

# Asia can help US, China find common cause: ESM Goh

**He says region as voice of moderation can prevent more conflict between the 2 powers**

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The best way to prevent further US-China conflict is for Asia to forge a common cause and be a voice of moderation, said Emeritus Senior Minister (ESM) Goh Chok Tong yesterday.

Stressing that he was not calling for “Asia First”, he said Asia must be part of the world, and countries that have a stake in the region, such as the United States, must continue to be deeply engaged with it.

Asia needs to band more closely together before it can begin to urge both China and the US to find their common cause. If it can do so, it will remove much of the suspicion of China’s long-term intentions as a global power, he added.

ESM Goh was speaking at a symposium jointly organised by Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, the United States’ Brookings Institution and the China Centre for International Economic Exchanges.

Addressing about 100 business leaders and officials at The St Regis Singapore hotel, he observed how far China had come since his first visit there in 1971.

It had lifted more than 850 million people out of poverty in a single generation, “a feat unparalleled in history”, he said.

But as Dr Bruce Jones, a fellow speaker and foreign policy director from the Brookings Institution explained, the election of US President Donald Trump in 2016 and the power expansion of Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 19th Party Congress a year later set the stage for a realignment in the rela-

tionship between the two giants.

ESM Goh said China is pulling ahead in 5G technology and artificial intelligence, and the US has been considering economic and technological measures to slow China down.

The US is not reassured by China’s repeated declarations that its rise and development will be peaceful, and is worried that it wants to propagate a model of “illiberal authoritarianism”, he added.

He added that the US does not understand why China’s socialist political system has not liberalised along with economic reforms.

Meanwhile, China has concluded the US is out to contain its growth.



A BETTER WAY FORWARD

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**EMERITUS SENIOR MINISTER  
GOH CHOK TONG**, on the danger of an all-out conflict between the US and China.

But Asia, in the eye of the storm, can be a voice of moderation – by embodying the shared values of peace and stability, and growth and prosperity, and maintaining an open, inclusive, rules-based multilateral order, he said.

It should find common cause not just in word but also in deed, through trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, he said.

“Our common cause is to get the US and China to play a ‘positive sum game’, not a zero sum game.”

This voice of moderation must also be a strong Asian one, he added, and Asia must build up trust within itself and chart its own way forward.

Meanwhile, China can dispel the anxieties of the international community by working to strengthen the international system and ensure that Belt and Road projects are clean, green and inclusive.

It can also address US concerns about involuntary technology transfers and an unequal playing field between foreign and Chinese companies in China, he added.

He said that China’s reforms, if accomplished comprehensively and prudently, will promote the growth and development of China, Asia and the world.

ESM Goh said an all-out conflict between the US and China on economic and technological fronts would be disastrous.

“Even an unbridled contest where allies are pressured to choose one side and exclude the other will be highly destabilising for the global multilateral system. The best way to prevent a conflict is to forge a common cause for the two superpowers to build a better world.”

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Former Chinese vice-premier Zeng Peiyan says China, the US and the world need the two giant economies to cooperate rather than decouple. He believes that if decoupling is left unchecked, "it would be a disaster for both China and the United States and the whole world". ST PHOTO: MARCELLIN LOPEZ

# Call for China, US to oppose decoupling

**Goh Sui Noi**  
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Whether it be economic well-being, global value chains, science and technology advancement or the supply of global public goods, China, the US and the world need the two giant economies to cooperate rather than decouple, said a former Chinese vice-premier.

If decoupling is left unchecked "it would be a disaster for both China and the United States and the whole world", warned Mr Zeng Peiyan.

He called for the two sides to oppose decoupling and step up cooperation, which is the only option that serves the interests of their people.

However, the Brookings Institution's Dr Bruce Jones said that, even if both were to make serious progress in resolving their economic ties, it will not remove all the issues in their relationship.

"China has reached the point where it has global interests and will now seek to have a global security capacity to protect those interests. That's natural but it naturally pushes the United States and

China into a serious source of tension with one another", given the role the US has played in securing global trade and energy flows among other things.

"I don't think we are seeing nearly enough investment by either side in bilateral diplomacy or the multilateral architecture needed to manage that set of relationships and inevitable tension between them," he said.

Dr Jones and Mr Zeng were speaking yesterday at a symposium on China-US ties jointly organised by China Centre for International Economic Exchanges, Brookings Institution of the US and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

Mr Zeng, who is chairman of the centre, said China and the US had benefited from 40 years of opening up their markets to each other and increasingly closer cooperation, with China's economy growing around 9 per cent a year in that time and the US seeing an almost threefold rise in its economic aggregate.

The spillover effects of their economic cooperation had facilitated development in the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world.

Their trade frictions, however, have hurt both economies and that of the world.

China's growth has slowed to 6.2 per cent in the first three quarters of this year, signs of recession are emerging in the US economy and global growth for the year is forecast to be at 3 per cent, its slowest since the 2008 financial crisis.

The push to decouple would lead to a breakdown of the complex global value chain and building a separate independent and exclusive industrial system will be costly and less efficient, Mr Zeng said.

Also, decoupling will not change the status of the US trade deficit, he added, pointing out that, in the first six months of this year, the US trade deficit had gone up by 8 per cent instead of going down.

On a more positive note, former Thai deputy prime minister Surakiart Sathirathai said Asia – including Asean – is taking the lead in demonstrating an old Confucius adage: "when you collaborate you win, when you fight you lose".

He said significant multilateralism and free trade agreements in Asia-Pacific are taking shape and will become the foundation of Asian economic well-being, citing, among others, the soon-to-be concluded Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

"The world still needs both multilateral and globalised cooperation to turn conflict into cooperation and collaboration," he added.

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