

Biden administration warns China over Taiwan, as US carrier enters South China Sea

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26 January 2021

The newly-installed Biden administration is rapidly demonstrating that its stance toward China will be just as aggressive as that of the Trump administration.

In the economic sphere, Biden's nominee for treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, branded Beijing as "our most strategic competitor" at her confirmation hearing. Echoing Trump, she denounced its alleged "abusive, unfair, and illegal practices," including theft of intellectual property and forced technology transfers, and declared "we are prepared to use the full array of tools to address" these practices.

The White House is also continuing the Trump administration's confrontational military actions, with the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and its strike group entering the South China Sea on Saturday. The strike group included a guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill, and two Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers, the USS Russell and USS John Finn,

While the US military described the operation as "routine," the only aspect that is "routine" is the increasing frequency of such exercises under the Obama and Trump administrations, including "freedom of navigation operations" (FONOPs) inside the 12-nautical mile territorial limit around Chinese-occupied islets in the South China Sea. The FONOPs increased from two or three annually in the final years of the Obama administration to as many as 10 under Trump.

Strike group commander Rear Admiral Doug Verissimo declared: "It's great to be in the South China Sea again, conducting routine operations, promoting freedom of the seas, and reassuring allies and partners." While it is not clear whether a warship will this time enter territorial waters claimed by China, the very presence of a US carrier strike group close to

the Chinese mainland and sensitive naval bases on Hainan Island is provocative.

While the USS Theodore Roosevelt strike group entered the South China Sea, the US State Department criticised the Chinese military for flying its aircraft through the southwestern air defence identification zone (ADIZ) declared by Taiwan. In a statement issued on Saturday, US spokesman Ned Price expressed "concern" at the pattern of Chinese attempts "to intimidate its neighbors, including Taiwan" and warned "our commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid." While a number of countries have established ADIZs, they are not part of territorial air spaces, have no standing in international law and are based on tacit agreement between countries. Indeed, when China declared its own ADIZ in the East China Sea in 2013, the US declared that it would not recognise the zone and deliberately flew warplanes through the area without making any identifications.

China claims Taiwan as a part of its territory and regards it as a "renegade province." As such it has ignored the Taiwanese ADIZ and regularly flies military aircraft there. The only significantly different aspect of Saturday's operation was the number of aircraft, which included four fighter jets, eight bombers and one anti-submarine aircraft, making it the largest for several months. Taiwan's military sent radio warnings, put defence missile systems on alert and dispatched patrol aircraft to monitor the Chinese planes.

The latest US condemnation, which has been featured in the US and international press, is designed to demonstrate that the Biden administration will continue Trump's closer support for, and contact with, Taiwan. The US continued to arm Taiwan and oppose any forcible Chinese takeover of the island when it

established diplomatic relations with China in 1979. At the same time, however, Washington tacitly accepted the “One China policy,” acknowledging Beijing as the legitimate ruler of all China, including Taiwan.

From the outset, Trump publicly questioned the “One China policy” and increasingly ignored the diplomatic protocols established over three decades that narrowly limited official contact with Taiwan. In the final week of the Trump administration, its Secretary of State Mike Pompeo lifted all restrictions on meetings between US and Taiwanese officials, military and civilian, prompting an angry Chinese response.

In a clear indication that the new administration intends to do the same, Taiwan’s de facto ambassador to Washington, Bi-khim Hsiao, was invited to attend Biden’s inauguration last week. This was the first time that a Taiwanese representative had been asked to attend since formal diplomatic relations between the US and Taiwan ended in 1979.

Taiwan is potentially the most dangerous flashpoint for conflict between the US and China. The US navy intervened in 1949 to protect the Kuomintang (KMT) forces that fled to the island from the revolutionary movement that put the Chinese Communist Party in power in Beijing. For decades, the US propped up the brutal KMT dictatorship in Taiwan and maintained the fiction that it was the legitimate government in exile of all China.

The shift in diplomatic relations in 1979, following the visit of President Nixon to China in 1972, was driven by US strategic interests—a de facto alliance against the Soviet Union. Over the past decade, first under the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” and then under Trump, US imperialism has shifted to regard China as its chief rival and has made another strategic about-face—to prevent Beijing from threatening US global hegemony by all available means.

Biden’s choice for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, emphasised during his confirmation hearings last week that there was “no doubt” that China posed the most significant challenge to the US of any nation. He agreed that Trump “was right in taking a tougher approach” to China, though perhaps differing with the former president’s tactics. He also declared that Washington would continue arms sales to Taiwan.

Blinken said he was in favour of greater engagement with Taiwan and did not oppose Pompeo’s decision to

lift all restrictions, saying only that his team would examine the protocols. In 2019, as deputy secretary of state in the Obama administration, Blinken met with Tsai Ing-wen who was then the presidential candidate for Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party. Tsai is now the Taiwanese president and favours greater independence for Taiwan from China.

In his hearings, Blinken also agreed with Pompeo’s provocative designation of China’s treatment of the Muslim Uyghur minority as “genocide.” Pompeo’s comments—one of his last actions before leaving office—were deliberately aimed at inflaming US-China relations and are part of the escalating US propaganda campaign, hypocritically exploiting “human rights” as the justification for economic warfare and military build-up against China.

Just a week after his inauguration, Biden, who was part of the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” targeting China, is already indicating that he will continue and escalate Trump’s reckless and dangerous confrontation with Beijing.



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