



## **Xi Visit Underscores Rising Mutual Expectations**

by Bonnie S. Glaser

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The five-day official visit to the United States by China's vice president and leader in waiting, Xi Jinping, accomplished several important objectives. In Washington D.C., Xi had his first ever meeting with President Obama, which provided an opportunity for the two leaders to begin to establish a rapport that will prove especially important in managing the increasingly complex US-China relationship if Obama is elected to a second term. He met with legislators and heard their concerns about Chinese trade policies, human rights record, and its ties to Syria and Iran. On Valentine's Day, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton celebrated the expanding US-Chinese friendship by hosting an elegant and sumptuous lunch for the Chinese vice president on the eighth floor of the State Department. At the Pentagon, Xi was greeted with full military honors and exchanged views on the US-China military-to-military relationship and security matters with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. In a public address, Xi highlighted the mutual benefits of the massive US-China trade relationship and vowed greater cooperation to cope with international challenges. He introduced himself to US business leaders and listened to their recommendations for advancing the US-China economic relationship.

Stopping in Iowa, Xi renewed friendships with dozens of residents of the town of Muscatine he had met during his first visit to the US in 1985, including the family that hosted him for two nights. Climbing into a John Deere tractor on an Iowa farm, Xi demonstrated affability rarely demonstrated by Chinese leaders. In California, Xi toured the Port of Los Angeles, attended a trade conference hosted by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, visited a suburban school with Vice President Joe Biden to promote the study of Mandarin in the US, and went to a Lakers game. As a reminder of the importance of the Chinese market to US exporters, Chinese trade and investment delegations traveling with Xi purchased approximately \$27 billion of US goods, including silicon chips, electronic materials, equipment and machinery, and agricultural produce.

Exuding self-confidence and vigorously defending Chinese interests at every venue, Xi also helped boost his stature back home by showing he is capable of steering his country's relationship with Washington for the next decade. A successful visit, devoid of any major missteps, has likely increased the odds that Xi will smoothly succeed Hu Jintao later this year as secretary general of the Chinese Communist Party, and subsequently assume the titles of president of the nation and chairman of the Central Military Commission.

The central theme of the visit was that the US and China have rising expectations of each other. In closed-door

meetings as well as open statements, Xi raised demands for changes in US policy while fending off US pressure to adjust Chinese policies to satisfy US concerns. For example, in written answers to questions posed by the Washington Post published on the eve of his arrival, Xi reassured the US that China "welcomes a constructive role by the United States in promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region." In an obvious reference to the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia, he suggested, however, that recent US moves in the region to bolster its military presence and access arrangements are viewed by China as destabilizing: "At a time when people long for peace, stability and development, to deliberately give prominence to the military security agenda, scale up military deployment and strengthen military alliances in not really what most countries in the region hope to see."

Speaking to a luncheon hosted by groups with shared interests in better US-Chinese relations, Xi called for the US to respect PRC "core interests" through concrete actions. Quoting George Washington, he stated that the standard to judge a true friend is actions, not words. Regarding Taiwan, Xi called on the US to adhere to the three US-China joint communiqués, uphold the one-China policy, support the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and oppose "Taiwan independence" with actual deeds.

In his closed-door meeting with Obama, Xi warned against protectionist measures, suggesting instead that trade friction be managed based on the principle of consultation on an equal basis and mutual benefits. At various events, Xi publicly called on the US to lift restrictions on high-tech exports to China as soon as possible and provide a level playing field for Chinese firms investing in the United States. He insisted that China has already taken ample steps to address US concerns about the trade imbalance, IPR protection, indigenous innovation, and the investment environment in China.

Xi told Biden that the two sides should correctly and objectively view each other's strategic intentions, implying that Washington's assessment of China's ambitions is unsound. He urged the two sides to not create trouble for each other and "refrain from exceeding each other's bottom line." In a thinly veiled reference to Chinese dissatisfaction about US arms sales to Taiwan, Xi demanded that the US "avoid causing repeated disruptions and damage to Sino-US relations." Sources say that he pressed the US to end its arms sales to Taiwan.

In the run-up to the visit, the US side urged Beijing to signal the importance a sustained and reliable bilateral military relationship by announcing an agenda of bilateral military exchanges for the coming year during Xi's visit to the Pentagon, but the proposal was rebuffed. At the opening of the meeting with Defense Secretary Panetta, the friction between

the two militaries was palpable. Reflecting the PLA's growing suspicions that the US is seeking to strategically encircle China and contain its re-emergence as a great power, Xi conveyed lack of enthusiasm for strengthening military relations with the US. Using carefully chosen words, he told Panetta that "I know you attach a great deal of importance to developing our relationship. You support mil-to-mil exchanges and cooperation between China and the United States. And you want our two militaries to build a constructive relationship. I appreciate that position." Following their meeting, the Pentagon's spokesman said that Xi agreed that the two militaries should "discuss the specifics of a program of future exchanges" and endorsed an exchange of visits between Chinese and U.S. defense ministers, but no timetable for those goals was set.

American messages to Xi were equally sharp and demanding.

At the State Department lunch, Biden referred to the many differences between the US and China in their approaches to global challenges, and noted that the US "strongly disagreed with China and Russia's veto of a resolution against the unconscionable violence being perpetrated by the Assad regime" against protesters in Syria. Obama encouraged Xi to pursue policies that contribute to the resolution of regional and global problems. "With expanding power and prosperity also comes increased responsibilities," Obama stated. As countries reduce their imports of oil from Iran as part of a multilateral effort to pressure Teheran to forego development of nuclear weapons, the president warned Xi that China should not backfill by closing more deals with Iran.

Economic and trade issues were highlighted at every opportunity. Vice President Biden insisted that Americans welcome competition, but underscored that the game must be fair and the rules must be followed. "We very much want to see more of our businesses able to sell their goods and services in China," he stated in a speech delivered at lunch in Los Angeles. President Obama also called for China to play by the same trade rules as other major world powers. He also pressed China's presumptive next leader to let the value of the yuan rise more quickly.

Both Obama and Biden raised US concerns about China's human rights situation, noting that in some areas conditions have deteriorated. They called for the release of several prominent individuals who remain in Chinese prisons. Signaling that human rights would remain a priority for the US after Xi assume power, Biden maintained that "we see our advocacy for human rights as a fundamental aspect of our foreign policy and we believe a key to the prosperity and stability of societies."

Blunt communication between US leaders and Xi Jinping, who will soon head the Chinese government, party and military, is positive and essential if the two countries are to begin to close the "trust deficit" that both sides agree exists. But saying is one thing and doing is another. Concrete steps should be taken by both sides to adapt to each other for mutual benefit. Once the US presidential election and China's 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress are behind us, the US and China should work

out a modus vivendi on the issues that divide them and build a more cooperative future.

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