

US foreign policy

Donald Trump blocks Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te from New York stopover

Move comes as US and China hold trade talks and seek to stabilise relations



President Lai Ching-te's office says he has no plans to travel overseas in the near future because Taiwan is recovering from a recent typhoon and Taipei is in talks with the US about tariffs © An Rong Xu/Bloomberg

Demetri Sevastopulo in Washington and **Kathrin Hille** in Taipei

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Donald Trump's administration has denied permission for Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te to stop in New York en route to Central America, after China raised objections with Washington about the visit.

Lai planned to transit the US in August en route to Paraguay, Guatemala and Belize, which recognise [Taiwan](#) as a country. But the US told Lai he could not visit New York on the way, according to three people familiar with the decision.

On Monday in Taipei, Lai's office issued a statement saying he had no plans to travel overseas in the near future because Taiwan was recovering from a recent typhoon and Taipei was in talks with the US about tariffs.

The people familiar with the matter said his decision not to travel came after he had been told he would not be allowed to visit New York.

The White House's decision will deepen concerns among Taiwan's supporters in

Washington that [Trump](#) is taking a softer stance on China as he pushes to hold a summit with President Xi Jinping.

The Financial Times reported on Monday that the US commerce department had been told to [freeze planned export controls](#) against China as the countries hold trade talks and discuss a summit.

China objects to Taiwanese leaders visiting the US, which does not have official diplomatic relations with Taipei. In 2023, the Biden administration allowed then-president Tsai Ing-wen to [stop in New York](#) on her way to Belize and Guatemala.

Lai had approached the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank in Washington, to host him at an event in New York during his proposed trip, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Lai also planned to visit Dallas on his trip. It was unclear if the US only denied permission to visit New York or whether he was told he could not transit through the US at all.

A senior US official said both sides were “working to remedy the situation” and that no trip had been cancelled.

The Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Washington, which serves as the de facto embassy, referred to the statement from Lai’s office that he “currently has no plans for overseas visits in the near future”.

“Donald Trump’s decision to deny permission for President Lai to visit New York sends a dangerous signal: that the United States can be bullied by Beijing into silence on Taiwan. This is a victory for Xi,” [said Nancy Pelosi](#), the Democratic lawmaker and former Speaker of the House.

Bonnie Glaser, a China and Taiwan expert at the German Marshall Fund, said the US decision suggested that “Trump wants to avoid irritating Beijing while US-China negotiations are ongoing and planning gets under way for a possible summit with Xi

Jinping”.

Glaser said the decision recalled events in Trump's first term when he delayed arms sales to Taiwan and “went ballistic” after Alex Wong, a senior state department official who served as deputy national security adviser early in this administration, visited Taiwan to give remarks at a conference.

“Trump should be standing up to People's Republic of China pressure, not caving into it,” Glaser said. “By signalling that aspects of the US relationship with Taiwan are negotiable, Trump will weaken deterrence and embolden Xi to press for additional concessions regarding Taiwan.”

Several people familiar with the debate said the Trump administration was trying to avoid jeopardising trade talks with China. Treasury secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese vice-premier He Lifeng started a third round of negotiations in Stockholm on Monday.

The Trump administration has also held back from taking tough action against China after Beijing in May [slowed the export of rare earths](#) to the US, using its dominance in the industry as leverage against Washington.

Randy Shriver, a former senior US official who serves as chair of the board of the Institute for Indo-Pacific Security, said the decision to block Lai from visiting New York reminded him of previous periods when the US avoided taking actions related to Taiwan that it believed would upset Beijing.

“If this is a result of the administration trying to curry favour with Beijing, it is a mistake,” Shriver said. “This is the old playbook, ‘tyranny of the calendar’, where there is never a good time to do something on Taiwan. You box yourself in.”

Rush Doshi, a former National Security Council China official, said it was important to see the Taiwan move in the context of an across-the-board softening of policy towards China ahead of a possible summit with Xi.

“... ..

They've frozen export controls and possibly financial actions too, approved the sale of powerful AI chips to China for nothing in return, and throttled the unofficial relationship with Taiwan,” said Doshi, an assistant professor at Georgetown University and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

“What will they do when Beijing pockets this and asks for more, like changing Taiwan policy or demanding even better US technology?”

In addition to concerns about derailing a summit, some officials say the US needs to “hide and bide” with respect to China. The phrase — which was used by China’s former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping — is being invoked to explain that the rare earths leverage China has created over the US limits Washington’s ability to take tough actions against Beijing.

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