

**CHINA-US RELATIONS: PRESIDENT
XI JINPING'S STATE VISIT TO
THE UNITED STATES (I)**

L YE Liang Fook

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Executive Summary

1. Chinese President Xi Jinping's high profile state visit to the United States in September 2015 took him to Seattle and Washington DC. He also debuted at the United Nations on the invitation of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.
2. The trip is not Xi's first visit to the United States as president. In 2013, he visited the United States to meet President Barack Obama to get to know him at a personal level to set bilateral relations on a stable footing.
3. However, ties between the two countries have since been affected by intractable issues. The United States is deeply concerned with theft of intellectual property by the Chinese in cyberspace. It has also taken issue with China's land reclamation and construction activities in the South China Sea.
4. These two issues overshadowed Xi's visit. Xi even had to send his special envoy Meng Jianzhu to stave off possible sanctions that the United States was reportedly considering for Chinese actors engaged in economic espionage.
5. Despite Xi's renewed call for a new model of major country relations, the United States did not embrace his call. Instead, Obama said that the United States will be closely watching if the Chinese are following words with actions especially on cybersecurity cooperation.
6. At the strategic level, Xi's visit did not lead to any clarity on the roles that China and the United States would play as well as on their strategic intentions. This was despite Xi's call for the two countries to read each other's strategic intentions correctly.
7. At the functional cooperation level, progress has been made particularly on climate change and people-to-people exchange. The United States also agreed to collaborate further with China at the regional and international levels to provide more public goods.

8. Even on the thorny issue of cybersecurity, both sides were keen to show progress. They agreed that the two governments would not conduct or knowingly support cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property.
9. They further agreed to set up a high-level joint dialogue mechanism to fight cybercrimes. It remains to be seen whether this mechanism can deliver results. The work of an earlier Cyber Working Group was stalled due to differences.
10. Both sides recognised the benefit of cooperating and properly managing their differences. However, the two countries are simultaneously locked in an intense competition on various fronts. There is also a lack of strategic trust between the two.
11. The future trajectory of the world's two greatest powers remains uncertain. At the moment, they are feeling their way forward in adjusting to each other given their shifting relative strengths.