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[>> Back to the article](#)

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Obama seeks better China ties

WASHINGTON - US President Barack Obama wants more balanced trade and closer military ties with China and will not lecture the Chinese on human rights, his top adviser on Asia said on Friday.

Jeffrey Bader, senior director for Asian affairs at the National Security Council, told an audience of prominent Chinese-Americans in Washington that Obama also would look to China to exercise a leading role in world affairs.

Mr Obama is not satisfied with the current US-China trade relationship, Bader said. China's surplus, a constant source of friction, hit a record US\$266 billion (S\$394 billion) in 2008.

The US president sought a closer trade balance as well as a better balance between savings and consumption in the two countries, he added.

Mr Obama seeks to work with the Chinese to tackle the global economic crisis as he and Chinese President Hu Jintao did when they met in London last month at the summit of G20 industrial and big developing countries, said Mr Bader.

Communist-run China's human rights situation has been a troublesome to bilateral ties for decades and Mr Bader said the Obama administration would work on what was still a 'poor' record by Beijing.

But he said, 'President Obama does not believe in lecturing people' and would reach out to the Chinese people. 'He believes in leading by example, not by fingerpointing,' Mr Bader said, citing Mr Obama's decision to close the Guantanamo detention centre shortly after taking office.

Mr Bader also asked his audience, the Committee of 100, to use their influence in Beijing to seek a peaceful solution to simmering tensions in Tibet. Prominent Chinese-American business and cultural figures can 'help persuade Chinese officials that the Dalai Lama is not part of the problem but rather part of the solution' in Tibet, he said.

Mr Obama aimed to get the US and Chinese militaries talking together at high levels, Mr Bader said. The brief naval clash between the two Pacific Ocean powers in waters near China in March, underscored that 'the absence of a sound relationship between our two militaries is a part of that strategic mistrust,' Mr Bader said.

In that encounter, the US Defence Department said an unarmed US Navy surveillance ship was shadowed and harassed by Chinese ships. -- REUTERS