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# US-China Rift Eases After Blinken Trip, But Frictions Remain

**Iain Marlow**

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(Bloomberg) -- The US and China agreed to boost dialog but tensions lingered after Secretary of State Antony Blinken became the highest-level American official to visit Beijing in five years, as the world's largest economies seek to put frayed ties on more stable footing.

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"My hope and expectation is we'll have better communications, better engagement going forward," Blinken told reporters in Beijing in a press conference that capped two days of meetings in Beijing, including with President Xi Jinping. Still, he said the US has "no illusions about the challenges of managing this relationship."



elaborate in comments shown on state TV.

While the US diplomat's visit may have helped get ties back on track, there was no sign that his meetings helped to resolve major differences on a range of issues that divide the two countries. There was no progress on restoring direct contacts between the two countries' militaries, something the US has been eager for amid increasing tensions between forces around Taiwan and elsewhere.

### Taiwan Security

The US and China also remain at odds over trade and intellectual-property disputes, human rights concerns, China's support for Russia's war in Ukraine and US limits on advanced technology. President Joe Biden also faces increased hawkishness back home, as evinced by an announcement Monday that four US lawmakers will travel to Detroit in a bid to push automakers Ford Motor Co. and General Motors Co. to reduce their supply-chain exposure to China.

Shortly after Blinken's plane left Beijing, China's Foreign Ministry also took a downbeat tone, playing down the Xi meeting as purely a matter of "courtesy" and laying the blame on the US for the frictions, according to state TV.

Still, while tensions remained close to the surface and specific agreements were sparse, the upbeat words from Xi and Blinken suggest that both sides are ready to turn back the clock to November. At that time, the two countries' leaders pledged to improve relations during a meeting in Indonesia. That process was derailed in February after an alleged Chinese spy balloon floated through US air space, causing Blinken to cancel a trip to Beijing and bringing US-China relations to their lowest point in decades.

Even the otherwise-downbeat statement from China's Foreign Ministry after the visit highlighted returning to the agreements the leaders reached in Indonesia as the "most important" result.

Blinken's meeting with Xi lays the groundwork for in-person talks between the two countries' leaders later this year. On Sunday, Foreign Minister Qin Gang accepted an invitation to visit Washington, the State Department said, after 7 1/2 hours of talks with Blinken that both sides described as "productive" and "candid."

China has reasons to want to cool tensions. Beijing is facing an increasingly challenging geopolitical landscape, as the US blocks China's access to high-tech chips to thwart its military progress and puts pressure on Xi to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Geopolitical strains are also





associate at Oxford University's China Centre, told Bloomberg TV. "He wants to appeal and be seen to be constructive to Global South partners."

### Leaders' Meeting

In his meeting with Blinken, Wang Yi, China's top foreign policy official blasted "illegal" US sanctions and putting the blame for worsening ties on Washington, which he said had misunderstood China, according to China's Foreign Ministry. The US called it a "candid and productive discussion" - diplomat-speak for a tough conversation.

Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu has declined to meet with his US counterpart Lloyd Austin until Washington lifts sanctions against him. The US and Chinese militaries recently had two confrontations between naval vessels and jets in the region, which the Pentagon characterized as "dangerous."

"Blinken sets the stage for future interactions between different levels of government, the business community and academia and research," said Henry Wang, founder of the Center for China and Globalization in Beijing. "He's brought a period of stabilization, of easing tensions for at least the second half of the year."

Blinken's visit became one of the top ten trending topics on China's Twitter-like Weibo after Xi's comments on Monday afternoon, with related hashtags getting millions of views. Under photos of Xi shaking hands with Blinken, some users called for US-China relations to "return to the right track."

That response was in contrast to the beginning of Blinken's visit, when Weibo users pointed out the US official was greeted by red lines on the tarmac rather than a red carpet — a reference to China's core concerns on Taiwan and other issues — and Chinese state media gave his trip muted coverage.

But after the Xi meeting, the official Xinhua news agency posted an item highlighting the lotus blossoms that decorated the table at the session, noting that the Chinese word for the flowers has the same pronunciation as the character for "cooperation."

Blinken underlined that the US is seeking to "de-risk" its relationship with China but isn't seeking to "de-couple" from its largest trading partner or contain its economic rise. He portrayed the limits the US has imposed on technology exports to China as narrowly focused on sensitive national security areas, not sweeping limits.

Beijing so far doesn't appear to have been convinced.



(Updates with more Chinese reaction from sixth paragraph)

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