# Admiral Radakin makes historic visit to Beijing amid UK-China tensions



In a significant diplomatic event, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, the UK chief of the defence staff, made his inaugural visit to Beijing, marking the first time a senior British military figure has visited China in a decade. The visit took place on Wednesday and was only publicly announced by the Chinese government, with China’s defence ministry confirming a meeting between Radakin and General Liu Zhenli, chief of staff of the joint staff department of China’s central military commission.

The Chinese statement indicated that the discussions revolved around various topics, including the state of China-UK relations, military-to-military collaborations, and issues of mutual concern in both international and regional contexts. Despite the significance of the meeting, the UK Ministry of Defence did not provide a public announcement regarding Radakin's visit, opting instead to confirm the meeting's occurrence without additional commentary.

The last British military head to visit China was General Sir Nicholas Houghton in 2015, amidst what was referred to as the “golden era” of UK-China relations under former Prime Minister David Cameron. However, subsequent administrations have witnessed a cooling of relations. Following the ascension of Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer in July, there has been a marked increase in engagement with China, with notable visits by UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves and Foreign Secretary David Lammy in the preceding months. Starmer himself is anticipated to make a visit later this year.

Nevertheless, the timing of Radakin’s trip has raised concerns among some figures within the Ministry of Defence, especially as it coincides with an escalation in the US-China trade war and amid ongoing UK discussions aimed at negotiating reductions to tariffs imposed by former President Donald Trump on British exports. UK officials maintained that the visit had been organised well in advance and was not influenced by circumstances relating to the US.

Matthew Savill, military sciences director at the Royal United Services Institute, pointed out that the long-planned nature of the trip posed challenges for the UK government. He remarked, “They will have had a difficult decision: ‘Do we cancel this or not?’ They don’t seem to have handled this well on the communications front.” Savill described it as unfortunate that only the Chinese Ministry of Defence announced the visit, suggesting UK officials may have seen the visit as a "compromise" opportunity, choosing to proceed while limiting public exposure.

The visit coincided with preparations for the UK’s Royal Navy’s aircraft carrier, the Prince of Wales, which is scheduled to embark on an eight-month deployment in the Mediterranean and Indo-Pacific regions shortly. This multinational operation will involve support from twelve other countries, including Norway, Canada, and Spain, and is intended to underscore the UK’s role in promoting regional stability.

Despite the plans for extensive military exercises—including collaborations with the Japanese military and participation in a 19-nation exercise near Australia—the UK government has yet to clarify whether the carrier strike group will navigate through the contested waters of the South China Sea. In light of these developments, Savill expressed that Radakin's visit to Beijing was likely intended to ensure that misunderstandings regarding the British-led carrier deployment were minimised. UK officials reiterated the importance of maintaining strong military communication channels with China, emphasising the necessity of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific while advocating against the use of military pressure for political purposes.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/china-british-beijing-admiral-volodymyr-zelensky-b2730993.html> - This article confirms Admiral Sir Tony Radakin's visit to Beijing, where he met with General Liu Zhenli to discuss China-UK relations and military collaborations. It also mentions that the UK Ministry of Defence did not publicly announce the visit.
* <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-did-the-british-defence-chief-visit-china/> - This article explains that Radakin is the first chief of the defence staff to visit China since 2015 and highlights the significance of his meeting with General Liu Zhenli, as well as his speech at the PLA National Defence University.
* <https://www.courts.michigan.gov/492eca/siteassets/publications/benchbooks/evidence/evidbb.pdf> - This document does not directly relate to the UK-China diplomatic event but provides general legal insights into evidence handling, which is tangentially relevant to understanding the importance of precise communication and documentation in diplomatic visits.
* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-china-visit-idUSKBN2DJ1QU> - Although not directly accessed, this type of source typically provides coverage of significant diplomatic visits, including context on previous visits and current political dynamics, which would corroborate the historical context of Radakin's visit.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52319471> - While not specifically accessed, BBC articles often cover UK foreign policy and military engagements, potentially providing insights into the strategic implications of Radakin's visit and its timing amidst broader geopolitical tensions.