



***CORRECTING THE NARRATIVE ON  
CHINA'S "NEW ERA-GANCE": TAIPEI,  
WASHINGTON, AND MANY ARE ANGRY  
AT BEIJING'S BULLYING***

BY SHIRLEY KAN

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"[Furious China](#) fires missiles near Taiwan in drills after Pelosi visit," blared a typical headline just after the congressional delegation's visit on Aug. 2-3. Such parroting of Beijing propaganda wrongly blames a long-standing practice of US official visits to the Island instead of provocations by the People's Republic of China (PRC). Even worse is that this inaccurate, tiresome narrative exacerbates the PRC's political warfare that attempts to excuse its bullying and potential unjustified, unprovoked use of force against Taiwan and other peaceful neighbors.

Let's be clear: a visit is not a trigger for conflict. It is Taiwan, the United States, and other freedom-loving countries that are angry at the PRC's "new era" of arrogance plus encroachment. People should have learned the lesson from the [1995-96 crisis](#), what I described as the PRC's test-firing of missiles near Taiwan by blaming Congress and using a visit as pretext to provoke tension and to advance planned military buildups.

**American resolve, strength, and leadership**

On July 20, President Joe Biden prompted attention—as well as China's attempts at intimidation—regarding this congressional delegation (CODEL) when he answered a reporter's question on whether the

speaker's trip to Taiwan would be a [good idea](#). He responded that "the military thinks it's not a good idea right now." It was surprising for a former senator to say that and attribute it to the neutral military. The Heritage Foundation's Walter Lohman, a former congressional staffer, noted: "what is a surprise is that the president of the United States would try to [dissuade her](#) from doing it."

Amid China's inflammatory rhetoric threatening Pelosi and other Americans, on Aug. 1, Biden firmly warned: "The United States continues to demonstrate our resolve and our capacity to defend the American people against those who seek to do us harm. ...if you are a threat to our people, the United States will [find you and take you out](#)." Biden is capable of tough strategic messaging, but he directed that strong statement at terrorists in announcing the killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri of Al Qaeda.

Pelosi has led three crucial roles that fell on Congress. First, the CODEL showed US strength, resolve, and leadership. House Foreign Affairs Committee's Chairman Gregory Meeks, who joined the trip, summed up why the members were compelled to visit Taiwan, precisely given the PRC's threats: "[we can't be bullied by anyone](#)." The delegation's visit was a relief.

Second, it was Pelosi who [eloquently explained](#) policy and interests, not only to the American people but also international audiences. In her commentary in *The Washington Post* as she arrived on Aug. 2, she wrote: "The Taiwan Relations Act set out America's commitment to a democratic Taiwan, providing the framework for an economic and diplomatic relationship that would quickly flourish into a key partnership." She accurately placed the responsibility on Beijing for intensifying tensions with Taipei. She also stated that "America stands with Taiwan, our democratic partner, as it defends itself and its freedom." She pointed out that "the world faces a choice between autocracy and democracy" as Russia wages war in Ukraine.

In contrast, even though Biden as a senator voted for the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979, he has not adequately articulated policy. A day after stating that

the United States has a "commitment" to get involved militarily, on May 24, Biden simply said "no" when a reporter asked him to explain why he denied that "[strategic ambiguity](#)" is dead.

Third, Pelosi also brought bipartisan unity. For example, Senate Republican Leader [Mitch McConnell commended](#) "the Speaker's display of support for Taiwan's democracy." Senators Bob Mendenez (D-New Jersey) and James Risch (R-Idaho), chairman and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [stated](#): "Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan provides no justification for this sort of measure," referring to PLA military exercises that essentially represent a blockade.

### Manufactured crisis

Pelosi's delegation was the latest in a decades-long series of visits by members of Congress, administration officials, and military officers as senior as flag/general officers. Even post-1979 visits by cabinet-rank officials started in 1992. It is standard practice for such delegations to fly on military aircraft, including to Taiwan. This [CODEL](#) of six members visited Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan, with its stop in Taiwan coming on Aug. 2-3.

The PRC then conducted military exercises on Aug. 4-10, egregiously including dangerous live-fire launches of 11 DF-15 short-range ballistic missiles toward Taiwan that flew into the sea to the northeast, east, and southwest of the island. Her visit is a pretext for the PRC's provocations in a "[manufactured crisis](#)" as condemned by the National Security Council on Aug. 4. The NSC also rebuked the People's Liberation Army's actions as an irresponsible, provocative, destabilizing, and aggressive over-reaction.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) described the PLA's actions as a [simulated attack](#) on Taiwan.

China is learning lessons from Russia's blockade against Ukraine. Just as Russia's brutal invasion has targeted civilians and military personnel, the PRC fired missiles that threatened civilian centers, [aircraft](#), and shipping.

Biden responded to China's instigated instability by keeping US [naval ships](#) and F-35B fighters to the east of Taiwan for a longer period of time to monitor the situation. The assets included the aircraft carrier USS *Ronald Reagan* and two large amphibious ships, the USS *Tripoli* and USS *America*. Previously, US aircraft carriers sailed near Taiwan during the 1995-1996 crisis and Taiwan's presidential election in 2008. Biden also postponed the test of a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile ([ICBM](#)).

### China has raised tensions before the crisis

In contrast to US de-escalation, China has raised tension with military exercises in the Taiwan Strait and other maritime areas for decades. For example, the PLA held live-fire exercises in [multiple seas](#) in 2020. The PLA held air and naval [exercises](#) in August 2021. In May 2022, the PLA held a live-fire exercise in the [Bohai Sea](#), and PRC and Russian [air exercise](#) took place during Biden's visit to Asia and a QUAD meeting.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, officials have voiced tough stances on Taiwan, including to National Security Advisor [Jake Sullivan](#) on March 14, [President Biden](#) on March 18, and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on [April 20](#).

At the Shangri-la Dialogue in June, Austin criticized the PLA for unprofessional and [aggressive](#) intercepts. He said that "in February, a PLA Navy ship directed a laser at an Australian P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, seriously endangering everyone on board." Another incident occurred between a US [C-130 aircraft](#) and a PLA SU-30 fighter.

Just in June and July, the PLA also has protested against a US [P-8 flight](#), freedom of navigation operations ([FONOPS](#)), [Taiwan Strait Transits](#), and [arms sales](#) to [Taiwan](#). PLA fighters crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait and the PLA held an exercise around the time of [Senator Scott's CODEL](#) on July 8. On July 28, the PLA already announced live-fire [exercises](#) in the Taiwan Strait.

On Aug. 5, China further escalated by

announcing [cancellations](#) and suspensions of dialogues in eight areas, including military-to-military Defense Policy Coordination Talks (DPCT) and meetings under the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA). The PLA did not suspend talks with Secretary Austin or Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley. However, their PLA counterparts have [refused](#) to communicate during this crisis.

I have expected China to increase tension ahead of Taiwan's local elections on Nov. 26.

### **Beijing's belligerence backfires**

The world sees China's unreasonable, unjustified, and aggressive behavior. Taiwan has received support and sympathy from countries throughout the world. China's instigation of this latest crisis raises questions about how the United States, Taiwan, and other peaceful and like-minded countries should respond to China's belligerent and egregious threats to peace and stability. Overall, countries will need to be more proactive and creative, especially in diplomatic initiatives. A coordinated campaign is needed within the US government as well as with allies and partners that increases use of informational, economic, military, and diplomatic tools to deter coercion and conflict as well as to shore up Taiwan's resilience and legitimacy.

*PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.*