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## White House begins wooing China's next president

By [Aamer Madhani](#), USA TODAY

With the man who is in line to be China's next president by his side, Vice President Biden barely hinted that the U.S.-China relationship is at a moment marked by growing strategic distrust between the two nations.

“We are not always going to see eye-to-eye ... but we have very important economic and political concerns that warrant that we work together,” said Biden, as he kicked off a bilateral meeting at the White House this morning with China's Vice President Xi Jinping.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Commerce Secretary John Bryson and U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke also sat in on the meeting.

President Obama later sat down with Xi in the Oval Office, and called Xi's visit a chance to “build on” the U.S.-Chinese relationship.

“We welcome China's rise,” Obama said. “We believe a strong and prosperous China is one that can help bring stability and prosperity to the region and the world.”

The president added that “we want work with China” on disputes that include trade rules and human rights.

Ahead of today's meetings, administration officials framed the visit by Xi — who will become the Communist Party leader this fall and is expected to succeed President Hu Jintao next March — as a getting-to-know-you moment with the man who will likely lead the emerging power for the next decade. Administration officials have made clear they don't expect any great breakthroughs in the U.S.-China relationship this week.

“It's worth keeping in mind that Vice President Xi is not the decision-maker in China,” said Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security adviser for strategic communications, ahead of Xi's White House visit. “He's not the head of state at this point; he's the future leader. So, again, it's mostly an investment in relationship-building, even as it's also an opportunity to continue to press the items on our agenda with the Chinese.”

Still, Xi's visit comes at a complicated time in the U.S.-Sino relationship. There are important differences between the U.S. and China on how to go about preventing Iran and North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons. The business community — as well as Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney — is pushing Obama to confront China on its currency policy as well as its policing of intellectual property. And Obama has laid out a plan to reorient U.S. defense strategy toward the Pacific — a pivot that has put China at unease.

"Should China's relative power continue to grow, its ambition is likely to do the same," said Justin Logan, the director of foreign policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute. "Given that there are few signs that Washington will welcome a larger Chinese role in Asian security issues, this could portend serious disagreements in the years to come."

Michael Green, who served as former senior director of Asia Affairs at the National Security Council during the George W. Bush administration, said these visits are sort of like a "date night," crucial for relationship-building but lacking in any substantive policy.

Green, who is now an analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, helped coordinate the 2002 U.S. visit for then-Vice President Hu Jintao, who made a similar trip to the one Xi is making before making his ascension.

Hu's visit was a big deal back then. But in the aftermath of 9/11, China wasn't a front burner foreign policy concern, Green said. That's all changed.

"The relationship is important, and it's important to invest in it," Green said. "That said I think it's a harder task for the Obama administration that it was for us in 2002."

Contributing: David Jackson