

Headline: US envoy Kerry says climate cooperation could redefine US-China ties

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U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry and Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi shake hands before a meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China July 18, 2023. REUTERS

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BEIJING — China and the United States could use climate cooperation to redefine their troubled relationship and lead the way in tackling global warming, U.S. climate envoy John Kerry told senior Chinese officials on Tuesday.

Kerry's three-day visit to China aimed at reviving climate cooperation between the world's top greenhouse gas emitters has coincided with waves of extreme weather across the planet, including a heat dome in the western United States that brought temperatures in California's Death Valley to 53 Celsius (128 Fahrenheit) on Sunday.

"Our hope is that this can be the beginning of a new definition of cooperation and capacity to resolve differences between us," Kerry told top diplomat Wang Yi in a meeting in the Great Hall of the People, China's cavernous legislative building.

Addressing Premier Li Qiang, Kerry warned that the situation could get worse this summer, and cited reports that a weather station in China's northwestern Xinjiang region had recorded an all-time high temperature of 52.2C on Sunday.

"The predictions are much more serious than they've ever been," Kerry added after an unusual interruption by Li expressing doubt about the Xinjiang temperature.

Li acknowledged later in the meeting the severe climate impacts facing China and elsewhere, according to people in the room.

Major areas of contention between the two sides include the issue of climate financing, China's coal consumption and the abatement of methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Kerry told Wang that talks could provide a fresh start for the two countries that have been mired in disputes over Taiwan and trade.

"We are very hopeful that this can be the beginning, not just of a conversation between you and me and us on the climate track, but that we can begin to change the broader relationship," Kerry told Wang.

Wang referred to Kerry as "my old friend", saying they had "worked together to solve a series of problems between both sides". Kerry also referred to their work together, including on the Iran nuclear talks.

Kerry met his counterpart Xie Zhenhua for nearly 12 hours at the Beijing Hotel on Monday. Wang praised Kerry and Xie for their "hard work" throughout the talks.

The U.S. and Chinese delegations will pick up on Tuesday where they left off the previous day and negotiate through the day. Asked how the discussions were going, Kerry said it was too early to assess.

Kerry's third visit to China as U.S. climate envoy marks the formal resumption in top-level climate diplomacy between the countries. The former secretary of state is the third top U.S. official to visit Beijing in the past month.

While Kerry has sought to ring-fence climate issues from wider diplomatic disputes, Wang said during Kerry's previous visit in 2021 that climate could not be separated from broader concerns.

"From experience, if we work at it we can find the path again in ways that resolve these challenges," Kerry said. "The world is really looking to us for that leadership, particularly on the climate issue."

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