

US/CHINA: Blinken confirms Washington's policy of *de facto* containment

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken gave a speech on 26 May outlining the Biden administration's overall policy towards China. The speech contained no new policy announcements and largely served as an affirmation of the administration's existing approach. Though US officials have shied away from the term, this approach amounts to a *de facto* policy of containment.

Blinken pledged to remain focused on China despite the war in Ukraine. Justifying this focus is the assertion that "China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." Consistent with this focus, Blinken announced the creation of a new "China House" within the State Department that will coordinate China-related policies across regions and issue areas.

The speech summarizes Washington's China strategy as "invest, align, compete": invest in the domestic US economy; cooperate with US allies and partners; and compete with China on economics, technology, security, diplomacy, and values. Blinken also repeated previous assurances that Washington does not seek a new Cold War, even as he recited a familiar series of complaints about Chinese "aggression."

As [previously noted](#), US President Joe Biden has retained the key elements of the Trump administration's approach to China. The main differences are Biden's greater emphasis on [working with other countries](#) and somewhat [greater sensitivity](#) towards US businesses that profit from the Chinese market. Blinken's speech did not mention tariffs, suggesting that the [debate over tariffs](#) within the administration remains unresolved.

On Taiwan, Blinken dismissed the idea that the One China Policy (OCP) is [eroding or shifting](#), while shifting the focus to Beijing's alleged aggression. "While our policy has not changed, what has changed is Beijing's [growing coercion](#)," he said. On 1 June, the Biden administration announced a plan to promote trade and economic cooperation with Taiwan. The plan includes an initiative by the US Trade Representative to cooperate on digital trade, clean energy, and labor rights with Taiwan. The US Commerce Department will also lead a bilateral dialogue on technology trade and investment, with a focus on semiconductors. Given the constraints of the OCP, these initiatives stop short of a formal free-trade agreement, but they continue Washington's [recent efforts](#) at pushing against those constraints to promote closer ties with Taipei. China's foreign ministry denounced the move, demanding that Washington "stop negotiating agreements with Taiwan that have sovereign connotations."

Amid his full-throated criticism of Beijing, Blinken also pledged to address the risk of unintended conflict. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe are reportedly planning their first in-person meeting on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue on 10-12 June. As [previously noted](#), military-to-military contacts diminished during the Trump administration but have increased since late 2021.

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Finally, despite the generally antagonistic tone, Blinken pledged that Washington remains willing to cooperate with Beijing “where our interests come together.” He cited climate change as the key example, reinforcing our view that the two governments are willing to [isolate that issue](#) from broader bilateral hostility.

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