



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

China's climate blackmail – a modest result of John Kerry's first mission in Beijing



Nature made sure that the talks between the two biggest polluters on the planet take place in a menacing *mise-en-scène* after one year, which announced the outcome that awaits us if there was no agreement.

China and the US made no progress on agreements to reduce harmful gas emissions, despite Europe and parts of the US and China experiencing record high temperatures.

Political differences prevented the agreement renewal between the world's two largest economies and, at the same time, the two largest emitters of harmful gases.

The three-day mission of former US Secretary of State John Kerry, in the capacity of President Biden's climate envoy to China, did not produce results.

Although Mr Kerry tried to rate the talks in Beijing as significant progress, as they were resumed after a one-year pause due to tensions over Taiwan and the economy, the Chinese leadership pretty much crushed his optimism.

Xi has the last word

Chinese President Xi Jinping did not speak to Mr Kerry, but in a separate address, he devalued his mission, saying China would follow "its own path and timetable" in reducing emissions.

"The pathway and means for reaching this goal, and the tempo and intensity, should be and must be determined by ourselves, and never under the sway of others", said President Xi.

This was Beijing's final response to

Washington's effort to persuade China to move more decisively towards decarbonisation, as its emission percentages increase every year, despite the simultaneous growth of green energy sources.

Mr Kerry did not hear this from his high-level interlocutors from the Chinese establishment. There is no doubt that the message that the US subsequently received from the Chinese leader was, in fact, the only official Beijing position.

Climate as a topic in itself

One of the reasons that the US-China climate talks this week ended without tangible success is that Washington advocated separating the topic of climate from other open issues that burden relations between the two countries.

"Climate should be free standing, because it is a universal threat to everybody on the planet", said Mr Kerry in a conversation with Han Zheng, Vice President of China.

However, he received a response from another address: from Wang Yi, a top foreign affairs official, who told the envoy of the US president that cooperation on climate protection "cannot be separated from the broader environment of Chinese-U.S. relations".

This means that Washington will have to find a new, creative way to continue climate talks with China because separating them from the significant package of other contentious issues did not bring results this time.

Climate change and state sovereignty

The second reason for the failure of Mr Kerry's mission is profound and more fundamental, as the first man of China, President Xi, said, and not at some lower level.

His message that China will determine its own pace and ways to combat emissions and not under pressure from others (the US) reflects China's fundamental position on protecting its sovereignty on any issue, including climate.

China generally considers the US to be the main global destroyer of the concept of national sovereignty and itself the global leader in the resistance to such policies.

All the US-China disputes meet at this point, and now they also regard the climate, even though it is hard to connect global warming with national sovereignty and state borders.

The vicious circle

China is aware of this, and its plans for reducing harmful gases are clear, although not as decisive as in Europe or the US.

China has estimated that it will reach the peak of carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and has committed to stop emitting additional carbon into the atmosphere by 2060.

However, Chinese participation in global warming is still colossal, and it has been increasing the sources of pollution, primarily coal-fired thermal power plants.

China emits as much as 31% of total global harmful gases (11.4 billion tons of carbon dioxide in 2022), larger than all other polluters combined.

The second one on the list, the US, participates with a twice smaller percentage (14%).

From that aspect, the US is not the only country with the right to ask China to renounce the source of the greenhouse effect faster and more decisively, because its arbitrariness causes global consequences.

Authorities in China approved the construction of new coal-fired power plants in as many as 80 locations last year, in an effort to meet the increased demand for electricity from industry and the population.

China has thus entered a vicious circle, fighting against the heat and the constant rise in temperature due to pollution by increasing the consumption of electricity for cooling, which, again, is produced in power plants that create the greenhouse effect.

Chinese authorities are more focused on mitigating the consequences of climate change, such as improving flood warning systems or storm mitigation mechanisms, particularly in significant economic zones.

Political expectations of climate problems

By refusing to accept American suggestions to accelerate the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, primarily through the reduction of coal-fired power generation, China wants to strengthen its position in talks with the US on other, more significant issues.

Beijing is aware that achieving decarbonisation goals is one of the most important political issues in the US (not in China), on which the election results of Western leaders largely

depend.

Beijing's intention is not to negotiate such a significant issue separately. It wants to add it to the list of all other open issues, expecting that it could profit from any concessions on climate issues in some other disputed field.