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U.S. Department of State Diplomacy in Action

Secretary Kerry Co-hosts a Lunch for Chinese President Xi Jinping Along With Vice President Joe Biden

Remarks

John Kerry

Secretary of State

Ben Franklin Room

Washington, DC

September 25, 2015

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Please sit down. Thank you. Take seats.

(In Chinese.) (Applause.) And Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, Madam Peng, distinguished colleagues from China, the United States, very special guests – and everybody here is a special guest – we’re very, very pleased to welcome you all to the Ben Franklin Room. As most of you know, this room was named for the fellow up there above the fireplace, Benjamin Franklin, one of the founders of the United States and someone who is considered by historians to be America’s first professional diplomat.

Do we have – I see there are no headphones for --

STAFF: Yes, there are.

SECRETARY KERRY: -- for our -- okay, good. All right.

Dr. Franklin – the reason I mention this is because Dr. Franklin was absolutely fascinated by the great scholar Confucius and by China generally, which he way back then called the wisest of nations. As a scholar himself, Franklin learned all he could about Chinese silkworm, cultivation, about ship design, candle-making, and home heating. And one of his inventions, the Franklin stove, was actually based on Chinese ideas, which emphasizes that intellectual property was a hot issue way back then. (Laughter.)

I’m really delighted to be able to welcome President Xi and his delegation back to Washington and to take this opportunity to wish all of our friends from China a very happy Mid-Autumn Festival. I’m a little bit early; the festival actually begins on Sunday, and I understand that it has traditionally been a time of courtship and matchmaking, when young Chinese couples get together and fall in love. Now, here in the United

States, we have our own Sunday ritual which takes place in major cities, involves large numbers of people in parking lots grilling meat and drinking beer outside of football stadiums. We call it tailgating, and I want to confirm to everybody here today it has absolutely nothing in common with the Chinese tradition. (Laughter.)

My friends, it really is a privilege to host such a great gathering of public and private sector leaders. We have two of my predecessors as Secretary of State here today – Dr. Madeleine Albright and Dr. Henry Kissinger – and we welcome you. Thank you. (Applause.)

We have top officials from throughout the executive branch, friends from Congress, and some of the world's most successful and innovative business leaders, economists, and scholars. And a guest list like this speaks volumes to the breadth of the U.S.-China relationship. In fact, I truly wonder if a relationship this close and this consequential was, in fact, foreseen even by Dr. Kissinger – he will tell you yes – (laughter) – during that first historic visit to Beijing 44 years ago.

It's important to remember that in the not very distant past, U.S.-China ties were centered on a very – relatively narrow set of bilateral and regional matters. But today, thanks to focused diplomacy on both sides – and, I might add, a very constructive and comprehensive set of discussions last night at dinner and through this morning with the President – through the leadership of President Obama and President Xi, our nations are now collaborating to tackle some of the most complex global challenges the world has ever seen. And we are – as you will learn today with the comments of the Vice President and the releases from the White House and our friends from China, the breadth of the memoranda of what is going to be engaged in coming out of this is sweeping.

Today, our nations recognize that while our differences will undoubtedly continue to test our relationship, they should not and in fact they must not prevent us from acting cooperatively in other areas. The United States and China comprise one quarter of the global population. We make up one-third of the global economy. We generate one-fifth of global trade. And when we're pulling in the same direction, we can bend the curve of progress in a way that few other nations on earth can accomplish.

Now that is true on a number of issues, but I have to tell you it has proven to be particularly true on something where only three years ago we were divided, and that is the issue of climate change. Together, the United States and China have an extraordinary opportunity to correct the perilous course that our planet is on and which the Holy Father has spoken to so eloquently most recently in his visit to Washington.

As the Chinese proverb says: "Opportunity knocks at the door only once." I'm pleased to say that I believe both of our nations are now committed to opening that door, to taking advantage of the time that we have to act and to bringing about a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable future for us all.

