

# UK EYEING UP WARMER RELATIONS WITH CHINA

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Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said it was better to talk of “robust and constructive” ties than a new cold

war.

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UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly has called for “[robust and constructive](#)” ties with China. News of the approach is likely to receive a stamp of disapproval from U.S. officials and British Conservative Party ‘hawks’ —where it hasn’t already. It should, however, wash better in parts of Europe—[France](#) in particular—which have been seeking improved relations with Beijing.

Speaking at the City of London’s Mansion House, Mr. Cleverly [argued](#) that while it would be “clear and easy—perhaps even satisfying—for me to declare a new cold war and say that our goal is to isolate China,” it would be wiser for Britain to seek a greater partnership with the Asian powerhouse, particularly with the view of solving “significant world problem[s].” He stressed that no such issue, “from climate change to pandemic protection, from economic stability to nuclear proliferation, can be solved without China.”

The address has caused some confusion over the foreign policy approach of Rishi Sunak’s government, with the then-Tory leadership candidate last summer [accusing](#) rival Liz Truss of “[rolling] out the red carpet and [turning] a blind eye to China’s nefarious activity and ambition.” At the time, he added that “I will change this on day one as PM.” Luke de Pulford, executive director of the inter-parliamentary alliance on China, wrote ahead of the speech that he “regret[s]” the shift in tone, which now sees the foreign secretary “taking a swipe at concerned backbenchers,” many of whom take a much more critical view of Beijing.

The about-turn has led many to question the government’s motives. Climate change can’t be it, [argues](#) Stephen Daisley in *The Spectator*. To suggest otherwise is “risible,” he added, given China’s record on the subject. Mr. Pulford [asked](#) separately: “Did anybody brief the

foreign secretary that Xi Jinping has never kept a climate promise, and uses the climate issue as a diplomatic bargaining chip against naive governments?"

To understand the shift in tone, Mr. Daisley [added](#), it is better to look towards home:

*If the government wants a reset with China, it should be honest about it: we need China on-side or our post-Brexit prosperity-in-Asia strategy is buggered. That kind of candid self-interest you can respect.*

Anticipating the response to Mr. Cleverly's speech, the *Financial Times* rather tentatively reported that "hardline Conservative critics of China ... are likely to be unhappy with the foreign secretary's speech." Perhaps the most renowned of these figures is one-time Tory leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith, who earlier this week [argued](#) that "China clearly poses, as the PM once said when standing for election, a systemic threat to us and the rest of the free world."

*The Daily Telegraph's* [report](#) on the address begins in a more hawkish manner, leading on the secretary "[urging] China to come clean about its 'biggest military build-up in peacetime' in a major speech warning of the risks of a new cold war with Beijing." While not the focus of Mr. Cleverly's talk, persecution against the Uyghur people and tensions over Taiwan did also come up, though it is worth questioning the extent to which Beijing will take note, given the impression Britain is more occupied with Xi Jinping reaching emission targets.