



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on October 21, 2023

U.S. Ambassador Slams China's Stance on Hamas, Taliban Wants to Join China's Belt and Road

During an interview with Bloomberg Television on October 19, U.S. ambassador to China Nicholas Burns urged the Chinese government to condemn terrorism by Hamas, arguing that Beijing's stance toward the group was another major division in already-deteriorating bilateral ties between China and the United States.

President Joe Biden reinforced America's strong support for Israel during a recent visit to Tel Aviv, while China has expressed support for the Palestinian cause and refrained from denouncing Hamas, which the United States regards as a terrorist organization.



AP Images
Nicholas Burns

"We do not have identical views on this particular position," Burns declared when questioned if he saw the recent outbreak of tensions in the Middle East as a chance to boost relations between the United States and China.

"China has taken the position of supporting the two-state solution — as has the United States — and so obviously, the focus here should be directed against Hamas," Burns continued. Hamas has called for the destruction of the State of Israel.

When questioned about Burns' comments at a regular press briefing in Beijing on October 20, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning replied that "major countries, when dealing with hotspot issues in the region, should be objective and just."

With Israeli air strikes pounding Gaza following Hamas' deadly attacks on Israeli civilians earlier in October, regional and global leaders have been trying, at least in public, to prevent the conflict from spiraling into a larger one.

Notably, the United States has called on China to use its clout with Iran to forestall a broader conflict intensification.

Tensions between Israel and Hamas rose further after [a blast at a hospital in Gaza on October 17](#) that Palestinian officials claimed killed hundreds. Israel and Hamas have issued competing claims about who was culpable for the blast.

Earlier in October, U.S. congressional leaders lambasted President Xi Jinping for China's reticence to condemn Hamas and express support for those killed in Israel.

In particular, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer asked China to back Israel and denounce the attacks, hours after he blasted Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi for exhibiting "no sympathy or support for Israel during these tough, troubled times."

Subsequently, China said that it condemned actions that harm civilians and was ready to cooperate with



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the international community toward peace talks. On October 19, Xi urged for an immediate ceasefire while suggesting that he could work with Egypt and other Arab nations “to push for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue as soon as possible.”

Earlier in 2023, Xi tried to play global peacemaker, suggesting a ceasefire in Ukraine and helping long-time rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran attain a diplomatic truce. Later, Xi recommended an Israel-Palestine peace conference to be held.

Last week, Wang said that China was working toward “a more authoritative, influential and broad-based international peace conference” hosted by the UN to find a permanent solution to the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Burns said bilateral efforts by the United States and China over the past several months to establish Cabinet-level contact have led to results. “Where we didn’t have that sustained high-level contact, we now have it,” he declared.

The ambassador added that Chinese ministers will be heading to Washington in the coming months. “We need this kind of interaction, but the US is not going to fundamentally make concessions just to have meetings,” he said.

Even as there are indications that relations are starting to warm up, both the United States and China continue to disagree in key areas including security, technology, and human rights, Burns stated.

He said a recent tightening of export controls on high-tech products was required to address loopholes.

“We are serious about preventing any kind of military advantage to the People’s Liberation Army here because of the export of advanced dual-use American technology,” he said.

Burns reiterated calls for a restart of military-to-military communication channels, which were halted after former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited to Taiwan last year.

“The last thing that we should want in this relationship is the absence of communication,” Burns said.

China’s initial reaction to the Israel-Hamas war was similar to its reaction to the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022: It has refrained from openly identifying and denouncing an aggressor.

In response, Yuval Waks, a senior official at the Israeli embassy in Beijing, stated on October 15 that Israel had anticipated a “stronger condemnation” of Hamas from China, a country it regards as an ally.

“When people are being murdered, slaughtered in the streets, this is not the time to call for a two-state solution,” Waks told reporters.

China’s foreign ministry earlier on October 15 called for relevant parties to remain calm and immediately cease hostilities to protect civilians, stating that “the fundamental way out of the conflict lies in implementing the two-state solution and establishing an independent State of Palestine.”

Meanwhile, on October 19, the Taliban government of Afghanistan has requested to join China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), indicating its plans to dispatch a technical team to Beijing to negotiate membership, the Taliban’s acting Commerce Minister Haji Nooruddin Azizi said.

Earlier, Kabul had sent an entourage to the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing that ended on October 18. Afghanistan was among the 35 countries that inked an agreement on the digital economy and green



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development on the fringes of the summit.

“We requested China to allow us to be a part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Belt and Road Initiative,” Azizi told Reuters. The corridor is a key element of the BRI, China’s major infrastructure undertaking in Asia that reportedly hopes to promote international trade and commerce.

An Afghan technical team will visit China to “better understand” the remaining obstacles to joining the initiative, Azizi said, without providing more details.

“China, which invests all over the world, should also invest in Afghanistan.... We have everything they need, such as lithium, copper and iron,” Azizi told Reuters. “Afghanistan is now, more than ever, ready for investment.”

Various Chinese firms already operate in Afghanistan, primarily in the field of mineral extraction. The Metallurgical Corp. of China Ltd (MCC) has been in talks with the Taliban about establishing a major copper mine there.

“The Chinese company has made a huge investment, and we support them,” said Azizi, explaining that discussions have encountered impediments because the proposed mine would be based near a historical site.

Last month, China nominated a new ambassador to Kabul, becoming the first country to do so after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The erstwhile U.S.-backed Afghan government had surrendered without much resistance even before the last American troops withdrew from Afghanistan.

The United States has since frozen \$7 billion in Afghan central-bank funds located at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Another \$2 billion kept in the U.K., Germany, the UAE, and several other countries have been frozen as well.



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