

US-China relations

Joe Biden and Xi Jinping agree to resume high-level military communication

US and China pledge co-operation to control drug trafficking and add commercial flights



China's President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden met at the Filoli estate in Woodside, California, on Wednesday © Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

Demetri Sevastopulo and **Ryan McMorrow** in San Francisco 6 HOURS AGO

US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have agreed to resume military communications at a summit designed to stabilise relations after several years of rising concern about a possible conflict over Taiwan.

At a press conference following his meeting with Xi outside San Francisco on Wednesday, Biden said the countries had reached a series of agreements, including a commitment from China to reopen military communication channels that it had shut after then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022.

“We’re back to direct, open, clear . . . communication,” said Biden, adding that it marked “important progress” in [US-China relations](#), which had descended to their lowest point since the countries established ties in 1979.

The two sides also agreed to set up a counter-narcotics working group. Beijing has said it will [curb the export of chemicals](#) used to make fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that has sparked a deadly drug epidemic in the US.

The leaders held roughly four hours of talks on Wednesday that included lunch in their second in-person summit since Biden took office in 2021. Asked by reporters how the talks went, Biden responded “well”, giving a thumbs-up gesture.

Biden said he had stressed to Xi the importance of “peace and stability” in the Taiwan Strait, but he sidestepped a question about whether he stood by his previous statements, made on four occasions, that he would order the US military to defend Taiwan from an attack by China.

He also declined to say whether Xi had clarified the circumstances under which China would invade Taiwan, which Beijing claims as part of its territory.

A senior US official said the leaders held a “substantial exchange” about Taiwan and that Xi had raised the fact that a number of US officials have mentioned specific timelines, such as 2027 or 2030, for China to invade Taiwan.

“There seemed to be a slight amount of exasperation in [Xi’s] comments,” the official said, adding that the Chinese president “basically said there are no such plans”.

General Charles Brown, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, has also [downplayed the risk of Chinese military action](#), saying last week that he thought Xi “doesn’t actually want to take Taiwan by force” but would “try to use other ways”.

PLAY | 01:22

US President Joe Biden hosts a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping © Reuters

Over the past three years, tensions have escalated Washington’s concern about Chinese military activity around Taiwan, Beijing’s rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal and its treatment of Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang. China has raised objections about US export controls to restrict access to cutting-edge technology, such as chips for quantum computing and artificial intelligence, that also have military applications.

As the leaders greeted each other at the Filoli estate outside San Francisco, Biden said they had an obligation to ensure competition did not turn into conflict. Xi said despite some “grave” problems, they should be “fully capable of rising above differences”.

“Planet Earth is big enough for the two countries to succeed,” Xi said.

China’s official state news agency Xinhua said the sides also agreed to establish a dialogue on AI and increase the number of commercial flights between their countries. Xinhua said Xi told Biden that the US president’s [recent executive order](#) restricting investment into China and sanctions “seriously damaged China’s legitimate interests”.

“Suppressing Chinese technology equates to containing China’s high-quality development and depriving the Chinese people of their right to development,” Xi said, expressing hope that the US would take action to provide fair treatment to Chinese companies.

He added that China had “no plans to surpass or replace the US, and the US should not intend to suppress or contain China”.

Asked at the conclusion of the press conference whether he still viewed Xi as a “dictator” — a reference to a comment Biden made in June — the US president said the Chinese leader was a dictator “in a sense”, adding that Xi runs “a Communist country based on a form of government totally different than ours”.

At the leaders’ last in-person meeting a year ago, on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Indonesia, they agreed on the need to set a “floor” under the relationship, but that effort was derailed three months later when a suspected Chinese spy balloon flew over North America.

In recent months, the countries have renewed high-level engagement. Ahead of the summit, US officials stressed that there would be some agreements, but the aim was to maintain top-level channels of communication to prevent misunderstandings and avoid conflict.

Chinese state media hailed the summit as “positive, comprehensive and constructive”, with the People’s Daily, the ruling Communist party’s mouthpiece, declaring that “San Francisco should become a new starting point for stabilizing Sino-US relations”.

Daniel Russel, a former top Asia official in the US state department and vice-president at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said the fact that Xi had met Biden after years of “giving Washington the silent treatment” was a “big improvement”

a year of giving Washington the same treatment was a big improvement .

“While it remains to be seen if there is follow-through by the Chinese, while there is no agreement on core issues, and while the intense competition will continue, a meeting like this helps prevent dangerous misunderstandings,” said Russel.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2023. All rights reserved.
