# China acknowledges visit of UK military chief amid tensions



China has officially acknowledged the unannounced visit of Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, the head of the British military, earlier this week. The meeting, which took place amid intensifying trade disputes between Beijing and Washington, involved discussions with General Liu Zhenli, the chief of staff of China’s Central Military Commission. The announcement was made by China’s defence ministry in a short statement published on its website.

During the discussions on Wednesday, the two military leaders engaged in “in-depth exchanges” relating to the state of China-UK relations, military-to-military relations, and key international and regional issues of mutual concern. The Chinese defence ministry further indicated that the talks included communication on enhancing exchanges and cooperation between their respective militaries.

While the UK Ministry of Defence did not immediately comment on the visit, British sources indicated that maintaining robust military communications with China is seen as beneficial, alongside the necessity of "firm conversations" regarding peace in the Indo-Pacific region.

The visit has prompted surprise and concern among certain British politicians. Former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith expressed his astonishment at Radakin's visit, suggesting that it reflects an inappropriate alignment with China, which he characterised as a nation that has undermined the Sino-British agreement on Hong Kong and suppressed peaceful pro-democracy advocates. “The most astonishing and alarming thing is to watch China being treated as an ally and friend,” Smith remarked.

Frances D'Souza, a cross-bench peer and member of the all-party parliamentary group on Taiwan, also raised concerns, stating that the visit does not bode well for the UK’s commitment to supporting democratic governance in Taiwan and undermines the possibility of a coherent UK policy.

This visit marks the first instance of a UK chief of defence staff visiting China since 2015, after which relations had been a focal point of British foreign policy aiming to nurture a "golden era" of diplomacy. However, since that period, UK-China relations have soured considerably, particularly following China's stringent measures in Hong Kong and allegations of espionage against the UK. Additionally, China has faced accusations of being a vital supporter of Russia during its conflict in Ukraine, reportedly supplying components for munitions involved in the war.

In the context of balancing foreign relations, the Labour government has made attempts to sustain positive economic ties with China despite an increasingly complex security landscape. Notably, British Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Chancellor Rachel Reeves have made recent visits to China, with Reeves stating during her January trip that maintaining a long-term relationship with China is “squarely in our national interest.”

Admiral Radakin additionally spoke to students at the People’s Liberation Army National Defence University, a renowned institution for military education. Reports indicate he championed the post-World War II security order and stressed the importance of alliances during his address.

Meanwhile, the United States has introduced significant tariffs on Chinese imports, with former President Donald Trump proclaiming a 125% levy, leading Beijing to announce an 84% reciprocal tariff. Beijing has further asserted that a trade war with the US would ultimately be unsuccessful.

In a separate but related context, UK Defence Secretary John Healey recently co-hosted a meeting of defence ministers from 30 nations at NATO headquarters in Brussels to discuss increasing pressure on Russia regarding the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Healey urged his counterparts not to lose sight of the ongoing war, highlighting the dire conditions faced by Ukrainian citizens due to persistent drone attacks and missile strikes.

The situation remains complex, with reports emerging of airstrikes against Kyiv by Russia, and amidst this turmoil, Ukraine claimed to have captured Chinese nationals allegedly fighting for the Russian army. China's foreign ministry is currently verifying this claim while dismissing the assertion that a significant number of Chinese citizens are involved in the conflict as groundless.

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

## References

* <https://www.forces.net/china/armed-forces-head-visits-china-first-time-decade-discuss-mutual-security-issues> - This article corroborates the visit of Admiral Sir Tony Radakin to China and his discussions with General Liu Zhenli on security issues and military relations.
* <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-did-the-british-defence-chief-visit-china/> - It provides insights into Admiral Radakin's speech at the People’s Liberation Army National Defence University in Beijing and his meeting with General Liu Zhenli.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - The original source article detailing Admiral Radakin's visit and its implications on UK-China relations.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/oct/17/foreign-secretary-david-lammy-china-trade-talks> - This article could potentially discuss Foreign Secretary David Lammy's visit to China, aligning with efforts to maintain economic ties despite strained relations.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world/europe/64580742> - Though not directly available in the search results, BBC News could provide coverage on the recent political and diplomatic developments involving the UK and China, including the impact of trade disputes and visits by British officials.