

Top US official in Taiwan attends military commemoration

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Over the weekend, the top US representative in Taiwan, Brent Christensen, attended a ceremony alongside Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen marking a battle fought between the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland in 1958. The US decision to take part in the ceremony is a deliberate provocation aimed at Beijing and will only further heighten the danger of war.

Christensen's attendance at the August 23 ceremony was the first time a director of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), Washington's de facto embassy on the island, took part in the annual event that commemorates those killed during the Second Taiwanese Strait Crisis in 1958. This was a month-long conflict between the ROC and the PRC over the Kinmen and Matsu Islands, which are controlled by Taipei, but sit just kilometres off the coast of mainland China. Christensen also laid a wreath at a memorial for two US military officers killed during the First Taiwanese Strait Crisis in 1954.

While Christensen, the only foreign dignitary at the ceremony, did not make an official statement, the AIT declared on Facebook, "US—Taiwan security cooperation goes back decades and has been a key element in our partnership... Commemorations such as these remind us that today's US-Taiwan security cooperation builds on a long and proud history that exemplifies the phrase 'Real Friends, Real Progress.'"

Christensen's involvement in the ceremony was undoubtedly approved at the highest levels of the Trump administration. It is part of Washington's stepped-up confrontation with Beijing, initiated by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last month, which includes closer military cooperation with Taipei. Taiwanese President Tsai, re-elected in January on an explicitly anti-China platform, has signed up for this

conflict behind the backs of the Taiwanese people.

Following Washington's false narrative, the current conflict is one between defenders of "democracy" like Taiwan opposed to Beijing's "tyranny." In reality, the escalating tensions are the result of Washington's decades-long imperialist agenda in the Asia-Pacific.

The fighting that erupted in 1954 and 1958 between the ROC and the PRC was a continuation of the Chinese Civil War that had forced the Kuomintang, otherwise known as the Nationalist Party, to flee to Taiwan in 1949. With US backing, including naval patrols in the Taiwan Strait, Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists established a military dictatorship on the island that planned to reinvade the mainland and continued to claim legitimacy as the ruler of all of China. Taipei received recognition as such from Washington and even took China's seat in the UN Security Council.

The First and Second Taiwanese Strait Crises took place only one and five years respectively after the end of the Korean War, which was launched by the US and its puppet state in South Korea in an effort to overthrow the Soviet-aligned government in Pyongyang while threatening Beijing. This included discussions on dropping "between 30 and 50 atomic bombs"—in US General Douglas MacArthur's words—"strung across the neck of Manchuria." The US also considered introducing hundreds of thousands of Chinese Nationalist soldiers into Manchuria and in the south around Shanghai.

That these plans did not materialize did not mean they were off the table. With Taiwan sitting just 130 kilometers off the mainland's coast, it has constituted a major base for US aggression against the PRC. Furthermore, the islands of Kinmen and Matsu, at the center of the Taiwanese Strait Crises, sit a couple of

kilometres off the Chinese coast and were heavily fortified in the 1950s as they continue to be today. As such, Sunday's commemoration of the fighting that took place there demonstrates they could be used for future military incursions.

US policy towards China began to shift to the mainland in the 1970s, gaining momentum with President Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972, and culminating in the recognition of PRC as the sole government of China in 1979. Formal US relations with Taiwan ended in a de facto recognition under the "One China" policy that the island is part of China's territory. A rejection of this policy would likely trigger a war, with Beijing unwilling to allow Taiwan to become a base of operations for US war plans.

The US turn to Beijing was part of Washington's agenda to further drive a wedge between the Soviet Union and China to deepen its influence in Asia. Under Mao Zedong, China also began the process of the restoration of capitalism, which accelerated in the 1980s, transforming China into a cheap labor platform for US companies.

However, with China's emergence as an economic competitor, Washington is once more actively preparing for war with Beijing, with Taiwan a key element of these plans. The Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" sought to undermine China diplomatically, economically and militarily, an agenda that has accelerated under Trump. Before his inauguration, Trump called into question the "One China" policy, taking a phone call after his election from President Tsai, the first between leaders of the two countries since 1979. His administration has also overseen the sale of billions of dollars' worth of military equipment to Taipei.

Now, with the US presidential election, both Trump and Democratic Party candidate Joe Biden are positioning themselves as more aggressive than the other towards Beijing, signaling an even more aggressive shift in the near future. Both candidates and their respective parties are attempting to deflect growing social anger in the US over the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis facing millions outwards against China as an "enemy."

On August 17, the *New York Times*, a mouthpiece for the Democratic Party and US intelligence services, cited unnamed officials in Washington calling for even

deeper relations with Taiwan which will only exacerbate tensions with Beijing. It wrote, "Those officials, as well as Republican and Democratic lawmakers, aim to do as much as possible to show explicit US support for Taiwan. They want to send military signals to China and to make relations with Taiwan as close to nation-to-nation as possible, short of recognizing sovereignty."

It is within this context that Sunday's ceremony took place and indicates the growing danger of war erupting in the Asia-Pacific as Washington increasingly ramps up pressure on Beijing in its attempts to offset its own historic decline and worsening crisis.



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