

# Trump again threatens to tear up One China policy

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Just days before his inauguration, US President-elect Donald Trump has provoked an angry reaction from China by again suggesting that his administration's recognition of the One China policy would be contingent on Chinese concessions on economic issues.

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* on Friday, Trump declared that he would not commit to the policy until he saw what he considered progress from Beijing in its currency and trade practices. "Everything is under negotiation including 'One China'," he told the newspaper.

The One China policy, under which Washington recognised Beijing as the only legitimate government of all China including Taiwan, has been the bedrock of US-China relations for decades. On that basis, the US established diplomatic relations with China in 1979 and formally broke off ties with Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a renegade province.

By placing a question mark over the One China policy, Trump is threatening a serious confrontation with China that could potentially lead to a break in diplomatic ties between the two countries.

The Chinese foreign ministry hit back on Saturday declaring that the "One China" principle was the political foundation of China-US relations and was "non-negotiable." Spokesman Lu Kang said: "There is but one China in the world, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China."

Lu urged "relevant parties in the US to fully recognise the high sensitivity of the Taiwan question, approach Taiwan-related issues with prudence and honour the commitment made by all previous US administrations."

Beijing regards Taiwan as a critical core issue and has declared that it will go to war if Taipei ever declared formal independence from China. The Chinese

government has routinely protested against US arms sales to Taiwan under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act which committed the US to defend the island against a forcible Chinese take-over.

Trump's latest remarks indicate that he has no intention of taking notice of China's warnings. He made similar comments last month when he defended his decision to take a phone call from Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on December 2—the first contact between top American and Taiwanese leaders since 1979.

In relation to Taiwan, Trump commented: "We can sell them \$2 billion of the latest and greatest military equipment [last year] but we're not allowed to accept a phone call. First of all it would have been very rude not to accept the phone call."

It is absurd to suggest that the phone call to Trump from Tsai had not been organised in advance by members of their respective staffs. High-level members of Trump's transition team, including his incoming Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, have strong ties with Taiwan and advocate closer US relations with the island.

Speaking on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, Priebus said that "there are no plans to change the 'One China' policy". However, he then added: "But certainly that policy is on the table if China doesn't come to the table and work with us on trade, work with us on the South China Sea and what's happening there."

In his *Wall Street Journal* interview, Trump lashed out again at China over trade and currency issues. He dismissed Chinese claims that its currency was simply falling against the US dollar. "It's not dropping. They are doing it on purpose. Our companies can't compete with them now because our currency is strong and it's



killing us.”

In the course of the election campaign, Trump repeatedly threatened to brand China as a “currency manipulator” but told the newspaper that he would not do so immediately. “I would talk to them first,” he said.

Trump’s remarks signify that his administration is preparing to confront China diplomatically, economically and militarily across the board. By suggesting that he will not be bound by the One China policy, he is threatening to recognise Taiwan as an independent entity—a move that would provoke dangerous military tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

The last major crisis in the Taiwan Strait in 1995–96 occurred after Washington reneged on its assurances to Beijing that it would not grant a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to speak at Cornell University. After the Chinese military mobilised forces and held naval exercises, the Clinton administration sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to the area and provocatively sent one—the USS Nimitz and accompanying warships—through the Taiwan Strait.

Trump’s nominee as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told a confirmation hearing last week that the US should deny China access to islets under its control in the South China Sea. Any attempt by the US to intercede militarily to block Chinese planes and ships would almost certainly provoke clashes that could rapidly lead to conflict between nuclear armed powers (see: “Trump’s China policy threatens nuclear war”).

The hawkish state-owned *Global Times* warned in an editorial on Friday that what would eventuate was a large scale war in the South China Sea and advised Tillerson to “bone up on nuclear strategies” if he wanted to force China to withdraw from its territories.

In comments to *Business Insider*, Bonnie Glaser, an analyst with the Washington-based Centre for International and Strategic Studies, suggested that Tillerson had misspoken. If the US were to place “a cordon of ships around one or all of the islands, and the Chinese flew an aircraft to one of their new islands, what are we going to do?” she asked. “Shoot it down? We’d certainly end up in a shooting war with China.”

Trump has also taken a belligerent stand towards China over North Korea, condemning it for not taking stronger action to halt Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile programs. Responding to a North Korean announcement that it was preparing to test an

intercontinental ballistic missile, he declared that it “won’t happen,” suggesting the possibilities of further US sanctions, strong pressure on China or a military intervention.

Trump’s threats of trade war measures as well as his remarks on Taiwan, the South China Sea and Korea are utterly reckless. All three are highly volatile flashpoints that have the potential to provoke war.



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