

Col. Jacques Baud: US vs China: The Iran Trap & Taiwan's Shadow

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#Nima

Donald Trump's visit to China was because he wanted something from China, basically related to the war in the Middle East. He thought that China could help the United States. And what is your understanding of the kind of relationship China has with the United States, considering that somehow Donald Trump felt they could use Chinese leverage on the Iranian government to help them with the case of the Strait of Hormuz? Because looking at what's going on right now, we had an Iranian proposal to the United States, then the response from the United States—two totally different proposals. The opposite, totally the opposite, you know.

And Iran, just before coming up, we've learned that Iran responded with, again, a 14-point plan. I don't see anything changing on the part of the Iranians. And Donald Trump—the situation is getting somehow desperate for Donald Trump. That's why last night he tweeted that the clock is ticking, and it seems that they're preparing for a new sort of attack on Iran. How do you see the situation totally? Because on one side, he didn't get that much help from China with the case of the Strait of Hormuz, and he has to do something about it. We know the price of energy, the price of food—everything is going up. Your take on that.

#Jacques

Well, coming back to the visit of Donald Trump to China, we have to understand that this visit was initially planned for late March this year. And probably at this stage, what Donald Trump wanted was not to talk about Iran. He thought that Iran could have been past history at this point, because he expected to subdue Iran within days. And the Strait of Hormuz event came as a surprise to him because he didn't expect that, meaning that the whole approach to the trip to China was first to talk about trade issues between the US and China. And by the way, if you look at the composition of the delegation, you had not mostly, but a large part of businessmen and people from the financial world in the US, and high tech also. So the idea was definitely to talk about trade issues.

Since he didn't achieve victory, or decisive victory, or however you may call it, in March, he had to postpone this visit because obviously he was not ready to do that. The consequence of this was that,

as it appeared to me, this visit was very poorly prepared on the American side and to some extent on the Chinese side as well. I mean, the Chinese tried to squeeze the visit of Donald Trump between other heads of state visits, and that didn't give Trump's visit the importance it should have had normally. Just last week. So that's, I think, a very important point. And the issue of the Strait of Hormuz and leveraging China to solve Iran, this is something that came, obviously, after the end of March. I mean, that was because that was not the initial and the primary goal of this visit.

And that also shows the lack of something we have said many times about Trump — the lack of strategic thinking. He's not a strategist; he's a tactician. And he tries to put tactical issues together in order to have the appearance of a strategic issue, but it remains tactical in essence. And that's exactly what we have. That's the first thing. The second thing is that, when we assess the visit, we have to look at the readouts of the visit, or the communique, as I said — the communiqués, both of them. And if you look at the Chinese one, it has basically three main issues: obviously, this idea of strategic stability — this is a very important point in the communique — the issue of Taiwan, and the issue of balanced relationships between the two countries.

The stability cooperation is a very central aspect in that because it also comprises the issue of Taiwan. It also raises the issue of the, I don't know in English, the trap. You know, this is a trap that was first identified or derived from the wars in ancient Greece, when you had a power, namely Sparta, that was so keen to keep its position as the primary force in the Mediterranean that it had to wage war on everybody who tried to challenge its primacy. And this is a little bit the thing we have with the US. You may remember, and that's not just Donald Trump, by the way, you may remember what Joe Biden said when he was inaugurated, I think, or it was the first State of the Union.

In any case, that was in 2021 when he said the rest of the world is getting closer to us and we cannot allow that. You know, that's exactly the trap — that you are so keen to keep your hegemonic position that you will do everything to destroy everybody who wants to challenge this position. And obviously, in 2021, it was probably directed at China, but also at Russia — Russia on the military side, and China on the economic and trade side, and probably also the high technology side. So you have this idea in the U.S. that the U.S. must be dominant regarding technology, regarding military power, regarding influence, and, and, and.

And that's — this is part of this — the idea of stability, the Strategic Stability Cooperation. I think that's the real word, the exact word. The Strategic Stability Cooperation between the U.S. and China. And that's, in essence, what was in the Chinese communique. And when you read the U.S. communique, you have nothing of that. Absolutely no word about this. There is no word about Taiwan. There is no word about Hormuz. They mentioned Hormuz, but they didn't mention these fundamental issues that were raised by China. And China doesn't mention, or only very quickly, it didn't mention Hormuz as such, if I remember well, but it just mentioned that the U.S. and China talked about the Middle East issues, period.

So obviously, on the Chinese side, the Iranian issue was not the centerpiece of this meeting, while for the U.S. it was the centerpiece, because that's the current concern of U.S. foreign policy. Very interesting also to see, if you read the communiqué of the White House, that everything mentioned in the communiqué regards what the U.S. could win during this visit — like a better trade agreement on this and that. So it was only oriented on the wins for U.S. trade, basically, while the Chinese focused on the strategic balance and strategic and fundamental issues.

