



The Road Ahead: The Post-COVID-19 International Order

Stimson-CIGS Webinar

April 23, 2020

<https://www.stimson.org/event/the-road-ahead-the-post-covid-19-international-order/>

SUMMARY

Panelists

Ellen Laipson

Kuni Miyake

Yuki Tatsumi (moderator)

On April 23, 2020, the Stimson's Japan Program hosted a webinar via Zoom, discussing the current uncertainty of the international order in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yuki Tatsumi, director of the Japan Program, moderated the event with Ellen Laipson (Director, International Security Program, George Mason University; President Emeritus, Stimson Center) and Kuni Miyake (Research Director, Foreign and National Security Affairs, Canon Institute for Global Studies) participating as panelists. The event began with Yuki Tatsumi introducing both of the panelists, and asking the viewers to direct any questions to the Q&A chat option.

Tatsumi began the discussion by asking the panelists about what the post-coronavirus world may look like. Miyake put in perspective the pessimistic outlook of the current pandemic. Pandemics do not produce anything; they only destroy with no discrimination. Miyake expressed his concern about the future of globalization and the view of a free, open, rules-based international order. While globalization will continue to exist, the globalization of "hearts and minds" will not, according to Miyake, due to less travel. Miyake noted that although the economic side of globalization will continue, there are not many winners in a pandemic, and xenophobia and nationalism will remain strong.

Laipson agreed with most of the assessments Miyake put forth but asserted that the pandemic will not transform the international order as much. Despite the pandemic being a global problem, states will continue to look inward, and that will harm the logic of international order. With competition and strife comes the opportunity to cooperate, but also a great question remains facing a "consensus to adapt the system." Laipson mentioned that middle powers in the global system may have more influence and leadership going forward.

Tatsumi elaborated on both panelists' points that even though the system is shifting to one that "takes care of its own people," supply chains are more integrated than ever. She asked Laipson about how the elements of competition, middle power leadership, and global supply chains intersect. Laipson noted how the United States continues to worry about actors such as North Korea and Iran despite the pandemic. Regular national security threats continue to exist, but the impulse to turn inward changes "how countries think about their national security

priorities.” Laipson expressed her worry that states may question integration with each other and look for individual solutions.

Miyake observed that in the early 20th century the world dealt with the Spanish Flu, the failure of the League of Nations, and the World Wars. While history may not repeat, it may “rhyme,” and there is a risk of making similar policy mistakes as were made in the 1930s. He coined the term “bi-globalization,” or the economic network dividing into two independent parts or more, one side representing China and the other the United States or European countries. Still, even with constant worries, the United States has a measure of security due to abundant resources and geography. In comparison, China deals with more domestic political strife and resource struggles.

Tatsumi then asked the panelists about the future of U.S.-China competition. Laipson noted that the relationship is more contestational compared to a Cold War scenario. The United States is attempting to level the playing field of U.S.-China economic relations amidst other issues, and in the coronavirus outbreak there is a lack of security cooperation that is concerning. Miyake stated that the coronavirus is accelerating competition, rivalry, and an anti-China sentiment in Washington. Miyake asserted that China’s goal is to remove Western elements from its sphere of influence going forward.

The webinar then transitioned to a Q&A. William Jannace asked Miyake and Laipson about the possibility of a temporary system of relatively benign spheres of influence emerging to meet the supply side of the international order. Laipson noted that there is a possibility that supply chains may be strengthened through regional efforts. Naturally, countries that are closer together can develop supply chains faster. Miyake cautioned that China plays too large a role in global trade to exclude.

The next question from Gil Rozman was centered on how Japan will respond to China-U.S. competition. Miyake answered that Japan’s only option is to survive. For Japan, China is too significant a neighbor to completely ignore, geographically and politically. Miyake indicated that regardless of what happens, Japan will stand its ground to deter China by developing its defense and security relations, while increasing spending on its own defense. Laipson put forth another point that as Japan increases its spending on defense, questions are being raised in the United States as to whether it is spending too much on its own defense.

Yoso Furumoto asked about the role of Japan in U.S.-China relations. Miyake replied that as long as tensions with the United States remain, China will attempt to have a better relationship with Japan. Even though this is happening, Miyake does not expect China to make concessions to Japan and vice-versa.

Laipson fielded the next question from John Jojin on the prospective role of middle powers in the post-pandemic international order. She noted that even since President Clinton, the United States has been searching for ways to pass more responsibility to other states in the system. As the United States is preoccupied with domestic issues, middle countries have a perfect opportunity to take more responsibility. Laipson sees the pandemic as a chance for middle states to step forward.

Kevin Maher asked about excessive dependence on Chinese supply chains going forward. Miyake observed that dependency on China would be okay if China was a normal nation. Since it is not, there is a political or economic cost associated with it. Laipson added that the United

States was wrong when it believed that China's economic reforms and growth would lead to China's political transformation. China's rise happened at a time of great technological progress, and both panelists expressed their concern about China's use of technology going forward.

Sada Ito asked if the United States can play a role in creating a G7 summit or something similar to deal with pandemics with coordinated responses. Miyake stated that while the United States should, the Trump administration would not. Laipson followed up by mentioning that President Trump had an unpredictable nature that makes it difficult to assess where any bilateral relations are going.

Joe Ross asked if the costs of dealing with China are beginning to outweigh the benefits. Laipson responded by saying that the United States must deal with China no matter what, not having the choice of walking away because China plays such a major role in the international community. Miyake added that, when negotiating cost and benefit, each side should have 49 percent. The last two points are fought over until both parties believe there is a win-win situation.

John Parachini asked how Russia and India will be positioned in the international system after the pandemic and how the United States and Japan will respond to them. Miyake suggested that India will engage with both countries and interact on overlapping interests but is not a natural ally of Japan, while Russia will continue to harass the United States and Japan in order to stay relevant. Laipson mentioned that for the United States, Russia will continue to be a headache, and while India should be a close ally, there is too much uncertainty going forward to see a clear path.

The webinar wrapped up with Tatsumi thanking the audience and the panelists for participating.