

Will China Mess with US Warships Headed for Taiwan Strait?

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The US has thrown down the gauntlet. A showdown may come “in the coming weeks,” if sanity does not prevail.

White House and Pentagon spokesmen keep insisting, [as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl did on Aug. 14](#):

“What’s important for us right now is to make sure that Beijing understands that our forces in the region will continue to operate, to fly, to sail wherever international waters allows. That includes the Taiwan Strait.

“I think you should expect that we will continue to do Taiwan Strait transits, as we have in the past, in the coming weeks. ...”

What About President Biden?

Not to worry. To the degree it matters, he seems relaxed. On Aug. 8, after China announced new post-Pelosi-visit military drills in the seas and airspace around Taiwan, [Biden expressed mild concern](#) about China’s deployments, but spoke reassuringly to reporters:

“I’m concerned they (the Chinese) are moving as much as they are,” but I don’t think they’re going to do anything more than they are.”

Is Biden Listening to His Own PR People, and ...

Here is White House Strategic Communications Director [John Kirby at a briefing on August 1](#):

“... Nothing has changed - nothing has changed – about our One China policy ... Put simply, there is no reason for Beijing to turn a potential visit [by Pelosi] ... into some sort of crisis or conflict, or use it as a pretext to increase aggressive military activity in or around the Taiwan Strait. [Emphasis added.]

“And yet, over the weekend, even before Speaker Pelosi arrived in the region, China conducted a live-fire exercise. China appears to be positioning itself to potentially take further steps in the coming days and perhaps over longer time horizons.

“Now, these potential steps ... could also include actions in the diplomatic and economic space, such as further **spurious legal claims like Beijing’s public assertions last month that the Taiwan Strait is not an international waterway.** [Emphasis added.]

“Some of these actions would continue concerning trendlines ... but some could be of a different scope and scale.”

... and is Kirby Listening to the Bobbsey Twins?

Kirby’s boss, whiz-kid national security adviser Jake Sullivan and his elder (but equally innocent twin) Antony Blinken have served Biden poorly. In the fine schools they attended, they seem to have concentrated on courses on US Exceptionalism, skipping over what [John Mearsheimer calls](#) “Balance of Power Politics 101.”

On the key question of Sino-Russian relations, they seem to have been operating out of textbooks a half-century old when they told President Biden that China was “squeezing” Russia – the exact opposite of what has been happening for several decades now. Worse still, they seem to have learned close to nothing about what the Soviets used to call the “world correlation of forces.”

In a word, these extremely bright whiz kids have helped drive the Chinese and the Russians into each other’s arms. **That’s what has changed** – plus China’s recent military buildup that makes it a formidable foe.

Not Hard to See This Coming

On May 25, 2021, [when the date of June 16 was announced](#) for the in-person summit between Presidents Biden and Putin, it seemed necessary to warn Biden and his neophyte advisers that a major shift in the “world correlation of forces” was bound to heavily influence the June talks. China, of course, would not be taking part in the bilateral talks, but it would be very much present.

[We worried:](#)

“Whether or not Official Washington fully appreciates the gradual – but profound – change in America’s triangular relationship with Russia and China over recent decades, what is clear is that the US has made itself into the big loser. The triangle may still be equilateral, but it is now, in effect, two sides against one. ...

“There is little sign that today’s US policymakers have enough experience and intelligence to recognize this new reality and understand the important implications for US freedom of action. Still less are they likely to appreciate how this new nexus may play out on the ground, on the sea or in the air.”

It was clear that the new phenomenon of Russia-China entente would dwarf the significance of less important issues; and we could not be sure Biden would be appropriately informed.

He wasn't.

The Chinese "Squeeze"

President Biden did not get the word. [Here is the bizarre way Biden described](#), at his post-summit presser, his decades-behind-the-times approach to Putin on China:

"Without quoting him [Putin] – which I don't think is appropriate – let me ask a rhetorical question: You got a multi-thousand-mile border with China. China is seeking to be the most powerful economy in the world and the largest and the most powerful military in the world."

At the airport, Biden's co-travelers did their best to whisk him onto the plane, but failed to stop him from sharing more of his views on China – this time on China's strategic "squeezing" of Russia:

"Let me choose my words. Russia is in a very, very difficult spot right now. They are being squeezed by China."

Have Biden's innocent advisers, by now, sought out new textbooks, updated from the ones they may have read in the 70s and 80s. Have they learned that Russia and China have never been closer – that, indeed, they have what amounts to a virtual military alliance?

Why This Matters

Back to what may be in store for U.S. warships should they try to enter the Taiwan Strait "in the coming weeks." Will China try to impede or harass them?

Experts on China tell me there is low likelihood of that, and I defer to their judgment. At the same time I cannot banish from memory what they told me before Russia invaded Ukraine; namely, that China's principled stand against interference in the affairs of other countries would make it impossible for China to support such an invasion. And yet, the Chinese have been in the forefront of defending it, explaining that Russia's "core interests" are at stake. Beijing is now reminding all that Taiwan is a "core interest" of China.

Would the Chinese expect Russia to have their back, so to speak, if they moved to interdict or harass US warships in the Strait? I believe they would expect that. Russia's immediate endorsement of China's policies on the Pelosi visit is one tangible sign pointing in this direction. (Use your imagination and pick the various ways President Putin could up the ante so as to advantage his friend and ally Xi Jinping.)

Is this worth testing by trying to sail into the Taiwan Strait? Only an innocent hawk would think so. And yet the Chinese have every reason to believe that it is the hawks who are calling the shots in Washington – not Biden. (I discuss some of these issues in a short interview I gave early yesterday [Sunday](#), though the connection dropped at minute 8:40.)

Bottom line: The White House has left little incentive for the Chinese to keep pushing what they call a "Win-Win" policy. According to reliable sources, when top Chinese officials pressed the mutual advantages of "Win-Win" with White House National Security Council China guru Kurt Campbell, they were set back at his response. They described it as "Your win-win *IS BULLSH*T!*."

Aside from the use of vernacular, this is not difficult to believe, given what is known about Campbell, who very early on said [“the era of engagement is over.”](#) Sadly, Campbell is no wiser than the Bobbsey twins with respect to the implications for the US of the virtual alliance that now exists between China and Russia.

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