

# Facilitating US-China relations via "Asymmetric Harmony"

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*By Robert Lawrence Kuhn*

Again we are awash with advice. With China's President Xi Jinping again meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama, pundits the world over are eager to offer their suggestions and proposals to improve US-China relations. This is no altruism: it's not a matter of hoping to help China and the US get along; rather, everyone recognizes that US-China relations affect the stability and prosperity of the whole world.



Though good-willed and appreciated, much of the advice — whether prescriptions, what to do, or proscriptions, what not to do — is repetitive, even soporiferous. Maybe that's a good thing — because predictability, in sensitive diplomacy as in

financial markets, is a good thing. But maybe there's better advice.

The Xi-Obama meeting took place during the fourth Nuclear Security Summit, held in Washington, D.C. on March 31 and April 1, 2016. While the aim of the Summit is critical — preventing nuclear terrorism — attention focused on the sidelines where the two leaders huddled.

The last time the two leaders met, in September 2015, also in Washington, the summit went surprisingly well — considering the low expectations going in, what with cybersecurity and maritime disputes dominating the agenda. At the time, wise counsel was to focus on areas that unite us, not divide us, so the list stressed climate change, economic cooperation, fighting terrorism and organized crime, preventing pandemics, promoting alternative energy and green technologies, stopping regional wars, and the like.

While nothing in US-China relations is easy, these areas of common concerns are easier to handle — but here not my focus. I prefer to tackle the thorny, contentious issues. How can the sides show mutual respect to each other without compromising their core interests? And how can they accommodate each other without lapsing into appeasement?

Honesty is a place to start, even if not so politically correct. Here's what some on each side, suspicious of the other side, really think.

In China, some say that the U.S. seeks to "contain China" and thwart its historic rise. They see America encircling China by alliances, explicit or implicit, with Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, and India; manipulating Taiwan to keep the motherland divided; coercing China to open its markets in order to control China's industries and exploit Chinese consumers; restricting Chinese companies' operations and mergers and acquisitions in the U.S.; hacking China's computers and sending spy planes to patrol China's shores; fomenting "extremism, separatism and terrorism" in Tibet and Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous regions; and injecting Western values to overwhelm Chinese values, eroding China's independence and undermining its sovereignty.

In the U.S., some say that China is a looming political and military challenger, an economic superpower that plays by its own rules and whose opaque intentions are intimidating its neighbors. China acts solely in its own interests, critics claim, even to the detriment of the international order. China is a mercantile predator that uses government power to promote commercial interests, boosting exports and stealing jobs, and allows (indeed promotes) nefarious hacking and industrial theft. Moreover, China's authoritarian government limits human rights to maintain Party

control, and China's mounting military power, especially its modernizing blue-water navy, betrays expansionist ambitions.

How to deal with such sweeping, invidious suspicions? The normal way is for leaders to emphasize commonalities and manage differences, which seems to work well at first, but then often seems to backslide.

There is no magic solution. While progress is best made incrementally, not precipitously, I like to push for fresh perspectives.

I've been thinking of late about how to characterize differences between China and the US, and a descriptive term I've been playing with is "asymmetric". Because the core interests of China and the U.S. are not the same — which is fortunate — a zero-sum game is not inevitable. We hear about "asymmetry warfare". How about "asymmetric peacefare"!

Contrast US-China disputes with, say, the struggle between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany to control Poland. That was a "symmetric dispute" in that each side wanted precisely the same thing, making the struggle a classic zero-sum game and becoming one of the factors that led to war. This is no such symmetric dispute between China and the U.S. and therein lies the potential for progress.

So what are the kinds of asymmetric disputes found in China-US relations and how can they be handled?

There is an obvious political asymmetry. President Obama is in his last year in office and seeks, in his opinion, what's best for the U.S., without having to worry about the next election. President Xi has yet many years in office and seeks, in his opinion, what's best for China — what it will take to transform his country through economic transition, reform and the rule of law. More important, though, is the China-US asymmetry in core interests.

China would like the US to understand and respect its three core interests: (i) China's political system, which, given the country's historical traditions, huge population and imbalanced development, China's leaders believe it serves the best interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people; (ii) China's development as the country's highest national priority, which leads naturally to the need for social stability, especially during a time of economic complexities when deep and sensitive reforms are essential; and (iii) China's sovereignty over specific land and maritime territories, which reflect, after a century and a half of national oppression, both historic realities and national pride.

The US would like China to understand and respect its three core interests: (i) the sanctity of the international order and the standards of international law; (ii) accepted norms of behavior in foreign affairs and international commercial activities; and (iii) respect for human rights.

It is vital that each side come to appreciate the other side's core interests, not just what they are, but also how they have come to be. Each side should come to discern the ways of thinking that led to the specific development of each core interest, those of your side and those of the other side. In this manner, by discerning different "ways of thinking," one acquires deeper understanding and can make more nuanced and effective judgments.

My claim — perhaps my plea — is that all of these asymmetric core interests should not conflict. My hope is for harmony, which is why my call is for "asymmetric harmony" to help facilitate US-China relations. Perhaps recognizing the reality of the asymmetry and the need for the harmony can transform thinking.



