

Military and political tensions escalate over threatened Pelosi visit to Taiwan

Mike Head
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The continuing provocative threats of a visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a military aircraft to Taiwan, which China regards as part of the mainland, have stoked already acute global tensions, as well as a political and military crisis in Washington.

Pelosi, who has already embarked on her East Asian mission with a six-person delegation of Democrat congressional leaders, has deliberately refused to rule out landing in Taiwan, despite warnings from Beijing that any such trip will be resisted.

Whether or not Pelosi's visit goes ahead, it has already served to bring the US confrontation with China, which Washington has designated a threat to its Asia-Pacific and global hegemony, closer to a potentially disastrous nuclear war.

An official statement issued by Pelosi on Sunday after a stopover in Hawaii indicated high-level discussions with military chiefs from the US Indo-Pacific Command about flying into Taiwan accompanied by US fighter jets.

Pelosi said her mission would focus on "mutual security, economic partnership and democratic governance," and take in Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan. There was no mention of Taiwan, in keeping with the secrecy surrounding the trip.

She continued: "After a fuel stop in Hawaii, we were honored with a briefing from USINDOPACOM Leadership, as well as a visit to the Pearl Harbor Memorial." The Indo-Pacific Command would be directly involved in any operation to escort Pelosi's delegation into and out of Taiwan.

Pelosi has refused to make public any information about the timing of her itinerary, saying that would be a threat to her safety—insinuating that China would endanger her. Today and tomorrow she is in Singapore, according to local media reports.

The *Wall Street Journal*, which is agitating for the trip to proceed, reported on the weekend: "Logistical

preparations were under way for a Taiwan stop in case a decision to go there was finalised, people familiar with the matter said."

Adding to the baiting of China, the American nuclear-powered and armed aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its strike group, including a guided missile destroyer and cruiser, is now in the South China Sea, within striking distance of Taiwan.

Because of the obvious danger of a military clash, with unknown consequences, divisions have evidently erupted in the Biden administration and the Pentagon over sending Pelosi into Taiwan.

This crisis is likely being exacerbated by the fact that US President Joe Biden, aged 79, has suffered his second COVID infection within days, after trying to dismiss the initial illness as mild.

Last Wednesday, Biden told reporters he thought the US military believed a visit by Pelosi to Taiwan was "not a good idea right now." At the same time, the White House has insisted that it has no jurisdiction over Pelosi's decision to fly to Taiwan, even in a military plane.

The Pentagon has made preparations for the flight to ahead. US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, declared last week that America's armed forces were ready to "do what is necessary to ensure a safe, safe conduct of their visit."

The dangers of a military clash were underscored when the Chinese government announced on state media last Thursday that it was holding live-fire military drills in the Taiwan Strait, about 120 kilometres from the Taiwanese coast. Video footage of the drills was later broadcast on China's main television network, CCTV. At its narrowest the Taiwan Strait is just 130 kilometres wide.

The announcement said the manoeuvres, to be conducted over a 13-hour period on Sunday local time, would be limited in scope and take place off the island of Pingtan in Fujian province. But it said any entry into the

Taiwan Straits waters between Taiwan and the mainland would be prohibited.

China's Maritime Safety Administration said its coast guard would also hold an exercise in the South China Sea off Guangzhou province on Monday. State media further broadcast footage of a Chinese destroyer firing its weapons in the South China Sea, through which the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier group is believed to be sailing.

To add to the tensions, Taiwan's government has been conducting large-scale defence exercises, including air-raid drills in major cities that ordered millions of residents to shelter as sirens wailed.

The island's military simulated an attack on the Su'ao Naval Base, a major military port in northeastern Taiwan. Mirage 2000 and F-16 jets scrambled to intercept war planes invading from the east; helicopters challenged submarines; and guided-missile destroyers fired cannon, missiles and torpedoes.

Last Tuesday, Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, personally inspected the live-fire military exercises. The drills demonstrated "the ability and determination of our military in defending our country," Tsai told troops afterward. The Taipei City government said the purpose of the air raid drills was to teach the public the location of bomb shelters "in the event of war."

Regardless of the clear dangers, including to the 82-year-old Pelosi herself, leading figures in the US Congress and the security apparatus have urged her to go, declaring that Beijing should not be permitted to "dictate" the terms of US engagement with Taiwan.

Republican Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday that "if she doesn't go now, she's handed China sort of a victory of sorts". House minority leader Kevin McCarthy added that he wanted to lead a congressional delegation there if he was elected house speaker.

This war-drum beating is bipartisan. The Democratic chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Adam Smith, declared: "I don't think we should let China dictate something like this.

Writing in *The New York Times*, security insiders Bonnie Glaser and Zack Cooper shed some light on the crisis wracking the White House. They cautioned against triggering a potential war. "A single spark could ignite this combustible situation into a crisis that escalates to military conflict. Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan could provide it," they said.

In a phone call with Biden last week, Chinese President

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

Yesterday's editorial in the *China Daily*, the government's official publication, further warned: "US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's proposed visit to the island, if materialised, will constitute a grave violation of China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and seriously shake the political foundation of the Sino-US relations."

But the Pelosi affair is not an isolated development. Successive US administrations, from Obama and Trump to Biden, have increasingly eviscerated the One China policy, including by sending troops, military aid and delegations to Taiwan.

At present, the Ronald Reagan strike group is headed through the South China Sea, conducting "maritime strike exercises," supposedly on a "routine patrol," stated Commander Hayley Sims, a public affairs officer for the Japan-based US 7th Fleet.

Far from being routine, Secretary of Navy Carlos Del Toro was onboard the aircraft carrier, where he issued a statement accusing unnamed countries of "misrepresenting" US maritime operations, with an "aim to claim the resources of others."

The reality is that Washington is the aggressor, continuing three decades of unending wars to assert global domination. Just as it goaded Russia into a catastrophic invasion of Ukraine by extending NATO to Russia's borders and building up the Ukraine military, the US is transforming Taiwan into a launch pad for war with China.

As well as targeting China, regarded as the chief threat to US power, the Biden administration is responding to a deepening social, economic and political crisis at home by using war as a means of diverting rising working-class struggles to target a supposed foreign enemy.



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