

WIDENING RIFT: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE DOWNWARD SLIDE IN U.S.-CHINA TIES

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March 11, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 01:21 am IST

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The downward slide in relations between the world's two biggest powers fast appears to be reaching a point of no return. That was certainly the message from Beijing, where, during the ongoing annual session of the National People's Congress or Parliament, Chinese leaders took aim at Washington's recent approach to ties. Xi Jinping, now [reappointed for a third five year-term as President](#), told a parliamentary delegation on March 6 that China was facing "unprecedented severe challenges to the country's development" because "Western countries, led by the U.S., have implemented all-round containment and suppression of China". That Mr. Xi chose to directly name the U.S. underlined starkly how relations have deteriorated. China's new Foreign Minister [Qin Gang said the U.S. was seeking "to encircle China"](#). He also rejected the Biden administration's claim that "it seeks to out-compete China but does not seek conflict," saying it "... means to contain and suppress China in all respects". He added that "if the U.S. does not hit the brake... there will surely be confrontation".

If the hope was to "responsibly manage" competition, as the two leaders put it at their G-20 Indonesia meet in November 2022, recent events do not inspire confidence. A scheduled visit early last month by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was [cancelled](#) after the [sighting of a Chinese balloon over the U.S.](#) Washington saw the "spy balloon" as a grave provocation on the eve of a visit aimed to restart engagement. Beijing slammed the U.S. decision to shoot down a "civilian meteorological airship" as reflecting a sense of "hysteria" in Washington when it comes to China. For the rest of the world, recent events suggest the rift is here to stay. Beijing, which is increasingly looking at the rest of the world through the prism of its all-encompassing U.S. rivalry, appears to be mending fences with Europe, while courting its neighbours. Beijing is planning a major Central Asia summit this year, while its strained relations with Japan are warming. The U.S., meanwhile, is shoring up alliances and partnerships in the region. While India has so far adeptly managed the fallout from the Ukraine war by adhering to its self-interest, China poses a unique challenge given the Line of Actual Control crisis. After Beijing's increasingly vocal objections to the Quad, India will have to remain prepared for continued pressure along the land borders, even as it assesses whether the worsening China-U.S. rift may alter Beijing's calculus as it grapples with two fronts, though Taiwan remains its primary concern. India must be nimble enough to exploit the opportunities in an increasingly divided world full of uncertainty and difficult challenges.

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