

**US-China relations**

## Antony Blinken to visit China this month in sign of easing tensions

US secretary of state had scrapped planned trip over suspected spy balloon incident



US secretary of state Antony Blinken had abruptly cancelled a planned trip to China in February over a suspected Chinese spy balloon's flight over the US © Zhang Xiaoyu/Xinhua via Reuters

**Demetri Sevastopulo** in Washington 7 HOURS AGO

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US secretary of state Antony Blinken will travel to China this month, in the latest sign that Beijing and Washington are beginning to stabilise a turbulent bilateral relationship that had sunk to the lowest point in decades.

Blinken is expected to visit within the coming weeks, according to two people familiar with his plans. Blinken had [abruptly cancelled a trip](#) in February in response to a suspected Chinese spy balloon's flight over the US, which upended efforts to repair relations.

The US diplomat's visit would be a sign of renewed headway between Washington and Beijing to re-establish high-level engagement. President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping agreed at the G20 summit in Bali in November to try to set a "floor" under the [relationship](#), but their efforts were derailed by the balloon episode.

Speaking at the G7 summit in Hiroshima last month, Biden said he expected an [imminent "thaw" in relations](#), raising expectations that the countries had moved past the balloon incident.

The sides have resumed a flurry of contacts in recent weeks. The [Financial Times reported last week](#) that CIA director Bill Burns made a secret trip to Beijing in May,

making him the most senior Biden administration official to visit China. His trip came at China's invitation, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Daniel Kritenbrink, the top state department official for east Asian affairs, and Sarah Beran, the top National Security Council official for China and Taiwan, met their counterparts in Beijing on Monday. In statements, both sides said the talks aimed at improving relations were "candid and productive".

Last month, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan [held two days of talks in Vienna](#) with Wang Yi, China's top foreign policy official. The US is also trying to arrange a telephone call between Biden and Xi to create momentum after months of little progress.

China had previously [refused to agree to reschedule Blinken's visit](#), partly out of displeasure that he had cancelled it in February, as well as out of concerns that Washington could embarrass Beijing by releasing the results of an FBI investigation into the balloon incident while he was in China.

In another sign of progress, Chinese commerce minister [Wang Wentao recently met](#) US commerce secretary Gina Raimondo in Washington, in the first senior Chinese visit to Washington since January 2020. He also met the top US trade official, Katherine Tai, at an Apec meeting in Detroit.

Xie Feng, the new Chinese ambassador to the US, arrived in Washington last month after a long delay since the departure of his predecessor Qin Gang, now foreign minister.

The state department did not confirm Blinken's imminent travel to China, saying his visit would be rescheduled "when conditions allow". China's foreign ministry also declined to comment on the trip. The news of the trip was first reported by Bloomberg.

Despite signs of growing engagement, the countries are still struggling to revive military-to-military communications channels.

Chinese defence minister Li Shangfu declined to meet his US counterpart Lloyd Austin at the Shangri-La Dialogue Asia security forum in Singapore last week because Washington refused to lift its sanctions on the general.

The US says military communication channels are critical because of a rising number of what officials describe as [dangerous intercepts by Chinese fighters](#) over the South China Sea. It also accused a Chinese warship of sailing recklessly close to a US naval

vessel in the Taiwan Strait on Saturday.

*Additional reporting by Maiqi Ding in Beijing*

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