

A SPECIAL REPORT

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The 2022 Pelosi Visit to Taiwan: Assessing US-China Signaling and Action-Reaction Dynamics

Andrew Scobell, Shao Yuqun, Carla Freeman,
Wu Chunsi, Alison McFarland, and Ji Yixin



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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report presents the findings of a joint research project conducted by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS). The project examined signaling and action-reaction dynamics, with a focus on Taiwan, in the lead-up to, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the August 2022 visit to Taiwan by then Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi. The findings, analyses, and insights are based on not-for-attribution interviews with policymakers and analysts in the United States and China.

The first section, “Introduction,” was written jointly by all six authors; subsequent sections were written separately by the USIP or SIIS author teams, as indicated by the headings in those sections.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Andrew Scobell is a distinguished fellow with the China program at USIP. Dr. Carla Freeman was a senior expert for China at USIP at the time of writing and is currently a senior lecturer in foreign policy at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and director of the SAIS Foreign Policy Institute. Ms. Alison McFarland was a program specialist at USIP at the time of writing and is now a graduate student at Princeton University. Dr. Shao Yuqun is the director of the Institute for Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau Studies at SIIS. Dr. Wu Chunsi was the director of the Institute for International Strategic and Security Studies at SIIS and is now the director of Center for American Studies at SIIS. Ms. Ji Yixin is a research fellow in the Institute for Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau Studies at SIIS.

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United States Institute of Peace

2301 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20037

Phone: 202.457.1700 | Fax: 202.429.6063
E-mail: usip_requests@usip.org | Web: www.usip.org

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Introduction

In recent years, the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have found it particularly challenging to interpret one another's foreign policy signals. Misinterpretation of each other's signaling may contribute to a bilateral action-reaction dynamic and can intensify into an action-reaction cycle and escalation spiral. The United States, for example, may take a particular action, and China might view that action as being provocative, rather than interpreting it as it was intended to be seen—as a reaction by the United States to China's own behavior. This interpretation challenge can inadvertently elevate bilateral tensions and escalate into a crisis or even war.

Taiwan continues to be the most contentious issue in US-China relations. Moreover, the Taiwan Strait is routinely identified as the most plausible location of a military confrontation between the United States and China. Thus, it is important that each side accurately interprets the other side's signals regarding Taiwan to avoid unintended escalation and unwanted conflict.

This project examines US-China signaling and action-reaction dynamics related to the visit to Taiwan of Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi in August 2022. Some have dubbed this episode the “Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis.”¹ Visits by senior US officials to Taiwan have been infrequent, especially since 1979 when Washington severed formal diplomatic relations with Taipei and established ambassador-level ties with Beijing. The PRC considers visits by senior US officials to Taiwan as violating the “One China Policy,” because such travel implies that the United States recognizes Taiwan as a political entity distinct from the PRC. Before 2022, the last time a senior member of the US Congress visited the island was when Speaker of the US House of Representatives Newt Gingrich did so in 1997. The PRC attaches considerable significance to the fact that Speaker of the House is third in line to succeed the US president. Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan came at a tense moment in US-China relations, and China launched a series of massive, multiday military exercises at multiple locations around Taiwan's periphery and canceled or suspended several exchanges with the United States in response.²

This report is the outcome of research conducted on the US side by United States Institute of Peace (USIP), one in a USIP series on signaling between the United States and China. The first report titled “US-China Signaling, Action- Reaction Dynamics, and Taiwan: A Preliminary

1 The First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises erupted during the Cold War: in 1954–55 and 1958, respectively. The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis occurred in 1995–96. Each crisis witnessed significant saber-rattling and the ratcheting up of tensions between the US and the PRC in the Taiwan Strait.

2 Andrew Scobell, “What Pelosi's Trip to Taiwan Tells Us about U.S.-China Relations” United States Institute of Peace, August 5, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/08/what-pelosis-trip-taiwan-tells-us-about-us-china-relations>.

Examination” was published by USIP in September 2022.³ It focused on the first ten weeks of the Biden administration and arrived at several preliminary judgments. One of the most notable of those conclusions was that there were multiple areas where the two sides missed, misperceived, or misunderstood each other’s signals. In some instances, signals sent by one side, or the other were unrecognized and therefore ineffective; in other instances, efforts to reduce tensions were understood as provocations and contributed to escalating tensions. Thus, it was possible that in some cases, US-China signaling was increasing rather than decreasing the risk of crises developing between the two countries.

The first report focused on a period that was not one of crisis but rather one when the governments of both capitals were beginning to interact following a change in US administration. The then new Biden administration in Washington was beginning to put together its relevant staff and establish the parameters and tone for its approach to the US relationship with China. For Beijing, the period represented an opportunity to convey its own posture toward the new administration, even before the two sides had engaged in significant bilateral diplomatic interaction. Although there were some action-reaction dynamics at play, the report’s findings were weighted toward the communication and interpretation issues in US-China signaling, rather than toward the action-reaction dynamics that are also an important dimension of bilateral signaling.

In contrast to the first study, this second report on signaling between the United States and China focuses on a period of high tension between the two countries, defined by some but not all experts as a crisis.

The project on which this report is based was designed jointly by experts at USIP and the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), and the research was conducted in parallel efforts by USIP and SIIS.

Two central research questions drove this project:

- How accurately do US and Chinese policymakers interpret each other’s signaling?
- Do these interpretations impact bilateral action-reaction dynamics and, if so, how?