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To find more about Robert Lawrence Kuhn at:

<http://english.cntv.cn/2014/12/23/ARTI1419321298029803.shtml>

To watch programs of *Closer To China with R.L. Kuhn* at:

<http://english.cntv.cn/2014/12/18/ARTI1418891990154602.shtml>

<http://english.cctv.com/2016/04/01/ARTIE3oANev2f8QZR7Rw3eIS160401.shtml>



# 罗伯特·库恩：以"非对称和谐"促进中美关系

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【熊猫观察原创】3月31日至4月1日在华盛顿举行第四次核安全峰会，令国际社会瞩目；峰会期间，中国国家主席习近平与美国总统奥巴马再次会晤，同样令国际社会瞩目！各国的专家学者们都迫不及待地奉上关于改善中美关系的意见和建议，真可谓一大波建议向我们扑面而来！但是，在我看来，专家学者们热衷提建议可不是出于利他主义，也就是说，并非单纯出于希望帮助中美两国搞好关系的考虑，而是基于一个共识：中美关系直接影响着整个世界的稳定与繁荣。



不论是指出"从哪些方面去做"的"处方型"建议，还是指出"哪些方面不能做"的"禁令式"建议，其出发点都是好的，因而值得赞赏。但我觉得，这些建议确实有些重复，听得都快让人犯困了。话又说回来，敏感的外交关系



就好比多变的金融市场，有人愿意预测趋势和分析走向是件好事儿，因为我们或许能从中筛选出很好的建议。这一次习奥会的大背景是在华盛顿举行第四次核安全峰会。此次峰会的主旨：防范核恐怖主义。在当今复杂的国际形势下，这一议题在国际上引起了高度关注。

中美两国元首上一次会见是在2015年9月，也是在华盛顿，习主席应邀对美国进行国事访问，并在纽约出席联合国成立70周年系列峰会。回想起来，在此次习奥会之前，各方对他们的会见并不太看好，担心双方会因为网络安全、海洋争端等产生龃龉。但中美双方通过理性、睿智的商议，把会谈的重点放在能让双方谈拢而不是谈崩的议题上。于是，习近平主席和奥巴马总统就气候变化、经济合作、打击恐怖主义和有组织犯罪、预防流行性疾病、推广可替代能源和绿色科技、停止局部战争等议题进行了友好且务实的会谈，达成了多项共识，取得了出人意料且令双方满意的效果。

说句实话，但凡涉及中美关系，没有一件是易事。相对而言，上述这些有着共同利益的领域处理起来还稍容易些。不过，这些不是我下面要谈的重点。我个人更乐意触及一些棘手、有争议的问题：双方该如何在不损害各自核心利益的前提下，做到相互尊重？双方如何才能在不"姑息纵容"对方的前提下，做到互相包容？

我认为，即便是不那么政治正确，也必须以"诚信"为出发点。但是，中美双方都有一部分人在怀疑对方，下面就是他们的真实想法。

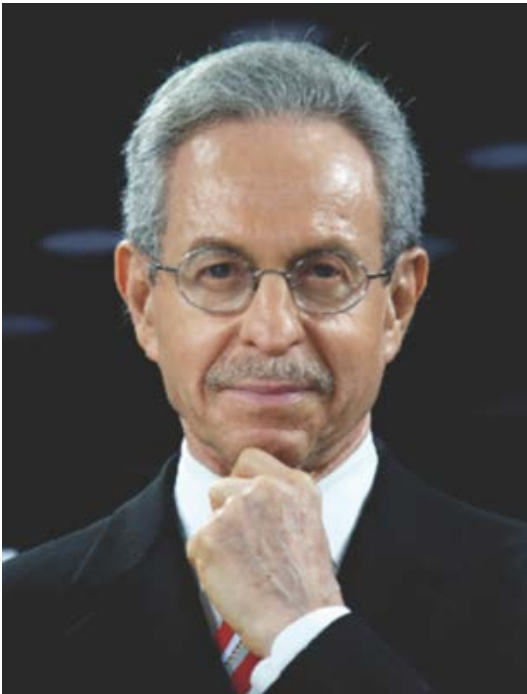
在中国，有些人说，美国试图"遏制中国"，以挫败中国历史性的崛起。在他们看来，美国正在联合日本、韩国、菲律宾、越南和印度等盟友，或明或暗地对中国进行围追堵截；美国还在操纵台湾，阻止中国统一；迫使中国开放市场，以便控制中国的产业、从中国消费者身上渔利；限制中国企业在美的经营和并购活动；利用黑客侵入中国的电脑系统，派间谍机在中国海岸近空巡航侦察；在西藏和新疆维吾尔自治区煽动"极端主义、分裂主义和恐怖主义"；向中国灌输西方价值观以压倒或替代中国的传统价值观；削弱中国的独立和践踏中国的主权等。

而在美国，则有人说，中国是一个正在赫然显现的政治和军事领域的挑战者，也是一个奉行自己的一套规则、其不透明意图使邻国感到威慑的一个经济大国。有的批评者甚至妄称"中国只顾自己的利益，以至破坏了国际秩序"，"中国是一个商业利益的巧取豪夺者，甚至动用政府权力来寻求商业利益，刺激出口、容忍（抑或支持）黑客和商业窃密行为"。还有



而美国希望中国理解并尊重它的三个核心利益：（一）国际秩序的神圣性和国际法标准；（二）在外交事务和国际商业活动中，遵循已被普遍接受的行为规范；（三）尊重人权。

双方都非常有必要尊重对方的核心利益，不仅要知道对方的核心利益是什么；更为重要的是，需要弄懂为什么这些成为了对方的核心利益。双方都应该学会换位思考，要弄明白每个核心利益的具体走向，不仅要知己，还需要知彼。只有通过真正领悟"思维方式"的差异，才能从更深层次了解对方的诉求，从而做出更贴合实际、更有效的判断。我主张或曰我请求：应当尽量避免让这些"非对称核心利益"发生冲突。我期望世界和谐，因此，我呼吁，借助"非对称和谐"来促进中美关系。也许，一旦认识到"非对称性"的存在及和谐发展的需求，这就是我们转换原有思维和理念的开始。



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