



Nancy Pelosi Rebukes Biden's China Policy

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They could have ironed out their differences privately and worked everything out behind closed doors. Instead, unnamed White House officials leaked Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan travel plans and sought to spike the trip.

Senior Biden staffers saw no upside to the Speaker of the House visiting Taipei. Publicly, they cautioned against embarrassing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on the 95th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army, not to mention the upcoming Party Congress in late 2022. More anonymous sources warned about possible military responses from Beijing. President Joe Biden went public with these concerns, saying "the military thinks it's not a good idea right now."

The White House's own communications with Beijing were the unspoken subtext. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Secretary of State Antony Blinken had just concluded a five-hour meeting at the G-20 during which Wang had previewed eight areas of bilateral cooperation. Shortly thereafter, Biden and General Secretary Xi Jinping scheduled their fifth phone call, in advance of an in-person meeting. The upcoming COP27 summit provided John Kerry, the White House's climate envoy, another bite at the climate change cooperation apple. Concurrently, the president was weighing whether to lift his predecessor's tariffs on Chinese goods—a longstanding demand from Beijing.

With this semblance of cooperative momentum, the administration forced the issue publicly and hoped Speaker Pelosi would back down. She did not.

The moment her plane touched down at Songshan Airport in Taipei, Pelosi made her position clear: "We must stand by Taiwan." As the CCP punished Taiwan by canceling food imports, hacking government websites, and conducting invasive military drills, she bolstered her message, insisting that the U.S. "will not allow [China] to isolate Taiwan."

Those words were a rejoinder to Xi's bellicosity, but they were also a gentle rebuke of the head of Pelosi's own party.

Ever since January 2021, President Biden's China policy has been a tenuous mix of cooperation and competition. The president believes he can pursue both agendas simultaneously without one adversely affecting the other. As he insisted in his remarks at the United Nations last year, "All the major powers of the world have a duty, in my view, to carefully manage their relationships so they do not tip from responsible competition to conflict."

The administration's fixation on "carefully managing" U.S.-China relations has created and reinforced dangerous policy instincts. In February 2021, Biden officials were unwilling to admit that the CCP's genocide of Uyghurs and other groups in Xinjiang was ongoing. That summer, John Kerry worked to limit the number of Chinese companies that received an effective import ban for slave labor. In October, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman lobbied Congress against critical human rights legislation. Then, administration officials declined to sanction key Chinese entities after that bill became law. With respect to Taiwan, U.S. officials cut the video feed of Taiwan's digital minister during the Summit of Democracies for sharing a map that colored China and Taiwan differently. The very next month, American diplomats reportedly urged Lithuania to refrain from upgrading its *de facto* Taiwan embassy.

These failures do not negate Biden's good decisions, particularly his ongoing efforts to strengthen the quadrilateral security dialogue with Japan, India, and Australia. His Indo-Pacific Economic Framework also holds great potential. But his administration's poor judgment diminishes and overshadows these accomplishments. In its efforts to responsibly compete with the CCP, the Biden administration has imperiled the very people in the direct line of Beijing's ambitions.

Which brings us back to Speaker Pelosi. Mere days after her trip, the *Global Times*, a CCP propaganda organ, announced eight countermeasures in response—the same number of items as those on Blinken's cooperation list from Wang. Whether the symmetry was incidental or intentional, the message was clear: the cooperative agenda is on ice. Among those nixed initiatives were bilateral climate negotiations. When asked whether her "symbolic trip" undermined these "important objectives," Pelosi responded:

What dialogue were you aware of that they were having on climate? They had been shutting down on many things. So again, this thing of, "Oh, but they were going to be doing this, and they were going to be doing that." Let's just say this is not something that should be dividing us.

The speaker said the quiet part out loud. There were no substantive talks before her trip; in fact, Beijing had already scuttled and slow-walked many of these initiatives. Her final words, however, were an even more pointed criticism of the Biden administration. She made clear that the CCP is exploiting the potential for U.S.-China collaboration to divide Americans. Instead of a clear-eyed focus on Xi Jinping's culpability, Washington is busy assigning domestic blame for destabilizing the bilateral relationship. A divided America isolates our friends and empowers our adversaries. As it turns out, "responsible competition" is deeply irresponsible.

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