



The Xi-Obama summit: Spurn the China-bashers

Ted Galen Carpenter

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Although there are expectations that the summit meeting between China's President Xi Jinping and US President Barack Obama will be cordial and produce a constructive dialogue, there are influential elements in the United States who seem unable to restrain their hostility toward China. That sentiment is especially evident among the Republican Party's presidential candidates. It is an unfortunate attitude that could do serious damage to the bilateral relationship.

The leading GOP candidate, Donald Trump, has repeatedly scorned US leaders for not being better negotiators in their trade dealings with Beijing. Senator Rand Paul notes that China holds an enormous amount of US governmental debt, making it clear that he believes such dependence is an unhealthy national vulnerability. Several other candidates have implied that China is among the "enemies" that supposedly no longer respect the United States because of Barack Obama's lack of effective leadership.

That behavior has been typical of the campaign thus far. Carly Fiorina, the fastest rising star in the Republican field, goes out of her way to bash China at every opportunity. In the two televised debates and on other occasions, Fiorina has taken an extremely confrontational stance regarding such issues as the South China Sea territorial disputes and cyber security. In an interview with CBS News, she recommended that the United States increase its flyover aerial surveillance of the South China Sea. And it is clear that she has no sympathy whatsoever for Beijing's territorial claims. "We cannot permit China to control a trade route through which passes \$5 trillion worth of goods and services every year," she stated bluntly.

Fiorina is mild on the South China Sea controversy, though, compared to her stance regarding recent cyber attacks - which she blithely assumes originate in China. She contends that such attacks are an act of aggression against the United States, implying that an especially stern, confrontational response is warranted.

Senator Marco Rubio even urged President Obama to cancel the invitation to President Xi for the state visit. Although Rubio took a shot at China's human rights record, labeling it "a disgrace," it was clear that Beijing's principal sin, in his view, is its defiance of US hegemony in East Asia. "Xi Jinping is trying to convince his country's 1.3 billion people that the way to establish Chinese greatness is to undermine the United States and enhance China's influence at our expense," he fumed. The goal, Rubio assumed, was "to push America out of Asia." Numerous scholars in both the United States and East Asia have pointed out that Beijing's policy is far more ambivalent and nuanced than that, but such subtleties tend to get lost in the heat of presidential campaigns.

President Obama needs to utterly reject such attitudes. China and the United States have numerous important interests in common, and the summit affords a valuable opportunity to further explore those areas of cooperation. Two areas stand out in importance. One is the global economy; the other is preventing nuclear weapons proliferation.

Nearly everyone acknowledges that China and the United States maintain an extensive and mutually beneficial trade and investment relationship. But the mutual interest goes far deeper than the bilateral ties. The two countries have become the principal instruments of global prosperity. That is important because evidence is mounting that global economic growth is increasingly beleaguered. The summit meeting is an important opportunity for Chinese and US leaders to discuss strategies for boosting growth and preventing the onset of a new economic recession. Such a dialogue can occur only in an atmosphere of cooperation and an appreciation of crucial shared interests.

The other major area of mutual concern is preventing nuclear proliferation. The issue of Iran's nuclear program appears to have been solved, despite the continuing attempt by hardliners in the US Congress to sabotage the P5+1 agreement. But there are other worrisome developments, including reports that Turkey may be secretly developing nuclear weapons.

The most troubling remaining issue, though, continues to be North Korea's behavior. President Xi and President Obama need to consider bold new initiatives to break the long-standing impasse on this problem.

Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, is the author of ten books and more than 600 articles and policy studies on international affairs.