unfairly and treated unfairly. So I wanna say to you, and we've known each other a very long time, views are hardening here in the United States. And I would even say that most Democrats and most Republicans are united in the belief that China has been too aggressive in the Indo-Pacific and that we may be at a fundamental turning point towards competition. So my question to you is, is there a recognition in Beijing of the very tough-minded attitudes here, negative attitudes, here in the United States towards China, towards the government in Beijing by both of our political parties and nearly all of our leaders, and what can Beijing do to allay that concern because this is part of what diplomacy is? And right now, we're not seeing much conciliation at all from the Chinese government.

**0:59:21:** Well, Nick, when you were talking, I somehow thought you were still a spokesperson for the State Department. Andrew and I, we touched upon many of the issues you just mentioned. I know we have limited time. I don't want to repeat everything, but let me say this to you. People in China, the Chinese people, they are also very much shocked and they feel very disappointed about what is happening in this country towards China. There is a rising anger among the Chinese public. I think the people have to be aware of this. You're asking us what we can do to make the relations better and people in China are asking what the United States can do to make the relations better. And for many of the issues, sometimes I just don't understand why such a misperceptions could continue and even spread.

**1:00:30:** You see, I myself was personally involved in dealing with many of the issues in Asia. And I know China and all our neighbours just want to have normal, stable and friendly, mutually beneficial relations. We do have disputes, like the border disputes with India and some territory disputes in South China Sea. But on the whole, all the countries in our region want to develop mutually beneficial relations. I don't think any one of them want to see any escalation of tension. This is also the reality. So I have full confidence that between China and our neighbors, we will be able to solve any problem through friendly and peaceful negotiations without external interference,

without external attempt to escalate the situation. For instance, China is surrounded on the land by 14 other countries, that means we have land borders with 14 countries. And out of the 14 countries, we have already solved the border issue. We have concluded treaties with 12 of them.

**1:01:47:** India and Bhutan are the only two left. Maybe we are not able to solve the border issue in the short while, but I don't think this issue should dominate relation between China and India. And I don't think this is the view of our Indian friends. So hopefully, our American friends could have a really better understanding of the realities in our region, could really understand our concerns, our perceptions and what we need, what the people in the region really need, and could refrain from taking any action to try to take advantage of any disputes in the region or you can escalate the situation. I think the real problem for America, I want to be very honest and frank with all of you, the real question for America is that, is the United States ready to live with another country with a different history, different culture, maybe different system, but with no intention to compete for global dominance with the United States? Are you ready to live with us in peace? This is the fundamental question. Hopefully politicians and diplomats, journalists, scholars here, could think about this really seriously. Nick? Nick disappeared.

**1:03:21:** Now, thank you again. I think Nick directly points out that there is political agreement among Democrats and Republicans on few things in the US right now, but suspicion and antagonism towards China is one of them. So both of our countries have our work cut out for us to try to overcome those disagreements.

**1:03:46:** That I agree. We'll have both sides, both of us, have to work harder to overcome the current difficulty, to try to solve, to dispel such suspicion, doubts or even fear. We have to build a constructive and mutually beneficial relationship for the future.

**1:04:06:** We can all agree with that aspiration. Thank you so much. Thank you.

**1:04:11:** Thank you. Thank you.



## **Thank You for choosing Scribie.com**

Cross-check this transcript against the audio quickly and efficiently using our online Integrated Editor. Please visit the following link and click the Check & Download button to start.

<https://scribie.com/files/209a5e07a33343eda3c34c7cc9ead13f14fe0897>