Last year in Beijing, I was privileged to be with President Obama and President Xi when they jointly announced our respective ambitious, post-2020 greenhouse gas mitigation commitments and called on other countries to come forward with their own ambitious targets. I've been active, I can tell you, in this fight all of my Senate career and even before, and I will tell you we were stuck until China and the United States came together. And that moment broke the veil of avoidance and got countries across the world to say, "If they're serious, we need to be serious." It sent a clear message to the world that the time for excuses was over and that the roadblocks that have slowed us for too long can be removed. And over the course of the past year, we have continued to make progress and implement the targets that we announced last fall.

I'm very pleased to say that the joint statement that our leaders is releasing today is, again, a major step forward. It sets forth a common vision for the final agreement describing our aligned views on a number of key negotiating issues. This is heading into Paris for the Paris negotiations in December. And it demonstrates a strong momentum in both countries on domestic climate policy, including our clean power plan and China's commitment to green dispatch in their power sector. It breaks new ground on climate finance, to help the most vulnerable nations be able to transition to low carbon development and it helps to actually build resistance to climate impacts in many nations, with China today announcing a 3.1 billion climate finance commitment commensurate with the U.S. pledge to the Green Climate Fund.

So we – (applause). There's a lot more, but that – let me just say quickly that the bottom line is that both the United States and China are truly blessed as nations with the strength and the resources and the people to lift up people in other parts of the world, to brighten prospects across the globe. But we can obviously accomplish far more when we are focused on doing so together. It's certainly true that the close ties

between our nations would have, except for Henry Kissinger, been hard to envision years ago. But if we can continue to invest in this relationship – which is what we’re trying to do – if we can remain committed to frank discussions – and believe me, they were frank – and to managing our differences even as we expand our cooperation, we can only imagine where we might be a few decades from now.

It’s now my pleasure to introduce the Vice President. I have been fortunate to call the Vice President a friend and a colleague for a very long time. And throughout those years, I’ve relied on his advice, his expertise, and his good humor. In recent months, for reasons that are well known to all, America has come not just to admire Joe Biden, but to fully understand the depth of his character and the love in his heart. The world knows Joe Biden to be an outstanding leader, a champion of international understanding and peace. We also know him as a wonderful and courageous human being.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Vice President of the United States. (Applause.)

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Please. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. Please. You’re very kind. Thank you.

It’s obvious only a good friend could make that up. (Laughter.) Thank you, John. Jill, Secretary Kerry, Teresa, President Xi, Madam Peng, it’s an honor to have you here. Ambassador Baucus, who’s a great friend and doing a great job; Secretaries Lew and Pritzker; Secretary of State Albright, it’s great to see you, Madam Secretary; and our former ambassadors to China are here, Jon Huntsman, Gary Locke, Winston Lord, Ambassador Roy, Ambassador Sasser – you’re all welcome.

I don’t know – you know I’ve been an admirer of yours, Dr. Kissinger, for a long time. And that’s for real; you know that. And as John said, I wonder whether you could’ve imagined being here today, where what you started, your initiative and your incredible personal diplomacy, began to change the face of the globe in terms of this relationship. And I look out there today, and we have leading members of the Senate and the House; we have great foreign policy experts who are – represent every element of our foreign policy establishment; we have the most dynamic group of business leaders – with all due respect, Mr. President – in the entire world assembled here, although the best one is from my home state, Chairman Kullman, the – she is the – she runs the DuPont company. And we have the nation’s leading representative of American labor, a great, great friend of mine, Mr. Trumka.

And all assembled here for one reason – with a sense of optimism and expectation that we’ll be able to work through whatever differences exist and what those that will come forward.

Secretary Kerry and President Xi have heard me say this before, and I sort of learned it from you, Dr. Kissinger: It’s presumptuous to try to improve on Tip O’Neill who said, “all politics is personal.” I’ve become convinced from watching you over 40 years, all international politics is only personal. If you can’t establish a personal relationship – you don’t have to love one another, but you can’t establish a personal relationship where you understand one another – it’s awfully hard to get anything done. And more than four years ago, President Obama and President Xi decided that then-Vice President – President Hu decided that then-Vice President Xi and I should get to know one another.