To answer these questions, researchers at USIP and SIIS prepared to conduct a series of not-for-attribution interviews with policymakers and analysts in their respective countries. The first task was to develop a timeline of key bilateral actions for the period from April to August 2022. This timeline (which is reproduced in the appendix to this report) was generated

3 Andrew Scobell, Shao Yuqun, Carla Freeman, Wu Chunsi, Alison McFarland, and Ji Yixin, “US-China Signaling, Action-Reaction Dynamics, and Taiwan: A Preliminary Examination,” United States Institute of Peace, September 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/us-china-signaling-action-reaction-dynamics-and-taiwan-preliminary-examination>.

by the SIIS research team and revised and expanded with input from the USIP research team. The research effort was conducted by the two teams in parallel, with the USIP team interviewing more than a dozen Americans in the United States and the SIIS team interviewing an equivalent number of Chinese citizens in China. Researchers began each interview by providing a brief background on the project and then shared a copy of the timeline and asked interviewees to study the document. Each interviewee was asked to identify any events or episodes they deemed to be particularly important and to justify their selections. Each interviewee was also asked to identify any attempts at signaling by one side or the other and to offer an opinion as to whether this signaling had been successful. In addition, each interviewee was asked to identify any action-reaction dynamics. Lastly, interviewees were asked to offer additional comments or raise questions. Subsequently, the interview data were collated and analyzed separately by the USIP and SIIS research teams. The two teams then shared the data each had aggregated from its interviews and its overall findings.

This report distills the project's major findings into three sections: "Perspectives," "Analyses," and "Policy Implications." The subsections were written either by the USIP team or by the SIIS team, as indicated in the subsections' titles. The report concludes with a call by the USIP team for further research into the interpretation, and more particularly the misinterpretation, of signaling between the United States and China in order to inform efforts to create a more stable bilateral relationship.

Perspectives

This section presents first the perspectives of the US interviewees (as summarized by USIP authors) and then the perspectives of the Chinese interviewees (as summarized by authors from SIIS). All footnotes inserted by USIP authors.

US Perspectives: Major Points of Consensus among the USIP Interviewees

American interviewees' analyses of the timeline displayed a high degree of consensus, although there were also some points of disagreement among them. The areas of agreement fall into five main categories: (1) the timeline is a reliable rendering of relevant events; (2) China had ample time to prepare for the Pelosi visit; (3) both sides wanted to avoid escalation; (4) the visit established a "new normal" in terms of China's behavior in the Taiwan Strait; and (5) China did not understand the separation of powers as laid down in the US Constitution.

First, US interviewees largely agreed that the timeline covers the key events relevant to Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. One interviewee described the timeline as like a “key word search” of the Pelosi visit. Additionally, there was agreement that the start date of the timeline was correct, although interviewees observed that the end date could be extended as the impact of the Pelosi visit reached far beyond the timeline. Some interviewees suggested that April 2023, which is when Speaker Kevin McCarthy met then Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen in California during the latter's stopover in the United States, was a more appropriate end point.

Nevertheless, there was recognition that the end of August 2022 was a logical date with which to conclude the episode.

At the same time, interviewees felt that there were other events that could have been included in the timeline. Several interviewees pointed out that there were interactions between the two sides—including meetings and regular communications that one interviewee described as amounting to an “almost daily rhythm”—that were not made public. Moreover, some interviewees pointed to third-party statements that they felt should be included. For example, one interviewee stated that the timeline should have included the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers' statement of August 4, which blamed both the United States and China for the crisis but also noted that it seemed to have been precipitated by PRC military activities. The same interviewee recommended including an August 12 statement from India, saying it was the first time New Delhi had made a unilateral statement about Taiwan. While recognizing that the timeline is focused on the United States and China, the interviewee stated that some of those statements and actions merit inclusion because regional reactions to Pelosi's visit registered among policymakers in both Washington and Beijing. Another interviewee commented that statements from US allies, such as Japan and Australia, criticizing China's military exercises were also missing from the timeline, noting that from the perspective of US diplomacy, statements from allies are important. Finally, one interviewee pointed to some PRC actions in June and July as providing important context for the timeline. These included a June 13 statement by a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson asserting that the PRC has sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the Taiwan Strait.

Second, interviewees commented that the postponement of the visit, which had originally been planned to take place in April, gave the PRC ample time to prepare its response.

Interviewees noted that the swiftness of the PRC's response to the August Pelosi visit indicates that Beijing had started planning a potential response in April. The additional time enabled China to assemble a larger demonstration of PRC military might than would have been possible had the trip taken place in April. One interviewee pointed out that the type of military exercise conducted would likely have happened anyway as the PRC routinely undertakes

summer exercises, and another commented that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is more active in August than April. However, the extended timeline leading up to the Pelosi visit provided Beijing with ample opportunity to build a narrative that it was launching the exercise in response to Pelosi's trip.

Third, interviewees expressed the belief that both sides wanted to avoid escalation.

Although neither side felt it could back down, neither side desired escalation to actual conflict. Instead, each side believed it was well within its rights to undertake the actions it did. Several interviewees commented that they did not think the PRC wanted a confrontation in the Taiwan Strait, with one saying that the PRC did not want a conflict before the 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. One interviewee opined that there was a "tacit understanding" in both Washington and Beijing that the incident would not escalate to conflict. Another interviewee asserted that both sides knew it was a signaling exercise and that the actions they took seemed to be controlled. For example, the flight path Pelosi's aircraft used was selected to minimize the chances of contact with the PLA, and Beijing did not move any aircraft into the vicinity until Pelosi's plane had taken off from Taiwan. A third interviewee opined that, after Pelosi's trip was announced on July 31, everything became "predictable." The United States took measures to avert direct confrontation or outright conflict in response to the incendiary tweet on July 29 by Hu Xijin, former *Global Times* editor in chief, asserting that the PLA had the right to "forcibly dispel" Pelosi's aircraft; the PRC was aware that the United States was taking those measures in order that the two sides could avoid an incident.

Although agreeing that there was a desire on both sides to avoid conflict, some interviewees expressed concern about the potential for accidents that could have triggered escalation.

