

China's president-in-waiting Xi Jinping visits Washington

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Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping arrived in Washington this week for discussions with President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, and other top US officials, who pressed him on economic and trade issues. He is traveling on to Iowa and California, to announce deals by Chinese corporations with US agricultural and film interests.

Xi is expected to become China's president after this autumn's 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which will significantly reshuffle the CCP's top leadership. Of the nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee, the CCP's leading organ, only two—Xi and his apparently defeated rival for the presidency, Li Keqiang—will keep their positions.

The visit was billed as an opportunity for top US officials to meet the future leader of China. On Tuesday Xi met with Biden, US military officials, and stopped briefly for an Oval Office meeting with Obama.

Biden issued an extraordinary public denunciation of China during a champagne toast at the US State Department. He criticized China's currency as undervalued—thus helping keep China's exports to US consumers relatively cheap and competitive—as well as alleged Chinese violations of intellectual property rights, and human rights abuses.

Biden reserved a special criticism of Beijing over Syria. On February 4 China joined Russia in vetoing a UN Security Council resolution the US and its allies hoped would allow them to press for military action against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Biden said he “strongly disagreed” with China's veto of “a resolution against the unconscionable violence” in Syria.

Xi responded with a bland invocation of Beijing's pleas for “mutual respect” and requests for the United States not to use “protectionism” to cut off China from

its export markets in the US

Xi's visit was also marked by rising Sino-American military tensions, after the Pentagon's strategic review last month identified China as the main target of US military planning. Though he is a civilian, Xi stopped at the Pentagon for talks with US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. Panetta said he hoped for a “healthy, stable, and reliable military-to-military relationship” with China.

Obama also attacked China's currency policy and human rights record, with Xi responding that there was “room for improvement” in China's human rights record.

Small groups of protesters appeared around the White House—including Tibetan separatist groups, activists from the Uighur ethnic group that lives in China's Xinjiang region, the Falun Gong religious movement, and pro-Taiwan independence protesters. They chanted, “Xi is a liar.”

Yesterday Xi discussed trade and human rights issues with US congressmen, and addressed a 600-strong group of US corporate executives. He called US-China economic ties an “unstoppable river” and asked the United States not to work against Chinese “core interests” in Taiwan or Tibet. Xi left Washington last night for Muscatine, Iowa—a city he visited in 1985 during a research tour to study US agricultural practices.

The most striking element of Xi's visit is the provocative and high-handed character of the US treatment of China—a country which holds over \$1 trillion in US debt, and with which the US carries out over \$295 billion in yearly trade. This trade includes US imports of cheap consumer goods that are critical to US living standards.

US criticisms of the Chinese Stalinist dictatorship's human rights record are entirely hollow, however, when compared to the policies of the Obama administration. With this year's National Defense Authorization Act, Obama signed a law allowing him to order indefinite military detentions of US citizens—whom he has already asserted the right to murder without trial, as in the case of Anwar al-Awlaki. Though its population is four times larger, China still incarcerates fewer people than the US, which jails over 1 percent of its population.

Already responsible for the deaths of over a million Iraqis and Afghans, US officials now lecture Beijing for not giving its imprimatur to a new US war—this time, against Syria.

If Chinese officials do not storm angrily out of meetings when given hypocritical lectures by US politicians, it is because they are terrified of an open break in relations with Washington and the impact this would have on the rising working class protests in China's export industries. Often, moreover, their private sympathies increasingly tilt towards American imperialism.

A so-called "Fifth Generation" of CCP leaders expects to come to power at this year's party congress. Trained more as businessmen and lawyers than previous generations—who were often trained as engineers or technical specialists—the "Fifth Generation" is riven by the profound antagonisms unleashed by the CCP's decision to integrate China into the world market as a source of cheap labor.

The "Fifth Generation" is divided into various factions, including the "princelings"—children of former top CCP officials who have become rich by exploiting their family connections to get top state or business posts—and the nominally more populist "League faction" (*tuanpai*) of ex-Communist Youth League members. The latter faction is more tied to current President Hu Jintao and his protégé, Li Keqiang. However, in 2007 the CCP's 17th National Party Congress imposed Xi over Li as Hu's presumptive successor.

The "princeling" faction has become a target of popular resentment, amid rising land protests and strikes by industrial workers in recent years. Including both Xi and Chongqing party secretary Bo Xilai, the "princeling" faction includes many officials whose

families pressed for more free-market policies, even prior to the Stalinists' re-establishment of capitalism in China in the 1980s. It is also apparently more powerful in China's export-processing centers, where CCP officials have more direct ties to foreign capital.

Cheng Li, a Brookings Institution commentator on China, told the *Wall Street Journal*: "Princelings were never popular, but they've become so politically powerful, there's some serious concern about the legitimacy of the 'Red Nobility.' The Chinese public is particularly resentful about the princelings' control of both political power and economic wealth."

Xi himself has impeccably pro-free market credentials. His father, Xi Zhongcun, was imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution and Xi himself was sent to the countryside because Mao distrusted Xi Zhongcun's open support for market policies in the early 1960s. Once returned to high office in the 1970s as Deng Xiaoping deepened the ties to US imperialism developed under Mao, Xi Zhongcun set up China's first major export-processing center at Shenzhen, near Hong Kong.

Xi himself had a prominent career in coastal provinces profiting from the explosion of private export businesses producing for US and European markets. He became the governor of Fujian province in 2000, the year he came onto the Politburo standing committee. He subsequently took up regional leadership posts in Zhejiang province in 2002 and Shanghai in 2007.



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