

Larry Johnson & Wilkerson: US-China Summit Fails: Who Holds the Keys to the Middle East?

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#Nima

You've just, before coming up, you've just mentioned what was the outcome. I was asking you, what was the outcome of Trump's meeting, or these new, the two delegations? Look at what has happened in China. Look at the people, the delegations, the two parts—significant. But what was the outcome? We know one of the greatest problems for Donald Trump right now is the case of the Strait of Formosa and the Middle East, and he wanted to do something about that. But overall, when you look at the meeting, what was happening, and what was the outcome for Donald Trump?

#Larry

He got some more frequent flyer miles, you know, and he got a chance to travel with a bunch of, you know, oligarchs and then have them confined on his plane. But beyond that, you know, the Chinese didn't see this as an important meeting, and they sent several signals. You know, it started with the fact that, like, eight hours before Trump arrived in town, the Tajik flags were still adorning the light posts along with the Chinese flag. They hadn't made it a priority to go take those down and put up a U.S. flag. The China Daily, its main headline just hours before Trump was arriving, was about the Chinese talks with Tajikistan, and there was just a sidebar attached to the meeting with Trump. Then, you know, the biggest one I saw that sent the clear message—and the Chinese did this to Trump back in 2017 as well.

They sent the second-level people out to the airport to greet him. Now, all the apologists for Trump and, you know, the MAGA defenders, they keep saying, oh, that's just the Chinese following protocol. You know, no. When Vladimir Putin showed up, Xi was at the airport. In fact, he piled Putin into a Cadillac, you know, like a convertible, and they drove downtown together. When Kim Jong-un of North Korea showed up, hey, Xi's at the airport. So the fact that Xi decides this guy is not important enough to go to the airport for—"you know, well, I'll see him tomorrow"—sent a message. I did get a note from... because, you know, I predicted at the outset this was going to be a nothing burger. And he wrote me back. He said, you were right.

He said he had talked to somebody in the White House, and this person I know does have that kind of access. And he said she basically told Trump, with respect to requests Trump made about Iran, to go pound sand. So, you know, Trump came away, he got some great photo ops, they got to see some beautiful architecture. I don't think he fell asleep on camera. So, you know, from that standpoint, it was a rousing success. And actually, since, you know, because Col. Wilkerson's got far more experience with this—any high-level meetings like that, you know, Colin Powell had as Secretary of State—there was always Sherpa work involved. And it doesn't appear, you know, Chas Freeman said his sources at State told him there was zero Sherpa work on this one.

#Lawrence

Yeah, which is typical for Trump. It's standard practice with Trump and standard practice with Rubio.

#Nima

Colonel, here's what Donald Trump himself said about Chinese support for Iran.

#Speaker 04

And you've been asked about it, and you've spoken about it, and that is China's support for Iran, right? How big a discussion was that today? We discussed it.

#Speaker 05

I mean, when you say support, they're not fighting a war with us or anything. No. He said he's not going to give military equipment. That's a big statement. He said that today. That's a big statement. He said that strongly. But at the same time, he said, you know, they buy a lot of their oil there, and they'd like to keep doing that.

#Nima

How do you find the tone, the way that he's talking about it? We know that China is not fighting the United States in Iran. Iranians are fighting. But when he was asked about the support that China is giving Iran, Colonel, what's your understanding of that?

#Lawrence

Well, first of all, listen to Dr. John Gartner, Johns Hopkins University, and he's gained some publicity of late because he's an expert in narcissism and an expert in the kind of afflictions Trump is increasingly demonstrating. And his latest one was he's far worse and he's going to get a lot worse. And I think he's probably right. I have no perspective educationally to say that, but he's convincing in the way he describes what this kind of megalomania, this kind of narcissism does to someone

over time, particularly if they're hard-pressed over that time. So I think we are dealing with that now. But let's back up to what Larry was talking about, which I'll add to in spades.

#Larry

The Chinese are absolutely superb at choreographing visits.