Several interviewees expressed the view that in the spring of 2022, it felt like they were "watching two trains on a collision path." In retrospect, according to some of these same interviewees, there seems to have been little risk of conflict, but they "didn't think so at the time." Yet, while neither side seemed to be looking for a fight, an inadvertent "major incident" held the real potential for unintended escalation. One such incident was the missile that landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) on August 4. Several interviewees expressed the view that they did not believe that Beijing intended for this missile to come down in Japan's EEZ. One interviewee speculated that the PLA officials responsible for targeting may have been using an inaccurate map.

Fourth, several US interviewees described the events surrounding the Pelosi visit as establishing a "new normal" in the Taiwan Strait. China demonstrated through its reactions in the aftermath of the Pelosi visit that whatever new action it took would become part of its repertoire going forward. Interviewees highlighted that Beijing's response to the visit set new expectations for what could be considered normal PLA activities in the Taiwan Strait and to the east of the island. Although not all interviewees liked the use of this term, several commented

that China's response to the Pelosi visit established a new baseline for how the United States interprets degrees of PRC displeasure. One interviewee stated that Beijing used the visit as a pretext to establish this "new normal," with another describing China's actions as "gray-zone salami-slicing tactics" that have been seen elsewhere, such as in the South China Sea.

Fifth, Beijing did not have a clear understanding of how the separation of powers works in Washington. Beijing appeared to assume that the executive branch exerts control over the legislative branch and that the US president has the power to prevent the Speaker of the House from making a trip abroad. Multiple US interviewees opined that Chinese leaders do not fully understand the relationship between the executive and legislative branches in the US political system. Beijing equates the US Congress with the PRC's National People's Congress; the Chinese government does not appreciate that the legislative branch has coequal status with the executive branch and that President Joe Biden did not have the authority to order Pelosi not to visit Taiwan. Moreover, some contended that Beijing did not understand that the visit was motivated in part by Pelosi's desire to shape her personal political legacy and that, due to the domestic political dynamics at play, Biden could not exert pressure on Pelosi to abandon the trip. At the same time, some interviewees also expressed uncertainty about whether the PRC truly does not understand the US separation of powers or, in the words of one interviewee, the PRC was displaying "willful ignorance." One interviewee expressed concern that Chinese interlocutors spoke with some former US officials who expressed the view that Biden could have communicated directly with Pelosi, which may have misled Beijing into thinking that Chinese pressure could stop the visit. Another interviewee opined that while Chinese officials did try to lobby Congress by calling Pelosi's office, the primary target of Beijing's messaging was then National Security Council coordinator Kurt Campbell. Interestingly, one interviewee observed that since the visit, op-eds in Chinese publications seem to indicate that this event altered some Chinese views on the separation of powers.

US Perspectives: Differing Interpretations among the USIP Interviewees

Outside of these general areas of agreement, US interviewees offered differing interpretations in three key areas, and two trenchant points were expressed by a minority of interviewees.

First, US interviewees responded differently to the question of whether the visit and surrounding events could accurately be described as a "crisis." Many commented that whether the visit could be categorized as a crisis depends on how one defines that term. By some definitions, it could be labeled as a crisis because there was a sharp uptick in rhetorical salvos and PRC military activity; it also changed the status quo and carried the potential for escalation. As mentioned above, interviewees specifically pointed to the landing of missiles in Japan's EEZ as illustrating the possibility for inadvertent escalation, with one commenting that the last time the PRC launched ballistic missiles was during a crisis. Several experts compared

the visit with the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis, with some contending that by the terminological standards used during that episode, one could call the Pelosi visit a crisis as well. Moreover, according to several interviewees, US government bureaucracies treated the episode like a crisis.

However, multiple interviewees asserted that they did not think the situation would escalate to military conflict, with one interviewee noting that unlike the 1995–96 crisis, “the end game was written into the beginning.” Another interviewee stated that although the visit had crisis-like characteristics, it was better described as a “Pelosi scare.” Prior to the visit, according to some interviewees, China threatened a “Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis” and there seemed to be some sense in Beijing that it might trigger a “21st-century Cuban Missile Crisis.” However, there were no direct or lasting confrontations, and it appears that the Chinese side did not feel that it rose to the level of a crisis. Another interviewee observed that the episode did not feel like a crisis on the ground in Taiwan, which may have been part of a deliberate effort by the Tsai administration and others not to characterize it as such. Two interviewees observed that, unlike previous Taiwan crises, this one was a PRC response not so much to Taiwan’s actions but to something the United States did. A third interviewee described it as a “watershed moment,” where the Taiwan aspect of the US-China relationship aligned itself with the downward trajectory of the broader bilateral relationship. Hence, rather than being a true crisis, the visit was a “manufactured crisis” in the sense that it was an opportunity both sides seized upon to recalibrate their respective positions on Taiwan. Lastly, one interviewee contended that the two sides approached the event from different angles, with the United States working to avoid the event becoming a crisis and the PRC to some extent trying to create a crisis to show the severity of the issue from Beijing’s perspective.

Second, multiple interviewees identified the problem of discerning what constitutes an authoritative signal and whom should be considered an authoritative actor or messenger.

The incident that highlighted this critical issue was Hu Xijin’s provocative tweet. Was this statement that the PRC had the right to “forcibly dispel” Pelosi’s aircraft to be regarded as reflecting Beijing’s thinking or as the voice of a hawkish commentator? Interviewees noted that Hu’s tweet evoked a reaction from the United States because of uncertainty about its authoritativeness. One interviewee commented that although Washington interpreted Hu’s tweet as a credible signal of official thinking and took appropriate measures to respond to a potential emergency, Washington may in fact have misinterpreted it as a signal. Another distinguished the political and military impacts of the statement, asserting that the way the signal was understood influenced US military planning but did not change the political situation. Other interviewees expressed doubt that it was really intended as a signal, with one stating that there seemed to be debate in the Chinese system about how much Hu’s tweet represented official views. Another interviewee asserted that although Hu received the information from the government on the understanding that he would reword it and post it as a signal, Hu exaggerated what China would actually do. Some interviewees also observed

that it caused significant online discussion in China, from which the PRC government likely took its own lessons. Interviewees suggested that Beijing prevented Hu from making similar statements during other events; Hu was silent, for example, when then Taiwan Vice President William Lai stopped over in New York a year later, in August 2023.

