# Biden declares US in “extreme competition” with China

**Mike Head**
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The Biden administration is sending unmistakable signals that it will escalate, not step back from, the aggressive and dangerous confrontation with China initiated by the Obama administration and intensified under Trump.

At a press conference Wednesday during his first trip to the Pentagon since taking office, President Joe Biden announced the formation of a Defense Department task force that will review Washington’s strategy and “force posture” for confronting “the growing challenges posed by China to keep the peace and defend our interests in the Indo-Pacific and globally.” Countering China, he added, “will require a whole-of-government effort.”

This followed an interview broadcast on Sunday in which Biden declared that China was in for “extreme competition” from the United States. He claimed that his approach need not be one of conflict, yet he sent a pointed public message to Chinese President Xi Jinping, saying: “And I’m not going to do it the way that he knows.”

Without any explanation, Biden insisted that this was because Xi was “sending signals as well.” To add to the atmosphere of a showdown, Biden acknowledged that he had yet to speak with Xi since Biden’s inauguration on January 20.

That was a stark contrast to Biden’s phone conversations with the leaders of US allies, including Canada, Mexico, the UK, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea and Australia, as well as the NATO secretary-general and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Biden said he and Xi still “haven’t had occasion to talk to one another yet.” The contrast points to the Biden administration’s efforts to assemble a coalition to combat China, economically, diplomatically and militarily, to prevent it from rising to challenge the global dominance asserted by the US through its victories in World War II.

While Biden was recording his interview last Friday, to be broadcast on CBS’ “Face the Nation” on Sunday, his administration was conducting further provocative military operations directed against China, focused on two of the most strategically critical flashpoints for potential clashes: Taiwan and the South China Sea.

A US warship, the destroyer USS John S. McCain, sailed near the Chinese-controlled Paracel Islands in the South China Sea on February 5 in a “freedom of navigation operation” (FONOP) that the US Navy said was the first such mission under Biden’s administration. Conducted under the false flag of “freedom of navigation,” FONOPS involve sailing inside the 12-nautical mile territorial limits around Chinese-occupied islets.

It was the second time that Biden had sent US warships into the South China Sea. Within days of his inauguration, the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and its strike group entered that sea. That continued a course set by the Obama administration, which conducted two or three FONOPs annually, which Trump increased to as many as 10 per year.

Earlier last week, the USS John S. McCain also sailed through the highly sensitive Taiwan Strait—the narrow passage, barely 180 kilometres wide, that separates mainland China from Taiwan. This is particularly provocative because Taiwan, which has been armed by the US, is so close to major Chinese cities and military facilities. Taiwan was also part of China before it was seized by Japan in 1895 and was then occupied by the US-backed military dictator Chiang Kai-shek after the 1949 Chinese revolution.

China condemned both of last week’s military incursions as infringements on China’s sovereignty and security, and said it had dispatched naval and air units to the Paracel Islands to follow and warn away the USS John S. McCain.

In his CBS interview, Biden stoked the tensions with Beijing by describing Xi as “very tough” and without “a

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democratic, small D, bone in his body." That was in keeping with Biden's branding of Xi as a "thug" during the US presidential election campaign.

These taunts combine provocation with sheer hypocrisy. While the Beijing regime is certainly repressive particularly when it comes to dealing with the struggles of Chinese workers, the US is known around the world for its mass surveillance, anti-democratic interventions, including its support for brutal dictatorships like those in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and brutal neo-colonial wars.

Biden's interview was matched by a phone conversation last Saturday, in which US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reportedly told senior Chinese foreign policy official Yang Jiechi that the US would stand up for "human rights" and "hold Beijing accountable for its efforts to threaten stability in the Indo-Pacific, including across the Taiwan Strait."

Media outlets called Blinken's performance "tough." For his part, Yang said the Taiwan issue was the "most sensitive" for China and that Washington should not interfere with China's domestic affairs in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

Taiwan has become central to Washington's thrust against China. In the Trump administration's final week, its Secretary of State Mike Pompeo lifted all restrictions on meetings between US and Taiwanese officials, military and civilian, undercutting the 1979 US recognition of Beijing as the sole legitimate government of China.

This prompted an outraged Chinese response, but Taiwan's de facto ambassador to Washington, Bi-khim Hsiao, was nevertheless invited to attend Biden's inauguration, indicating that Biden will follow the Trump policy. This was the first time that a Taiwanese representative had been asked to attend a presidential inauguration since formal diplomatic relations between the US and Taiwan ended in 1979.

Biden's interview on Sunday was also in sync with his first foreign policy speech since taking office, delivered last Thursday. Speaking at the US State Department in Washington, Biden sought to differentiate from aspects of Trump's unilateralist "America First" agenda. But his catch-cry—"America is back"—has the same belligerent content.

Biden declared that his administration would "take on directly the challenges posed to our prosperity, security, and democratic values by our most serious competitor, China." He vowed to "confront China's economic abuses; counter its aggressive, coercive action," and "push back on China's attack on human rights, intellectual property, and global governance. He said he was "ready to work with Beijing," but only "when it's in America's interest to do so."

For now, Biden and Blinken have said that some policies are under review. The US still has punitive tariffs on Chinese exports, sanctions on more than a dozen top Chinese officials and bans on Chinese telecommunications companies.

No matter what shifts in approach take place, however, the effort to reverse the obvious loss of US credibility under Trump will mean a heightened offensive against China, the perceived "most serious competitor."

This is a bipartisan drive, also reflected in a mounting clamour by both Democrat and Republican leaders, and the corporate media, for a boycott of next year's Beijing Winter Olympic Games. This is being accompanied by incendiary and unsubstantiated accusations of Chinese "genocide" of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province. Blinken himself has endorsed those lies, as did Pompeo, his predecessor.

Biden's TV interview reference to Xi's supposedly matching confrontational "signals" is another misleading bid to justify bellicosity toward China.

So far, Beijing's response to Biden has veered between appeals for collaboration and nationalist, militaristic responses. On Monday the Chinese state news agency Xinhua published a commentary that said "candid and constructive" dialogue was needed to better understand each side's strategic intentions and rebuild trust.

On February 5, another government media outlet, the *Global Times*, welcomed a recent Chinese ballistic missile test as a "brilliant" reaction to Admiral Charles Richard, head of US Strategic Command, who published an article last week saying the US has sought new ways to deter China and Russia, including the "real possibility" of a nuclear war.

Such statements and counter-statements highlight the real danger of the reckless US offensive triggering a catastrophic nuclear conflagration.

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