Relations between China and the United States are a key component of this current level of the Great Global Game being played out in international affairs, and the COVID-19 pandemic is a factor that is generally having a negative impact on their relations, putting them under increasing strain. Although more positive trends could seem more appropriate, given that the world is facing a common threat.

It is difficult but nonetheless possible to discern those positive trends that give us cause for some optimism about what we can expect to see on the horizon once we have gotten past the COVID-19 pandemic, a factor affecting relations comprised of several elements. One of these elements is strictly medical, which we could hardly say is the most influential element, underpinned by a belief that is popular today: medicine should not be more life-threatening than the disease.

However, the consequences of severe drug overdoses loom beyond the horizon we have mentioned. A process where...
lines of communication are being broken down all over the world is already visible, and communications between the world’s two biggest economies have not been spared.

This has a lot to do with the economic hole China has already fallen into, and the United States is now sliding in the same direction, sinking inexorably into crisis by the look of it. Just take a look at the almost apocalyptic unemployment growth projections in the US, which would have been unthinkable just two or three months back.

It looks like both of the world’s leading powers will have to drink this bitter cup of suffering to the last dregs. And the rest of the world will have to drink it too. They will have to do so for reasons, whether real or fabricated, which stem from the very same strictly medical concerns, an element of the COVID-19 pandemic factor.

However, it seems that now would be a good time to discuss what the picture will look like after the battle with COVID-19 is over. There is a baffling yet popular theory about the collapse of globalism, a theory about regions and states becoming self-sufficient in complete isolation from one another. These kinds of theories are complete nonsense, because there have never been these kinds of regions or states recorded throughout the entire history of humanity. More importantly, they simply would not be able to survive.

People incorrectly cite the USSR in the 1930s as an example, which arguably stood out as the most progressive period in Russian history. Yes, it certainly did have its flaws, but flaws can always be found in every state and throughout every period of history. Even back then, when “heroism of the workers” and the role of “the inspirer and organizer of the victories of communism” were important domestic factors and ideological pillars, the factor of international affairs, the same Great Global Game, played no less of an essential role during that period of history.

In other words, what is now referred to as “globalism” has been observed in one form or another throughout history. Just consider the Great Silk Road that existed in ancient and medieval times, and its modern counterpart, the Belt and Road Initiative. Before COVID-19 emerged as a new factor affecting relations, the trade and economic ties between the US and China were the most important and generally beneficial element of the modern process of globalization.

That is why it is so important that these relations should be restored beyond the horizon of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once again, the prospects for this process to take place given the bilateral political landscape appear quite bleak.

Rather than coordinating efforts to overcome a common affliction, both sides are playing a blame game, trying to pin the responsibility for the outbreak on the other side. The media war is simply not going to die down, whose victims are journalists working for leading accredited media outlets on the territories of the rival countries. Let’s hope that attempts to put a specific price tag on this blame will not be made on a state level.

The words spoken over the phone in a conversation between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping which took place immediately after the recent G-20 video conference offer a good cause for this kind of hope.

As for the medical aspect of the problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the phrases chosen by Xi Jinping to address his American counterpart stand out, which specifically highlight the shared nature of this threat, as infectious diseases “recognize no border or race”. That is why “joint efforts” need to be made, which reflects calls for a “coordinated” response in the wording of the G-20 Leaders’ Statement.

The Chinese leader expressed the “sincere hope of the Chinese people” that the US will contain the spread of COVID-19 at an early date and reduce its impact on the American people, and he also voiced China’s willingness to help.

The American President responded by expressing his gratitude and intention to accept this assistance, which commentators from leading news agencies made particular note of.

No less noteworthy are the Chinese leader’s words about the “need to enhance macroeconomic policy coordination to stabilize markets, boost growth and protect livelihood, and to keep global supply chains open, stable and secure.” After all, the problems that emerged affect these very supply chains. The medical factor is not the only objective cause of today’s problems, since they are mainly due to malevolent members of the American political elite who oppose the possibility of US relations with China developing in a positive direction.

Their interests are represented by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is already being called a “political hooligan” in China. It is Pompeo who still choses to refer to the novel coronavirus as the "Chinese virus". A week prior to the virtual G-20 conference, President Donald Trump succumbed to the temptation to use this simplistic
However, it seems that this was an isolated incident which he is unlikely to repeat in the future. As we have already noted, this is due to the objective situation in America, where the coronavirus is spreading and the economic situation is deteriorating, which is no time for stoking anti-Chinese sentiment.

Yet even in China, the current situation and prospects are still not looking great, although a positive economic trend is beginning to be seen there. China remains an export-oriented country despite efforts to boost domestic consumption.

That is why Beijing has welcomed the Trump administration's emergency fiscal package to stimulate American domestic demand, which will also play no small part in helping to revive the Chinese economy. Postponing the decision on whether or not to grant Chinese IT giant Huawei access the US market is considered to have been an equally important step in the right direction, whose increasingly prominent role on the level of the Great Global Game currently being played was recently discussed on HBO.

There has been news that China, in turn, may purchase more energy products from the United States in a deal worth $32.8 billion. China has committed to import an additional $52.4 billion worth of American energy products under the “phase one” trade agreement.

Nevertheless, the Chinese newspaper Global Times discusses the possibility of “countermeasures” against US restrictions being put on the agenda for China’s next meeting of legislative delegates and political advisers known as the “two sessions”, the largest political event of the year. These measures will presumably be taken if Huawei is refused access to the American market.

Overall, the bigger picture of US-Chinese relations appears to be quite inconsistent. But it is not a hopeless situation, and once we have gotten past the COVID-19 pandemic, the restoration of relations could be on the horizon.

Vladimir Terekhov, expert on the issues of the Asia-Pacific region, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.