Third, some interviewees observed that even direct communication between senior leaders and officials can be prone to misinterpretation and ambiguity. A prime example is the July 28 telephone call between President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Some US interviewees opined that the Chinese side came away from the top-level conversation believing that the Biden administration would work to prevent the visit. Other interviewees thought that Biden made clear in the telephone call to Xi that he was not going to do anything to stop the visit. Some experts also pointed to this phone call as an example of the two sides talking past each other. Another example was Biden’s July 20 statement, with one expert stating that it “did not look good for Biden” to say that he did not know the status of the visit (i.e., Biden appeared to be either poorly informed or evasive), and another saying that they found Biden’s comment on the visit’s status surprising as it seems very unlikely Biden did not know the details of the trip. Others posited that this statement may have been viewed by Beijing as reassurance and attempts to ease tensions by distancing the administration from Pelosi’s actions. At the same time, they recognized that the statement may have complicated the situation—or, as one interviewee put it, may have been interpreted as a “cover your assets” statement.⁴

The first of the two trenchant points made by a minority of interviewees was that domestic political considerations were prominent for both sides. For the Chinese side, the consideration was public opinion. Beijing could not afford to look weak on Taiwan in front of the Chinese people and so PRC leaders had to talk tough and prepare a strong response to the Pelosi visit.

Several interviewees also pointed out that the visit took place during a politically sensitive period as Beijing was preparing for the 20th Party Congress (held October 16–22). For the US side, domestic politics were also a significant factor. Biden, for example, could have tried to persuade Pelosi not to go but was likely unwilling to expend the effort for at least two reasons. First, the president was almost certainly aware that the speaker was adamant about making the trip and unlikely to be dissuaded. Second, Biden was reluctant to expend precious political capital in what was most likely a fruitless quest when his higher priority was to work with Pelosi to advance his administration’s domestic agenda in Congress.

The second notable observation made by some US interviewees was that each side overinterpreted the actions of the other while overlooking nonactions. While there are

4 “Cover your assets” is a colloquialism meaning to protect yourself.

multiple examples of the former scattered throughout this report, an example of the latter bears mention, according to several interviewees. On August 4, the United States announced that it had decided not to go forward with a previously scheduled intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test. This statement was intended as an important signal to Beijing that Washington was acting prudently and in non-escalatory manner. Several interviewees insisted that Beijing failed to notice this signal. Interviewees also commented more broadly that neither side in the relationship ever gets credit for what it does not do, and that both sides find it difficult to communicate the actions they have *not* taken in an attempt to avoid escalation.

Chinese Perspectives: Major Points of Consensus among the SIIS Interviewees

First, the interviewees generally thought that before Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, China's signals were consistent and clear, whereas US signals were inconsistent and unclear.

PRC departments such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Taiwan Affairs Office, the PLA, the National People's Congress, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference issued strong and unified signals opposing Pelosi's visit. US signals, however, were inconsistent and thus unclear. Pelosi herself sent unclear signals, postponing her planned visit to Taiwan in April 2022 due to a COVID-19 infection and making no formal, public statement subsequently about planning to visit Taiwan at a later date. Additionally, congressional signals were unclear because although many members of Congress supported the visit, others opposed it. Moreover, President Biden's signals were unclear. The president stated in July 2022, "The U.S. military thinks it's not a good idea, but I don't know what the status of it is," indicating a divergence of opinion between the White House and the Pentagon. Finally, mainstream think tanks in the United States had differing opinions. Some interviewees thought that China's signals should have been multilayered; by being too simplistic, they prevented the United States from interpreting further content. A few interviewees believed that US signals were clear to begin with and became yet clearer, which is characteristic of a hegemonic country, whereas middle- sized powers tend to send ambiguous signals.

Second, the interviewees generally regarded China's signaling before Pelosi's visit to Taiwan as having three main aspects. First, China's stance was one of firm opposition to Pelosi's visit. Second, China had two primary reasons for opposing the visit: the United States and Taiwan have an unofficial relationship and Pelosi is the third-highest-ranking US official, so she should not visit Taiwan; and the US argument that "precedents make [the visit] permissible" (referring to former House Speaker Newt Gingrich's visit to Taiwan) is weak, because having a precedent due to a past action does not mean it is acceptable now. Third, if Pelosi visited Taiwan, then China would retaliate strongly.

Third, China's signals were not just restatements of past positions but were carefully crafted to emphasize the strength of China's opposition to the visit. For example, on August

1, Zhang Jun, China's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and then president of the UN Security Council, briefed mainstream UN media about the Security Council's August agenda; during the briefing, he made a statement about the Taiwan question and Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, emphasizing that the visit was dangerously provocative behavior. This indicated that China had anticipated that the United States and its allies would jointly promote the "internationalization of the Taiwan question." Thus, China stressed the importance of emphasizing the "one-China principle" within the international community. Some interviewees noted that it was rare for a UN representative to comment on this issue and that by doing so, Zhang was indicating that "China's anger had escalated."

Fourth, the PLA military drills that began on August 4 were both an "action" and the clearest, strongest deterrence "signal" sent by China after Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. These exercises effectively prevented a visit to Taiwan by the subsequent House speaker, Kevin McCarthy, and prevented China-US relations from suffering a more severe impact. In this sense, China's deterrence was strong enough. The military exercises not only deterred the United States but also intimidated the Taiwanese authorities and prevented a short-term escalation of the China-US conflict. It was a strong signal of "situation control." Some interviewees also believe that the military drills conveyed a deterrence signal by demonstrating China's ability to control the situation and counter interference and by showing that if US-Taiwan collusion were to become normalized in the future, Chinese military actions would also become normalized. Other interviewees noted that after China's military exercises, the United States remarked that China had created a "new normal," indicating that the United States "felt disadvantaged."

