

US Secretary of State's visit to China: An exercise in confrontation and bullying

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Far from easing tensions between the two countries, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's trip to China, which concluded last Friday, was aimed at intensifying the confrontation with Beijing by setting out an ever-expanding set of demands. During the three-day visit, he met with President Xi Jinping, Foreign Minister Wang Yi and other top Chinese officials.

At the top of Blinken's list was the demand that Beijing end its sale of so-called dual-use items to Moscow as the US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia has suffered a series of reversals. Washington has acknowledged that China has not sold weapons to Russia but is now insisting that Beijing assist the US and its allies in crippling the Russian economy, particularly its war industries.

Blinken told a press gathering on Friday that he had "reiterated our serious concern about the PRC [China] providing components that are powering Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine." He pointed in particular to China's sale of machine tools, microelectronics and nitrocellulose, declaring that "Russia would struggle to sustain its assault on Ukraine without China's support."

After accusing China of "supporting the greatest threat to European security since the end of the Cold War," Blinken added: "In our discussions today, I made clear that if China does not address this problem, we will." While he did not spell out the details, the Biden administration has made clear that it is considering a new round of punitive sanctions targeting Chinese banks that facilitate trade with Russia.

Blinken's comments stand reality on its head. While Russia's invasion of Ukraine was based on the reactionary interests of the Russian oligarchy, the US deliberately goaded Moscow into reacting by seeking to incorporate Ukraine into its NATO military alliance.

Washington provoked the war with the aim of destabilising and breaking up the Russian Federation in preparation for conflict with China, which US imperialism regards as the chief threat to its global domination.

Even as it is funnelling another \$61 billion in military aid to Ukraine and backing Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, the Biden administration is deliberately heightening tensions with China over Taiwan by undermining the One China policy on which US-China relations have been based since the 1970s. In establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979, the US de facto recognised Beijing as the sole legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. The US cut diplomatic ties with Taipei and withdrew American military personnel.

Under the Trump and now Biden administrations, the US has thrown the process into reverse—ending longstanding protocols limiting official contact, boosting military sales and stationing US troops on Taiwan. As well as providing military aid to Ukraine, the legislation signed into law by Biden last week for the first time provided military aid to Taiwan to the tune of \$8 billion.

While Blinken repeats the mantra that the US upholds the One China policy, Washington is strengthening ties with Taipei and encouraging a formal declaration of independence, knowing full well that China has little choice but to take military action to protect what it regards as its core interests.

Chinese President Xi appealed to Blinken for a defusing of tensions, saying that the two countries "should be partners rather than rivals" and calling for "mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation." Beijing, however, is well aware of the dangers posed by Washington's provocative actions.

Foreign Minister Wang said the US and China could “keep to the right direction of moving forward with stability or return to a downward spiral” and even “slide into confrontation.”

Wang warned that the US should not overstep China’s “red lines.” He told Blinken: “China’s legitimate development rights have been unreasonably suppressed, and our core interests are facing challenges.” By “core interests,” Wang is referring to Taiwan in particular, about which there was no agreement, while the suppression of “legitimate development rights” is a reference to the raft of punitive US trade measures against China.

Even as Washington demands Beijing assist in strangling Russian industries, the US has imposed tariffs on a broad range of Chinese goods, as well as bans on the export of the most advanced computer chips and chip-making equipment to China. The US is deliberately seeking to prevent Chinese hi-tech industries from developing as rivals to their American counterparts and more broadly to undermine the Chinese economy.

Following on from US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen’s visit to China earlier this month, Blinken repeated accusations of “unfair trade” and “dumping” items such as electric vehicles and solar panels onto the US market, allegedly that it is costing “American jobs.” Behind the demand for a supposed level playing field will undoubtedly be a new round of punitive trade measures against China, particularly as Biden is facing re-election this year.

Areas of agreement during Blinken’s visit were minor—China had taken steps to limit the sale of chemical precursors to the dangerous opioid Fentanyl, and to discuss managing Artificial Intelligence, and had restarted military-to-military talks with the US. By contrast, the US continued to stoke major disagreements that only ensure that the “downward spiral” toward war continues.

Blinken again accused China of “dangerous actions in the South China Sea,” particularly against the Philippines over the contested Second Thomas Shoal. As the Philippine administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jnr has turned to Washington, the US has seized the opportunity to expand its military bases in the Philippines and stage provocative joint military exercises in the South China Sea, including near the

Second Thomas Shoal.

Blinken repeated that US support for the Philippines under their military alliance was “ironclad”—meaning that the US would back the Philippines militarily in any conflict with China in the South China Sea.

Blinken also waved the tattered flag of America as the champion of democracy, raising concerns about “human rights” within China, in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet. This is the banner under which US imperialism has waged its illegal wars in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia in which millions have died. The accusation against China is all the more grotesque as the US is backing to the hilt—diplomatically, financially and militarily—Israel’s war of annihilation against Palestinians in Gaza that has already cost more than 30,000 lives.

Blinken’s visit, like that of Yellen earlier this month, was an exercise in confrontation, provocation and threats aimed at bullying China into making concessions even as the US escalates its military preparations to open up a third front in the Indo-Pacific in the emerging global conflict underway in Europe and the Middle East.



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