

Joe Biden

## Biden-Xi virtual summit: leaders warn each other over future of Taiwan

China president tells US counterpart that support for Taiwan independence is 'like playing with fire' during the most substantial discussion since Biden took office



Biden-Xi virtual summit: Biden says US and China must 'not veer into conflict' – video

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Xi Jinping warned Joe Biden in a virtual summit that China was prepared to take “decisive measures” if Taiwan makes any moves towards independence that cross Beijing’s red lines.

Xi also warned the US president that any support for Taiwanese independence would be “like playing with fire”, according to a Chinese state media account of the summit, adding that “those who play with fire will get burned”.

The language represented stock Chinese nationalist rhetoric, given extra potency by being delivered in person at the most extensive talks to date between the two leaders.

In response, Biden said the US remained committed to the “one [China](#) policy” that recognises only one sovereign Chinese state, and that Washington “strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait”.

The phrase was a reminder to the Taiwanese not to declare independence but also to China not to contemplate invasion. Biden told Xi that both countries had a responsibility to ensure the rivalry between their two nations did not “veer into open conflict”.

While both leaders restated longstanding policy positions, on Taiwan and other issues, the overall cordial tone of the video conference exchange, with Xi referring to Biden at one point as “my old friend”, gave an immediate boost to financial markets in Asia. Chinese state media described the talks as “frank, constructive, substantive and fruitful”.

“The two leaders really did have a substantial back and forth and ability to sort of interact with one another in a way that they’ve not quite had in their phone calls, and so it really did facilitate a different kind of conversation.” a senior US official said. “I would say that the the conversation was respectful and straightforward and it was open.”

However, the official was cautious about what the virtual summit had achieved.

“We weren’t expecting a breakthrough. There were none to report,” the US official said. “This was really about developing ways to manage competition responsibly, ensuring that as we go forward, the United States and China have a steady state of affairs where we take a series of competitive actions, but we’re able to keep open lines of communication. We work with our allies and partners and we confront China where we need to, and at the same time that we are able to work together where our interests intersect.”

One of Biden’s aims in the summit was to establish regular dialogue between US and Chinese officials on a range of issues. It was unclear how far the two leaders had gone to achieve that, however. The US official said the establishment of “guard rails” for the behaviour of both nations over Taiwan was not even discussed.

The video conference meeting between the two leaders, which lasted more than three-and-a-half hours represented their most substantial discussion since Biden took office in January, and comes at a time of particularly high tension.

There is growing apprehension of a confrontation over the fate of Taiwan, and over freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. The meeting also comes against a backdrop of global outrage over China’s treatment of its Uyghur Muslim population and Hong Kong, and a proliferation of cyber-attacks the US has blamed on China. There are also deep divisions over what each country should do to mitigate the climate emergency, and the US is increasingly nervous about the rapid development of Chinese conventional and nuclear military forces.

The US president said he hoped the two men would have a candid and forthright discussion “like all of the discussions we’ve had thus far”, and establish “rules of the road” for their future behaviour.

“We need to establish a commonsense guardrail, to be clear and honest where we disagree and work together where our interests intersect, especially on vital global issues like climate change,” Biden, seated at a table at the White House with senior aides, told Xi, who could be seen on a large screen

facing the US president. Both leaders had the Chinese and American flags behind them.

“It seems to be our responsibility, as leaders of China and the United States, to ensure that the competition between our countries does not veer into conflict, whether intended or unintended,” Biden said, saying the two nations should pursue “just simple, straightforward competition.”

In his opening remarks, Xi struck a conciliatory tone: “Although we can’t see each other face to face, this is not bad, either. I feel very happy to see my old friend.”

According to Chinese state media, Xi told Biden the earth was big enough for the development of both China and the US, and that leaders should not play zero-sum games.

He echoed Biden’s sentiments about the hopes for the call. “Humanity lives in a global village and we face multiple challenges together,” the Chinese president said. “China and the US need to increase communication and cooperation.”

The summit began at 7.45pm Washington time and lasted until just before 11.30. Biden was flanked by his secretary of state Tony Blinken, national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, Kurt Campbell, his Indo-Pacific coordinator, Laura Rosenberger and Jon Czin, senior director for China.

Xi appeared alone on screen for the introductory remarks, but according to an official list the other Chinese participants were Ding Xuexiang, director of the general office of the Communist Party, vice premier Liu He, the party’s foreign affairs chief, Yang Jiechi, Wang Yi the foreign minister and his deputy, Xie Feng.

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