Fifth, the series of countermeasures taken by China after Pelosi's visit to Taiwan demonstrated that China always views China-US relations systematically, rejecting the United States' "three-part" framework of "competition, cooperation, confrontation."⁵

The countermeasures China adopted included not only military exercises but also the "three cancellations" and "five suspensions" announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁶ This shows that while China is open to cooperating with the United States when doing so aligns with China's interests, when the United States directly threatens what China considers "the

5 "Secretary Blinken Speech: A Foreign Policy for America (March 3, 2021)" US Embassy Canberra, March 4, 2021, <https://au.usembassy.gov/secretary-blinken-speech-a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/>.

6 The "three cancellations" were canceling China-US Theater Commanders Talk, canceling China-US Defense Policy Coordination Talks, and canceling China-US Military Maritime Consultative Agreement meetings. The "five suspensions" were suspending China-US cooperation on the repatriation of illegal immigrant, suspending China-US cooperation on legal assistance in criminal matters, suspending China-US cooperation against transnational crimes, suspending China-US counternarcotics cooperation, and suspending China-US talks on climate change. See "Chinese Foreign Ministry Announces Countermeasures in response to Nancy Pelosi's Visit to Taiwan," Xinhua, August 5, 2022, <https://english.news.cn/20220805/fc97b40059204d2f9160da9f1dbb61dc/c.html>.

core of its core interests,” China is prepared to take decisive action to halt cooperation and consultations in other areas as a countermeasure. Such action indicates that China has never accepted the United States’ approach of handling China-US relations through a three-part framework.

Sixth, the interviewees unanimously believed that missiles falling into Japan’s EEZ were not a signal deliberately sent by China to Japan or the United States.⁷ Some interviewees pointed out that format of the discussion on this issue proves the lack of deliberate intent, as the situation was addressed by the spokesperson of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in response to a question from a foreign reporter, rather than being proactively announced by China.

Chinese Perspectives: Differing Interpretations among the SIIS Interviewees

First, interviewees had differing interpretations of the July 28 phone call between the two national leaders. Some believed that the Chinese leader’s call with the US president just before Pelosi’s anticipated visit to Taiwan indicates that both sides had reached a consensus that Pelosi would not be visiting Taiwan; otherwise, the call would not have happened. However, other interviewees viewed this call as part of “crisis management” between the two governments.

According to this perspective, because of factors including US domestic politics and US-Taiwan relations, Pelosi’s visit was inevitable, but both governments wanted to manage the impending crisis to prevent severe damage to China-US relations.

Second, interviewees had differing views on the August 10 release of the white paper “The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era.” At the same time that the PLA was conducting military exercises around Taiwan, China’s Taiwan Affairs Office and the State Council Information Office released the white paper, which emphasized “adhering” to the “basic principle of ‘peaceful reunification and one country, two systems’” and mentioned the “bright prospects for the peaceful reunification of the motherland.”⁸ Some interviewees believed that the white paper comprehensively and systematically presented Mainland China’s Taiwan policy to the international community and reaffirmed the PRC’s determination to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Others viewed the white paper as China’s “reassurance” to the international community and the people of Taiwan that the policy of “peaceful reunification of the motherland” remains unchanged and that the PRC is

7 The PRC, it should be noted, does not recognize Japan’s EEZ. See, for example, “China Rejects Japan’s So-called Exclusive Economic Zone in Waters East of Taiwan,” Xinhua, October 26, 2022, <https://english.news.cn/20221026/24527996b6884e76a37040bf750dd02d/c.html>.

8 Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, “White Paper: The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era,” August 10, 2022, https://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zqyw/202208/t20220810_10740168.htm.

prepared to use military means to deter US-Taiwan collusion. However, some interviewees argued that releasing the white paper during military exercises weakened the impact of China's military deterrence. Furthermore, they claimed that the content of the white paper, including the proposals presented in it, were not new and that therefore the white paper could not be considered a significant signal from China.

Third, interviewees had differing opinions on whether the online remarks by Hu Xijin represented an official signal from China and what their impact was. Generally, interviewees believed that because Hu Xijin's online remarks are widely considered semiofficial, his comments on how to counter Pelosi's visit to Taiwan (such as escorting or shooting down her plane) influenced domestic public expectations. However, opinions varied on whether his statements constituted an official signal from China and whether they influenced US judgments. Some believed his remarks influenced the United States, especially the US military. Others, however, argued that they had no impact; US decision-makers are professionals, and their assessments would not have been greatly influenced by Hu's comments.

Fourth, interviewees had differing views on whether the US executive branch could influence Congress's actions. Some believed that due to the separation of powers in the US political system, the executive branch, Congress, and the judiciary branch provide checks and balances on one another, and that President Biden could therefore not influence congressional actions. However, others argued that "the executive branch does have leverage over Congress and can influence it under certain conditions—it's not entirely uncontrollable." Thus, after China's military exercises, the US administration worked in private to prevent Speaker McCarthy from visiting Taiwan. Additionally, according to some interviewees, "the executive branch has the capacity to influence congressional actions, depending on the situation."

Analyses

This section of the report presents, in turn, the analysis of USIP's experts and SIIS's experts of both sets of interviews.

USIP Experts' Analysis

US interviewees were divided on whether the Pelosi visit was a crisis, with many assessing Chinese behavior around the Pelosi visit as a signaling exercise. In the view of these specialists, although neither the United States nor the PRC desired conflict and the two sides' interactions had an element of predictability, significant potential for unintended escalation existed and the US government was poised to respond to contingencies.

Effective signaling has four fundamentals: the message, the messenger, the mode of transmission, and the intended audience. As the visit of Speaker Pelosi demonstrated, the United States and China should take into account the way these elements combine to influence how the other side interprets or misinterprets a signal.

