

US-China relations

US and China to open communication lines after diplomatic push bears fruit

Move signals potential breakthrough after months of deterioration in relationship



The Chinese Communist party's foreign policy chief Wang Yi, left, shakes hands with US secretary of state Antony Blinken in Jakarta last month © Dita Alangkara/Reuters

Demetri Sevastopulo in Sedona, Arizona 45 MINUTES AGO

The US and China are opening new lines of communication to tackle contentious issues, in one of the first signs of progress towards stabilising relations since secretary of state Antony Blinken visited Beijing in June.

According to three people familiar with the situation, Washington and Beijing will create two working groups to focus on Asia-Pacific regional issues and maritime issues, and a possible third group to focus on broader areas.

The move comes amid tension between the powers over issues from China's assertive activity around Taiwan and refusal to condemn the invasion of Ukraine, to Beijing's concern about US alliances in the Indo-Pacific and tough export controls.

[The Financial Times reported](#) this week that the White House would ask Congress for more money for weapons for Taiwan in a move that would involve US taxpayers funding the arms supply for the first time. President Joe Biden is also poised to unveil an executive order that will restrict US investment into sectors in China with military applications.

US and Chinese officials are expected to flesh out the details in the coming months. The arrangement was discussed when Yang Tao, a top Chinese official, met senior US

officials in Washington on Monday. A fourth person cautioned that the two sides had not yet reached a final decision.

The move is the first tangible progress towards the goal Biden and China's president [Xi Jinping](#) agreed in Bali in November to set a "floor" under the relationship to stop competition from "veering into conflict".

The fourth person said the two sides were considering a series of meetings to tackle tough issues with clear goals, but that the US was not recreating the formal "dialogues" that existed in former administrations, which critics now say were too focused on process instead of outcomes.

The aversion to creating official "dialogues" comes as Republicans in Congress hit the administration for resurrecting high-level interactions with Beijing that House China chair Mike Gallagher has described as "zombie engagement".

"This would be the first real progress in some years in recreating systematic — as opposed to ad hoc — communication on core issues," said Kurt Tong, managing partner at The Asia Group consultancy. "It's a very important way of reinforcing national security via clear diplomatic communication of intentions to a potential adversary, for both deterrence and assurance."

The move to create the groups follows visits by top US officials to China, months after previous efforts to repair relations were aborted because of the suspected Chinese spy balloon. Treasury secretary Janet Yellen recently visited China and commerce secretary Gina Raimondo will soon follow suit.

"It is deeply in the US national interest to intensify communication with China on critical issues where war and peace are at stake," said Scott Kennedy, a China expert at the CSIS think-tank.

Ryan Hass, a China specialist at the Brookings Institution, said the US was not interested in talks for the sake of talks and had not resumed the formal dialogues that existed in the past. "They have not conceded anything for the exchanges they have held with their Chinese counterparts. I expect that posture to continue."

Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the German Marshall Fund, welcomed China's willingness to form working groups with the US, but said it remained to be seen whether the new channels would produce results.

"Will Beijing be willing to work with the US to pressure North Korea to return to talks about eliminating its nuclear weapons, or discuss how China can play a role in

bringing an end to the Ukraine war,” she said.

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