

**US-China relations**

## China hails US release of citizen convicted over child pornography

Former student freed as part of rare prisoner swap that Beijing said showed it would 'never abandon compatriots'



Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning: 'This once again demonstrates that China will never abandon its compatriots under any circumstances' © AP

**Ryan McMorro** in Beijing NOVEMBER 28 2024

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China has hailed the release by the US of three Chinese citizens including an allegedly politically connected former student convicted of possessing child pornography.

Jin Shanlin was freed as part of a rare prisoner swap negotiated with the Biden administration that [China's](#) foreign ministry said on Thursday was the result of "tireless" government efforts.

While the other two Chinese citizens were imprisoned in the US on [espionage](#)-related convictions, Jin pleaded guilty in 2021 to possessing child pornography. During his trial in Texas, an FBI special agent testified that his family was "connected to influential members of the Communist party in China", according to court records.

China's foreign ministry said on Thursday its three citizens had been wrongfully detained by the US and were safely returned home through the "tireless efforts of the Chinese government".

"This once again demonstrates that China will never abandon its compatriots under any circumstances, and the motherland will always be their strong support," said foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning.

Jin, 26, had admitted possessing and distributing "more than 600 images and videos of child pornography" while he was studying for a PhD at Southern Methodist University in Texas.

Local police department investigators said an internet protocol address linked to Jin's residence had used a peer-to-peer network to share a video of "sexual assault of an infant by an adult male" along with other child porn.

Police said they found child pornography open on Jin's computer when they entered his home, which included "videos involving infants and toddlers".

When asked by an investigator the age of the youngest person he had seen in pornography, Jin replied: "Uh . . . I'm not sure, but maybe 16, 17, or 14?", according to a transcript released in court.

Bill Bishop, author of the Sinocism newsletter on China, said it was surprising that Beijing would pick Jin alongside two citizens involved in cases related to national security.

"There must be other Chinese citizens in US jails," Bishop said.

Jin had been set to be released in December 2027, according to federal prison records. Biden on November 22 also commuted the sentences of Chinese citizens Ji Chaoqun and Xu Yanjun, saying in clemency statements that releasing the three men was in the "national interest".

Ji was sentenced to eight years in prison for attempting [to gather information on defence technology](#) for China's Ministry of State Security. Xu was his alleged handler.

Xu, a Chinese intelligence officer, was caught in a 2018 sting operation in Belgium and [convicted in 2021 of stealing trade secrets from GE Aviation](#).

Beijing in exchange released three Americans considered by Washington to have been wrongfully detained: Mark Swidan, Kai Li and John Leung. Swidan had been held in the country since 2012 and was given a suspended death sentence after being convicted of drug trafficking — charges he denied. The US and the UN have cited the lack of evidence against him to rule that Swidan was arbitrarily detained.

Li and Leung have each been held for several years in China on espionage-related charges, which the US and their families have disputed.

“Thanks to this administration’s efforts and diplomacy with the [People’s Republic of China], all of the wrongfully detained Americans in the PRC are home,” the US National Security Council said in a statement.

After the deal, the US on Wednesday lowered its travel advisory level for mainland China to “exercise increased caution” from “reconsider travel”.

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