The Message

Each side tends to assume that the message it is sending is crystal clear, but the other side almost invariably finds the message difficult to decipher, misconstrues it, or even overlooks it. For example, according to Chinese interviewees, the Taiwan white paper issued on August 10 was intended as a message of reassurance to be paired with a message of tough deterrence sent via military activities. However, most US interviewees completely overlooked this white paper, and those that did mention it did not take it as reassurance, with one even interpreting it as an indication of a hardening of the Chinese position vis-à-vis Taiwan. Meanwhile, the US side's August 4 announcement that it was postponing a scheduled ICBM test was intended to avoid increasing tensions, but Chinese interviewees observed that they did not interpret this action as a message until much later.

The Messenger

Both sides employ multiple messengers, but it is hard for the other side to discern who should be considered authoritative. Even when the messenger is clearly authoritative and the message is delivered directly, that message can be misinterpreted. The July 28 telephone call between Biden and Xi was an opportunity for each leader to communicate directly with the other—a situation that on the face of it should significantly minimize the chances of a misunderstanding. Nevertheless, some Chinese interviewees appeared to misinterpret the call, believing that it would not have happened unless an agreement had already been reached between the two sides that Pelosi would not visit Taiwan. Both Chinese and US interviewees were divided on whether the July 29 tweet by Hu Xijin should be interpreted as coming from an authoritative messenger. In addition, according to Chinese interviewees, the statement by the PRC ambassador to the United Nations on August 1 held “special significance,” but US interviewees attached no significance to the utterances of this messenger.

The Mode of Transmission

It is not clear what is a more effective mode of transmission: a message delivered in a face-to-face meeting, relayed during a telephone call, passed quietly through official or back channels, or delivered to the public via traditional or social media outlets. Although Chinese interviewees appear to believe that private communication tends to be a more effective way to ensure a message is delivered and received in an unadulterated fashion, it is unclear if the July 28 private telephone call between Biden and Xi proved effective. If the goal of the call was for the two heads of state to discuss managing a potential crisis or spike in tensions due to the visit, then it could be considered effective. However, if the PRC government's takeaway was that

Biden would stop Pelosi from traveling to Taiwan, then such direct, private communication was not effective. The effectiveness of the message that US ambassador to China Nicholas Burns delivered publicly in a CNN interview on August 19 is also unclear. Certainly, as discussed below, Chinese interviewees did not like it.

Chinese interviewees also seem to have concluded that that best way for Beijing to signal Washington in this case was through military actions. Although prior to the visit, PRC interviewees did not anticipate that nonmilitary signals would fail to get US attention, looking back it appears that the most effective form of signaling by the PRC was the military exercises conducted after Pelosi's visit. There was a sense of frustration among the PRC interviewees that nonmilitary signals prior to the visit failed to adequately convey the depth of Beijing's opposition to the visit.

The Intended Audience

Sometimes the intended audience for a message is unclear. Is one side targeting a specific audience and, if so, who? Perhaps there are multiple intended audiences? This lack of clarity can cause confusion and result in the message never being received. US interviewees speculated about the intended audience for Chinese messages: President Biden, NSC coordinator Campbell, Speaker Pelosi, or someone else? Similarly, in the case of various US messages, who was the target audience: Xi Jinping? The PLA? Chinese public opinion?

For US interviewees, persistent Chinese messaging directed at the US executive branch regarding a forthcoming international trip by a prominent member of the legislative branch seemed to suggest that the Chinese side did not understand the American system of separation of powers. However, according to Chinese interviewees, the Chinese side does have a good understanding of the US political system, though there was some disagreement on ability of the US executive branch to influence congressional activities. At the same time, there was a sense that the Chinese side needed to persistently message the executive branch to demonstrate the gravity of the issue.

Chinese interviewees also commented that China lacks an effective way to interact with Congress. What should one make of this? One explanation is that a significant portion of Chinese messaging was performative—that is, the Chinese side did not anticipate that its messages would be successful in preventing Pelosi from visiting Taiwan and was performing for various audiences. The intended audiences almost certainly included Chinese domestic audiences: namely, Xi Jinping and Chinese public opinion. Actors were performing to demonstrate they were staunchly defending Chinese interests on a sensitive issue. The government and public of Taiwan were also likely audiences, with the aim of demonstrating to them the costs of growing interaction with the United States. Yet, given that the United States was probably the prime target audience, China's rhetoric and actions are in the final analysis

best seen as performative because they were not expected to deter Pelosi's visit but rather were intended to communicate the strength of the PRC's opposition.

SIIS Experts' Analysis

First, in China-US interactions, the methods used to send and capture signals are very important. Indeed, the way signals are sent is important to understanding their content. For example, Chinese interviewees emphasized the special significance of Ambassador Zhang Jun's signal at the United Nations opposing Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, which highlighted that China is highly alert and opposed to the development of the "internationalization of the Taiwan question." Chinese interviewees also noted that it was unwise for Ambassador Nicholas Burns to "call out" to China through the media, as China and the United States have enough channels through which to transmit signals. Thus, China considered it a US attempt to shape US domestic and international public opinion. In terms of how signals are captured, some Chinese interviewees mentioned that the delay in testing the Minuteman-III ICBM was a proactive signal from the United States, but it was not understood as a signal at the time. However, interviewees did not recognize this until it was pointed out by US participants in a track two meeting.. This shows that even when there are ample communication channels between China and the United States, track 2 dialogues remain an important conduit, helping both parties accurately capture each other's signals in a "noisy environment."