And so we did exactly that. I had the opportunity of traveling from Beijing to Chengdu and every other place in between with the hospitality of the president. We had more hours of dinners alone than I think he ever anticipated, and then I had the honor of hosting him here in the United States in Washington and in – and Los Angeles. When he went to Muscatine, Iowa, I told him I couldn’t go, and – but I should have gone. He went – (laughter) – he went and he became President. I didn’t go and I’m still Vice President. (Laughter.) I don’t know what the hell’s in the water in Iowa, but whatever he was drinking, it worked, and we’ve had many opportunities to visit in the meantime.

Mr. President, the many hours we’ve spent together – we have had countless private discussions that go well beyond the typical talking points. And I came away – and I told the President this after our multiple meetings – that I came away impressed with the president’s candor, determination, and his capacity – his capacity to handle what was – what he inherited, and every leader inherits, is great opportunities but also very serious concerns. And as President Xi knows, because of Dr. Kissinger, in 1979 as a junior senator I joined a group of very senior senators, from Jack Javits and others, on the first visit of any American elected representative to Beijing to meet with Deng Xiaoping after Dr. Kissinger and President Nixon normalized relations. And I came back at the time and said a few things that – I know I never say anything

controversial, but were viewed as controversial at the time. I said that a rising and peaceful China could be and should be a very positive development in the world, and that I saw no reason back in 1979 and I see no reason why ultimately we could not work together, because the ultimate interests we have are not dissimilar.

Then as now, I recognized that our two countries had clear disagreements and we will continue to have them. This is not a new phenomenon. But the animating logic of our relationship is also not new. Both sides accept that we each gain more from working together than our interest – and our interest – where our interests align than working alone, by addressing the differences candidly. And as John said last night, we kept the poor president up very late and we went very long, and we had very, very candid discussions, the President – President Obama and President Xi, because we're of the view – the President and I and the Secretary, as I believe President Xi is – that that's the way we should deal with one another so there's no misunderstanding.

As I noted in this year's Strategic & Economic Dialogue, it's been 10 years since then-Deputy Secretary Bob Zoellick called on China to become what he then said: a responsible stakeholder. Here's what Zoellick said at the time – he said, "All nations conduct diplomacy to promote their national interest. Responsible stakeholders go further. They recognize that the international system sustains their peaceful prosperity, so they work to sustain the system." That's what we're about working our way through, is the how we best do that with one another.

President – since President Xi has assumed the presidency of China, he and President Obama have met six times, establishing their own close, personal relationship as well, because both our presidents are convinced that the U.S.-China relationship will be the defining relationship of the 21st century. President Obama feels that very strongly, and I know the president of China, President Xi, does as well.

We're still going to have differences. We have differences with our closest allies. But we've made much progress, from curbing Iran's nuclear activities to aligning our climate change goals, as John has spoken to in more detail, to, I predict, lead the world – lead the world – in the first really serious, serious international effort to deal with climate change. And today we announced progress on several other areas, including strengthening our military-to-military relationships – those have already been strengthened, but deepened even further today – and expanding our cooperation on international development.

And even as this cooperation contributes to our efforts to be responsible stakeholders, we also have to be responsible competitors, working together to sustain a level playing field that is fair and transparent. President Xi candidly spoke last night about actions the United States takes that impact on public opinion among his people in China. President Obama spoke candidly about actions that China takes or doesn't take that impact upon American public opinions, attitude toward China. We both understand that what our peoples think as well is equally as important as what our leaders think, and we talked about the need to protect our companies from cyber theft and commercial espionage, respecting and strengthening international law, promoting free and fair markets, and upholding the rights of women, minority, journalists, civil society, religious leaders. It was a very, very open and candid discussion.

