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Xi-Biden talk bolsters faith in stable ties

Three principles underlined to guide China-US bilateral relations in 2024

By **ZHANG YUNBI**
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The first phone conversation between President Xi Jinping and United States President Joe Biden since their landmark face-to-face meeting in November in San Francisco helped further shore up global faith in the stability of the relationship between the world's two largest economies, observers said.

The detailed consensus reached during the latest interaction between the two heads of state set out tasks to be accomplished this year, and underlined the need for China and the US to avoid potential major frustrations, they said.

So far, Xi and Biden have held two face-to-face meetings, including one in Bali, Indonesia, in 2022, and five phone conversations.

During their phone talk on Tuesday evening, Xi underlined three overarching principles that should guide China-US relations in 2024 — valuing peace, prioritizing stability and upholding credibility.

Urging the two countries to honor their pledges with actions and transform the San Francisco vision into reality, Xi told Biden that the issue of strategic perception is always fundamental to the China-US relationship.

The two countries should respect each other, coexist in peace and pursue win-win cooperation, and the relationship should continue to move forward in a stable, sound and sustainable way, instead of going backward, Xi added.

Diao Daming, a professor on US studies at Renmin University of China's School of International Relations, said that while last year's San Francisco summit set the tone for Sino-US relations, the phone talk took the ties one step further as it tapped the huge influence of head-of-state diplomacy to help effectively stabilize the relationship.

"If the US can fulfill the three major principles proposed by President Xi ... and work toward the same goal with China, the relationship is expected to remain stable this year," he added.

Experts said that Beijing aims to make Washington fully realize the seriousness of issues, including the US' suppression of Chinese companies, the Taiwan Strait situation and South China Sea concerns, have a correct perception of China-US relations and further manage potential risks.

During his phone conversation with Biden, Xi mentioned that "the negative factors" related to the Chi-

na-US relationship "have also been growing", and this requires attention from both sides.

Diao said: "This fully reflects Beijing's clear-eyed judgment of the current relationship as well as its sense of duty toward the relationship. The recent wrong practices of the US have failed some of the commitments it made."

During the phone talk, Beijing welcomed visits to China by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in the near future.

Biden reiterated the commitment to the "five noes" — that the US does not seek a new Cold War with China, it does not aim to change China's system, the revitalization of its alliances is not targeted at China, it does not support "Taiwan independence", and it has no intention to seek a conflict with China.

The two sides tasked their teams to deliver on the San Francisco vision, including advancing the consultation mechanisms on a number of areas such as diplomacy and the economy, and to carry out dialogue and cooperation in areas such as counternarcotics and artificial intelligence.

Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the Department of American Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said, "This shows that even though there are some problems and differences between the two countries, maintaining communication and putting issues on the table are necessary for stabilizing relations."

It will be a serious matter for both sides if the China-US relationship goes out of control, she said, adding that the uncertainty brought by the US presidential election is also something that needs to be managed.

"The US is breaching what it has been preaching. That's definitely not going to work (if it wants to improve its ties with China)," Su said.

During his recent visit to China, former US secretary of commerce Carlos Gutierrez rebutted claims that the two countries are destined for confrontation.

"We are not enemies. We compete, we disagree, (and) that's fine — friends disagree. But we cannot allow this to evolve, to turn into animosity," he told Chinese reporters.

"I believe our destiny is to be closer, is to be friends, is to be collaborators, is to help develop a better world for everyone, not just for our own two peoples. ... When that day comes, I think it will be an era of peace and prosperity for the world."

Taiwan's strongest earthquake in 25 years kills nine

By **LI MENGHAN**
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Taiwan's most powerful earthquake in a quarter century rocked the island on Wednesday morning, killing at least nine people, injuring more than 900 and causing widespread damage. Over 50 people were reportedly trapped.

The magnitude 7.3 quake struck Taiwan's east coast near Hualien at 7:58 am, triggering more than 100 aftershocks with magnitudes ranging from 3.4 to 6.5.

The epicenter was located at a

depth of approximately 12 kilometers on the boundary of the Philippine Sea Plate and the Eurasian Plate, an area prone to seismic activity, according to the China Earthquake Networks Center.

"The shaking was intense and lasted for almost a minute," a Hualien resident, surnamed Lee, told Beijing News. "It was impossible to stand still, and objects kept falling off the shelves."

Local authorities have announced the suspension of classes in schools and work in government and private offices in Hualien, where a

10-story building collapsed and several others were left leaning precariously following the tremors.

