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“The Present as Prologue: The Gloomy Outlook for US-China Relations”

Online talk by

Dr. Avery Goldstein

David M. Knott Professor of Global Politics and International Relations
University of Pennsylvania

10 a.m. Tuesday, October 6, 2020



Dr. Avery Goldstein is the David M. Knott Professor of Global Politics and International Relations in the Political Science Department, Inaugural Director of the Center for the Study of Contemporary China, and Associate Director of the Christopher H. Browne Center for International Politics at the University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses on international relations, security studies, and Chinese politics. He is the author of *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford University Press, 2005), *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear*

Revolution (Stanford University Press, 2000), and *From Bandwagon to Balance of Power Politics: Structural Constraints and Politics in China, 1949-1978* (Stanford University Press, 1991). Among his other publications are articles in the journals *International Security*, *International Organization*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Security Studies*, *China Quarterly*, *Asian Survey*, *Comparative Politics*, *Orbis*, and *Polity* as well as chapters in a variety of edited volumes. Goldstein is also a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.

Abstract: Relations between China and the United States took a clear and possibly irreversible turn for the worse in 2019. This transformation has been shaped by the constraints of the international system as well as national attributes distinctive to the US and China. Chief among the international constraints are the structural condition of anarchy in which all states find themselves and the distribution of power that defines the system's polarity. The national attributes most relevant to understanding the evolution of US-China relations are the countries' geographic locations, their technological capabilities, and their domestic politics. A brief review of these causes operating at the international and national levels suggests that the shift from limited competition to rivalry was very likely, perhaps overdetermined, even if its timing was unpredictable. These causes also indicate why it will be difficult to return to the pragmatic sort of managed and limited competition that characterized the era of engagement.



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