
Historic Visit from China to U.S.

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After North Korea's artillery attack on the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong last month, the United States increased pressure on China to respond forcefully to North Korea, which further complicated an already strained U.S.-China relationship. With Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to the United States fast approaching in January, it is crucial that differences of approach to the Korean crisis not derail the bilateral relationship.

The Korean crisis was just one of several topics addressed at the EastWest Institute's 2nd U.S.-China High-Level Political Party Leaders Dialogue, which convened prominent U.S. Democrats and Republicans with senior representatives of the Communist Party of China (CPC), from December 1-3 in Washington, D.C.

This was the first ever visit to the United States by a delegation of CPC officials. The visit was all the more significant because the leader of the Chinese delegation, Mr. Wang Jiarui, Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPC (IDCPC), is a key negotiator with the North Korean leadership. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright (D) and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard S. Williamson (R) led the U.S. delegation. This CPC visit to Washington, D.C. reciprocated a visit to Beijing by the U.S. delegation in March and April of 2010.

The Chinese delegation also met with Acting U.S. Secretary of State James Steinberg to discuss a range of issues related to the U.S.-China relationship, including the current North Korea crisis and expectations regarding President Hu's upcoming visit.

The off-the-record talks, which spanned two days, included a discussion of possible best responses to North Korea's recent actions and ideas for de-escalating conflict on the Korean peninsula. Delegation members also shared their views on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Myanmar/Burma, and Sudan.

To help provide a context for foreign policy decision-making as a whole, the two sides presented information on their domestic political landscapes and governance challenges, with special emphasis on how these landscapes and challenges bear on U.S.-China relations. The U.S. delegation interpreted the results of the November 2010 mid-term elections and key electoral issues, from low approval ratings for the Obama administration to the emergence of the Tea Party. The Chinese summarized their 12th Five-Year Plan, aimed at addressing key problems including uneven development in urban and rural areas, and between the eastern and western parts of the country; environmental degradation; and an economy driven by exports and investment rather than domestic consumption.

Both delegations also spoke candidly about other problems in U.S.-China relations, including human rights, trade frictions, and U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

In presentations and discussions, members of both delegations recognized the need for open channels of communications between the United States and China – not just to resolve specific challenges such as North Korea, but to build cooperation and communication in a broader sense.

According to Wang, the U.S.-China High-Level Political Party Leaders Dialogue represents “a historic contribution to the development of U.S.-China relations.” By laying the foundation for an ongoing dialogue between the two political establishments, the visit was an important step toward forging strategic trust between the two countries.

Note: Along with EWI and the CPC, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) also played significant roles in organizing this event. The third and fourth iterations of the dialogue are scheduled for next spring in China and next fall/winter in the United States.

Discreet Communication to Bolster U.S.-China Relations

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More discreet communication and non-official forms of candid exchange would bolster relations between the United States and China, suggests Wang Jiarui, Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC).

Wang spoke at the EastWest Institute (EWI) on December 8, 2010, to an audience that included EWI Co-Chairman Ross Perot, Jr. (who chaired the event); Edward Cox, Chairman of the New York Republican State Committee; Maurice Greenberg, Chairman and CEO of C.V. Starr & Co., Inc.; Winston Lord, former U.S. Ambassador to China; and Frank G. Wisner, Jr., International Affairs Advisor at Patton Boggs LLP.

Wang shared his first-hand impressions of the United States and China's approach to addressing various global challenges. In his speech, Wang endorsed a piece of advice given to him by Henry Kissinger, a former U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Advisor who helped normalize relations between the U.S. and China in the 1970s. Kissinger had suggested that the two countries find solutions to differences in private rather than present the contents of all conversations publicly to the media.

Wang emphasized the value of this kind of discreet communication in approaching the North Korean leadership, particularly during the current crisis on the peninsula. Regarding U.S. calls for China to take more forceful action against North Korea, he noted that his country does not publicize all that it does. Therefore, simply because China has not announced that it is conducting quiet diplomacy does not mean that it is not doing so.

Wang also suggested more candid exchanges between the United States and China, similar to the 2nd U.S.-China High-Level Political Party Leaders Dialogue recently convened in Washington, D.C. Lauding the dialogue as an important new platform for promoting relations between the two countries, he proposed the possibility of organizing additional dialogues between various groups, such as businessmen or youth. Citing interest by Ohio political leaders in attracting Chinese businesses to their state, Wang stressed, for example, the constructive role that a dialogue between Chinese and U.S. businessmen could play.

This speech came at the end of a nine-day, four-city visit of the United States by a 22-member Communist Party of China (CPC) delegation led by Wang.

Following the dialogue sessions in Washington, D.C. with Democratic and Republican leaders, the CPC delegation visited Chicago, Illinois, and Columbus, Ohio, before concluding their trip in New York City. In Chicago and Columbus, the delegation had meetings with a number of prominent local Republicans and Democrats (including Illinois Governor Pat Quinn, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, and Ohio Governor-Elect John Kasich), members of the Midwest U.S.-China Association, leading Ohio businessmen, and The Ohio State University President Gordon Gee. In New York, the delegation also met with Dr. Henry Kissinger.

2nd U.S.-China High-Level Political Party Leaders Dialogue
December 1-4, 2010





Madeleine Albright and Wang Jiarui
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