Significant damage has been reported in other parts of Taiwan. Tiles fell from older buildings as the earthquake shook Taipei, and schools evacuated their students to sports fields, equipping them with yellow safety helmets, The Associated Press reported.

Over 300,000 households across the island experienced power outages during the tremors, with more than 80,000 still lacking power despite ongoing repairs.

Local media outlets, such as China Times, reported large-scale traffic disruptions. The roadbed leading to the Taiwan Daqingshui Tunnel fractured, creating a height difference of several meters.

Train services on the Metro Taipei Circular Line, on railway routes across Taiwan and even on some routes in Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Fujian provinces as well as Shanghai were temporarily suspended, but are gradually resuming operations.

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President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, joins schoolchildren in a tree planting activity on Wednesday in Beijing's Tongzhou district. Other leaders also participated in the voluntary activity. **JU PENG / XINHUA**

More efforts urged to secure nation's 'green assets'

By **MO JINGXI**
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President Xi Jinping called for further efforts to advance the country's large-scale afforestation programs, promote green development and strengthen the protection of forests and grassland, in order to build a more beautiful China.

He made the remarks on Wednesday when attending a voluntary tree planting activity in Beijing's Tongzhou district.

Noting that this year marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of the National Tree Planting Day in China, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist

Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, spoke highly of the nation's remarkable achievements in afforestation.

It was the whole country's persistent efforts that transformed barren mountains into picturesque landscapes and deserts into oases, he said.

Official data shows that China planted more than 3.9 million hectares of forests, restored 4.3 million hectares of degraded grassland, and treated 1.9 million hectares of sandy and stony land last year.

Xi said it is important to be aware that China still faces the problem of inadequate forest and green coverage, and the potential of forests in

terms of economic development has not yet been fully tapped.

Efforts must be continued to plant trees, generation after generation, in order to accumulate the country's "green assets", he said.

While planting saplings of various types of trees together with young students, Xi encouraged the children, whom he called the future of China, to sow the seeds of green in their hearts, respect and love nature, and endeavor to become the backbone of the nation.

Xi emphasized the importance of using scientific methods to plant trees, in order to increase their survival rate, and expanding the ways to transform lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets.

Given that afforestation is hard won, he said that efforts must be made to prevent and control forest fires and to carry out campaigns to identify and prevent major hidden risks.

In order to build a green Great Wall in Northeast, North and Northwest China, he also urged more efforts to be devoted to the Three-North Shelterbelt Program, where tackling desertification has become a long-term task of historic importance.

Xi has participated in Beijing's annual tree planting activities for 17 consecutive years since he became a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee in 2007.

Farewell, furry friend



Fans gather around a vehicle on Wednesday to bid farewell to giant panda Fu Bao at Everland theme park in Yongin, South Korea. The beloved 3-year-old bear, the first giant panda to be born in South Korea to a panda couple leased by China for 15 years, embarked on her journey to China on Wednesday. **YAO QILIN / XINHUA**

AI GIVES IMPRESSION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

Technology developed to provide comfort to the grieving at a time of emotional stress

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Even though they cannot pass the Turing test (a machine communicating with a human without seeming like a machine), for families who are coping with the loss of their loved ones, grief chatbots are helping them reconnect with the dead and find solace in the digital world.

Since 2022, Super Brain, an artificial intelligence startup in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, has created digital avatars for bereavement support for more than 600 families, using tools involving AI and machine learning.

"Technically, digital immortality is coming, which enables everyone to have a virtual online twin," Zhang Zewei, co-founder of the AI startup, says.

While building avatars of the dead, Zhang adds, the company has helped more than 100 tech-savvy clients to create their virtual avatars based on

their digital trails, including emails, photos and social media posts, with prices ranging from thousands of yuan to 10,000 yuan (\$1,390).

Usually within a week, technicians from Super Brain can generate a life-like chatbot, which can interact with people, according to Zhang.

"With enough data inputs, the AI chatbot can learn the thinking patterns of the person it 'cloned'" the 32-year-old entrepreneur says, adding technology may provide an answer to humans' quest for immortality.

"I saw the demand from the market, and technology helps us to build a bridge between life and death, beyond time and space," he adds.

Among Zhang's clients, there are parents who lost their single child, a woman who wants to say goodbye to her boyfriend who died in an accident, and a mother who asks to "revive" her husband to comfort their daughter.

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