



Obama Offers Extended Visas to Chinese at APEC Summit

In an effort to shore up his shrinking political influence following the shellacking the Democrat Party took in last week's midterm elections, President Obama offered a modest bouquet to China's "paramount leader" at the opening of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Beijing on Monday. He touted the tentative agreement he and China's President Xi Jinping had come to concerning visas issued by each country.



As of November 12th, the United States will start granting visas to Chinese visitors that are valid for up to 10 years instead of just one. That this was just an opening bid in the game populated by card sharks was clear from Obama's initial remarks: "We want China to do well. We compete for business but we also seek to cooperate on a broad range of challenges and shared opportunities."

Those "challenges and opportunities" are wide-ranging and fraught with difficulties. They include issues such as the human rights abuses that continue apace in China, China's alleged manipulation of its currency values in world markets, the freedom uprisings in Hong Kong (aided and abetted by the CIA, according to some observers), the hacking into sensitive U.S. computer mainframes by the Chinese government, putting the finishing touches on the odious Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and attacking global warming with a straight face, to name just a few.

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The peace offering of visa enhancements was preceded by a cleverly arranged release of two American hostages by North Korea on Saturday before the APEC summit started (CIA Director James Clapper made a secret trip to Pyongyang prior to the start of the summit to negotiate the release of Kenneth Bae and Matthew Todd Miller).

Those enhancements are modest, to say the very least. A U.S. visa only serves as preliminary permission to seek admission to the United States. Final admission remains, as it always has, in the hands of a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer who, after questioning and investigating the nonimmigrant's purposes, will then issue a Form I-94. That form serves as the official government document authorizing the foreigner's stay in the country.

But this modest enhancement didn't faze the president, who celebrated the potential benefits: "One country's prosperity doesn't have to come at the expense of another. If China and the United States can work together, the world benefits."

At present, fewer than two million of the 100 million Chinese who travel abroad come to the United States, contributing an estimated \$21 billion to the economy and, according to the president, supporting more than 100,000 jobs in the sectors serving them. But under the new enhancements that number could quadruple, he said, bringing an estimated \$85 billion into the economy and requiring a workforce of 400,000 workers to serve their needs while they are here. He also touted the dubious advantage of closer relationships between Americans and Chinese in the process: "This agreement



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on November 13, 2014

could help us more than quadruple those numbers ... which will benefit our economies [and] bring our people together.”

He was also hoping against hope that China’s “paramount leader” would reciprocate the agreement, but the details from the Chinese side of the fence were scant. Americans have found it increasingly difficult to obtain travel visas into China and it is unclear whether Monday’s “agreement” will make things easier for them.

But this gave the president the opening wedge he needed to get to the real meat of the meeting with China’s leader:

We look to China to create a more level playing field on which foreign companies are treated fairly.... [We hope that China will] move definitively toward a more market-determined exchange rate and, yes, to stand up for human rights and freedom of the press.

He stepped lightly over the issue of human rights, however, not wanting to offend the holder of massive quantities of U.S. treasuries: “We’re not going to stop speaking out on behalf of the things that we care about, recognizing that we also have a significant interest in [the] business [we] do with China and recognizing that China is not in the same place in terms of their development, politically and economically, as we are [in the United States] today.”

Before leaving the summit on Wednesday, the president announced another modest concession: reducing tariffs on high technology equipment between the two countries. Beyond that, however, the president found himself on the outside looking in. Over the last two years the authoritarian leaders of China and Russia have forged a tight relationship that will likely far outlast Obama’s second term as a lame duck president. Said the *Wall Street Journal*,

Mr. Obama’s goals are increasingly challenged by Mr. Xi’s own vision and the closer ties that the Chinese leader is forging with [Russia’s President] Mr. Putin. The two have developed a rapport, having met at least 10 times over the past two years, and are trying to build closer economic ties through transport links and energy deals.

In fact, the two dictators have developed their own trade pact that excludes Obama and the United States. They have already inked a deal to supply natural gas from Western Siberia to China that has the potential to exceed the volume of gas already being shipped to Europe. And there is word that Russia is offering Chinese investors the opportunity to purchase significant ownership interests in “some of our biggest production assets,” according to a Kremlin transcript.

This much is clear following the ending of the summit on Wednesday: Human rights abuses in China will continue, as will the government-funded attacks on U.S. computer mainframes. The protests in Hong Kong will be ignored as long as they don’t get ugly, and China will continue to pollute its air, causing the premature death of millions of its people.

None of that was in evidence in Beijing, however, as all traffic and polluting factories in the city were shut down prior to the meeting so that the high-ranking elitists could enjoy blue skies and clear, brisk autumn weather while jousting for political influence among their peers.

Photo of President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the APEC summit in Beijing: AP Images
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