We continue to have serious concerns about some of China's actions, as they do ours, in each – in such areas for us as cyber space, maritime security, economic policy, human rights, that are preventing our relationship from reaching its full potential. But the commitment was we would work very hard to work through it to see the Chinese perspective, and for them to see ours.

And the fact of the matter is that, as the Secretary of State knows, I never presume to tell another leader what is in his or her interest. They know their interests better than we do. And President Xi knows the interests of his country better than we. But as President Xi knows, I've never been reluctant to say what the United States interest is. And as a powerful – excuse me, as a peaceful and prosperous Asia Pacific region that's free from intimidation or coercion, we hope China and the United States can continue to work to keep it that way.

China has made remarkable, remarkable strides in the past 20 years, lifting a half a billion people out of poverty. And as the president last night was talking humbly about their prospects, I pointed out that I thought that their projected progress between the next 10 years was going to be met and exceeded. This is a great achievement, and there's much more to come. And with the new capacity which – that China is acquiring, comes enormous responsibility. You said it correctly, Mr. President, back in 2010 when you said, "There is competition in our cooperation. Yet such competition, we believe, is healthy – healthily based upon a mutual learning and mutual reinforcement. And in a fundamental sense, it's conducive to our common development," is what you went on to say.

Our challenge today is to meet this test. That is what we're both striving for. So we welcome healthy competition. Like you, we will help – it will help advance our common goals as well, Mr. President. And if we can meet the shared objective – both nations, both open and collaborative, embracing our roles as responsible stakeholders and responsible competitors – our people will benefit tremendously, and quite frankly, so will the world. And as we along with the entire region build a future that realizes the full potential of the Asia Pacific, visits like this are incredibly important.

As I told you, Mr. President, back in 2012, the history of the next 50 years is going to be largely based on how well our two countries, the United States and China, navigate this relationship. So I'd like to make a toast, Mr. President. I'd like to make a toast, and – to the hope and expectation that 50 years from now our great grandchildren will look back and say what a beautiful history we wrote together.

Mr. President, the podium is yours.

PRESIDENT XI: (Via interpreter) Vice President Biden and your wife, Secretary Kerry, I can't name all the friends both old and new here. Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to thank Vice President Biden and Secretary Kerry for hosting this welcoming luncheon for me, my wife, and the Chinese delegation.

To me Vice President Biden is an old friend, and we have interacted with each other so much and we visited each other's countries and we spent more than 10 hours together exchanging views. And Secretary Kerry is also our old friend, and I have also seen many familiar faces in this room, friends who have made direct contribution to the growth of China-U.S. relations.

It is such a delight to see old friends again. Let me take this opportunity to express sincere appreciation to all of you and through you to American friends from all walks of life who have long dedicated themselves to China-U.S. relations.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the victory of the world anti-fascist war and the victory of the Chinese people's war of resistance against Japanese aggression. Seventy years ago, China and the United States fought side-by-side against a fascist aggression to defend the cause for peace, freedom, and justice. Many touching stories have been left behind and are still being told today.

In February 1932, Robert Short, who was serving as a fighter jet test pilot and trainer in China, lost his life protecting local Chinese from an air raid. He was the first American airman to die in aerial combat for the Chinese people. And in April 1942, Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle of the U.S. Air Force led a group of bombers returning from a mission. Their planes ran out of fuel and had to force land in China, and some of the planes crashed. At the risk of their own lives, local Chinese and – Chinese soldiers and civilians came to their rescue and later helped the 64 U.S. airmen return home safely. A strong bond of friendship was forged in those days when China and America fought alongside each other through blood and fire, and the Chinese people will always remember the valuable assistance from the American people.

Over the past 70 years, China-U.S. relations have traveled an extraordinary journey. We were comrades in arms during the World War II, then we became rivals, estranged from each other for most of the Cold War period. And today we are partners with closely intertwined interests. Despite the twists and turns, China-U.S. relations have on the whole moved forward and delivered much benefit to the people of the two countries and around the world.

