Former US ambassador advocates American military bases on Taiwan

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19 January 2017

Former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton has provocatively advocated that the incoming Trump administration not only "revisit" the "One China" policy that has formed the basis of US-China relations for decades, but boost US military sales to Taiwan and station US military forces there. Basing American military units on Taiwan would set the stage for a major US confrontation and conflict with China.

Beijing has already responded to Trump's declarations that he will adhere to the "One China" policy only if China makes major concessions by flatly declaring the issue "non-negotiable" and urging caution. Under the "One China" policy, Washington recognised Beijing as the sole legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

Bolton was among the most militarist figures in the George W. Bush administration. As an undersecretary of state and then UN ambassador, he staunchly defended the illegal US invasion of Iraq, supported the lies about weapons of mass destruction and advocated aggressive US measures against North Korea and Iran. He was high on Trump's list of possible nominees for the key post of secretary of state and undoubtedly has strong links to the new administration.

Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* on Monday, Bolton declared: "[I]t is high time to revisit the 'One China' policy and decide what it means … We need strategically coherent priorities reflecting not 1972 but 2017, encompassing more than trade and monetary policy, and specifically including Taiwan. Let's see how an increasingly belligerent China responds."

In 1972, President Richard Nixon visited China, signalling an abrupt shift in foreign policy to enlist Beijing in Washington's Cold War machinations against the former Soviet Union. Nixon's initial acceptance of the One China policy in the Shanghai Communiqué was formalised in 1979 when the US broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and established them with China. At the same time, the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act committed the US to defending Taiwan against any attempt by China to forcibly re-integrate Taiwan.

Bolton's claims about Chinese "belligerence" were laced with a concoction of lies and half-truths similar to that used by the Bush administration to justify the military occupation of Iraq. In citing China's land reclamation in the South China Sea and declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea, Bolton simply ignored the confrontational actions of Obama's "pivot to Asia" to which Beijing has responded. As far as Bolton is concerned, the "pivot," which has involved a massive military build-up against China, has not gone nearly far enough.

After condemning China, Bolton advocated steps that would provoke the most serious crisis in East Asia in decades. He wrote: "America could enhance its East Asia military posture by increasing US military sales to Taiwan and by again stationing military personnel and assets there, probably on favourable financial terms." Such measures, Bolton said, could be taken under the Taiwan Relations Act and thus would not require legislation.

Bolton clearly envisages a major commitment of US forces to Taiwan. Given the island's location close to the Chinese mainland and the South China Sea, this would give "US forces greater flexibility for rapid deployment throughout the region should the need arise." A closer military relationship with Taiwan, he argued, would be a significant step toward achieving core American interests in Asia—that is, the domination of US imperialism.

As Bolton is well aware, the return of US military

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forces to Taiwan would be an inflammatory move that could rapidly lead to the end of diplomatic relations between the US and China, and an escalation of moves toward war. Bolton is among those militarist layers of the US establishment who regard conflict with China as inevitable, and, given America's historic decline, want to precipitate a confrontation sooner rather than later.

Bolton has his counterparts in the incoming Trump administration, including specifically on the issue of Taiwan.

Trump's designated chief of staff, Reince Priebus visited Taiwan with a Republican delegation in 2011 and again in October 2015, when he met Tsai Ing-wen before she was elected Taiwanese president last year. Taiwanese Foreign Minister David Lee has called Priebus a friend and described his appointment as "good news" for the island.

Peter Navarro, who has been appointed to head the new National Trade Council, is a belligerent anti-China hawk whose books include *The Coming China Wars: Where They Will be Fought and How They Can Be Won.* He is not only a strident advocate of trade war measures against China, but criticises Obama's "pivot" as inadequate, and calls for stronger US relations with Taiwan.

After visiting Taiwan and holding "extensive talks" with government officials, business executives and academics, Navarro published an article in the *National Interest* last July titled "America can't dump Taiwan." It called for a fundamental reorientation of US relations with Taiwan. Navarro urged American leaders to "*never* acknowledge the 'One China, Two Systems' policy—nor even refer to the 'One China' policy again." [emphasis in the original]

While not going as far as Bolton, Navarro insisted that maintaining Taiwan as an independent pro-US ally was absolutely critical for "strategically balancing" against the rise of China. Rather than basing US military forces on Taiwan, he called for sending private, retired military, contractors to the island to train its troops.

Navarro also advocated greater military aid to Taiwan, including anti-access, area denial capabilities comparable to China's—a move that would require a major upgrading of the Taiwanese military. He called for US assistance to Taiwan to develop a fleet of state-of-the-art diesel electric submarines. Such military hardware would threaten the Chinese navy and shipping and could in no way be construed as "defensive" under the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act.

The most bellicose remarks, however, have been made by Rex Tillerson, Trump's nominee for secretary of state, not over Taiwan, but China's land reclamation and construction in the South China Sea. At his confirmation hearings last week, Tillerson declared: "We are going to have to send a clear signal to China that, first, the island building stops and second, your access to those islands is also not going to be allowed."

On the *Defence One* web site on Tuesday, Michael Fuchs explained that any attempt to block China's access to its islets in the South China Sea would mean war. "The only way to block China's access to the islands it occupies in the South China Sea would be to enact a naval blockade, which is an act of war," he wrote, adding that under international law the US would be the aggressor in starting a war.

Fuchs served as a deputy assistant secretary of state in the Obama administration until 2016. He advocates a "more robust policy" to confront China in the South China Sea, including "expanding the pace and scope of freedom of navigation operations"—that is, provocative naval challenges to China's territorial claims. Fuchs does, however, bluntly state the dangers in what Tillerson is proposing: an act of war that could quickly lead to armed clashes and a devastating conflict that would engulf Asia and the world.

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