Second, China and the United States have opposite views on the desirability and utility of signaling by third parties, which has become a significant factor negatively affecting the stable development of China-US relations. Some US interviewees emphasized the importance of the positions taken by India and ASEAN, while others believed that the attitudes of allies such as Japan and Australia were crucial to US diplomacy. Chinese interviewees shared the belief that it had become a routine practice for the Biden administration to orchestrate its allies and partners to collectively pressure China on Taiwan-related issues. The statements by the G7 foreign ministers on the Pelosi visit only served to increase China's indignation. Clearly, the United States views the statements and policy positions of third parties as a stabilizing force, demonstrating the "legitimacy" of US actions and the "illegitimacy" of Chinese actions. In contrast, China views them as destabilizing forces, demonstrating the United States' attempt to "gang up" on China to "internationalize the Taiwan question" and indicating the necessity for China to adopt strong military deterrence. The Biden administration's strategy toward China was seen as having emphasized the importance of the United States' regional allies, in contrast to the policies of the first Trump administration (2017–21) and a pathway for the Biden administration (2021–25) to limit China's development opportunities by strengthening the US "Indo-Pacific" alliance system. This approach was reflected not only in the Biden administration's Taiwan policy but also in many other issue areas such as science and technology and the South China Sea. These diametrically opposed views of third-party

statements and other types of third-party signals have negatively impacted the stability of China-US relations.

Third, differences in perspectives on Taiwan's policies have become a key factor affecting the transmission and reception of signals as well as the action-reaction dynamics between China and the United States. The policy insights offered by the USIP team included the suggestion that although third-party statements may provoke China's anger, they may still serve the intended purpose of signaling, namely, "catching Beijing's attention." This supposition is based on the notion that previous US signals may not have attracted sufficient attention from China, leading to no adjustments in China's policy. This involves an important question not addressed in prior research: How do China and the United States view Taiwan's policies? For the sake of research feasibility, Taiwan's policy responses were not included in the timeline.⁹ However, in the interactions between China and the United States surrounding Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, differences in views on Taiwan's policies have remained a crucial factor. The United States considers the policy of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities toward the Chinese mainland to be moderate and rational, consistent with "maintaining the status quo," while many policies implemented by Mainland China are deemed "coercive." Conversely, Mainland China believes that the DPP authorities neither accept the "1992 Consensus" nor clearly define the cross-strait political relationship.¹⁰ Moreover, Taiwan leader Tsai's 2021 statement of the DPP's "commitment to the principle that the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China are not subordinate to each other" promotes a "new two-state theory" as well as "gradual Taiwan independence."¹¹ Such statements undermine peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Therefore, the visit by the US House Speaker not only interfered in China's internal affairs but also sent dangerous signals to "Taiwan independence forces" on the island, threatening peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Thus, it was not a case of China "overlooking" the US signals before and after Pelosi's visit; rather, Mainland China was highly dissatisfied with US support for Taiwan's policy of "gradual Taiwan independence." However, China's dissatisfaction did not gain sufficient attention from the United States, which failed (or chose not) to seriously heed China's assessment and criticism of Taiwan's promotion of gradual independence. This ultimately compelled China to convey stronger deterrence signals against "Taiwan independence" and US interference through military exercises.

Fourth, the United States intends to use the concept of a "new normal" to shape a favorable

⁹ In the view of SIIS researchers, Taiwan is not considered a "third party."

¹⁰ The 1992 consensus refers to an agreement reached during a meeting held that year in Hong Kong between quasi-official representatives from both sides of the Taiwan Strait: the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait from Beijing and the Strait Exchange Foundation from Taipei. The two sides differ in their interpretation of what was agreed upon. Moreover, Taiwan's participants were from the Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party.

¹¹ Taiwan's and the PRC's positions are reflected in Office of the President of the Republic of China (Taiwan), "President Tsai Delivers National Day Address," October 10, 2021, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/6175>; and Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, "White Paper: The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era."

public opinion and policy environment. Multiple US interviewees mentioned that China, through Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, has created a "new normal" in the Taiwan Strait; they also believed that the delay in Pelosi's visit gave China more time to prepare military exercises. However, Chinese interviewees emphasized that China's military actions are contingent on US-Taiwan collusion and that if such collusion becomes normalized, so will China's military actions. Chinese interviewees also noted that the United States claimed that China had created a "new normal" after China's military exercises, indicating that the United States "felt at a disadvantage." This depiction of the US mindset is insightful. Due to this feeling of being disadvantaged, the United States seeks to use the "new normal" label to shape a favorable public opinion and policy environment. First, the US stigmatizes PLA actions to deter Taiwan independence by labeling them 'coercive' military actions and deliberately exaggerates the possibility of unification by military means. Second, Washington equates the PLA's military deterrence actions in the Taiwan Strait with China's actions conducted in the South China Sea for "rights protection"—law enforcement operations carried out by PRC Coast Guard vessels in waters claimed as being under China's jurisdiction—confuses the nature of the Taiwan question. Further, by employing the "new normal" label, the United States seeks to justify continued collusion with the DPP and further mobilize its regional allies to exert collective pressure on China. This is the United States' method of reshaping a favorable public opinion and policy environment after feeling disadvantaged.

Fifth, China's repeated strong signals of opposition sent to the US executive branch before Pelosi's visit to Taiwan were not a domestic "performance." The USIP team believes that because China understands that it is difficult for the president to influence congressional decisions under the US political system and because China has limited ability to sway Congress, the main reason for China's repeated warnings to the US administration may have been to demonstrate to a domestic audience a firm defense of national interests. However, this characterization of the warnings as "performative" misinterprets or overlooks four aspects of China's approach to signaling. In the first place, China is aware that in the history of China-US relations, examples of the US executive successfully influencing Congress to shift policy perspectives are not uncommon. For instance, before Congress voted on granting China Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR), President Bill Clinton personally engaged with undecided bipartisan members, which played a critical role in passing the measure. Two, if China had not repeatedly issued strong opposition signals to the US administration, the administration might have believed that China's opposition to Pelosi's Taiwan visit was not very resolute. Three, the strong signals issued by multiple Chinese departments—including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Taiwan Affairs Office, the Ministry of National Defense, the National People's Congress, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—underscore that the stance against Pelosi's visit represented a whole-of-government, whole-of-society position. To view this as "performative repetition" or merely for domestic consumption misunderstands China's political system or shows ideological bias against it. Four, China's military exercises following Pelosi's visit were a powerful signal. As a result, the

US administration was motivated to expend political capital to persuade Congress not to take certain later actions. Notably, the symbolic Taiwan-related provisions in the China Policy Act were abandoned and other elements were absorbed into the National Defense Authorization Act. Moreover, Speaker McCarthy did not follow through on his previously stated commitment to visit Taiwan if he became speaker, and his meeting with Tsai Ing-wen in California was notably low-key.

