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Transcript

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## CHINA IN THE WORLD PODCAST

Host: **Paul Haenle**

Guest: **Randall Schriver**

Episode 34: Obama's Trip to Asia

December 1, 2014

**Haenle:** You're listening to Carnegie–Tsinghua China in the World podcast, a series of conversations with Chinese and international experts on China's foreign policy, international role, and China's relations with the world, brought to you from the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center located here in Beijing, China. I'm Paul Haenle, the director of the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center and I'll be your host.

Today we're delighted to be speaking with Randy Schriver, who is in China this week to participate in the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center's distinguished speaker program. Randy served as deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 2003 to 2005, and prior to that as chief of staff and senior policy advisor to then Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. Randy has experience serving in China policy as the head of China policy for the Secretary of Defense and, prior to that, service as an active duty Navy intelligence officer. Randy is founding partner of Armitage International, an international business consulting firm and president, founding president and CEO of the Project 2049 Institute, a U.S. think tank focused on security issues and public policy in the Asia-Pacific region and Central Asia. Randy, thank you for joining us here today, thank you for joining us as part of the Carnegie–Tsinghua Distinguished Speakers program and for our podcast today.

**Schrivner:** Paul, thank you. Yeah, it's been great to be with you and it's been a terrific week for me, and I look forward to our conversation today.

**Haenle:** So we're taping this podcast following the conclusion of President Obama's November trip to Asia, began here in Beijing for the APEC leaders' meeting and also a summit between President Obama and President Xi, followed by a trip to Naypyidaw and Rangoon in Myanmar, Burma for the East Asian Summit, and finally, and also the U.S.-ASEAN summit, as well as a bilateral visit with Burmese leaders, and then finally to Brisbane, Australia for the G20 and a trilateral meeting there with Japanese and Australian leaders.

I want to start out our discussion by just asking you for your impressions of President Obama's trip to Asia. What do you think the significant accomplishments were? What was he trying to achieve as well?

**Schrivner:** Thank you. I think from where I sit, it looks like a very successful visit. And, I think there are things that the administration should feel good about on each stop, and then taken collectively; I think overall a successful visit. I think the China piece, the president, through his meetings with Xi Jinping and the various agreements reached, I think has helped stabilize Sino-U.S. relations and, and probably given us some momentum, a slight improvement, and some momentum. There's work to be done as follow up to his visit because there are agreements that were reached which are really agreements to work further in these areas, not necessarily conclusions of agreements. But they are consequential if they are implemented, so I think the president has really helped us gain some momentum in U.S.-China relations and really given us an agenda going forward that includes some very important issues like climate change, a bilateral investment treaty, and the middle-to-middle relationship.

But moving on beyond that, I think also the stop in Myanmar, the tone the president put out was exactly right, which is, "There are important developments in Burma and we're glad to see political reform instituted, but there is some backsliding in the area of human rights." And, I think the president mentioned the Rohingya by name and the Rakhine State, and he mentioned the interest in further political reform, I think clearly signaling that we hope Aung San Suu Kyi is in a

position to run for president, because right now the constitution prohibits it and it is clearly directed at her personally.

And, I think in Australia again, showing some leadership in the G20 is an accomplishment but also, Paul, the trilateral you mentioned is something that we started in the Bush administration and I think we've seen that really evolve to the point where we're still the convener, but in fact Australia and Japan are reaching their own agreements between the two countries, which is an evolution that I think we can take some satisfaction in, and I think the President was able to continue to promote that in ways that will serve our interests. So, overall, I think a very successful visit and it certainly comes at a time when the President needed some good news, but there'll be a lot of details to follow and agreements to be implemented. So, there's still work ahead.

**Haenle:** Randy, given that we're here in China, and this week you've engaged with a range of Chinese experts and scholars on U.S.-China relations, I want to look a little bit closer at the President Obama-President Xi summit. You mentioned some of the announcements that were made regarding climate, trade, there was progress made on the information technology agreement, there were some confidence-building measures announced in the military sphere, and, of course, the announcement on visas. How significant are these, and what kind of opportunities will they create going forward, and how might they be challenging?