#Lawrence

And other things, too. Even when Richard Haass and I went in 2003—well, I guess it was before 9 /11, so it must have been summer of 2001—it was choreographed even for us at the level that we were. Well, the first thing that struck me about this choreography was that Xi was standing there, flat-footed, looking at Trump coming toward him. He made no effort whatsoever to advance and meet Trump. He made Trump walk across the intervening space and stick his hand out, and then Xi took it. And I suspect that the rest of the choreography was much the same, as Larry was indicating at the airport, for example, which should have been taken as an indicator by the party, including Marco Rubio. Most of all, they ain't doing things very well with regard to diplomacy and with regard to this number one power in the world in many respects.

And so it flowed into more and more and more of that. And so it flowed into more and more of what the doctor was talking about—Trump making things up as he went along and reporting on things to the press in this country in particular, but also at different stops on the trip—that things were going swimmingly or were going better than they certainly were going, because what he was getting was a stonewall on everything he was asking about. Now, he did get, for example, I'm told, the Cargill guy got at least four of them. And that's another thing—this was not a diplomatic mission, anything but a diplomatic mission.

As Larry pointed out, there were no teams put together, no sherpas, no working groups, no people doing the spade work beforehand, no people working out the details, for example, of what might happen between Cargill or whomever and the Chinese in terms of resuming buying U.S. soybeans. And footnote, I called my friend in Iowa and I said—he's a Republican, he's head of the most important farm lobby in the United States of America, and he's a real fan of what we're doing with him on the climate crisis because he understands the climate crisis from a farming, from a visceral perspective: too much rain, too much heat, longer growing season, higher yields.

Yeah, but it ain't going to last, that sort of thing. Republican. I said, what are we talking about here? He said, well, it ain't going to matter a bit because we don't have the fertilizer. We're not going to be raising any soybeans. And that's the truth—unless you get the state of hormones functioning again and you get that urea and other things out, and you essentially take the pressure off global commerce, then a lot of farmers in this country, and I know this from the perspective of my son-in-law who has a farm up in Maryland, they're not going to be able to plant. Simply not going to be able to plant.

So the disconnects in this are just awesome. And then the last thing I'd say—so much to say—is that he didn't get anything, really. And the one thing he thought he was going to get was couched in truly Chinese reasoning, which is explicit: if the Strait of Hormuz were open, we'd all be better off. So if you want help opening the Strait of Hormuz, here it is: lay off the Iranians, let them control the Strait, you know, that sort of thing. Donald Trump probably didn't even hear that. But I think it was probably pretty explicit. And you go downhill from there.

#Larry

Yeah, let me just add that when I use the term, for those who are not aware, Sherpa—well, normally it refers to the guides on Mount Everest. It is also a term used within diplomatic channels for the diplomats who have to do the actual heavy lifting. They have to write the documents, they have to negotiate out whether you're going to say happy or glad or pleased. They get everything prepared so that when the principals come together, they're not caught up in a big argument over, you know, the actual substance of the matter. It's already sort of been pre-cooked or predetermined.

#Lawrence

And none of that was done for this.

#Larry

Zero. Yeah. So, you know, that's where they get into the first problem. You know, the other thing is, the one who's blockading the Strait of Hormuz now is the United States. Yeah.

#Lawrence

She meant that. Yeah, get out of the way and commerce will resume.

#Larry

Yeah, because Iran has started allowing ships through that meet the Iranian terms. And Iran has basically said, look, if you're aligned with the United States and Israel in attacking us, okay, you're not going to come through, period. We're not going to allow that. However, you know, if you sign up and agree to our terms, you can go through. And I think there were at least 30 ships that were allowed through yesterday. And so now, as far as global diplomacy goes, it's not Iran that's seen as holding things up. It's the United States.

The other critical thing here, and I put an article up on Sonar 21 earlier this morning or late last night, depending on where you were, going through the five critical commodities that come out of the Persian Gulf that fuel the global economy. And when I say fuel, I mean they are literally essential. You can't live without them, just like Col. Wilkerson was talking about fertilizer. So the

fertilizer that's produced is produced in part from urea and from sulfur. I didn't know that. But the sulfur content is about 40% of the world's sulfur comes out of the Persian Gulf. I mean, these numbers are fantastic numbers. And we don't appreciate that when you sit down and look at it. You know, oil, liquid natural gas, urea, sulfur, and helium.

