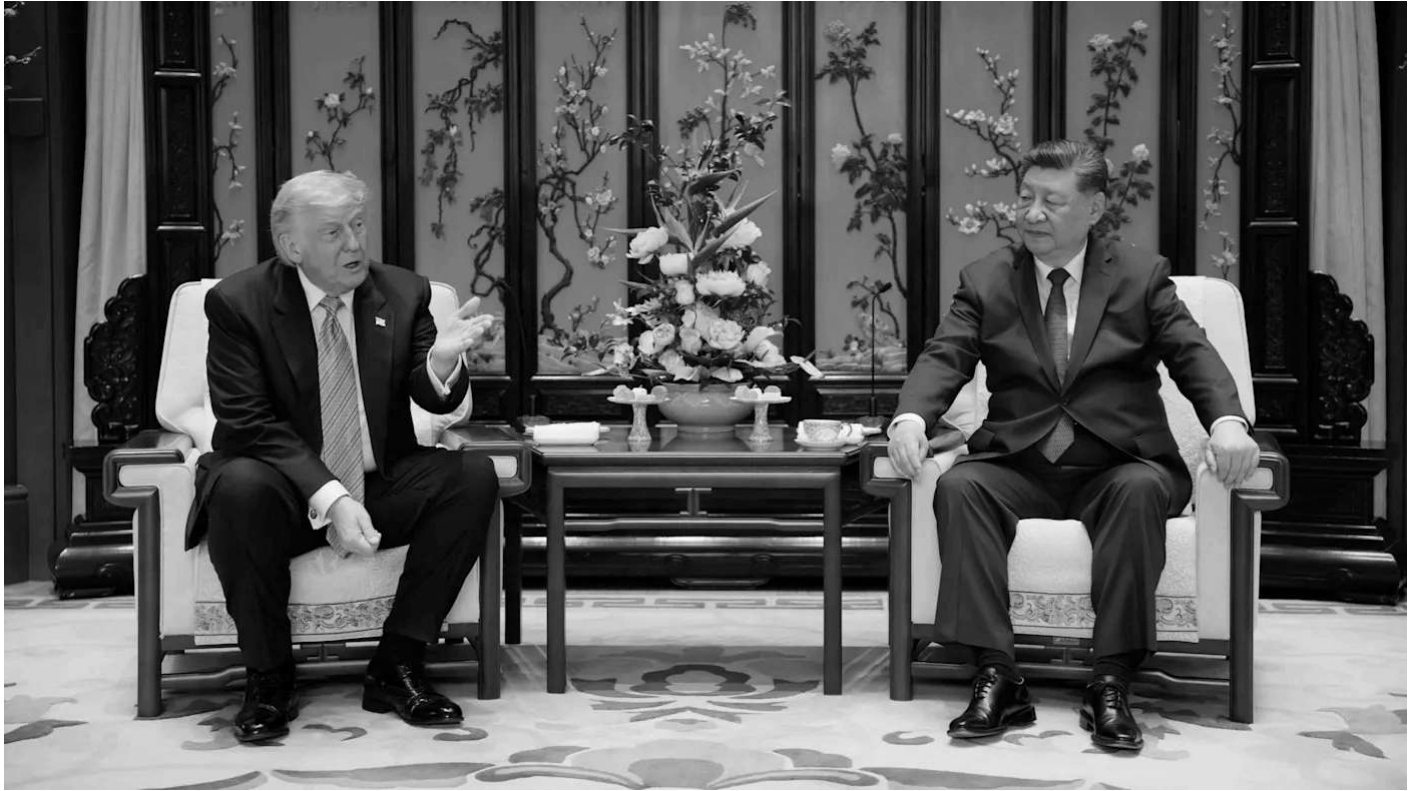


US-China relations**Donald Trump undecided on Taiwan arms sale after summit with Xi Jinping**

US president raises doubts about \$14bn weapons package for Taipei after two days of meetings in China



Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, hosted US President Donald Trump at the Zhongnanhai leaders' compound in Beijing on Friday © Evan Vucci/Reuters/AP

Joe Leahy, James Politi and Edward White in Beijing and **Demetri Sevastopulo** in Washington

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Donald Trump said he had not determined whether to approve a \$14bn US arms sale to Taipei after a two-day summit with Xi Jinping at which the Chinese president warned him not to “mishandle” the Taiwan issue.

Speaking on Air Force One on his return to Washington, Trump said of the arms sale package, which has been compiled by his team: “I’ll make a determination over the next fairly short period.”

The US president said the leaders had discussed Taiwan and arms sales “in great detail”, which appeared to break decades of precedent for Washington of not consulting with Beijing on weapons exports to Taipei.

The Trump administration has compiled a package of arms sales for Taiwan that includes Patriot missile interceptors and advanced surface-to-air missiles. Officials have also discussed approving two other weapons systems, which would add another \$6bn to the package.

