

US carrier group heads toward Taiwan as Pelosi flies to Asia

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The American aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its strike group, including a guided missile destroyer and cruiser, set out from Singapore on Monday heading toward the South China Sea and Taiwan.

This deployment, clearly linked to the planned highly provocative visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, greatly heightens US military and political tensions with China, which threaten to trigger a potentially catastrophic nuclear war.

“It is clear from this for everyone to see who is the biggest threat to the South China Sea and the Asian region’s peace and stability,” Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a briefing on Thursday.

Despite warnings from Beijing, including by President Xi Jinping, and public statements of reservation by the White House, Pelosi and other congressional representatives began an East Asian tour yesterday, deliberately leaving open the option of landing in Taiwan.

According to the itinerary of Pelosi’s Asia mission, as reported by US media outlets, it includes Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore, all seen as US allies against China, with Taiwan listed as “tentative.”

To fuel speculation, Pelosi has refused to answer reporters’ inquiries about her Taiwan plans, saying on Wednesday: “I never talk about my travel. It’s a danger to me.” That remark literally accuses China of being prepared to attack her mission.

Regardless of White House claims that it has no jurisdiction over Pelosi’s decision to fly to Taiwan in a military aircraft, the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, declared this week that America’s armed forces were ready to intervene against any Chinese response.

“We will do what is necessary to ensure a safe, safe conduct of their visit. And I’ll just leave it at that,” Milley told reporters at the end of the 24th Indo-Pacific Chiefs of Defense Conference held in Sydney for two days this week.

With reckless disregard for the danger of provoking a military conflict, Milley added: “So what that results in,

we’ll have to wait and see.”

The Associated Press reported on Wednesday that Pentagon officials had said such US military engagement would include aircraft carriers, fighter jets and “surveillance assets” to protect Pelosi on her flights to and out of Taiwan as well as on the ground.

Whether or not the Pelosi visit to Taiwan goes ahead, such incendiary comments fuel tensions by declaring US intent to take military action against China in or around the island, which China regards as a breakaway province, and which lies just 160 kilometres (100 miles) off the mainland.

Xi has tersely opposed a visit by Pelosi, the second in line to the US presidency, to the island, which would be a further violation of the One China policy, by which the US has not recognised Taiwan as a country since 1979.

During a reported two-hour phone call with US President Joe Biden on Thursday, China’s state news agency reported that Xi told Biden: “Public opinion shall not be violated, and if you play with fire you get burned. I hope the US side can see this clearly.”

The brief White House readout of the call pointedly made no mention of the escalating confrontation. It said Biden had told Xi that US policy on Taiwan had not changed, and Washington “strongly opposed” unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

In reality, successive US administrations, from Obama and Trump to Biden, have deliberately undermined the One China policy, including by sending troops, increasing arms sales and dispatching officials and delegations to Taiwan. The Biden administration has approved four large arms sales to Taiwan, and a fifth, worth \$108 million, is scheduled for imminent congressional approval.

Pelosi would be the first sitting US House speaker to visit Taiwan since the far-right Republican Newt Gingrich went there in 1997. This threatened trip occurs under much more inflammatory conditions, as part of escalating moves by Washington to repudiate the One China policy.

In Sydney, in a transparent bid to blame any clash on

Beijing, and thus justify a war, Milley said he had ordered a study of China's actions in the South China Sea and other areas of the Pacific region, which found a significant increase in "aggressive" actions. Asked for details, Milley said the report was classified—thus hidden from public scrutiny. Nevertheless, he insisted that China's activity "seems to imply that they want to bully or dominate" other nations.

Speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, senior Pentagon official Ely Ratner echoed Milley's characterisation of China's "irresponsible behavior" and said it was "only a matter of time" before China caused a "major" incident.

Those comments present a conflict with China as inevitable. They follow three public statements by Biden since taking office that the US would go to war to defend Taiwan if it were purportedly attacked by China. Biden's comments overturn the longstanding US policy of "strategic ambiguity." Not committing the US to defend Taiwan under all circumstances was aimed at blocking a provocative declaration of Taiwanese independence and conflict with China.

Pelosi's plans are proceeding despite warnings issued by Chinese defence officials. "If the US insists on taking its own course, the Chinese military will never sit idly by, and it will definitely take strong actions to thwart any external force's interference," Senior Colonel Tan Kefei, a Chinese Ministry of Defense spokesperson, said.

To send an aircraft carrier group through the narrow Taiwan Strait between the island and the mainland would itself be provocative. In 1995, President Bill Clinton sent the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier into the strait after China conducted missile tests near Taiwanese-claimed territory.

The USS Kitty Hawk appears to be the last US carrier to have transited the strait, in 2007, but other US warships have done so on a monthly basis. The USS Benfold transited the Taiwan Strait on July 19, after sailing near the disputed Spratly Islands on July 16 and the Paracel Islands on July 13.

Liu Pengyu, spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the US, has underlined Beijing's concerns over Pelosi's trip. "On the Taiwan question, we have made our stance loud and clear," Liu said. "The embassy is making all our efforts to prevent the peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and the stability of China-US relations being damaged by the potential visit of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan."

Other Chinese figures, particularly those associated with the *Global Times*, a hawkish state-run outlet, have warned of military reactions. Hu Xijin, former chief editor of the *Global Times*, called Pelosi's planned visit an "invasion."

China long warned that it would forcibly reunify Taiwan

with the mainland if the island declared independence, which Washington's actions are now encouraging. Last month, Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe told US officials at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore: "If anyone dares to secede Taiwan from China, we will not hesitate to fight, and we will fight at all costs."

Under these conditions, both Democrats and Republicans in the US Congress, as well as the American corporate media, have urged Pelosi to travel to Taiwan. These figures include prominent ex-generals and members of Donald Trump's fascist Republican leadership.

The Democratic chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Adam Smith, declared: "I don't think we should let China dictate something like this. Nancy Pelosi is the speaker of the House, she's the most powerful person in the country. If she wants to go visit Taiwan, she ought to be able to do that."

The US is recklessly provoking conflict with Beijing both because it regards China as the chief threat to its global hegemony and as a means channelling working class discontent amid a profound economic and social crisis at home against a supposed foreign enemy.

US military planners regard Taiwan as a key strategic platform for an assault on China. It is also a key economic asset, producing an estimated 92 percent of the world's advanced semiconductor chips.

Just as Washington for years built up the Ukrainian military as a bastion against Russia with the aim of provoking the current disastrous war, the US is strengthening the Taiwanese military and seeking to goad China into military action in a bid to weaken and destabilise its rival.



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