Those are the big five. The two countries in the Persian Gulf that actually produce the majority of those items are Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates do a little here and there, but they're not the major players in those. And Qatar, surprisingly, plays a major role with urea, sulfur, LNG, and helium. And the urea and LNG, they were basically destroyed when Iran took out the Ras Laffan plant. So what we're looking at here is that even if they magically opened the strait, the gut punch to the global economy is just starting. And China understands that. And China is well positioned to not suffer like the rest of the world is going to suffer. And that's what I don't think Trump even had a clue about.

#Lawrence

And the other thing I'd point out that the farmer in Iowa pointed out to me was diesel's critical. And the cost of diesel is critical. And they can't go to the point that they went to, for example, a few years ago and expect to sustain themselves if diesel is as expensive as it was a few years ago. And it has every portent of being that way if we don't get this strait open.

#Nima

The other point, Colonel, was the sanctions on Chinese companies because they were somehow sending or receiving products from Iran and Russia. Donald Trump was talking about sanctions. They sanctioned some Chinese companies before going to China. It seems the outcome of this meeting between the two presidents was that Donald Trump decided to lift those sanctions.

#Lawrence

And the other point, Colonel, is... well, the Chinese weren't adhering to him anyway. And they directed all of their colleagues, if you will, in the world not to pay any attention to him also. So Trump was doing something that Xi had already done.

#Nima

Yeah. Do you feel, Carl, that China, when you look at the meeting, I think something has changed? Looking at the big picture, something has changed, totally changed. China today, in my opinion, is a product. They saw what has happened in Ukraine. They saw what has happened with the case of the Iranian war, the war on Iran. And they're just thinking of their position. How do you find China's position right now? How do they define themselves? We know that the most important issue for China today is Taiwan. And they were talking about it, they were mentioning it, but we haven't

heard anything in the outcome, in that statement by the White House, about Taiwan. It was about the Strait of Hormuz and demilitarization of the Strait of Hormuz—nothing of that sort for Taiwan. What is that, in your opinion, and how is that going to change the situation in Taiwan?

#Lawrence

Well, ever since Deng Xiaoping, the number one talking point for any Chinese diplomat or any Chinese person in the governmental structure, whether it be a district governor or just a simple minister in the districts or up at the higher level of the Politburo, the very first talking point is Taiwan. Every time we went to China, that was the first thing that came up, whether it was Wang Yi talking to us. At that time, he was head of the North American division in MOFA and knew more about North America than any other Chinese. Then Chen Shicheng, and Chen Shicheng passed away.

So he inherited that moniker, if you will. So it's the very first thing they say. It doesn't really comport with putting enormous emphasis on it because it is pro forma with them. Now, that said, I suspect it is a little more serious right now because he sees—Xi sees—the Politburo, the military structure, which Xi just changed majorly. Think about that for a minute. And I have input that tells me that that was a lot about the nuclear arms race that is aborning right now and what those military people believed, and what the civilians believe, but that's another matter altogether. I doubt they even talked about that.

I doubt very seriously, because there was no—as he said—there were no sherpas, there was no groundwork done, there were no issues discussed. This is a very important issue, Mr. President. We should have a working group on this, and we should have a position when we go in. None of that was done. Key issue, but none of that was done that I can detect. And none of those business people were there to talk about nuclear weapons, except in the sense that they might be making money off them. They might have had a side conversation about it. So what we're looking at with regard to China's position—which is your bigger question—China's position in its grandest scheme is: do nothing to stop the suicide.

You don't necessarily have to do anything to aid and abet it, but if you have something, bring it forward and we'll talk about it. But right now, we're not in the business of aiding and abetting a clear suicide by the other power on the other end of the world that competes with us. Now, we don't want that suicide to suddenly turn into a dying elephant thrashing in the grass, and maybe we're in the grass. So be careful what we do, be careful how we might decide to aid and abet this particular aspect of it. For example, the war in Iran, because it might have ramifications for us, which the war in Iran certainly does in terms of oil and other things.

