

Biden dispatches military-national security delegation to Taiwan

Peter Symonds
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Even as the US conflict with Russia over the Ukraine intensifies, the Biden administration has deliberately stoked tensions with China by sending a delegation of former top-level US military and national security officials to Taiwan.

The timing of the trip underscores its provocative character. It coincides with the passage of 50 years since former President Richard Nixon travelled to China and met with Chinese leader Mao Zedong in 1972, laying the basis for the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Half a century on, the US is engaged in a dangerous confrontation with China.

When Washington subsequently established formal diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1978, it cut diplomatic relations with Taipei, removed all military forces from the island and downgraded contact with Taiwanese officials. De facto, the US recognised the “One China” policy that Beijing is the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

Biden, following on from Trump, has systematically undermined these longstanding diplomatic protocols and strengthened relations with Taipei. In the final days of the Trump administration, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo ended all restrictions on official contact between Washington and Taipei—an abrupt diplomatic shift that Biden has upheld with minor changes.

Last year, a leak to the media revealed for the first time that the US military had Special Forces trainers on Taiwan—a fact that was confirmed by Taiwanese officials.

While the current delegation stopped short of including serving US generals and officials, its make-up is an open declaration that the US will bolster its military ties with Taiwan—an island that it acknowledges is part of China. Last year, Biden

dispatched a US delegation to Taiwan led by former Senator Chris Dodd, but it included former State Department officials, not retired military and national security personnel.

Included in the delegation that landed in Taipei yesterday is the former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Michael Mullen, who served between 2007 and 2011 under presidents Bush and Obama.

Others are Meghan O’Sullivan, deputy national security adviser for Iraq and Afghanistan under Bush; Michèle Flournoy, undersecretary of defence under Obama; and Mike Green and Evan Medeiros, who were both senior directors for Asia on the US National Security Council.

While the delegation is described as “unofficial,” the Biden administration authorised and organised the trip, which will undoubtedly involve discussions not just of a general character but more specific military arrangements.

As the ex-Pentagon chief, Mullen remains highly connected to the entire US military and national security apparatus, as are all the members of the delegation. Talks have been scheduled with top-level Taiwanese officials, including President Tsai Ing-wen and Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng.

Speaking at an online forum on Monday, White House Indo-Pacific policy coordinator Kurt Campbell declared that the trip would underscore US support for “peace and stability” in the region. In fact, by undermining the basis for its diplomatic relations with China, which hinged on the “One China” policy, the US is doing precisely the opposite.

For the past decade, the US has ramped up its confrontation with China, not just over Taiwan, but on every front. Biden and Campbell were part of the Obama administration that launched the “pivot to

Asia,” involving a military build-up and strengthening of alliances throughout the Indo-Pacific and efforts to undermine China economically and diplomatically. The anti-China offensive has accelerated under Trump and Biden.

In his comments on Monday, Campbell issued a thinly-veiled threat that the US was prepared for war against both Russia and China. After noting that the US had historically had to sustain wars on two fronts, he declared: “I believe that we’re entering a period where that is what will be demanded of the United States and this generation of Americans.”

The delegation’s visit to Taiwan coincided with a US military show of force. On Saturday, the guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson passed through the narrow strait between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan. A Chinese military spokesperson branded this as “a provocative act.” The Biden administration has stepped up the frequency of US warships transiting the Taiwan Strait to roughly monthly.

Washington hypocritically accuses Beijing of “expansionism” and planning to forcibly reunify Taiwan with the mainland. The US points in particular to the flights of Chinese military aircraft through Taiwan’s extensive Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). Yet the US asserts the “right” to routinely sail its warships and fly its warplanes close to the Chinese mainland, thousands of kilometres from the nearest American territory.

Speaking on Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin condemned the presence of the US delegation on Taiwan. “The will of the Chinese people to defend our country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is immovable. Whoever United States sends to show support for Taiwan is bound to fail,” he said.

As the US delegation leaves today, former US Secretary of State Pompeo is due to arrive for a separate four-day visit, nominally as a private citizen. He is accompanied by Miles Yu, who acted as the main China policy planner and strategist for the Trump administration. Yu and Pompeo were instrumental in engineering Trump’s strident anti-China strategy, which combined economic warfare with the inflaming of tensions over Taiwan and other regional flashpoints.

Biden, who has declared that his administration’s support for Taiwan is “rock solid,” has taken over

where Trump left off, greatly heightening the danger that the conflict between NATO and Russia over the Ukraine will spread to the Indo-Pacific.



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