

**Chinese politics & policy**

## Xi Jinping vows to make Chinese military 'great wall of steel' as tensions rise with west

Premier Li Qiang concedes meeting 5% economic growth target for 2023 will be significant challenge



Chinese president Xi Jinping pledged to work to resolve the 'Taiwan issue' during the closing session of the National People's Congress in Beijing on Monday © Wu Hao/EPA/Shutterstock

**Ryan McMorrow** and **Joe Leahy** in Beijing and **Cheng Leng** in Hong Kong 11 HOURS AGO

Xi Jinping has pledged to strengthen China's security and build the military into a "great wall of steel" to defend the country's interests as relations with the west reach the lowest point in decades.

The Chinese president's speech on Monday to the nearly 3,000 delegates of the National People's Congress came at the close of the country's annual rubber-stamp parliamentary session, during which [Xi](#) secured an unprecedented third term as president and appointed a close ally as his number two.

After thanking delegates for his [unanimous re-election](#) last week, Xi said he would "build the military into a great wall of steel that effectively safeguards national sovereignty, security and our development interests".

He also pledged to better marry "development and security", stating that "safety is the foundation of development, and stability is the prerequisite for prosperity".

Xi's focus on security comes as relations with the US have hit their lowest point in decades. China's new foreign minister [warned during the congress](#) that Washington's efforts to contain Beijing's interests could drive the rival superpowers towards "conflict and confrontation".

Tensions over Beijing's claim to sovereignty over Taiwan, which the Chinese Communist party has never ruled but has threatened to subjugate by force, have also continued to rise. Xi said on Monday he would work to resolve the "Taiwan issue", but said he "resolutely opposed external interference and Taiwan independence separatist activities".

Newly appointed premier Li Qiang, Beijing's number two, struck a more conciliatory tone in his first press conference, saying [China](#) and the US were closely intertwined economically to the benefit of both sides.

"Some have been trumpeting the idea of decoupling with China . . . but I wonder how many people can truly benefit from this hype," Li said on Monday. "Encirclement and suppression are in no one's interest."

Li also sought to reassure China's business community, which was hit hard by Covid-19 lockdowns last year, as well as defuse concerns about the administration backtracking to a state-led economy.

"Governments at all levels should make friends with entrepreneurs, build a friendly business environment and care about private entrepreneurs," he said.

The premier admitted that with business still finding its footing, even hitting the country's [5 per cent economic growth target](#) for the year would "not be an easy task" and "require redoubled efforts".

"Emphasis will be placed on ensuring stable growth, stable prices and stable jobs," Li said.

The roughly week-long meetings in Beijing close on Monday after Xi pushed through extensive reforms to the country's financial regulatory system.

But facing mounting geopolitical friction and an unresolved property crisis at home, Xi defied some expectations and opted for continuity among his top financial regulators. He [retained central bank governor Yi Gang](#) and kept the finance and commerce ministers unchanged.

He also bolstered the science and technology ministry to drive research advancements and compete with the west in pursuit of "self-reliance and strength in science and technology", he said.

"With the founding of the Communist Party of China . . . and after a century of struggle, our national humiliation has been erased, and the Chinese people have

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become the masters of their own destiny,” Xi told delegates. “The Chinese nation’s great revival is on an irreversible path.”

*Additional reporting by Nian Liu in Beijing*

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