

# [***Exclusive: Xi promised Biden China wouldn't interfere in 2024 election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B72-FK61-DY7V-G03P-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** By Sean Lyngaas and MJ Lee, CNN

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Chinese leader Xi Jinping told US President Joe Biden that China would not interfere in the 2024 US presidential election when the [*two men met*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/joe-biden-xi-jinping-meeting-11-15-23/index.html) in November - an assurance reiterated by the Chinese foreign minister to Biden's national security adviser this past weekend, two people familiar with the conversations told CNN.

The previously unreported exchange between Xi and Biden took place during a [*high-stakes, hourslong meeting*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/15/politics/biden-xi-meeting/index.html) in California that was aimed at easing historically high military and economic tensions between the two superpowers.

It was Biden who raised the issue, according to one of the sources, who described the exchange as brief. In a [*meeting*](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/01/27/readout-of-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivans-meeting-with-chinese-communist-party-politburo-member-director-of-the-office-of-the-foreign-affairs-commission-and-foreign-minister-wang-2/) this past weekend in Bangkok with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan again brought up the topic. Wang offered Sullivan the same assurance Xi had given Biden months prior - that Beijing would not meddle in the American election this fall, the source said.

The potential for China to interfere in or influence US elections has repeatedly come up at senior-level meetings between the two nations in recent months, the source who was briefed on the matter said.

Those discussions signal just how fraught US-China relations have become, and how wary American officials still are of foreign election meddling after 2016, when [*Russian intelligence agencies hacked*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/07/politics/us-blames-russia-for-targeting-election-systems/index.html) the Democratic National Committee and released emails to damage Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

Since then, Iranian, Cuban and Chinese agents have all been active in trying to influence US elections, according to public US intelligence reports. Though none of those efforts have been as aggressive as the 2016 Russian operation.

Even if China refrains from interfering in the 2024 election, Beijing's hackers are still a potent force, with a foothold in key US infrastructure. For several months, US national security officials have publicly warned that Chinese cyber operatives have burrowed into computer networks in the maritime and transportation sectors - access that Beijing might use to disrupt any US military response to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

The FBI and the Justice Department [*used a court order*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/29/politics/fbi-doj-chinese-hacking-us-infrastructure/index.html) to try to mitigate the impact of the Chinese hacking operation, CNN reported on Monday, but the threat remains.

The White House National Security Council declined to comment on whether election interference came up in the Biden-Xi and Sullivan-Wang meetings.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement, "China's position has been consistent and clear: We always adhere to the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. US general elections are US internal affairs and who becomes the next president is up to the American people. China does not interfere in US elections. We oppose making China an issue based on election ***politics***."

At a US House hearing on Wednesday, FBI Director Christopher Wray was asked about the Wang'st assurance to Sullivan that China would not interfere in the 2024 election.

"China [has] promised a lot of things over the years, so I'll guess I'll believe it when I see it," Wray told lawmakers.

China's history of election meddling

China has traditionally taken a more passive role in trying to influence US elections than Russia, focusing on shaping a handful of congressional races, according to US intelligence officials. There are indications, however, that Chinese operatives have become more aggressive in targeting US voters and political candidates.

Since 2020, senior Chinese officials have issued broad directives to Chinese operatives to "intensify efforts to influence US policy and public opinion in China's favor," and senior Chinese officials have aimed to "magnify US societal divisions," according to a US intelligence assessment [*declassified*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/18/politics/china-russia-iran-cuba-2022-midterm-election-meddling/index.html) in December. Those influence efforts have included using fake social media accounts to attack US politicians online.

Those directives likely gave Chinese operatives "more freedom to operate" ahead of the 2022 midterms, according to the US intelligence document.

Microsoft [*warned*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/07/politics/chinese-operatives-ai-images-social-media/index.html) in September that Chinese operatives had used AI-generated images of the Statue of Liberty and other symbols of American life to mimic US voters online and provoke discussion on divisive political issues.

Last week, a senior National Security Agency official told reporters that the agency had not yet seen signs of any notable new foreign influence operations aimed at the 2024 election. But US officials are preparing for the possibility that Russia, Iran, China and other foreign actors will try to sow discord among voters through propaganda, hacking or some other means.

"Between expanding geopolitical turmoil and the chaotic domestic political environment, there will be plenty of motivations and opportunities for a wide range of threat actors to interfere in this year's election," said Chris Krebs, who led the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's work to protect elections from foreign interference in 2020.

"Throw in AI-powered influence campaigns and 2024 might be unlike any prior election," Krebs told CNN.

A year spent stabilizing China-US relations

Any signs of Beijing attempting to interfere with the 2024 US elections could disrupt the painstaking work that American and Chinese officials have put into stabilizing US-China relations over the last year.

The Biden-Xi summit in Woodside, California, in November produced the re-establishment of military-to-military communications between Washington and Beijing which had been severed over tensions related to Taiwan, a commitment for the two countries to work together on curbing fentanyl production, as well as an agreement for the two countries to continue talking at the highest levels.

Despite Xi's attempt to personally reassure Biden on the matter, it's an open question for some US officials the extent to which the Chinese leader has full visibility over the vast array of agencies and bureaucrats that make up the Chinese national security apparatus. That means US officials will be watching closely to see if Xi adheres to his promise not to interfere in US elections, one of the sources said.

Biden [*told attendees*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/21/politics/biden-xi-china-dictators-fundraiser/index.html) of a private fundraiser last June that Xi was "embarrassed" when the US military shot down an alleged [*Chinese surveillance balloon*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/29/politics/chinese-spy-balloon-us-internet-provider/index.html) flying over the continental US because the Chinese leader was unaware the balloon was a Chinese asset. Last year's balloon incident rankled US-China relations and even delayed a trip to Beijing by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken by several months.

This story has been updated with a statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

CNN's Natasha Bertrand contributed to this report.

By Sean Lyngaas and MJ Lee, CNN

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