

# ‘We need to get China’: John Kerry calls for return to bilateral climate talks

Negotiations between world’s biggest emitters have stalled since House speaker’s visit to Taiwan



John Kerry, the US special envoy on climate, says: ‘China is 30% of all emissions. We need to get China.’ Photograph: Christophe van der Perre/Reuters

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John Kerry has urged China to return to the negotiating table with the US on the climate crisis to kickstart stalled global progress on cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

The special envoy on climate to the US president, Joe Biden, said: “China is 30% of all emissions. We need to get **China**.”

Relations between the US and China were **plunged into crisis over the summer**, when Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the House of Representatives and the third most senior Democrat in government, **visited Taiwan**. This was **regarded as a**

**major provocation by Beijing**, which claims sovereignty over the disputed islands, and diplomatic relations were in effect broken.

The failure of the world's two biggest emitters to cooperate has created problems for global climate action. "Absent China, are we getting the best hope for where we want to try to go? Not, not in my judgment," Kerry told the Guardian in an interview.

Kerry said the two governments must cooperate: "I think China and the US must inevitably work together to do the things we need to do to win this battle [on the climate]. And I'm really very concerned about the interruption that has taken place due to events that are nothing to do with climate."

**China's freeze with the US** should not, in theory, affect negotiations on the climate crisis, which are supposed to be held in a separate bubble from other geopolitical concerns.

But Kerry said China had in effect stopped negotiating with the US on climate issues, as well as on other matters. He said: "It's been impossible, really. China has pulled out of the talks for now."

Some sections of the Chinese government were pursuing "wolf diplomacy", he said, by which climate was treated "like all the other issues" and subject to a "suspension [though] not a termination".

Kerry said: "I personally vehemently disagree with that. Climate is a universal issue, a universal threat. Without political ideology, without political party. It does not represent global competition. It represents a global threat to the world, which the two largest emitters and two largest economies could greatly benefit the world by coming together and cooperating to try to deal with it."

The rupture between China and the US came just as cooperation between the two was looking more promising than it had done for years. At the Cop26 UN climate summit in Glasgow last November, the two countries **astonished observers with the sudden announcement of a bilateral pact**. They agreed to work on clean technology, methane and other ways of reducing emissions.

Kerry told the Guardian: “We really wanted to cooperate together. We were planning a major negotiation between us, and **my counterpart was very explicit about wanting to get something done.**”

Since Cop26, the **outlook for global progress on the climate has dimmed with the war in Ukraine**, which as well as raising geopolitical tensions has sent some countries back to coal and spurred new investment in gas and oil. That makes the lack of negotiation between the world’s two biggest emitters even more critical.

China’s cooling on climate talks would not destroy progress at **Cop27, the two-week UN climate summit taking place in Egypt next month**, Kerry said.

However, it would cause problems. “It won’t necessarily stop the [UN] process from working at all. It will lessen the presentation that we would jointly be able to make about our cooperation, of what it can do for dealing with the crisis, which I regret – I would like to do,” he said.

China could still take strong action on its own, Kerry said. The country has a record of exceeding its own targets on renewable energy and reducing its carbon relative to its economic output.

The US strategy for **Cop27** is what Kerry terms “implementation plus”, which would mean countries putting policies and measures in place to fulfil their existing promises, and taking on fresh targets where existing ones are too weak. “Implementation – you do what you promised you would do in Glasgow. Plus, if you didn’t get on a 1.5C track, you have got to start to get on it,” he said.

Kerry said he was still optimistic on the global target of limiting temperature rises to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, the **focus of Cop26**. He pointed to research from the International Energy Agency at the talks that showed **if all the promises made at Cop26 were fulfilled the world would reach 1.8C of heating**. These promises were made by countries responsible for about two-thirds of global GDP, so if the remaining third could be brought to pursue a 1.5C temperature limit, the goal would be in sight.

“You have to bring some of that 35% to the table to advance this, which was why I was Indonesia, Vietnam, why we are working with India and South Africa and Mexico, and so forth,” he said. “We’re just getting on the move, nobody’s really

noted it. But there is not enough indication yet that there's a critical mass of the 35% ready to move sufficiently."

He said countries at Cop should "organise to accelerate ambition" by making announcements on their progress. He does not expect a significant breakthrough at Cop27, and no single big decision that would change the course of the climate crisis, but hopes for a series of initiatives from countries and a will to progress on cutting emissions.

"It requires individual countries making decisions to do things, and to announce this," he said. "I encourage that, wholeheartedly. That is really important."