Isn't that a huge difference? And Dr. Kissinger said to me that in the 1970s, when they conducted the icebreaking journey, they had never imagined the way that China-U.S. relations have become today. At that time, they focused on the immediate strategic issues, but they never imagined that our interests could have been so closely intertwined. And he also said to me that back then, they had never imagined that China will come this far in terms of economic and social development.

The question we face today is how China, the biggest developing country, and the United States, the biggest developed country, should work together to take our relations to the future. The answer, I believe, lies in making the right choices on two things of fundamental importance. First, China and the United States need to increase strategic mutual trust, seek peaceful coexistence, and prevent the so-called Thucydides Trap from locking the two major countries in conflict and confrontation. The two sides need to read each other's strategic intention properly and do what they can to avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation.

Yesterday evening, President Obama and I exchanged views in in-depth manner on enhancing strategic mutual trust. The path China follows is one of peaceful development, and China does not pose a threat to other countries. China wants to work with the United States for common development and prosperity. We hope the U.S. will do the same, and we are sure that the U.S. is doing the same.

Second, China and the United States need to work together to make the pie of cooperation bigger to better serve the interests of our two peoples and the wider international community. This requires that the two sides focus on shared interests and unlock the potential for cooperation. The two countries may strengthen practical cooperation in business, military, law enforcement, energy, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. This will make life better for our two peoples and bring them closer together. The two countries may work together to promote settlement of regional issues such as the Iranian nuclear issue, the Korean nuclear issue, and Afghanistan. We may also join hands to tackle global challenges such as terrorism, climate change, and epidemic diseases. Together, China and the United States could contribute more to world peace, stability, and development.

Just now, the Vice President and Secretary Kerry mentioned that we still have differences between us. But I don't think they should become a source of conflict or friction. These differences will continue to exist for a long time to come, but they could be an impetus for even more exchanges and mutual learning. So long as the two sides bear the larger picture in mind, have mutual respect, and talk with each other on equal footing, we could manage differences in a constructive way and narrow them down as long as we work hard enough. This, I believe, will ensure that we hold firm to the overall direction of cooperation between the two countries.

It is heartening to note that from the Sunnylands meeting in 2013 to the Yingtai talk in 2014 and to the in-depth discussions we had at Blair House and the White House this time, President Obama and I have demonstrated firm commitment to building a new model of major country relations between China and the United States. Guided by this agreement, my current visit has produced fruitful results. Fresh and significant progress has been made in negotiating a bilateral investment treaty, strengthening confidence-building mechanism between the two militaries, expanding cultural and people-to-people exchanges, tackling climate change, and increasing coordination and collaboration in multilateral affairs. This is once again sending a clear and positive message to the world that China and the United States will work more closely together to meet challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, heart-to-heart communication between our two peoples is the source of strength of our bilateral ties. The growth of China-U.S. relations won't be possible without the mutual understanding and support of our people. During my visit, I've been deeply impressed by the sincerity and the enthusiasm for cooperation on both sides and by the friendly sentiments shown to the Chinese people from the American people. I have every confidence in a bright future of China-U.S. relations.

And last night President Obama showed to us his great sincerity in promoting common understanding between the two sides. And Secretary Kerry just announced to us that this room is named after Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States. And Mr. Franklin had a close connection with China. He has such great respect for Confucius – a Chinese philosopher, thinker, and founder of Confucianism – that he personally promoted Confucius moral philosophy among the American people. He once observed that energy and persistence conquer all things. Similarly, there is a saying in China that suggests as long as we keep at it, we could make a rope saw through wood and water drip through stone.

I'm convinced that as long as our two sides join hands and move forward together with perseverance, we will continue to make new progress in growing China-U.S. relations and better serve the people of our two countries and the world at large.

In conclusion, I invite you to join me in a toast to friendship between the Chinese and American people, to an even better tomorrow for China-U.S. relations, and to the health of Vice President Biden, your wife, Secretary Kerry, and all friends present. Cheers. (Applause.)

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