

The queen's China “gaffe”

Robert Stevens
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The queen intervened into British politics last week by openly criticising China.

In a video clip released after a Buckingham Palace garden party, the queen is heard accusing members of a Chinese trade delegation of being “very rude” to the British ambassador. Her comments point to a rift in ruling circles over the closeness of economic relations being developed with China by the Conservative government and what is being done to ensure this development. This is especially so under conditions in which the United States, Britain's main ally, is stepping up its encirclement of and war plans against China.

Last October, Chinese President Xi Jinping was feted by the British government on a five-day state visit. Trade and investment worth around £40 billion was agreed between the two countries.

China was offered unprecedented access to the UK's economy, including strategically important sectors such as the nuclear power industry. Funding is being sought for nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point and Sizewell, to be followed by China building a Hualong One-type reactor at Bradwell on the Essex coast. These projects could be worth £100 billion over the next decade. The key announcement during Xi's visit was the choice of London as the location of the first overseas sovereign debt market in Chinese renminbi. This followed Britain's decision earlier in 2015, against the wishes of the US, to join the \$50 billion China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

The queen's comments were presented by the British media as an “unguarded” moment, but the reality is that the woman who has been on the throne for more than 60 years does not make such “gaffes.” On the rare occasion she makes a statement involving politics, it is to ensure that her view is known. Prior to the Scottish independence referendum vote—to the dismay of those advocating a leave vote—the queen very deliberately told a well-wisher who mentioned the referendum, “I hope people will think very carefully about the future.”

The queen's comments on China were far less nuanced,

highly choreographed and were meant as a public expression of her displeasure. They were made during an exchange between the queen, the Lord Chamberlain, William James Robert Peel, senior officer of the royal household, and Lucy d'Orsi, the Metropolitan Police's Gold Commander during Xi's state visit.

The entire episode was filmed by Peter Wilkinson, a lifelong media professional, and the British queen's official cameraman for the last 16 years.

During the party, Peel took the queen over to d'Orsi and introduced the queen to her. Peel immediately made pointed criticisms of the Chinese delegation, with the queen responding in kind. Everyone clearly knew about the incident referred to, which has clearly been discussed within ruling circles though not to this point publicly.

The transcript is as follows:

Lord Chamberlain: Can I present Commander Lucy D'Orsi, who was gold commander during the Chinese state visit.

Queen: Oh, bad luck.

Lord Chamberlain: And who was seriously, seriously undermined by the Chinese, but she managed to hold her own and remain in command. And her mother, Judith, who's involved in child protection and social work.

Judith Copson: Yes, I'm very proud of my daughter.

Lord Chamberlain: You must tell your story.

D'Orsi: Yes, I was the gold commander, so I'm not sure whether you knew, but it was quite a testing time for me.

Queen: Yes, I did.

D'Orsi: It was ... I think at the point that they walked out of Lancaster House and told me that the trip was off, that I felt ...

Queen: They were very rude to the ambassador.

D'Orsi: They were, well, yes she was, Barbara [Woodward, the ambassador] was with me and they walked out on both of us.

Queen: Extraordinary.

Copson: I know, it's unbelievable.

D'Orsi: It was very rude and very undiplomatic, I

thought.

The garden party was attended by 4,000 people, with a number of guests within earshot of the queen as she made her barbed criticisms. Wilkinson's clip was then handed over to the media pool.

Xi's state visit proceeded despite trenchant complaints from sections of the military and intelligence apparatuses as to its implications for security and Britain's relationships with the United States. Sections of the media voiced loud concerns and published US criticisms of Xi's visit and Britain's close ties with China.

In response to the queen's garden party comments, the *Financial Times*, the mouthpiece of the City of London, ran several articles and was unequivocal in defending the monarch. A comment piece by Philip Stephens, "The Queen has expressed the uncomfortable truth about power," stated that her views on China "should be applauded."

Stephens commented, "Insiders responsible for such arrangements [state visits] ... suggest that Chinese diplomats stepped over the line that separates robust demands that leaders be treated with due respect from downright rudeness and threats."

Making a direct critique of government policy, Stephens continued, "Beijing might have been encouraged in such behaviour by the eagerness of the present government to do all it can to please China. British foreign policy towards China is run by the Treasury, and George Osborne, the chancellor, has decreed that nothing must be done to jeopardise the commercial relationship."

While Britain "should seek to maintain excellent relations with Beijing," Stephens warned, "there is ... a balance to be struck between the commercial relationship and wider strategic concerns, and between polite accommodation and kow-towing. We should thank the Queen for, albeit inadvertently, pointing this out."

The queen's comments follow the state visit last month by US President Barack Obama and takes place as the US is ratcheting up its provocations against China. Last month the US sent six military aircraft near to the Scarborough Shoal. The reef, which is claimed by both China and the Philippines, has been effectively under Chinese control since a tense standoff between the two countries in 2012.

Last Tuesday, on the same day the Queen criticised China, the Obama administration authorised the US Navy to send a guided-missile destroyer into the 12-nautical-mile territorial zone surrounding Chinese-held Fiery Cross Reef, located in the Spratly Island chain in the

South China Sea.

Sections of Britain's ruling elite and opinion formers are in favour of confronting China militarily. Following Li's trip to Britain, the *Economist* warned that the "new golden friendship with Beijing will endanger the old 'special relationship' with America." It added, "If China clashes with America, still East Asia's foremost power, Europe will not be spared the consequences."

To avert this danger, the *Economist* advised that Cameron "should support America when it challenges China's claims in the South China Sea. Even better, he could send along a ship."

The former British colony of Hong Kong, which was returned to China in 1997, is central to US plans to destabilise China. Last week, the US State Department released a report criticising Chinese rule in Hong Kong, using the pretext of attacks on democratic rights. The report stated, "Events over the past year ... raised concerns that greater central government influence and interference are eroding Hong Kong's autonomy." It noted that in February, the UK government "for the first time declared a breach of the [1997] Sino-British Joint Declaration."

In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said Hong Kong was part of China, and "certain people on the US side have always wanted to disturb Hong Kong, disturb its socio-economic development, disturb the normal order of its residents' lives, and even use the Hong Kong issue to interfere in China's internal affairs."



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