

Washington continues to ramp up tensions with Beijing over Taiwan

By Ben McGrath
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Tensions are continuing to escalate between Beijing and Taipei, stoked by the United States' provocative maneuvers in the region. Beijing has responded by sending dozens of fighter jets and bombers on multiple flights near Taiwan this month, with some travelling beyond the median line separating the mainland from the island. The crossing of this unofficial border demonstrates the growing potential for an armed conflict, even unintentional, to break out.

On September 22, Taipei accused two Chinese Shaanxi Y-8 anti-submarine aircraft of entering Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) for the fifth time since September 17. Taipei also denounced Beijing for allegedly sending two H-6 bombers and sixteen fighters across the Taiwan Strait's median line on September 18. On September 9 and 10, China reportedly held drills with nearly two dozen aircraft and seven naval vessels inside Taiwan's ADIZ, between the island and the Pratas (or Dongsha) Islands, claimed by Taipei.

It is important to note that governments declare ADIZs unilaterally. They are not legally enforceable by treaties. Beijing's flights and naval drills have therefore taken place in international airspace and waters. The US has made violating territory claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea a regular practice, on top of military exercises in the region, claiming "freedom of navigation." No such allowance is made for Beijing, however, even when its operations are in international spaces.

On September 21, responding to complaints from Taipei, Beijing's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Wenbin stated that "Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory; there is no so-called median line of the strait." This followed a statement by China's defense ministry on September 18: "Recently the US

and the Democratic Progressive Party (Taiwan's ruling party) have stepped up collaboration and frequently stirred up trouble. Those who play with fire will get burned."

Until 2019, Beijing and Taipei recognized the median line. Outside of an unintentional incident in 2011, Beijing had not crossed the boundary in two decades. This change is due to Washington's moves to dangerously challenge the status quo over Taiwan.

Beijing's recent military exercises were timed to coincide with the visit of Keith Krach, the US Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment. Krach arrived in Taiwan on September 17, ostensibly to attend the memorial service of former Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui, who passed away on July 30.

Krach is the highest ranking US government official to visit Taiwan since 1979 when Washington ended formal relations with Taipei and recognized Beijing. His visit follows that of US Health Secretary Alex Azar in August, who was previously the highest ranking US official to visit the island in the past four decades. These visits are not coincidental, but are part of a calculated campaign to deepen Washington's ties with Taipei. This agenda includes the bipartisan passage of the 2018 Taiwan Travel Act authorizing high-level US officials to visit Taiwan.

Krach met with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who called the visit a "milestone for a deepened Taiwan-US relationship." Krach also spoke with Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu and held a closed-door meeting with Economic Minister Wang Mei-hua and other officials.

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated after the undersecretary's departure on Saturday, "Krach fully utilized his time of less than 48 hours in Taiwan. He

met with high-level government officials and people from various sectors and held discussions with them on many issues.”

The administration of President Donald Trump is also planning to sell an additional \$7 billion worth of military equipment to Taiwan, Reuters reported on September 16. It would be the second largest military package to Taiwan following the \$8 billion package last year. The new spend is in addition to the nearly \$15 billion worth of weaponry already sold by the Trump administration to the island.

The package includes seven major weapon systems, from cruise missiles, to sea mines and drones. A US official claimed that Taiwan’s military build-up was necessary, while implying more sales could be coming in the future: “There is no equilibrium today [between mainland China and Taiwan]. It is out of balance. And I think that is dangerous.”

Washington is not concerned about defending so-called Taiwanese democracy, but in deflecting internal pressures outwards by scapegoating Beijing for the US economic and social crisis. While blaming China for the COVID-19 pandemic with no evidence whatsoever, Washington is utilizing phony human rights’ concerns over Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and most recently, Tibet.

A September 22 report authored by anti-communist researcher Adrian Zenz, an analyst at the US-based Jamestown Foundation, accused Beijing of forcing 500,000 Tibetans into labor programs throughout the first seven months of this year, with plans to send them to factories throughout China. Zenz has previously published similar reports on Xinjiang, all with very little evidence for their sensational claims.

These denunciations of China are highly selective and hypocritical. Washington has promoted violence against peaceful protesters in the US; attacked journalists exposing US war crimes, most notably Julian Assange, and forced immigrants to the US into jails and concentration camps. In the 20th century, Washington dropped atomic bombs on Japan, stoked barbaric wars in Korea and Vietnam, and backed police states throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

This included support for Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), who fled to Taiwan in 1949 after being defeated in the Chinese Civil War. Washington refused to acknowledge the Chinese

Communist Party government in Beijing and allowed the dictatorial Kuomintang regime in Taipei to take China’s seat on the United Nations’ Security Council.

In the 1970s under President Richard Nixon, Washington made a tactical shift, recognizing Beijing in an effort to further undermine the Soviet Union. The US established formal ties with Beijing in 1979 and ended official diplomatic relations with Taipei, a de facto acceptance of the “One China” policy, under which the CCP regime is the acknowledged government of China.

However, in a bid to prevent China from challenging its economic and geo-political hegemony, and in an attempt to divert mounting domestic social tensions, Washington is fanning the flames of war. In August, the US announced that it was making “significant” adjustments to its Taiwan policy and would not be bound by the de facto interpretation of the “One China” policy that has governed relations over Taiwan since 1979.

Beijing has previously made clear that any declaration of Taiwanese independence would trigger a military response. In pursuing its Taiwan policy, Washington is dangerously testing just how far it can push up against Beijing’s red line.

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