So that's China's geostrategic position: let them kill themselves. At the same time, you've got other people in the Central Party School who are advising, and generally that advice gets up to the Politburo, and it has some impact—that you don't want them gone completely from the world because they benefit you by being in the world in a number of ways, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. So if

you can develop diplomacy that keeps those aspects of the empire from disappearing and keeps them either negative, neutral, or in your favor, do that too. So he has a very exquisite portfolio that he can choose from at any given time in terms of actions China will take vis-à-vis America, and in general vis-à-vis the West, which he considers Europe in particular—Western Europe in particular, Eastern Europe.

I think he's kind of got real substantive questions about it, as do I and anybody looking at it. Are the Poles going to take over for Germany? Are you kidding me? That's what their government is talking about right now: send your troops to our country, we'll take over from Germany. Well, Poland—what are the two countries in the world you've had in the last few hundred years the most problems with? Moscow and Berlin. Okay, well, maybe that's not a smart move. So Xi's kind of puzzled about that, but he's not puzzled about Western Europe. Western Europe is essentially, for different reasons, in the same state that America's in.

So he's got a similar strategy toward that. Doesn't want to lose them, and certainly doesn't want to lose the aspect that Putin is talking to him about all the time—restoring Russian sales of LNG and oil to Europe, which is happening right now. It's happening right now, even though the EU has passed laws about it not happening. And so he's got a very exquisite view of what's happening in the world. And he's got a strategy, multiple strategies, for dealing with it. And this meeting was no disturbance of that. Not really. Just confirmed for him what he already thinks he knows—and probably rightfully.

#Larry

You know, the language he used was particularly striking. You know, when he brought up the Thucydides Trap, I bet Trump was going, huh? Who's that? What's that? What kind of trap? Now, and I admit, you know, I had to go back, and I said, you know, I was familiar with the term, but if you'd asked me to stand up and give a definition, I couldn't have given the definition offhand. Okay, so either we're looking at Xi Jinping as one of the most intelligent, educated leaders, well-versed in ancient Greek history, or one of his clever underlings said, hey, boss, let's lay this on Trump. This will freak him out. I'm not sure which it was, but it was one of the two. And the Chinese were sending a very strong signal that they are the rising power. In fact, I think on many—if you want to pick a number of variables—you could point out that China has now surpassed the United States.

They have more banks in the top ten of the world banks. They have a higher literacy rate than the United States. They certainly have a higher industrial capability. They can build more ships in one year than we've built in the last 60 years. They've developed hypersonic missiles that, you know, fly, and we haven't even deployed one. So, you know, we just keep going down the list. And, you know, I think they also know from history that this is this kind of displacement of a hegemon, displacement of the United States as, quote, who perceives itself as we're the world leader, we're the best, we're the strongest. And nope. You know, it's like with Snow White, where the evil queen's mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all? And the day comes up, the mirror looks back and says, you ain't, you know, your time is over.

#Lawrence

And one of the, Nima, one of the—what Larry's talking about is so true. One of the most difficult things in human history, the 3,000 years we know something about and the 5,000 we know a little bit about, is this kind of transition, which is what Graham Allison and the Thucydides Trap and General Thucydides himself—he was a general, a lot of people forget that, as well as a historian, one of the first historians of the world—part of their point is just this. It is one of the most difficult transitions, most often failed at rather than succeeded, out of empire, out of the grand power, out of the scheme of, you know, I'm the hegemon, I'm the number one power in the world. And it's not going to be any different for America.

In fact, in some respects, it's going to be more difficult because we have an incredible capacity to not be cohesive in 50 states, increasingly with different views, different visions, different kinds of problems, but some common problems that adhere—one of which is AI and water use and power. And it's coming into me, email after email after email, about the problems we're developing with this. Places like Culper City, Texas, which have no water, are going to disappear if we can't do something about their water problem. All of this is creating some real turmoil. So add to that the fact that this is an extremely challenging moment for anyone in human history to navigate successfully—stepping down from empire.

And by the way, Britain, when it stepped down, simply stepped into the shadow of America. So it had some place to go to hide. We don't have any place to go to hide. And we have a potential for dismemberment of our country, period, that's hugely potent right now, particularly with this administration, who would take total advantage of that, probably to create their own kind of government in its wake. That's extremely destabilizing and dangerous, I think. And we're at a moment right now in history, our history in particular, that's going to be difficult to navigate. And Xi knows that. Xi knows that. He doesn't want it to be catastrophic, but he wants it to proceed apace.