



## Qin Gang, Chinese Ambassador to the US, Is New Foreign Minister

SINGAPORE — China has named its ambassador to the United States, Qin Gang, as the new foreign minister, as the communist state displays indications of reverting back to a more subdued diplomatic strategy after a rising tide of opposition against its combative style.

The move was revealed last Friday evening by *China National Radio*, which said the decision was made at a gathering of the National People's Congress Standing Committee.

Qin, 56, is a trusted aide of President Xi Jinping. He rose through the ranks all the way to the politburo of the CCP in October, and was poised to contribute more to foreign policy.

He had been promoted to various positions, including the ministry's spokesman, and served postings at the Chinese embassy in Britain. He was Xi's chief protocol officer between 2014 and 2018, and according to Party sources had nearly weekly meetings with Xi during that time. "The high frequency allowed Qin Gang to become familiar with Xi's foreign policy thinking," said one party insider.

After his appointment, Qin will return to Beijing from Washington after 17 months as China's 11th ambassador to the U.S.

Since being deployed to the United States in July 2021, Qin has had to toe a fine line between protecting Beijing's interests and showing a softer side of Chinese diplomacy.

During his stint in Washington, Qin threw out the first pitch at a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game, took a ride in a Tesla with billionaire Elon Musk, and shot free throws at a Washington Wizards basketball game.

As Foreign Ministry spokesman, Qin delivered some of China's most moderate messages on key topics. For instance, he said Beijing would have tried to prevent Russia from participating in a war with Ukraine if it was aware of the plan in advance. He also downplayed the risk of a war with Taiwan.

However, evaluations of Qin's brief tenure in Washington have been mixed thus far. Unlike his predecessor Cui Tiankai, 70, China's longest-serving ambassador to the U.S., who had fostered warm ties with American politicians and businessmen during his eight-year tenure, Qin has allegedly faced roadblocks to meeting the most senior officials in the Biden administration. Factors like Washington's increasing hostility towards Beijing and Qin's lack of prior experience in the country could account for his inability to duplicate his predecessor's achievements.

Due to his three tenures in the United Kingdom between 1995 and 2011, Qin has been regarded as a



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Qin Gang



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specialist on Europe and thus provoked concerns when he was named ambassador to the U.S. in 2021.

“I don’t think Qin Gang’s mandate here was to improve relations with the US government,” said Chinese foreign policy and US-China relations analyst Yun Sun at the Washington think tank Stimson Centre. “Instead, he aimed (his work) primarily at improving the US public views of China, which you can see from his outreach to the media and the general population.”

Yet Qin has not refrained from giving interviews in the U.S., and among Chinese diplomats has one of the most active Twitter accounts, which he uses to extol China.

China’s current foreign minister, Wang Yi, 69, although older than the unspoken retirement age of 68, was appointed to the party’s 24-member politburo after the recent October CCP congress.

In his first public remarks since his promotion to the top job, in an essay published in the official party journal *Seeking Truth*, Wang said that both the U.S. and China have found the “correct way” to interact with each other and urged the two nations to pursue dialogue instead of confrontation.

He asserted that the two countries must “set an example” amid various challenges, using as an illustration his country’s robust cooperation with Russia throughout 2022. Wang also called for both countries to eschew blunders made during the Cold War. “Over the past year, we have unremittingly explored the correct way for the two major countries of China and the United States to get along with each other,” he wrote. “The two countries should establish a way of getting along with mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation and put China-US relations back on the right track of health and stability.”

In laying out its major diplomatic tasks for 2023 in December, China said it would try to “recalibrate” its relationship with the U.S. and boost communication with Europe. “We will follow through on the common understandings reached between the Chinese and US Presidents” and work to bring bilateral relations back on the right course, Wang said in a speech at a symposium about foreign relations.

Beijing’s more aggressive foreign policy has led to a fall in public support across the developed world during Xi’s stint in power, with an increasing proportion of people in the U.S. harboring negative views towards China, and observers said that Qin’s appointment aligns with this push by Xi to improve strained ties with the U.S. and its allies.

Xi met U.S. President Joe Biden in person during the Group of 20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, as well as with the leaders of top U.S. partners, including Japan and Australia.

The U.S. has been pushing its security partners, including South Korea, the Netherlands, Taiwan, and Japan, to adhere to wide-ranging sanctions on the sale of advanced semiconductors to China. Previously, Wang told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken that the U.S. should cease restraining China’s development, and that both nations should concentrate on enacting a consensus attained among the leaders in Bali. Although not mentioning the U.S. specifically, he said that China will oppose any hegemony and bullying.



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