

# A US ambassador visits Taiwan for first time since 1979

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31 March 2021

The US ambassador to Palau, John Hennessey-Niland, visited Taiwan on Sunday, becoming the first ambassador to visit the island since Washington cut formal diplomatic ties with Taipei in 1979. Hennessey-Niland is traveling with Palau's President Surangel Whipps, who leads one of only 15 countries that diplomatically recognize Taiwan rather than Beijing.

Whipps is ostensibly on a five-day trip to Taiwan to launch a new Taiwan-Palau "travel bubble," which will allow people to take trips between the two, with reduced COVID-19 restrictions. However, Hennessey-Niland's presence is a deliberate breach of long-standing diplomatic protocols, limiting contact between the US and Taiwan, and is aimed at further stoking tensions with Beijing. As part of establishing diplomatic ties with China in 1979, the US recognized the One China policy: that Beijing was the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), which serves as Washington's de facto embassy on the island, released a statement on the trip Tuesday, claiming, "The United States, Taiwan, and Palau share a strong commitment to democracy, to a free and open Indo-Pacific, and to advancing the peace and prosperity of the region." While not addressing Beijing by name, Washington regularly alleges that China is a threat to the "free and open Indo-Pacific."

While a small island nation in Micronesia, Palau is a major part of Washington's war plans against China. In 2017, the US Defense Department called Palau "indispensable to our national security." Currently, the US has exclusive rights under its 1982 Compact of Free Association with Palau to use the island nation, which is strategically located near the Philippines and Indonesia, as a military base. Last year, Palau requested that the US build bases, which would allow the US to

permanently station its military there.

The visit is another in a string of provocations aimed at Beijing, as the Biden administration continues and deepens the dangerous, pro-war policies of his predecessor, Donald Trump. In the final day of the Trump administration, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo ended all restrictions on contact between US and Taiwanese officials, both military and civilian. The Biden administration is following suit, preparing guidelines that would encourage US officials to meet with their Taiwanese counterparts. This would essentially cause most restrictions on such meetings to "disappear," in the words of an official to the *Financial Times*.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian denounced Hennessey-Niland's visit, saying on Monday, "The one-China principle is the political foundation of China-US relations. China is firmly opposed to any form of official exchanges between the US and the island of Taiwan. This position is consistent and clear... We urge the US not to try to breach China's bottom line, to avoid serious damage to China—US relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits."

Beijing also responded by dispatching 10 warplanes on Monday, through Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) to the southwest of the island. These maneuvers are often presented in the establishment media as violations of Taiwanese airspace, but ADIZs are declared unilaterally and have no standing in international law. As such, Beijing's flights have been through international airspace.

The hypocrisy is evident. Washington has already sent warships through the Taiwan Strait—thousands of kilometres from the American mainland—on three separate occasions since Biden took office, claiming the

voyages were “in accordance with international law.” Beijing, however, is accused of being aggressive and menacing, when passing through airspace close to the Chinese mainland, and moreover of territory recognized by Washington as being part of China.

The US is playing a dangerous and reckless game. Under Trump and now Biden, the US is deliberately inflaming the most explosive flashpoint for war with China. While a slew of articles in the American press warn of the dangers of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, it is the US that is deliberately undermining the “One China” policy, and establishing closer ties with Taiwan, which constitute a strategic threat to Beijing.

The *New York Times* wrote last August, citing unnamed officials in Washington: “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.”

The Biden administration is continuing the policy. In addition to the provocations already mentioned, the US is now engaged in a further militarization of the region, including plans to dispatch missiles to Taiwan over the next six years. Doing so could lead to the outbreak of war; Beijing will not allow Taiwan to be turned into a platform for military aggression against the mainland, less than 200 kilometres away across the Taiwan Strait.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken went so far as to refer to Taiwan as a “country” on March 10, calling the island, “a country that can contribute to the world, not just its own people. COVID is a very good example of that.” Beijing has made clear that if Taipei ever declares independence in violation of the “One China” policy, it would use military force to reunite with Taiwan. Blinken’s remarks cannot be excused as a slip of the tongue.

The US ultimately bears responsibility for the destabilization of the region. After World War II, the Republic of China, the formal name of Taiwan today, regained control of the island, which had been a Japanese colony since 1895. After the 1949 Chinese revolution, the defeated Kuomintang fled to Taiwan where it was protected by the US Navy. It was then allowed to posture as the legitimate government of all of China, including sitting as a permanent member with veto powers on the UN Security Council.

During the latter half of the 20th century, the US launched devastating wars against countries in Asia, including North Korea and Vietnam, while threatening China with nuclear annihilation. Washington made a tactical decision to formally recognize Beijing in 1979, aimed at undercutting the Soviet Union, while at the same time continuing to supply Taipei with weaponry and unofficial political support.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Washington has carried out a series of regime change operations from the Balkans to Iraq, Libya and Ukraine, that have left entire societies in ruin. Within this context, as part of the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” Washington began inflaming regional territorial disputes in the East and South China Sea to bring pressure on Beijing.

For all the talk of democracy and human rights, Washington’s fundamental aim is to offset its economic decline, deflect domestic tensions outwards, and prevent China from overtaking it as the leading economic power in the world. In doing so, US imperialism is recklessly engaged in the drive to a war that threatens the annihilation of the entire planet.



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