



China's Wang Yi Meets Antony Blinken Amid Escalating Tensions Over Taiwan

SINGAPORE — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met on September 23 in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, amid escalating tensions following an explicit pledge by U.S. President Joe Biden to defend Taiwan.

Taiwan was the focus of the 90-minute “direct and honest” talks between Blinken and Wang, according to a senior administration official. “For our part, the secretary made crystal clear that, in accordance with our long-standing one-China policy, which again has not changed, the maintenance of peace and stability across the Strait is absolutely, vitally important.”

Blinken “discussed the need to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage the U.S.-PRC [People’s Republic of China] relationship, especially during times of tension,” and “highlighted the implications” if China were to provide material support to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or engage in wholesale sanctions evasion.

Furthermore, Blinken “underscored that the United States and China and the international community have an obligation to work to counter the effects of that invasion and also to deter Russia from taking further provocative actions.”

The State Department had previously announced that this meeting was a part of Washington’s attempts to “maintain open lines of communication and manage competition responsibly.”

Officials have described managing the relationship between the U.S. and China as one of the most significant challenges facing the United States.

Wang said that both Biden and Xi Jinping seek to “make the China-U.S. relationship work” and to “steer clear of conflict and confrontation.”

“However, what has happened is that the U.S. seems to have two different sets of musical scores. Their leaders’ political will for a stable bilateral relationship has yet to be translated into logical policies,” he said.

The most recent previous encounter between Blinken and Wang was in July of this year in Bali, Indonesia. Back then, both sides seemed more hopeful for stability around the Taiwan Strait.

Just a month later, though, in August, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s high-profile visit to Taiwan stoked the flames of wrath in Beijing. In response, Beijing became more bellicose and staged unprecedented military exercises around Taiwan, which were perceived as a trial run for a Chinese invasion.



AP Images
Antony Blinken (left) and Wang Yi



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In a recent *60 Minutes* interview, Biden stated his pledge to defend Taiwan militarily, ending decades of American equivocation on the issue. Prior to Biden's clear declaration, the U.S. policy of "strategic ambiguity" made it unclear whether Washington would respond militarily to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

Biden's recent pledge to defend Taiwan appears to echo the views of many members of the U.S. Congress, which has been regarded as a bastion of support for self-governing Taiwan.

A Senate committee recently spearheaded an effort to offer billions of dollars in weapons directly to Taiwan. This initiative symbolized a notch-up after years of solely selling weapons to Taipei.

The decades-old U.S. law regarding the country's unofficial relations with Taiwan states that Washington's decision to set up diplomatic relations with China in 1979 "rests upon the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means."

However, the Chinese regime regards this U.S. law as null. Rather, China regards Taiwan as a renegade province and part of its territory to be taken back by force, if necessary.

In a speech prior to his meeting with Blinken, Wang alluded to the move for Taiwanese independence as a charging rhinoceros that must be stopped in its tracks. Moreover, he put the blame for exacerbating the desire for Taiwanese independence on the United States.

"Taiwan independence is like a highly disruptive gray rhino charging towards us that must be stopped resolutely," Wang declared in a speech at the Asia Society think tank in New York. "We have always worked with the greatest sincerity and effort to pursue peaceful reunification, but we will never tolerate any activity aimed at secession."

To put Wang's analogy of a "gray rhino" in context, Chinese authorities have used the term "gray rhinos" in the past to refer to huge-impact and highly likely financial hazards that risk being neglected, such as property bubbles and shadow banking.

"The Taiwan question is growing into the biggest risk in China-U.S. relations. Should it be mishandled, it is most likely to devastate bilateral ties," Wang warned at the Asia Society. "Just as the U.S. will not allow Hawaii to be stripped away, China has the right to uphold the unification of the country."

Daniel Russel, a leading U.S. diplomat for Asia under former President Barack Obama, opined that the meeting between Blinken and Wang was significant following the backlash that ensued after Pelosi's Taiwan visit.

In light of the Blinken-Wang meeting, Russel expressed hopes of a meeting between Xi and Biden on the sidelines of the G-20 in Bali in November. This meeting would be the first in-person meeting between Xi and Biden as leaders.

"Wang and Blinken's decision to meet in New York does not guarantee the November summit will go smoothly or that it will even occur. But had they been unable to meet, it would have meant the prospects for a summit in November were poor," said Russel, who is presently with the Asia Society.

Prior to his meeting with Wang, Blinken met with his counterparts from South Korea and the United States' partners in the so-called Quad — Australia, India, and Japan.

Wang also met with former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, commonly touted as the architect of U.S. relations with China.

Wang remarked that the odds of a peaceful resolution were reduced by ever more "rampant" Taiwanese



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independence desires, quoting a Chinese proverb: “It is better to lose a thousand soldiers than an inch of territory.”



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