

Biden-Xi Meeting at APEC - Background & Talking Points Memo

November 2023

Background:

This Wednesday will mark the first face-to-face meeting in a year between President Biden and President Xi on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco, California.

According to Biden administration officials, Washington is, among other things, hoping to resume military-to-military dialogue, finalize an agreement to halt the flow of fentanyl to the United States and the source material used to make it, and undertake new joint action on climate change with concrete emissions reduction and energy transition goals.

While there are low expectations for major breakthroughs in the Biden-Xi meeting, many are hoping that the leaders will put a floor under the relationship both to create some stability ahead of elections in the United States and Taiwan next year and to prevent disagreements or incidents from escalating into confrontation.

According to a recent opinion research project by FP4A and National Security Action on the U.S.-China relationship, the American public supports a smart and firm approach with China that avoids war and invests in American's strengths. The poll, conducted in September 2023, led to several [key findings](#):

- The majority of voters (76%) consider China a “competitor” rather than an “enemy” (21%);
- Voters are more concerned about growing tensions escalating into conflict than about the United States not being strong enough or standing up to China, by a 16-point margin (58% to 42%);
- 78% of respondents say our leaders should focus more on working to avoid a military conflict, while only 22% say leaders should focus more on preparing for one; and
- A clear majority of respondents (73%) say the United States should hold high-level diplomatic talks with China.

Talking Points:

Diplomacy is Important

- Diplomacy is a vital national security tool. Diplomatic talks are not a gift, but a mechanism to manage differences and address our most difficult challenges.
- These dialogues are a vital mechanism for the United States to demonstrate our leadership, resolve, and strength backed by sharpened economic tools and global partnerships.

- Now is not the time to be reactive. We can't wait for the next balloon or near-collision in the Taiwan Strait to decide how we want this relationship to look. There needs to be consistent communication between the two most powerful countries in the world.

Protecting our National Interests

- Waiting until our relationship is on life support is too late to prevent disastrous consequences for the American people and the international community.
- Deterring and engaging China does not have to be an either-or approach, we must be able to do both to have a clear, effective, and comprehensive approach to this relationship.
- Politicians who drum up hostility toward China to score easy political points do nothing to address this critical foreign policy issue or to improve the lives and security of Americans. In fact, by denouncing diplomacy, they tie our hands and undermine the core tools we have to promote U.S. interests.
- We also need to engage China to manage existential challenges like climate change and nuclear risk. To even get to that point, we have to be able to pick up the phone and talk to each other.

Reactive Q&A:

Q: Why are we pursuing useless photo-ops with dictators and not confronting China?

A: The Biden administration's approach towards China has smartly leveraged diplomacy to achieve our goals and firmly challenged China when its government threatens our allies or goes against our interests. Not only is he strengthening law enforcement against industrial espionage and investing in key industries at home to reduce our reliance on China, but he has also focused on strengthening our alliances in the Asia-Pacific region and rebuilding lines of communication to prevent unnecessary escalation or military confrontation. Finding common ground serves our interests more than scoring political points, putting our troops in danger, or making war with a nuclear power more likely.

The world is watching this meeting closely and worried about a confrontation between the U.S. and China. Our closest allies and partners—many who rely on China for trade—especially want the United States to stabilize relations with China. The American public is also very concerned about the prospect of conflict and don't want a confrontational approach. They want leaders to be firm with China and at the same time prioritize avoiding war and engage in high-level diplomatic talks.

Have more questions? Contact:

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