

China rejects U.S. call for meeting between defense chiefs

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Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu (R) and his American counterpart, Lloyd Austin

Beijing, June 1 (RHC)-- China has rejected a request by the United States for a meeting between the two countries' defense chiefs, as tensions continue to rise between Beijing and Washington. According to a report by The Wall Street Journal, China's Monday decision was apparently over Beijing's ire at

Washington over the latter's sanctions against the Chinese defense minister.

The Pentagon had asked for the meeting to take place on the sidelines of an annual security forum in Singapore, which is due this weekend. "Overnight, the PRC (the People's Republic of China) informed the U.S. that they have declined our early May invitation for [Defense] Secretary [Lloyd] Austin to meet with PRC Minister of National Defense Li Shangfu in Singapore this week," the Pentagon said in a statement to the Journal.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner complained that the Pentagon's attempts to reach out to China's military in recent months have been either rejected or ignored, after Beijing vowed to halt dialogue with Washington over recent sanctions on its top defense official.

Earlier this month, Beijing notified Washington that "there is little chance" of Li's meeting with his American counterpart in Singapore due to sanctions placed on him over his alleged involvement in the purchase of Russian advanced weapons.

Beijing further declared last week that it saw no reason to keep talking with Washington as long as the U.S. pursued a wholly disingenuous policy. "Where is the sincerity and sense of dialogue, when the U.S. side talks about the need to maintain contacts only to use them as a means to put pressure on China and hamstring our country," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Mao Ning, said at a press briefing earlier this week. She also demanded that Washington "immediately lift sanctions" against Beijing, adding: "It is necessary to create a favorable atmosphere and favorable conditions for dialogue and contact."

Tensions have been rising between the two countries over a visit last year to the Chinese Taipei by then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. China described the visit as a provocative move and a violation of the internationally accepted "One China" principle, which sought to incite secessionist groups there.

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