

The Obama-Xi Summit in Beijing

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On November 11, 2014 following the conclusion of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, President Barack Obama of the United States and President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China met together at Zhongnanhai's Yingtai for an evening conversation in the same vein as their 2013 meeting at Sunnylands estate in California. Their discussion lasted a total of five hours, two hours longer than anticipated. Prior to their Yingtai meeting, Obama had announced the loosening of restrictions on Chinese citizens' visas for travel to the United States, extending the validity of the visas; and the two states had reached agreement on revisions to the scope of IT products covered by the Information Technology Agreement (ITA), eliminating tariffs on an even greater number of new IT products. All of which contributed to a friendly bilateral summit atmosphere.

As they continued their discussion at Yingtai, Xi pointed out to Obama that on the very spot on which they were standing Qing Emperor Kangxi had once deliberated over strategies to retake Taiwan--an apparent attempt by Xi to emphasize to Obama the status of Taiwan as a part of China. Also included in Xi's talking points were China's ability to reach its goal of doubling per capita income by 2020 with a 7% annual growth rate and the idea that democracy need not be limited to the "one man, one vote" model of direct election. Here, Xi emphasized that the Chinese Communist Party required an extensive democratic consultation process within the party and that this "democratic centralism"

was collective in nature. Finally, Xi suggested that the most sensitive issues for China are external threats to its sovereignty and security. Though the Taiwan issue was not a primary topic for discussion during Obama and Xi's Beijing summit, Xi nevertheless again worked to instill in Obama the necessity of the United States recognizing Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as core interests of China. For his part, Obama indicated that the United States had no interest in either curbing or containing China, but was "willing to conduct candid communication and dialogue with China," in order to "manage and control disagreements effectively and avoid misunderstanding and misjudgment."

November 12th, Xi and Obama met in the Great Hall of the People to begin their official summit talks. Obama declared that he does not support Taiwanese and Tibetan independence while Xi put forward six priorities in furthering Sino-American relations: (1) strengthening high-level communication and exchanges, and promoting strategic mutual trust; (2) handling bilateral relations on the basis of mutual respect; (3) deepening exchanges and cooperation in all fields; (4) managing and controlling divergences and sensitive issues in a constructive way; (5) carrying out inclusive cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region; and (6) jointly coping with all regional and global challenges. The two countries also issued the "U.S.-China Joint Announcement on Climate Change," and concluded agreements on military-to-military confidence-building mechanisms specifically, the "Memorandum

of Understanding on Notification of Major Military Activities,” and the “Memorandum of Understanding on Rules of Behavior for the Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters.”

China, the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gasses (accounting for approximately 29% of the world total), promised to limit its rapidly increasing carbon emissions by 2030, and increase non-fossil fuel energy consumption to 20% of total consumption. Obama likewise announced that by 2025 the United States will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26% to 28% from 2005 levels. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), who is to take over as Senate majority leader in January 2015, criticized Obama over the agreement. McConnell claims Obama is using the agreement as an excuse to shut down American power plants, and he has demonstrated his intention to block the measure. As to Sino-American military confidence-building measures, agreement was reached only on preliminary memorandums of understanding. As such, the U.S. hopes in future to include annexes covering its top priority of prior notification by China of any ballistic missile launch as well as rules for air-to-air encounters.

The Obama-Xi summit in no way indicates that Sino-American bilateral relations are in for smooth sailing; the two states have shown a degree of cooperation, but there remains both private and public antagonism between them. While in Beijing, Obama insisted that the South China Sea dispute be resolved peacefully according to international law, but in a speech in Brisbane, Australia, prior to the G20 meeting, Obama openly declared the Asian security order “must not be based on spheres of influence, or coercion or intimidation where big nations bully

the small,” an obvious, albeit implicit, reference to China. **BT**

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