



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on April 8, 2024

Yellen Meets With China's Li Qiang; Sino-U.S. Military Meetings Resume

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told Chinese Premier Li Qiang on April 7 that both the U.S. and China have been on a ["more stable footing"](#) over the past year, as they were able to have challenging conversations about hot-button topics affecting bilateral ties.

As Yellen and Li started their talks in Beijing, Li [replied](#) that both the U.S. and China had to respect each other as partners, instead of treating one another like adversaries, and underscored that "constructive progress" had been made during Yellen's trip.



AP Images
Janet Yellen

In media comments prior to the meeting, Li said the high media interest in the visit "shows the high expectation they have ... and also the expectation and hope to grow" Sino-U.S. ties, and Yellen declared that both Washington and Beijing had a "duty" to responsibly navigate complex bilateral ties.

"While we have more to do, I believe that, over the past year, we have put our bilateral relationship on more stable footing," Yellen said. "This has not meant ignoring our differences or avoiding tough conversations. It has meant understanding that we can only make progress if we directly and openly communicate with one another."

Yellen's visit was the first by a U.S. Cabinet member since Joe Biden and Xi Jinping's meticulously arranged meeting in California in November last year to rejuvenate embattled Sino-U.S. relations.

At their meeting, Li told Yellen that his country and the United States have deeply connected economic interests. Boosting economic and trade cooperation would considerably benefit each other's development and global economic growth, Li continued, adding that both sides ought to jointly explore ways to tackle disagreements, instead of the U.S. side politicizing economic and trade issues or over-expanding what constitutes national security, the official Xinhua News Agency [reported](#).

Undoubtedly, China's rise as an economic and military power has created a rivalry with America, which was economically and militarily dominant for a significant portion of the 20th century.

In light of China's ascendancy, the [U.S. has limited China's access to advanced semiconductors](#) and other technology, claiming that such access could be used for military purposes. China, on its end, has repeatedly slammed Washington for [attempting to restrict](#) its economic development.

On April 5, Yellen urged China to tackle the issue of manufacturing overcapacity that she alleged risks giving rise to global economic dislocation, and to establish a level playing field for American companies and workers.

"The United States seeks a healthy economic relationship with China that benefits both sides," she announced before a meeting with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, the central bank governor, and other



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officials in the southern city of Guangzhou. “But a healthy relationship must provide a level playing field for firms and workers in both countries.”

[Yellen said](#) during an event organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in China that “Chinese practices ... are tilting the playing field away from American workers and firms.”

Chinese government subsidies and other policy support have [spurred](#) solar-panel and electric-vehicle makers in China to invest in factories, enabling far more production capacity than the domestic market can handle.

While such Chinese government policies have pushed down consumer prices, Western governments worry that such an over-capacity will inundate their markets with low-priced exports, imperiling American and European jobs.

In March this year, Yellen [said](#) that China’s [increased production](#) in solar energy, electric vehicles, and lithium-ion batteries “distorts global prices” and “hurts American firms and workers, as well as firms and workers around the world.”

According to [figures](#) from the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA), China in 2023 contributed around 60 percent of global electric-car sales.

However, in his talks with Yellen, Li contended that China’s development of the green-energy industry would significantly aid in tackling “climate change,” as [reported](#) by state-controlled Xinhua.

Also, on April 3 and 4, the United States and China [rebooted](#) a defense dialogue in Hawaii meant to improve bilateral ties that were cut off owing to tensions over Taiwan and territorial disputes in the South China Sea in recent years.

The two-day discussions, conducted in Honolulu, signified the resumption of the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement Working Group, a series of yearly operational safety dialogues. The MMCA dialogues were set up over 20 years ago, and were last organized in December 2021.

Officials from China’s People’s Liberation Army, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, and the U.S. Pacific Fleet met and tackled what both sides regarded as military interactions of concern.

“Open, direct and clear communications with the PLA — and with all other military forces in the region — is of utmost importance to avoid accidents and miscommunication,” Army Col. Ian Francis, the leader of the U.S. entourage, declared in a statement.

“The Military Maritime Consultative Agreement is U.S. Indo-Pacom’s primary means to directly discuss air and maritime operational safety with the PLA,” Francis [added](#). “The United States will continue to operate safely and professionally in the Indo-Pacific wherever international law allows, and we take this responsibility seriously.”

In a separate statement published on April 6, China’s defense ministry said that “at the meetings the two sides conducted candid and constructive exchanges on the China-U.S. maritime and air security situation.”

China also firmly resisted any attempt to undermine its sovereignty and security on the pretext of freedom of navigation and overflight, the ministry [elaborated](#).

The Hawaii meetings came amid efforts by Washington and Beijing to ramp up bilateral communications and diffuse rising tensions. Military-to-military contact was cut off in August 2022, when Beijing ceased all such communication after [then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan](#),



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the self-governing island China regards as its own territory, to be reunited with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Biden [obtained](#) China's agreement to resume military-to-military talks in November last year after meeting with Xi during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Woodside, California.

"We're back to direct, open, clear direct communication on a direct basis," Biden declared at that time.



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