

Beijing's top US envoy spurns critics of Xi-Trump summit results on North Korea and trade

Zhenhua Lu

November 17, 2017

China's ambassador to the US dismissed critics who said a presidents' summit meeting in Beijing last week made little headway towards resolving either the North Korean nuclear crisis or bilateral trade issues between the world's two largest economies.

Ambassador Cui Tiankai told a US-China Policy Foundation event that US President Donald Trump's first state visit to China, including meetings with President Xi Jinping, was "constructive and fruitful".

Cui said the two presidents sent "a very important and strong signal" by reaffirming "their commitment to a denuclearised and peaceful Korean Peninsula, and their determination to implement all the United Nations Security Council resolutions, and seek a diplomatic solution to the problem".

Trump also confirmed after returning from Asia on Wednesday that Xi had "pledged to faithfully implement" UN Security Council resolutions on North Korea and to "use his great economic influence over the regime" to achieve the nations' common goal of a denuclearised Korean Peninsula.

The ambassador dismissed some observers' complaints that the economic outcome of Trump's visit was "below their expectations".

While Trump visited Beijing, the two sides signed more than US\$250 billion worth of business deals covering various sectors, including energy, finance and agriculture.

Bloomberg reported that the deals contained "little of substance", since they were mostly non-binding memoranda of understanding that could take years to turn into projects of substance.

"This is an old-style visit when you pile up all the deals so you can to get a big number," James McGregor, China chairman of the APCO Worldwide consultancy, was quoted. "This is all for show for President Trump to demonstrate his deal-making prowess."

“I don’t think US\$250 billion is a small number,” Cui responded. “Of course, some of the deals will have to be implemented ... As long as there is sufficient political will, they will be implemented and benefit our two peoples.”

Trump may have “made it look like he was perfectly satisfied with that \$250 billion haul, and the Chinese may think for a little while that they’ve bought some peace on the trade front,” Dan Ikenson, director for trade policy studies at the Washington-based Cato Institute, was quoted by Politico.

“I don’t necessarily think that’s going to happen. For me, we’re moving inexorably toward the edge of the cliff.”

The US and China are beginning one year of negotiations on economic and trade issues after failing to reach a deal during their first Comprehensive Economic Dialogue in July. The Washington discussions were held to ease friction over the US trade deficit, US intellectual property theft concerns, China’s flooding of the US marketplace with lower-priced materials such as steel and China market access.

Trump said he had “very candid” conversations with Xi about the need to reduce the US’s “staggering” trade deficit with China and for the two sides’ trading relationship to be conducted on a “fair and equitable basis”.

“We can no longer tolerate unfair trading practices that steal American jobs, wealth and intellectual property. The days of the United States being taken advantage of are over,” Trump said in a speech from the White House.

Experts expect the US to take action against China over trade. US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer is in the midst of an investigation of China’s intellectual property rights under US law that could bring tariffs on China pending the countries’ failure to reach a deal.

Although Bonnie Glaser of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies accused China during an Asia Society event in New York this week of “pursing its economic interests at the expense of the United States”, Cui said that while China would never give up its “legitimate interests”, it would “never pursue” its “own development at the expense of others.”

Cui said China will adopt policies that promote high-quality trade and investment, significantly ease market access, further open the service sector and protect the legitimate rights and interests of foreign investors.

“All businesses registered in China will be treated as equals,” he said.