



The Xi-Trump summit: A media survey

From April 6-7 2017 Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump met for the first time since Mr Trump's inauguration. The Xi-Trump summit took place at Mr Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

Both Chinese and international media acknowledge there were few tangible outcomes from the Xi-Trump summit. However, the cordial tone and lack of controversy are generally considered positive steps towards ameliorating tensions in US-China relations during the first months of the Trump administration.

Both leaders agreed to establish four new high-level dialogue mechanisms for cooperation in diplomacy and security; economics; law enforcement and cybersecurity; and social and people-to-people exchanges. They also agreed to form a working group with a 100-day plan for trade talks aimed at boosting US exports and reducing the US trade deficit with China.¹ Mr Trump accepted an invitation to meet with Mr Xi in China.

In *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Bates Gill, Professor of Asia-Pacific Strategic Studies at the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, said the summit was 'long on ceremony and short on substantive outcomes' and noted that '[Xi] is no doubt relieved that he did not have to say a word in public...on any of the difficult questions which divide the US and China'. Furthermore, the developments from the summit 'for now at least, have put the relationship on a positive footing'.²

This fact sheet was prepared by Simone van Nieuwenhuizen, Project and Research Support Officer, Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney.

¹ Alan D Romberg, 'Xi-Trump Mar-A-Lago summit: Beyond sweet nothings', *South China Morning Post*, April 8 2017 <<http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2086035/xi-trump-mar-lago-summit-beyond-sweet-nothings>>.

² Bates Gill, 'Donald Trump's big Syria disruption was a much-needed diversion for a summit with no strategy', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 10 2017 <<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/donald-trumps-big-syria-disruption-was-a-much-needed-diversion-for-a-summit-with-no-strategy-20170409-qvh330.html>>.

The Australian's China correspondent Rowan Callick wrote on April 10 that:

Crucially for Australia, there was no public falling out over the massive engagement between the world's two largest economies. No declaration of China as a currency manipulator, no development that might — as feared — lead to contraction of the countries' trade and investment relationship and thus of global growth (ACRI's emphasis).³

In a piece for the Lowy Institute's *The Interpreter*, Kerry Brown, Professor of Chinese Studies and Director of the Lau China Institute at King's College, London stated:

There were no major announcements on big economic and trade issues, despite the initial excitement...The main achievement of the summit was simply that things didn't go wrong (ACRI's emphasis).⁴

Former managing editor of the *South China Morning Post* Wang Xiangwei wrote in the Hong Kong newspaper that despite Mr Trump's 'penchant for using superlatives', reflected in his comment that the two leaders had formed an 'outstanding' relationship, Mr Xi expressed a more cautious optimism, describing it as a 'good working relationship' (ACRI's emphasis).⁵

The Chinese Communist Party's official newspaper *People's Daily* surveyed foreign media reports on the summit, claiming that 'international public opinion gave positive

³ Rowan Callick, 'US and China forge new paths', *The Australian*, April 10 2017 <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/us-and-china-forge-new-paths/news-story/3f322c950a1a82add10030e980de3844>>.

⁴ Kerry Brown, 'The Xi-Trump Summit: Rearranging the furniture', *Lowy Interpreter*, April 10 2017 <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/xi-trump-summit-rearranging-furniture>>.

⁵ Wang Xiangwei, 'Xi-Trump summit: No winners or losers in Mar-A-Lago, but a prized first step', *South China Morning Post*, April 8 2017 <<http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/2086059/xi-trump-summit-no-winners-or-losers-mar-lago-prized-first-step>>.

assessments of this meeting, saying there were significant results despite the tight schedule, and that both leaders established a good relationship' (ACRI's emphasis).⁶

China's state media outlet *Xinhua* published a feature on the summit entitled "Xi-Trump summit completes the tower of China-US relations". The piece argued that the positive outcomes marked 'a new starting point' for US-China relations.⁷

International media highlighted the timing of Trump's decision to launch strikes on an airfield in Homs, Syria on the evening of the welcome banquet for Mr Xi, arguing it may be a signal to China that the US is ready to act militarily when faced with threats abroad, including North Korea's nuclear program. For example, on April 7 *Foreign Policy* published an article under the headline 'Syria strikes overshadow Trump summit with Xi Jinping'.⁸ On the same day, *The New York Times*' Beijing bureau chief Jane Perlez wrote that the 'attack on Syria...unravelling China's well laid plans for a summit meeting that would present President Xi Jinping as a global leader on par with President Trump'.⁹

Chinese state media, on the other hand, did not mention this development in reports of the Xi-Trump summit. Instead, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying stated in her regular press conference on April 7 that China condemns the use of chemical weapons, but '[w]hat is imperative now is to prevent further deterioration of the situation and uphold the hard-won process of political settlement of the Syrian issue'.¹⁰ The English-language edition of the *Global Times* quoted Ms Hua's statement in reports on the strikes, but separated these from articles lauding the 'positive, fruitful' summit between Mr Xi and Mr Trump.¹¹

Despite the summit's apparently non-confrontational atmosphere, following Mr Xi's departure Mr Trump suggested on Twitter that he may still follow through on his tough position on trade:

Tremendous...goodwill and friendship was formed, but only time will tell on trade.¹²

⁶Pointing towards the future direction of China-US relations (the international media look at the world) [指明中美关系未来发展方向(外媒看世界)], *People's Daily* [人民日报], April 10 2017 <<http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0410/c1002-29198001.html>>.

⁷Commentary: Xi-Trump Summit completes the tower of China-US relations [辛识平: "习特会", 把中美关系的大厦建设好], *Xinhua News Agency* (reprinted in the *Global Times*, April 10 2017 <<http://world.huangjiu.com/hot/2017-04/10447595.html>>.

⁸Emily Tamkin and Robbie Gramer, 'Syria strikes overshadow Trump summit with Xi Jinping', *Foreign Policy*, April 7 2017 <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/07/syria-strikes-overshadow-trump-summit-with-xi-jinping/>>.

⁹Jane Perlez, U.S. strikes on Syria put Xi in tough position for Trump meeting, *The New York Times*, April 7 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/07/world/asia/trump-china-xi.html?_r=0>.

¹⁰Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying's regular press conference on April 7, 2017, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, April 7 2017 <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/11452149.shtml>.

¹¹'Xi, Trump agree meeting "positive, fruitful"', *Global Times*, April 8 2017 <<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1041409.shtml>>.

¹²'FM: China condemns chemical attacks in Syria, supports UN investigation', *Global Times*, April 8 2017 <<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1041394.shtml>>.

¹² Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, April 8 2017 <<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/850722648883638272>>.