

# Pakistan Today

Islamabad

13 April 2017

## The Xi-Trump Summit at Mar-a-Lago

**Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik**



Two of the world's most powerful leaders, Chinese President Xi Jinping and his American counterpart Donald Trump, met at a private retreat of the latter. Both leaders are daring and ambitious in their approaches but equally ready to understand each other. This was the first interaction between the two leaders after President Trump assumed presidency. Earlier, they had had telephonic conversations at the time when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with President Trump at the same retreat in February. Both leaders have been trying to manage differences in mutual relations and share global perspectives. They agreed that their first meeting was “positive and fruitful”, if not substantial from other point of views.

They gained a better understanding of each other's viewpoint in two sessions held at Mar-a-Lago. President Trump said that the relationship developed with President Xi was “outstanding”. Their normal and good relations guarantee global peace and development.

### **Of trade and understanding**

The United States and China are the world's biggest trading partners. Trade has crossed US\$ 519 billion. President Trump asked for a reciprocal market access. Prospects are further bright and the two leaders might push bilateral economic ties to new heights. Both would devise strategies to reduce trade friction, and hopefully,

Trump's trade concerns with China would be minimised and accommodated. President Xi plans to make investment by creating 700,000 jobs for the Americans.

President Xi is trying to convince his counterpart to become part of the infrastructural and connectivity initiative, One Belt One Road (OBOR). "China welcomes the US side to participate in cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative," said Xi while making points with President Trump at the second day session of the summit at Mar-a-Lago.

President Xi also invited his counterpart to strength mutual military ties and the Asia-Pacific security dialogue. This would ease tension in the South China Sea. President Trump said the United States is willing to further strengthen cooperation with China in economy, military affairs and people-to-people exchanges, and support China's efforts in hunting for fugitives who have fled abroad and recovering illicit money. These are great attempts to consolidate relations between the two powerful nations.

The Chinese side reiterated its principles and positions on Taiwan issue and Tibet-related issues. The United States does not seem to disturb Chinese positions on these hot issues of utmost Chinese concerns. President Xi got assurance for the delay of American arms sales to Taiwan after the meeting of the Communist Party of China this year.

On the nuclear issue of the Korean Peninsula, the Chinese side reiterated the commitment to denuclearisation of the Peninsula, safeguarding peace, and stability, and solving problems through dialogue and consultation to comprehensively implementing the UN resolutions on the Korean Peninsula.

This assurance was essential after President Trump indicated of a unilateral action against North Korea. Consultation with all stakeholders would produce tangible results on the North Korean issue. China has been sincerely approaching the North Korean missiles and nuclear testing.

The Chinese side also conveyed its reservations on the US deployment of the THAAD defense missile system in South Korea to tackle North Korean missile provocations.

The two sides agreed to establish high-level dialogue mechanisms, including the diplomatic and security dialogue, the comprehensive economic dialogue, the law enforcement and cyber-security dialogue, and the social and people-to-people dialogue.

## **Does Mar-a-Lago spell clear skies for US-China relations?**

The Mar-a-Lago summit reset a fine tone of mutual ties between the two countries in the years to come and it looks that both would manage crucial issues facing the Middle East, the Asia-Pacific, and the Eurasian region. The Mar-a-Lago was a good start.

Chinese media enthusiastically cheered the Xi-Trump meeting. The Beijing-based *Global Times* noted that the meeting “served as an indicator that the China-US relationship is still very much on course since the Trump administration took office in January” and it was likely the two nations would develop a more “pragmatic relationship”. *People’s Daily* said the meeting established the tone for the development of US-China relations.

*China Daily* said both parties appeared “equally enthusiastic about the constructive relationship they have promised to cultivate”. *Xinhua* news agency wrote “hailing it as one of the most dynamic aspects in China-U.S. ties.”

To the disappointment of critics, President Xi’s visit to the United States was not a China bashing program rather a warm welcome was accorded to the visiting Chinese leader and the US-China relationship was hailed and strengthened. A healthy room was available to discuss all critical issues and to listen to each other’s viewpoint. They have avoided “strategic misjudgement” on key issues in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific. They built new hopes and decreased tensions.

*The writer is Director of the China-Pakistan Study Center (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. He writes on East Asian affairs."*