So you see that here, a totally different approach, which is not surprising, because China is obviously a more strategic country than the U.S., at least at this stage. That was probably different 50 or 60 years ago. But today, the U.S. has become tactical — there is only tactical thinking in America, in foreign policy, even in national security issues. And that's reflected very much in those two communiqués. Interesting also is that when you have such an important event that may affect the relationship between the two largest economies in the world, with obviously regional implications both in Asia and in the Western Hemisphere and possibly in the West at large, usually you have a joint communiqué. And that's where the preparation of this meeting comes into play.

I myself have been involved in some international conferences, and in most international conferences, you prepare the final communiqué even before the conference starts, in reality, because you know what you want to achieve. You know that there will be some slight modifications. But when you start the conference, the real conference, there is already a draft existing that you can adjust at the last minute with some probable declarations, things like this. But in essence, you have the document. And you have teams of experts from both sides working together months in advance in order to prepare the joint communiqué. When you read the two communiqués that were published after, you can see that, in fact, these were two communiqués worked out by two different teams.

They didn't talk to each other. You have a U.S. team preparing its own communiqué and a Chinese team preparing its own. And that's exactly why you see very little overlap between the two communiqués. And that also reflects the focus of both parties. And that also, in my view, reflects, let's say, not the failure of the summit, but the absence of success of the summit. I'm not sure it's a successful summit because, again, I mean, both parties can see that as a... I mean, the Chinese probably have a more successful segment because they could make their point and could emphasize their own red lines and their own priorities, while the Americans have come up with priorities such as trade, agriculture, products, and things like that, which are not very strategic.

So I think reading the communiqués, you can see that nothing has been achieved in common, but the Chinese have an edge in the sense that they were able to say, what are our priorities now? We have a difficult situation, and our priority remains Taiwan, stability, and balanced trade. It's not a balance for the U.S. or in favor of the U.S. It must be mutually beneficial. And I think that also

comes very often in the comments on the Chinese side. And on that point, I think the Chinese have made their point. And in that sense, I think this summit is probably more in favor of China than in favor of Donald Trump.

#Nima

Sorry for interrupting you. We are dealing with two different situations on the part of the United States and China. On the part of China, the main issue and the most important issue is the case of Taiwan. I don't see any sort of urgency on the part of China when it comes to Taiwan. They want to talk about it. They want to put an end to that sort of misunderstanding that exists between China and the United States. But they don't have that much of, you know, rush.

#Jacques

Yes and no. Remember that Congress approved 11 billion in credits—wrong word, credit, I don't know how to call that—for 11 billion for weapons sales.

#Nima

You're talking about weapons to be sent. Yes, exactly. Yes.

#Jacques

And that, I think, is a source of concern for Iran. Now, the amount has been approved by Congress, but the sales themselves have not occurred yet. And that's probably why there is a sense of urgency for China. So yes, I agree with you that it's not the same level of urgency between what is happening in Iran and what's happening in Taiwan. But remember that I'm not sure Iran is such an important matter for China. To be honest, China understands that the Israeli-U.S. aggression was illegal. They understand the consequences of that. They understand that the consequences of this aggression have implications for the global world. And they have said so much.

By the way, it's true that the Chinese have declared that the circulation of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz should be free, and there must not be any blockade on that. I think they target more the U.S. than Iran in this matter, because Iran has in fact not closed the Strait of Hormuz — the U.S. did. So that's also important to remember. The U.S. has blocked the traffic, not Iran. Iran has imposed some restrictions and has kind of managed — with quotation marks — managed traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, but it doesn't stop this traffic. So China understands, and by the way, China has also got some privileges for having its tankers through the Strait of Hormuz.

So for China, it's a problem at large, but not a major source of concern for itself. Remember also that China doesn't depend on the Strait of Hormuz, or only for a fraction of its energy, because roughly 85% of the energy that China uses is produced in China itself. So there's only 15% of their

energy needs that need to be covered through imports. And a large source of imported energy comes from Russia, which is a very close ally. Yes, it's a concern at large, it's a strategic concern, but it's not a matter of urgency for China. I think it's very important.

And that appears in the discussion, by the way, because what China has said—in fact, China has said to the U.S. to stop the blockade. That's what China said, because they consider that the U.S. is the problem in the region, not Iran. And that appears very clearly in the different declarations that have been made. The problem is that Trump doesn't want to understand that. But in reality, China doesn't see Iran as a problem. And remember that before—I mean, we have said that many times—but before the 28th of February, traffic in the Strait of Hormuz was free. So definitely the U.S. and Israel were the problem. They are part of the problem and not of the solution.