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U.S. President Donald Trump walks with Chinese President Xi Jinping while leaving after a visi

U.S. President Donald Trump walks with Chinese President Xi Jinping while leaving after a visit to the Zhongnanhai Garden in Beijing, May 15, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Evan Vucci)

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U.S. President Donald Trump left China with no resolution to the imprisonment of Jimmy Lai, the prominent Catholic media tycoon and pro-democracy campaigner.

Lai was convicted of national security offenses under Hong Kong's controversial national security law. U.S. officials, including Trump, have cast the charges leading to Lai's conviction as fabricated and said they were evidence that the Chinese Communist Party is seeking to silence dissent.

In Washington last week, lawmakers and advocates said they hoped Trump would secure the release of political prisoners of China, including Lai and Ezra Jin Mingri, founder and pastor of Zion Church, both cases that have provoked grave religious freedom concerns from U.S. officials.

After bilateral meetings at Zhongnanhai, the headquarters for China's ruling Communist Party, Trump told reporters that he and Chinese President Xi Jinping "settled a lot of different problems that other people wouldn't have been able to settle."

But one area appeared to remain unsettled: U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

China considers Taiwan to be its territory, and has indicated it would be willing to take the area by force. The looming threat is a source of frequent friction between Beijing and Washington, due to U.S. support for the self-ruling democratically-controlled island with a capitalist economy.

Xi told Trump during the meeting that the issue could destabilize relations between the two countries, a Chinese government readout said.

Trump did not directly answer a question from a reporter about whether he would ultimately sign off on a $14 billion weapons deal with Taiwan amid Chinese objections.

"I'll be making decisions," Trump said. "But, you know, I think the last thing we need right now is a war that's 9,500 miles away."

On his return trip to the U.S., Trump on May 15 told reporters that Lai's case was a "tough one."

"(Xi) said he's gonna strongly consider the pastor," Trump said, in apparent reference to Jin.

During Trump's visit, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution calling for the release of political prisoners of China, including Lai and Jin.

In remarks on the House floor, Rep. Chris Smith, Republican of New Jersey, a longtime Catholic lawmaker, said, "hundreds of innocent Americans languish in Chinese prisons today, including Nelson Wells of New Orleans and Dawn Michelle Hunt from Chicago."

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"This resolution is also about Pastor Ezra Jin, founder of Zion Church, detained and denied needed medical care," Smith said. "It is about Pastor Gao Quanfu and his wife Pang Yu, detained for peaceful religious leadership. It is about Dr. Gulshan Abbas, serving a 20-year sentence because her sister, Rushan Abbas, dared to tell Congress the truth about the CCP's genocide against Uyghurs. The CCP imprisoned one sister to silence another. That is hostage-taking, plain and simple."

"And this resolution is about Jimmy Lai, the courageous founder of Apple Daily, imprisoned because he defended freedom of the press, democracy, and the rule of law in Hong Kong," Smith continued.

The resolution, he said, "reaffirms America's commitment to defending political and religious freedom and advocating for those unjustly detained for exercising fundamental freedoms."