Post-Summit Analysis:

What We Can Learn from Xi Jinping's State Visit

October 7, 2015

This Capitol Hill Briefing, hosted by the Committee of 100 (C-100) and the U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress (USAFMC) Congressional Study Groups, is part of C-100's national Speakers Forum Series, a high-level platform that addresses major issues in U.S.-China relations and the Asian American community. This briefing examined outcomes from the September Summit between Presidents Barack Obama and Xi Jinping and the 2015 Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) and assessed the impact of these meetings on the direction of U.S.-China relations.

Moderator: Dali Yang, William Claude Reavis Professor, Department of Political Science, The University of Chicago; Member, Committee of 100

We have had extraordinary events in recent weeks: the visit by President Xi Jinping to Washington, both to the state of Washington and to Washington, D.C., and then to New York; and of course, one of the biggest events concerning China is the fact that we just concluded a deal on the Trans-Pacific Partnership. China is not a member or signatory to that deal, but everyone is talking about its implications for China as well.

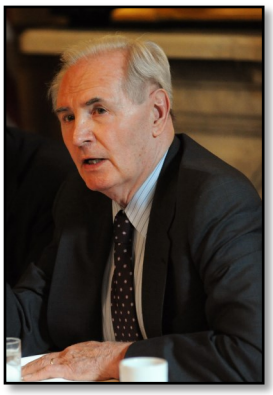
It is remarkable how rapidly the Chinese came up with a translation of the TPP and it is circulating very widely in China. The fact that they now have to cope with the TPP means that they are also likely to be thinking about what reforms they have to do...I think the biggest strength of the TPP is partly that China is not in it, but of course the biggest weakness of it is also that China is not in it.

Ambassador J. Stapleton Roy, Former U.S. Ambassador to China; Founding Director and Distinguished Scholar, Kissinger Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

This is why summits are essential: in good times and bad, they permit face-to-face communication between top leaders and they are action-forcing events that force lazy bureaucracies to look for ways to expand cooperation and to find better ways of dealing with troublesome issues. And that is exactly what we saw come out of the [Obama-Xi] summit.

A major joint statement on climate change following through on the earlier agreement on working together on climate change... We got a breakthrough on cybersecurity – China has agreed for the first time that states should not conduct or knowingly support misappropriation of intellectual property, including trade secrets or confidential business information, with the intent of providing competitive advantages to their companies or commercial sectors…If you look at the documents that came out of the summit meeting, you will find there is an extraordinary range of cooperation between China and the U.S. that gets zero attention in our media.

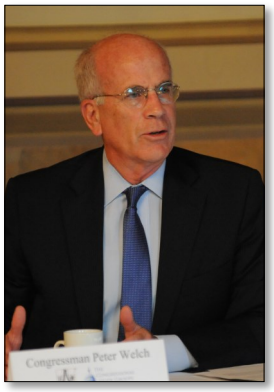
Richard Thornton, Professor of History and International Affairs, George Washington University



No pun intended, I think we're entering rough waters with the Chinese and the Xi-Obama Summit was a particularly turbulent patch.

With the Summit, you've noticed the last few sentences of the last factsheet referred to the South China Sea and referred to the U.S. decision to insist on freedom of navigation rights throughout the South China Sea. There was an article in *Foreign Policy* the other day by a couple of guys assigned to the Pentagon that revealed that the U.S. is going to exercise the right of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and sail close to those structures the Chinese have built. So it's a very pregnant moment and depending on what we do, I think we'll see us either moving into smoother waters or rougher waters

Congressional Perspectives



Congressman Peter Welch (VT-At Large): From a Congressional standpoint, generally foreign policy is really dominated by domestic considerations…There's not that much focus on China, except in so far as it really has a continuing economic vitality and anxiety associated with it...Secondly there appears to be a significant difference, or cleavage, between the administration, which is focusing on Asia in the pivot to Asia, whereas Congress is still focusing on the Middle East and domestic politics intensified by the presidential campaign... I expect the Trans-Pacific Partnership to be a very close vote that will be affected by people's perceptions of how this affects their economy in their states and also presidential politics and whether it is an indication of us being weak or strong.

Congressman Robert Pittenger (NC-9): As I listen, there were concerns about the economic expansion and military expansion of China, and its role in the world today. I would say that if we were discussing the same issues related to the U.K. or to Germany, we wouldn't have these same concerns. Why is that? Well, these are democratic states, open and free societies…Given the strength of our own culture, and with its faults, and the growth of our culture and democratic states, it seems to me that the issues of freedoms of conscience should be on the table in discussions with China in a more direct and clear way... Not for us to be saying to China what you should or shouldn't do because of our worldview, but what is good for China, what will help China.