**Schrivver:** They're significant in the fact that our two presidents were seen as on the stage together coming to consensus on some very important issues. Whether they're ultimately more significant or consequential will depend on a lot of the follow-up efforts, because, again, a lot of these agreements are less agreements than they are consensus to work harder to achieve certain things in these areas.

I should have mentioned the visas early on, as you know during this week we've heard an awful lot about that from Chinese interlocutors, and I think one of the points that was made during the visit this week that I'll take home is that, in a way, this might have the longest and the most important impact because it's really the one area that is going to affect a lot of people, our populations, and help us build stronger people-to-people ties. And, the fact that you can get a 10-year visa will surely promote more people-to-people exchanges, and that's really what our countries need if we're going to build a case domestically for stronger Sino-U.S. relations.

So, I think it's significant, and I think a lot of people in the region, and really around the world, like to see us coming together and cooperating, but there's still some pretty hard work ahead to fully implement these agreements, and time will tell if we've got that.

**Haenle:** Yeah, your comment about reactions around the world—as I've mentioned to you earlier, I was in the Middle East when the two presidents met, President Xi and President Obama, and it obviously came across as a positive summit. And, I had several former, senior government officials from different countries come up and tell me how pleased they were that President Obama, President Xi, and the two countries were working together, that they announced a range of things that showed the U.S. and China working together. And, I said, "Why is it so important you?" And, they said, "Because the relationship impacts the rest of the world fairly significantly and the rest of the world cares about it." And, I thought that was an interesting comment, something that I've shared this week with Chinese counterparts.

You mentioned that this is—I think your point is very valid—that this is a hard agenda. This is, in all those areas, with climate, trade, visa, and military agreements—none of these are a

done deal. There's still work to be done, and it's hard, and so there will be a lot of work that needs to be done to actually carry these out, and it'll be important that the two countries do that. You also are referring to some underlying tensions that still exist. Can you talk a little bit more about what you mean by that?

**Schrivver:** I think a lot of the really big strategic issues are still to be addressed. To some extent, it looks like our leaders are still talking past one another when they present their view for the future security architecture of the region or their respective views of our perceived role in the region going forward. And, that's ultimately going to inform the relationship more than any particular area of cooperation or agreement, because I think there's—from where I sit, it looks like we're on a trajectory for longer term competition. So, that's a big issue and will inform the relationship going forward. The extent to which we can cooperate in those other areas may mitigate against some of the risks that strategic competition would bring, but it doesn't completely eliminate it.

**Haenle:** These two presidents had, apparently, 10 hours, we heard this week, from government officials, together. One would hope that these issues related to strategic rivalry or strategic competition were discussed. Is it your sense that these were discussed, that these were part of the— maybe there weren't announcements made—but is it your sense that these two leaders are beginning to engage on these issues?

**Schrivver:** I think they are, and I'm sure they were discussed, but you can have a discussion and, and still have areas that lack clarity and lack specificity. Or, that simply the trust isn't there to ensure that your message is received the way you want it to. I'm sure President Obama repeated what he said, both privately and publicly, that the U.S. welcomes China as an emerging power, a more influential country, [and] in no way seeks to contain or constrain that. But, you wonder sometimes, particularly [with] what you hear in Beijing, if the Chinese really believe that and are ready to embrace that, and maybe their suspicions will get the better of them. On the other hand, what we hear from the Chinese and President Xi and his vision about the Pacific being big enough for both of us, that leaves unanswered many questions. What does that mean for our alliances going forward? What does that mean for the U.S. having forward deployed military forces? What does that mean in terms of a specific role in contentious issues such as the South China Sea? So, I think both presidents probably shared these views, but, again, you can have that conversation and still have a lot left on the table to discuss.

**Haenle:** Well, thank you, Randy, for joining me for this podcast, but thank you even more for spending an entire week out here in China with the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center. We appreciate you sharing your insights and your experience, and your recommendations, and we hope to have you out here again soon.

**Schrivver:** Paul, thank you very much, keep up the great work here at the center.

**Haenle:** Well that's it for this edition of Carnegie–Tsinghua China in the World podcast. If you'd like to read or learn more about China's relations with the U.S., you can find more articles, events, podcasts on our website at [www.carnegietsinghua.org](http://www.carnegietsinghua.org). I encourage you to visit and see the work of all our scholars at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center. Thank you for listening and be sure to tune in next time.