

Top US general reduces time frame for war with China to two years

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Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum this week, the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley targeted China as the No 1. security threat to the United States and narrowed the time frame for a potential war over Taiwan to two years.

Milley's remarks clearly reflect the discussion taking place in the top military, intelligence and political echelons in Washington. Over the past decade, Obama, Trump and now Biden have successively raised the stakes in an increasingly reckless confrontation with China, aimed at preventing it from threatening American global hegemony.

Speaking of China, Milley complained: "They want to challenge the so-called liberal, rules-based order that went into effect in 1945 at the end of World War II. They want to revise it." But the catchphrase—the international rules-based order—refers to the post-war international framework established by the US, in which it set the rules to suit its economic and strategic interests.

What concerns Milley is that China, by virtue of the sheer size of its economy and need for energy, raw material and parts, is coming into conflict with the world dominated by the US and its allies. Moreover, in order to compete economically, China is compelled to seek to advance hi-tech industries that both Trump and Biden have sought to block.

Milley focused attention on US tensions with China over Taiwan, which were intensified by Trump and have rapidly come to the fore under Biden. In March, the outgoing head of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Phil Davidson, warned of the potential for war with China within six years.

Milley said he did not expect Chinese military action over Taiwan in the next two years, which only suggests that the US military is preparing for war within a short

time frame. He added: "Having said that, though, the Chinese are clearly and unambiguously building the capability to provide those options to the national leadership if they so choose at some point in the future."

"We are witnessing one of the largest shifts in global geostrategic power that the world has witnessed," Milley said. In a statement that foreshadows a vast acceleration of the US arms race with China, he declared: "If we, the United States military, don't do a fundamental change ourselves in the coming 10 to 20 years, we're going to be on the wrong side of a conflict."

While Milley highlighted China's test of a new nuclear-capable hypersonic missile, the latest annual Pentagon report on China suggested that it would have 1,000 nuclear warheads by the end of the decade and more advanced delivery systems. All this feeds the Pentagon's argument for large increases to a defence budget that is already of record size, even though the US nuclear arsenal of 5,550 warheads dwarfs that of China—both now and in its projected future size.

The rapidity with which Taiwan has emerged as the most dangerous flashpoint for a US war with China underscores its strategic and economic importance. Militarily, it is a vital part of the first island chain, stretching through Japan to Taiwan and the Philippines, that US strategists regard as the means to hem in the Chinese navy, mount an economic blockade and serve as the frontline of any war. Economically, Taiwan is home to the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company that produces virtually all the world's most advanced computer chips, which have both economic and military applications.

While the US media and political establishment repeatedly speak of "Chinese aggression" toward

Taiwan, Washington is undermining the precarious status quo across the Taiwan Strait. The Biden administration nominally adheres to the “One China” policy that is the basis of US-China diplomatic relations, established in 1979 when the US broke diplomatic ties with Taipei. Washington in effect recognised Beijing as the legitimate government of China, including Taiwan.

At the same time, the US Congress passed the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act that committed the United States to sell defensive arms to Taiwan and maintain limited informal relations with Taipei. Since then, US actions have been governed by what is known as “strategic ambiguity”—that is, Washington would not give an unambiguous commitment to Taiwan to support it in a military conflict with China. The aim was to deter Taipei from declaring formal independence from China, to which Beijing has repeatedly warned it would respond with force.

Also speaking at the Aspen event, leading Democrat Adam Schiff, chairman of the House intelligence committee, joined the growing clamour in ruling circles for “strategic ambiguity” to be dropped. The US and its allies needed “to make it abundantly clear to China what a significant cost it would pay were it to use force to try to invade and take over Taiwan,” he said.

In a thinly-disguised evasion, Schiff declared: “I think probably less ambiguity is better than more ambiguity.” But, he added, there was a “fine line,” as “we don’t want to make any pronouncement that will accelerate Chinese thinking or timetable in terms of using military force against Taiwan.”

In reality, “less ambiguity” upsets the delicate diplomatic balancing act that has underpinned US-China relations for four decades. It means no ambiguity, or “strategic clarity,” to use a current catchphrase. That is, an unconditional commitment to back Taiwan in a war against China. The US has already begun to transform Taiwan into a military platform by dispatching US Special Forces to the island to train Taiwanese troops for the first time since American forces were withdrawn in 1979.

The Biden administration has already taken a large step toward ditching the policy of “strategic ambiguity” in favour of providing “rock solid” backing for Taiwan. During a town hall meeting last month, asked if the US would come to Taiwan’s defence if China attacked,

Biden declared: “Yes we have a commitment to do that.” While the White House sought to “clarify” that there had been no change in policy, the charade of “strategic ambiguity” is increasingly being dropped.

The US is also marshalling its military allies and strategic partners to support Taiwan. A delegation of European Union parliamentarians arrived in Taiwan on Wednesday for top-level discussions. Delegation leader Raphaël Glucksmann told Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen that they came with a simple message: “You are not alone. Europe is standing with you, by you, in the defence of freedom, rule of law.”

None of this is going unnoticed in Beijing. However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has no progressive response to the rising danger of war. On the one hand, it seeks to end the confrontation by cutting a new deal with US imperialism, while, on the other, engaging in a futile arms race that can only end in disaster.

In an editorial last week, the hawkish *Global Times* absurdly suggested that Beijing was in the box seat because it was not in the interests of Taiwan and the US to “trigger a war across the Taiwan straits.” The editorial boasted: “The ultimate decision of whether to wage a cross-straits war, what the scale of the war will be, and how and when to fight is in our hands.”

On the contrary, by deliberately undermining the diplomatic protocols that have kept an uneasy peace in the Taiwan Strait, the Biden administration is goading China to make the first move. US imperialism is determined to subordinate China to its interests using all available means, including war.

The only means for halting the drive to war between the two nuclear-armed powers is the intervention of the international working class through the building of a unified anti-war movement directed at abolishing the capitalist system—the root cause of geo-strategic conflict.



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