Ambassador Timothy Roemer (Former Congressman): The Trans-Pacific Partnership is going to be viewed by India, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, and all of Asia as an indication of whether the United States is going to be truly present in Asia. I think Congress has to review the TPP to see its strengths, its weaknesses, its impact on our economy, from the biotech to the agricultural sectors and determine, is this a winner for us? But I also completely agree with Ambassador Roy and underscore it more than he did about the urgency of how Asia looks at TPP as the economic component of our entire rebalance to Asia and if that fails how that will be viewed by the entirety of Asia, not just China, in very negative terms.

Key Issues for Policymakers to Consider

U.S.-China Relations

Over the last 40 years, four Republican presidents and two Democratic presidents have all concluded that having a new type of Cold War relationship between the U.S. and China was simply not in the national interest. If that's the case, the goal of wise policy should be to head off such an outcome, to find ways to limit strategic rivalry, and to keep the cooperative aspects of the relationship, if possible, stronger than the competitive aspects, which will always be there — Ambassador Stapleton Roy

The U.S. Presence in Asia

We must retain and strengthen confidence in East Asia that the U.S. is going to retain a position there for the long haul that will enable China to continue to rise and benefit the region if it behaves responsibly, without becoming a hegemonic power that can then begin to coerce its neighbors...Asians see the rebalance, or the pivot strategy, as essentially being a military strategy… And so every time I meet with Asians, they ask, "where's the economic side of U.S. presence? We don't want to be dominated by China." And that's why TPP is important to the Asians, because it represents the economic strength of our involvement in East Asia — Ambassador Stapleton Roy

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is the crowning economic jewel in the U.S. Asia pivot — Professor Dali Yang

Why is it now that the Chinese are starting to put pressure on American businesses in China, on American positions in the Western Pacific? And that takes us to an assessment of overall global relations: the Chinese perceive us as weak and inward-retreating, so they're trying to push in the Western Pacific and accelerate a long-term strategy. That long-term strategy has been to try to delegitimize the American legal presence in the Western Pacific. That presence is based on two agreements: the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and the Taiwan Relations Act. In recent years, the Chinese have very cleverly and subtly put pressure on both of those treaty relations — Professor Richard Thornton

Asia's Regional Dynamics

There's a lot of concern about China's rise and that's quite properly so, but in my judgment, fear of China's domination in East Asia is greatly exaggerated...The idea that China is somehow going to become the hegemonic power in East Asia is false...Other countries, including major outside powers, do not think it's in their interest to have one country, China included, as the hegemonic power — Ambassador Stapleton Roy

Our response has been, both in Europe and in Asia, to try to promote greater defense spending on the part of our allies. It has not worked in Europe, it has not worked at all, but it has worked in the Far East. We've witnessed Japan's decision to start changing their constitutional procedures and to begin to strengthen their military; that's very important, that's a great success on our part – but it can't be the only success. We need New Zealand, we need Australia, we need other countries to participate in this process. It's inevitable – it's a question of timing. The Chinese have decided to build power, and so there has to be compensatory power that emerges to counter and balance that — Professor Richard Thornton

Key Issues for Policymakers to Consider, continued

Cybersecurity

We have, in my judgement, strengthened the tools for whittling away at this problem and are trying to see if we can get better rules of the road for dealing with this problem. In the meantime, I think we have to be extremely vigorous in trying to strengthen the security of all our cyber systems in the U.S…There's also a potential with the Chinese to reach agreement on issues such as: there should not be cyberattacks on infrastructure — Ambassador Stapleton Roy

I'm not so optimistic, Ambassador Roy, as you are about the paper that was agreed to on this cyber bilat between the U.S. and China. I, quite frankly, don't think it's worth much. "Knowingly steal these secrets," we are getting absolutely razed across the board on national and economic security by our friends overseas – China, Russia, and other countries like Iran — Ambassador Timothy Roemer

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C-100 member Bob Gee; Professor Richard Thornton; C-100 member Dali Yang; C-100 advisor Ambassador Stapleton Roy; Congressman Peter Welch; USAFMC President The Honorable Barbara Kennelly; C-100 advisor The Honorable Norman Mineta; and C-100 Washington, D.C. Regional Co-Chair Ben Wu

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