Asked about the arms sales, Trump suggested that he would speak to Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te, in what would be the first call between a sitting American president and a Taiwanese leader since the US switched diplomatic recognition for China from Taipei to Beijing in 1979.

"I have to speak to the person that right now is . . . running Taiwan," he said.

The FT reported in late 2016 that Trump had become the first US president-elect to speak to a Taiwanese leader when he held a call with then-president Tsai Ing-wen, sparking an angry protest from Beijing.

The administration had planned to provide Congress with a mandatory notification about the arms sales package earlier this year but pulled back following pressure from China. Trump in December approved a separate record \$11bn package of weapons for Taiwan.

Trump said Xi warned him that he was opposed to any declaration of "independence" by Taiwan and that he listened but said nothing in response.

When asked in an interview with Fox News that aired after he had departed Beijing if the people of Taiwan should feel more or less secure in the wake of the summit, Trump responded: "Neutral".

He said US policy on Taiwan had not changed, adding: "I am not looking to have somebody to go independent." But he appeared to adopt language pushed by China when saying about Lai: "They have somebody there now who wants to go independent."

Trump suggested that his decision on whether to proceed with the arms sales package was related to other issues in US-China relations. "I'm holding that in abeyance and it depends on China," Trump said. "It's a very good negotiating chip for us, frankly."



Donald Trump returned to the White House aboard Marine One. He told Fox News that he had spent much of the dinner with Xi Jinping discussing Taiwan © Eric Lee/Bloomberg

Xi this week told Trump that Taiwan was the most important issue in US-China relations and any mishandling of the matter could lead to conflict.

“I think we’ll be fine,” Trump told reporters on his return flight to the US. “He doesn’t want to see a war.”

Trump also told Fox News that the two leaders had spent much of their dinner on Thursday discussing Taiwan. “We talked the whole night about that issue,” he said. “I know more about Taiwan right now than I know about almost any country.”

The discussion on Taiwan struck a more serious note at a summit that was characterised by pageantry and cordiality between the leaders of the superpowers but yielded little in the way of high-profile agreements.

On Air Force One, Trump said China would buy 200 Boeing aircraft, with a potential commitment for up to 750, and that it would also purchase billions of dollars of soybeans but gave few other details. Boeing and jet engine maker GE Aerospace declined to comment.

Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, said late on Friday that Xi would accept Trump's invitation to visit the US in the autumn. He said the two sides had agreed to set up boards of trade and investment to spur business activity and were examining "reciprocal tariff reductions". The White House did not make any announcements about the two boards.

Trump repeatedly raised the issue of Iran during the trip, with the US hoping for Chinese pressure on Tehran to reopen the crucial Strait of Hormuz. Trump said before boarding his aircraft that he and the Chinese president shared similar views on how they wanted the Iran war to end.

Wang said Xi had reiterated China's position that the strait should be reopened and the ceasefire maintained.

Trump sought to portray Xi as a friend during what was the first visit to China by a US president in nine years. But Xi has a closer relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is expected to visit Beijing soon and has met the Chinese leader more than 40 times.

Xi and Trump took a walk through a Qing Dynasty garden in Zhongnanhai, which was taken over by Communist leaders in 1949. Xi explained that some of the trees were up to 1,000 years old and promised to send rose seeds to Trump.

"This visit is a historic and landmark visit," Xi said of the summit. "So far, we have already reached a new bilateral relationship, a constructive relationship. This can be said to be a milestone visit."



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The Donald Trump-Xi Jinping summit was cordial but short on substance © FT

Trump was accompanied by a high-level business delegation, which included Apple's Tim Cook and Tesla's Elon Musk, and sought to paint the trip as beneficial for US companies.

Beijing has stressed its geopolitical objectives, emphasising tensions over Taiwan and trying to persuade the US to extend a truce in the trade war agreed when Trump and Xi met last year in South Korea.

China's foreign ministry quoted Xi as saying he had "agreed with President Trump on a new vision of building a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability". The US did not say anything about a new framework for relations.

Analysts said Beijing wanted to limit Washington's ability to escalate conflict as it struggles to get the domestic Chinese economy on track and reduce dependence on exports for growth.

"Beijing is effectively proposing a new operating system for the relationship," said Lizzi C Lee, a fellow on the Chinese economy at the Asia Society.

US trade representative Jamieson Greer said export controls on semiconductors had not been a big topic in the talks, despite the presence of Nvidia chief executive Jensen Huang as part of the US business delegation.

Maya Wang, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch, said the “glaring omission” of human rights during Trump’s talks with Xi signalled that the US was ceding ground to Beijing on the issue.

Trump later said he and Xi had discussed the case of Jimmy Lai, the former media tycoon jailed in Hong Kong, but suggested he was not optimistic that Lai would be freed.

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