

Chinese president appeals to Obama for “new type of great power relations”

John Chan
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In his June 7–8 meeting with US President Barack Obama in Sunnyland in California, Chinese President Xi Jinping tried to reassure Washington that China has no intention of challenging US global dominance.

The very fact that Xi agreed to attend an “informal” meeting at a billionaire’s retreat—breaking decades of insistence on formal state visits at the White House—was a peace offering from the new Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership, in the face of Obama’s aggressive “pivot to Asia” to contain China.

After the first day’s meeting with Obama, Xi insisted in front of reporters that China will firmly remain on the “path of peaceful development.” The Chinese president maintained that both Washington and Beijing must choose a course “unprecedented in history ... one that is different from the inevitable confrontation and conflict between the major powers of the past.”

Xi outlined his three points of what he termed a “new type of great power relations”; first, “no conflict and confrontation”, one that “must view each other’s strategic intention objectively and rationally.” Second, they must “mutually respect each other’s core interests and major concerns,” and thirdly, pursue cooperation based on “abandoning the zero-sum game.”

In fact, the tensions between the two countries are just beneath the surface. Washington is already moving against what China regards as its “core interests” because it views Beijing’s expanding influence as incompatible with US geo-political dominance in the Asia-Pacific—a state of affairs that has existed since the end of World War II.

Though its gross domestic product (GDP) was just one-eighth the size of the US economy at the beginning of the 2000s, China’s GDP is now over half that of the US. It has replaced the US as the largest trading partner for most countries in Asia.

The Obama administration has consistently sought to deploy more of its military resources to Asia, while strengthening its regional alliances and basing agreements. These include alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Australia, as well as deepening military ties with India and Vietnam, which have provoked tense territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas. The “pivot” aims to deploy superior US military power to force China to function economically and geopolitically in line with the interests of the US financial elite.

Speaking of Xi’s appeal for “new” and more harmonious international relations, Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, who advocates defusing US-China tensions, told CNN: “If it works well and both sides are lucky, then at the end of 10 years, this may have become a habit that has transformed international relations.”

“If it doesn’t work,” Kissinger continued, “each side will look after its own interests. We surely will.”

The message is that if China fails to fall into line by incorporating itself into a US-led order, Washington will ruthlessly undermine Chinese interests, including through war.

Xi proclaimed that his slogan of a “China Dream” shares a common objective with the “American Dream” of promoting global economic prosperity. But Xi’s main goal—i.e., to make China a “rich and powerful nation”—is fundamentally unacceptable to Washington. Xi took the slogan from a book written by Chinese military academic who called for building a military force to rival America’s in the coming decades.

Prior to the summit, Obama made clear he would aggressively raise the issue of alleged Chinese cyber intrusions into US corporations as well as government

and military networks.

Obama apparently succeeded in using the issue to extract concessions. In particular, Xi agreed to use China's economic leverage to exert pressure on its ally, North Korea, to return to talks over abandoning its nuclear program.

Outgoing White House national security advisor Tom Donilon told reporters that both leaders "agreed that North Korea has to denuclearise, that neither country will accept North Korea as a nuclear-armed state, and that we would work together to deepen cooperation and dialogue to achieve denuclearisation."

Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi reported that Xi had told Obama that China and the United States were "the same in their positions and objectives" on the North Korean nuclear issue.

Obama and Xi also announced that a working team will be set up under the annual US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue to jointly combat supposedly "common" cyber security threats.

"President Xi and I recognise that, because of the incredible advances of technology, the issue of cyber-security and the need for rules, and common approaches to security, have become increasingly important," Obama declared.

Obama downplayed the issue partly due to fallout from exposure of the fact that his government authorised the National Security Agency (NSA) to collect vast online and phone records from millions of American citizens, under the pretext of the "war on terror." This points to the stunning hypocrisy of the Obama administration, which runs the world's largest cyber spying operations, in using this issue to pressure the Chinese regime.

Nevertheless, Obama exploited alleged Chinese hacking to pressure Xi to discipline Chinese businesses not to violate US corporations' intellectual property and for Beijing to further open up economically.

Yang Jiechi also said that cyber security "should not become the root cause of mutual suspicion and friction; rather, it should be a new bright spot in our cooperation."

Shortly after the Xi-Obama meeting, North Korean officials met with their South Korean counterparts in the border truce village of Panmunjom to prepare a ministerial meeting in Seoul for Wednesday, the first since 2007. After the US and its South Korean ally

jointly threatened North Korea with military exercises in April—including over-flights by nuclear-capable strategic bombers—North Korea had threatened "all-out war" and shut down an industrial zone jointly run with South Korea.

Fearing the consequences of the US exploiting North Korea's nuclear "threat" to further ratchet up tensions with China, Xi apparently pressured Pyongyang, including by leaking plans for Chinese-backed "regime change" to oust North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Despite Beijing's efforts to appease Washington over North Korea, it is only a matter of time before Washington takes up another concern to confront China, on issues ranging from territorial disputes in the South China Sea to the ongoing civil war in Syria.



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