

Taiwanese president rejects China's calls for reunification

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Tensions across the volatile Taiwan Strait intensified last weekend after Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen used her National Day speech on Sunday to flatly reject calls by Chinese President Xi Jinping for a peaceful reunification of the island with China.

Tsai declared “there should be absolutely no illusions that the Taiwanese people will bow to pressure [from China].” She said that Taiwan would “continue to bolster our national defence and demonstrate our determination to defend ourselves,” adding that “nobody can force Taiwan to take the path China has laid out for us.”

The militaristic warning to China was reinforced by a rare display of weaponry as part of the National Day parade that included tanks and missile systems mounted on trucks. As Tsai reviewed the procession, fighter jets and helicopters conducted a fly past overhead.

Tsai declared that China’s “one nation, two systems” proposal, whereby Taiwan would be incorporated in China but retain its own economic and social order, “offers neither a free and democratic way of life for Taiwan, nor sovereignty for our 23 million people.”

Tsai and her pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) are opposed to any integration with mainland China, but have stopped short of declaring formal independence. Tsai, who has refused to accept that the island is part of China, has seized upon Beijing’s anti-democratic measures in Hong Kong to reject China’s overtures.

The very fact that Taiwan and China hold the same National Day, marking the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in the 1911 revolution that established the Chinese republic under Sun Yat-sen, points to the artificial character of the separation of Taiwan from the Chinese mainland.

In the wake of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

seizure of power in 1949 Chinese Revolution, the defeated Kuomintang (KMT) led by Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan and, with the protection of the US Navy, established a brutal military dictatorship. For decades, the KMT in Taipei, supported by Washington, claimed to be the legitimate government in exile of all China, even occupying China’s seat in the UN Security Council.

That abruptly changed in 1972 when US President Richard Nixon visited China, met its leader Mao Zedong and forged a de-facto alliance against the Soviet Union. The trip which resulted in the joint Shanghai Communique paved the way for the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the US and China in 1979.

Central to the lengthy negotiations over diplomatic ties was the status of Taiwan, which China insisted was part of its territory. The US recognised the “One China policy” in the Shanghai Communique and effectively acknowledged that Beijing was the legitimate government of all China including Taiwan when it ended diplomatic ties and its military alliance with Taipei in 1979.

In her speech, Tsai declared that the cross-strait situation was “more complex and fluid than at any other point in the past 72 years.” However, the chief responsibility for these dangerous tensions lies with Washington and Taipei.

The Biden administration, following on from Trump, is rapidly undermining the 40-year status quo in relation to Taiwan as part of its intensifying confrontation and military build-up against China. Biden has given the go-ahead for high-level consultations with Taiwanese officials and has declared that the US is “rock solid” in its support for Taiwan against China. At the same time, the US has stepped up

military sales to Taiwan, as well as the provocative dispatch of US warships through the Taiwan Strait between the island and the Chinese mainland.

In a flagrant breach of previous protocols, the US has sent special forces troops to Taiwan to train Taiwanese military forces—the first US military presence on the island since all American forces were withdrawn in 1979. The deployment of US military trainers on Taiwan was leaked via the *Wall Street Journal* last week in a move calculated to further escalate tensions with China.

Washington's backing has only encouraged Tsai and the DPP to make their opposition to any reunification with China more overt. While China called for negotiations and peaceful reunification, it has repeatedly declared that it will respond to any formal declaration of independence by Taipei with the use of force. The fear in Beijing is that the US will integrate Taiwan, strategically located just 160 kilometres off the Chinese mainland at its closest point, into war plans against Beijing.

In his National Day speech, Chinese President Xi warned against Taiwanese independence and called for cross-strait reunification as part of China's "national rejuvenation," reflecting his "dream" of transforming the country into a major international power. In a thinly-veiled threat, he declared: "It has never ended well for those who forget their ancestors, betray the motherland, or split the country."

In response to US backing for Taipei, the Chinese military has stepped up its activity near Taiwan, with an increased number of flights by military aircraft into Taiwan's self-declared Air Defence Identification Zone which extends into the middle of the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, two US aircraft carrier strike groups have engaged in drills with British, Japanese, New Zealand and Dutch warships in waters near Taiwan.

The Biden administration's claims to be standing up for "democratic" Taiwan are utterly hypocritical. The US backed the KMT dictatorship for decades as it used police state measures to violently suppress opposition to its rule. The KMT only allowed more open elections in response to a widening protest movement and workers' strikes in the late 1980s, with the first direct presidential election only taking place in 1996.

US imperialism is once again exploiting "human rights" to hide its predatory intentions. Having waged

decades of criminal wars and occupations in the Middle East and Central Asia to shore up its strategic position, the US has increasingly targeted China over the past decade as the chief threat to its global dominance.

Under Obama, Trump and now Biden, the US has engaged in an aggressive campaign to undermine China diplomatically, economically and strategically in a bid to subordinate it to American interests. Washington is determined to prevent its eclipse by China, now the second largest economy in the world, by any means, including military.

The rapidity with which Taiwan, arguably the most explosive flashpoint in Asia, has become central to US-China tensions is a sharp warning of the dangers of war between the world's two largest economies, both armed with nuclear weapons.



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