

China military drills following provocative US visit by Taiwanese president

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China has responded to the provocative visit by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen last week to the United States and Central America with a series of military exercises over the past three days. As she was about to return to Taiwan, Tsai held a high-profile meeting and press conference with the US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and other senior lawmakers in California.

The meeting with McCarthy—the second in line of succession to the presidency, after Vice President Kamala Harris—was the highest-level encounter on US soil since Washington formally broke diplomatic relations with Taipei in 1979 and established diplomatic ties with Beijing. At the time, the US de facto adopted the One China policy recognising Beijing as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

Now the Biden administration is in effect tearing up the One China policy that has underpinned US-China relations for four decades, by encouraging high-level diplomatic exchanges, accelerating arms sales to Taiwan and conducting naval provocations in the narrow Taiwan Strait and South China Sea.

Beijing, which regards Taiwan as a renegade province, has made clear it wants to peacefully reintegrate the island but will use force if necessary, in particular, in the event of a formal declaration of independence by Taipei.

When then House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan last August despite Beijing's warnings, the Chinese military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), staged a week of major drills in the airspace and waters surrounding the island. While the latest exercises were not of the same order of magnitude, it was to deliver a message to the Taiwanese government.

“This is a serious warning against the provocations of

‘Taiwan independence’ separatists in collusion with foreign forces, and a necessary action to defend the nation’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the PLA’s Eastern Theatre Command said. President Tsai and her Taiwanese nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) advocate greater independence from Beijing.

The Eastern Theatre Command said it had mobilised various forces to “create an all-round deterrence posture.” These included long-range weapons from the army, destroyers, missile cruisers, fighter jets, bombers, electronic warfare aircraft and long-range missile units. It stated that the units had simulated precision strikes on key targets in Taiwan and surrounding waters.

The Command released a video animation showing missiles being launched from the ground, ships and aircraft that included strikes on targets inside Taiwan. Scores of military aircraft, along with Chinese warships, were mobilised each day to rehearse combat operations, many of which crossed Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone and the Taiwan Strait’s median line—neither of which has any standing in international law.

One of China’s two aircraft carriers, the Shandong, also carried out exercises in international waters to the east of Taiwan and south of Miyako, one of Japan’s southernmost islands. The Eastern Theatre Command released video of fighters taking off from the carrier, the first to be domestically constructed. The Japanese military responded by scrambling its own fighter aircraft.

Even though China’s response was relatively muted, the US continued its provocations, both military and diplomatic. The US Navy’s Seventh Fleet announced on Monday that its guided-missile destroyer Milius had sailed close to the Chinese-controlled islets in the

Spratly Islands in the South China Sea under the pretext of “freedom of navigation.”

For decades, the US virtually ignored territorial rivalries in the South China Sea between China and neighbouring countries in South East Asia. However, beginning with President Obama, then Trump and Biden, the US military has ratcheted up its “freedom of navigation” provocations against China in these contested waters as part of its aggressive confrontation with Beijing.

The PLA’s Southern Theatre Command condemned the operation as “illegal,” saying its naval vessels had “shadowed the ship and kept on alert with naval and air forces all the way.”

At the same time, yet another US delegation arrived in Taipei for high-level discussions with Tsai and other government officials. This visit involved members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee who met with the Taiwanese president on Saturday.

Under Washington’s One China policy, the US deliberately downplayed any contact with Taiwan that was generally at a low level. Under Trump and now Biden, the diplomatic rule book has been torn up to allow for unrestricted visits at all levels, including of military officials.

In a particularly provocative statement, Michael McCaul, the committee chair, pledged support for US training for Taiwan’s military. As the US ended diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1979, it abrogated its military alliance with the island and withdrew all military forces. Now it is increasing the number of US personnel in Taiwan.

McCaul condemned China’s “acts of aggression against your nation,” then added: “I look forward to a great future together, our two nations, one of peace and prosperity. We stand with Taiwan.”

The comments reek of hypocrisy. In its bid to maintain its world dominance, US imperialism has waged wars of aggression continuously for the past three decades in the Middle East, Central Asia, North Africa and the Balkans. Now the US and its NATO allies are recklessly engaging in a proxy war with nuclear-armed Russia, which Washington regards as a prelude to war with China, the chief threat to its global position.

The Biden administration’s modus operandi against

China is similar to that against Russia: to goad Beijing into attacking Taiwan and drag it into a debilitating war to weaken and fragment China. Washington’s claims to be defending Taiwan are just as bogus as its declarations of support for Ukraine. Its overriding strategic aim is the dominance of the Eurasian landmass and its vast natural and human resources.

The only means of halting this inexorable slide towards world war between nuclear armed powers is through the building of a unified antiwar movement of the international working class on the basis of a socialist perspective to put an end to global capitalism and its outmoded division of the world into rival nation-states.



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