



By: TA | AP Brief

UK: Freezing relations with China is not an option



China's attempts to spy, destabilize and disrupt Britain's economy and democracy have grown, but Beijing is still a vital economic **partner** for the U.K., the government said Tuesday.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy said "China's power is an inescapable fact" and freezing relations with the world's second biggest economy is "not an option." He spoke to lawmakers as he outlined findings from the government's "China audit."

"China is our third biggest trading partner, our universities' second largest source of international students. China will continue to play a vital role in supporting the U.K.'s secure growth," Lammy said.

The Labour Party government pledged to conduct an in-depth examination of U.K.-China relations after it was elected almost a year ago, in an effort to balance the country's economic interests and its security.

Many details of the review will remain classified for security reasons, Lammy said.

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Its conclusions were summarized in a document outlining the U.K. government's broader national security strategy. It said that "instances of China's espionage, interference in our democracy and the undermining of our economic security have increased in recent years."

Yet the government resisted pressure from China hawks in Parliament to label China a threat on a par with Russia. The security review called it a "geostrategic challenge" but also an essential player in tackling major issues such as climate change, global health and economic stability.

"We will seek a trade and investment relationship that supports secure and resilient

growth, and boosts the U.K. economy," the government said. "Yet there are several major areas, such as human rights and cybersecurity, where there are stark differences and where continued tension is likely."

Signs of naivety about China

Opposition Conservative Party foreign affairs spokeswoman Priti Patel said the government was showing "signs of naivety" about China. Another Conservative lawmaker, Harriet Cross, branded Beijing "at best unreliable and at worst hostile."

U.K.-China relations have chilled since the short-lived "golden era" announced by then-Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015, after a series of **spying** and cyberespionage allegations, Beijing's **crackdown** on civil liberties in Hong Kong, a former British colony, and China's support for Russia in the Ukraine war.

There was no immediate comment from China on the review.

China was one of many challenges identified in a review that the government said marked "a hardening and a sharpening of our approach to national security" in an increasingly dangerous world.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government has **pledged**, along with other NATO members, to increase spending on security to 5% of gross domestic product by 2035. The total includes 3.5% on defense and 1.5% on broader security and resilience.

The U.K. currently spends 2.3% of national income on defense and says that will rise to 2.6% by 2027.