Policy Implications

Based on the preceding assessments and analyses of US and Chinese perspectives, this section presents suggestions by USIP and SIIS experts designed to help the United States and China cope with the challenges to clear communication and unambiguous signaling in an environment of heightened tensions, inflammatory rhetoric, confrontational behavior, and deep distrust in bilateral ties.

USIP Experts' Perspectives

First, given the above findings and analysis, it is important for each side to use multiple messengers, employ multiple modes of communication, and target multiple audiences to help ensure a message is received and understood by the other side. Of course, it is also important for all messengers and all modes to communicate a consistent message to all intended audiences. In other words, the message should be clear and consistent, with the only variables being the messenger, the mode of transmission, and the target audience.

Second, following on from the first point, the message should be explicit and direct, and its purpose clearly explained. As one of the US interviewees quoted in the 2022 USIP report observed: “If we don’t tell them [China] what we [the United States] are doing and why we are doing it, then they’ll draw their own conclusions—and we would do the same.”¹²

Third, even when you are “on message” and the other side receives that message, the message may or may not have the intended effect. One example of effective messaging may be the statements by third-party governments voicing support for Taiwan in face of Chinese coercion. According to Chinese interviewees, Beijing was incensed by these statements, perceiving them as “internationalizing” the Taiwan issue. Whereas Beijing tends to view “internationalization” as escalatory, and Chinese interviewees perceived these statements as destabilizing, US interviewees viewed these statements as contributing to stability in the Taiwan Strait. Yet, this might be an instance where the message had the intended effect—getting Beijing’s attention.

¹² Scobell et al., “US-China Signaling, Action-Reaction Dynamics, and Taiwan,” 17.

Fourth, pay attention to those words and deeds that are likely to be particularly alarming to the other side and be sure to carefully calibrate language and actions accordingly. For example, the visit of a senior US official—in this instance, a prominent member of the legislative branch—to Taiwan is what seems to constitute a red line for China. The comments and actions of various US officials regarding the visit have been overinterpreted by some in Beijing as the cumulative effects of PRC pressure. This misinterpretation may in turn have fueled unrealistic expectations that the visit would be cancelled.

SIIS Experts' Perspectives

When sending signals from multiple points, it is necessary to maintain signal consistency and enhance the signal's acceptance by strengthening targeting. Communicating the same information from multiple points is conducive to increasing signal strength and is an important way to achieve informational clarity. However, when sending signals from multiple points, a situation may arise where the information is too similar and so is ignored or misunderstood by the other party. To address this issue, messengers can tailor the language of the message to suit specific recipients, making important signal points more prominent and enhancing information transmission and dissemination results. Of course, there are also situations where the signaling party wants the signal to be ambiguous or deliberately releases ambiguous signals to probe the other party's intentions and capabilities. This can complicate the interactions between both sides and is an issue worthy of further study.

For extremely sensitive security issues or during a crisis or near-crisis, track 2 dialogues involving former officials and analysts as participants can be the best way of transmitting signals. Authoritative official channels are irreplaceable for sending accurate and clear policy signals. However, given the extraordinarily complex and sensitive nature of security issues, important policy signals may not be captured accurately or in a timely manner if communicated through official channels only. China and the United States need to maintain and unblock authoritative track 2 dialogues as a supplement to track 1 channels. Interestingly, many track 2 dialogues between China and the United States now exist, but whether they can all be deemed “authoritative” is questionable.¹³ Relying on “less authoritative” track 2 dialogues to convey signals can sometimes complicate the situation further. In addition, on highly complex and sensitive issues in China-US relations, “calling out” each other through media is not conducive to the accurate capture and understanding of signals. Both China and the United States should exercise restraint in this respect.

The differences in signal reception and judgment reflect both the different perceptions of China and the United States on many issues and the fundamental differences in their

¹³ According to the SIIS authors, “authoritative track 2” refers to those dialogues officially mandated, supported or valued and there are reliable channels for reporting the substance of the sessions back to a government. In the view of USIP authors, the SIIS authors appear to be characterizing what could best be described as track 1.5 dialogues.

interests regarding the Taiwan question. When basic mutual trust exists between two sides, it is relatively easy for each side to accept the other's explanations about differences in perception or understanding. However, at present, basic mutual trust between China and the United States is almost nonexistent. The only way to avoid misjudgment of each other's signals is to strengthen strategic communication and policy dialogue before and after a crisis or near- crisis.

Concluding Comments by USIP Experts

The report, like the report published in 2022, provides evidence that the United States and China are prone to missing, misperceiving, and misinterpreting each other's signals. This report shows that each side tends to believe it is sending clear signals even though the other side may not recognize them as signals or is unable to interpret them accurately. This finding applies to signals designed to draw or reinforce red lines, as well as signals sent with the goal of mitigating bilateral tensions or reducing the risk of escalation. Moreover, communicating effectively through signaling is not guaranteed even when the two sides are watching for signals from each other. While both this report and the earlier report focus on US-China signaling on Taiwan, as some interviewees in each study point out, signals may also come from other parties. These third-party signals may be deliberately reinforcing of signals sent by the United States, or by the PRC, or by both sides. However, because the extent to which third-party signaling is coordinated with the United States or China is often unclear, third-party signals may inject additional uncertainty into the signaling dynamic.

These points suggest several areas for future research. One of these is the question carried forward from the previous report about which nonmilitary signals should be understood as authoritative. Are there constraints on clarifying the relative authoritativeness of signals? In other words, does either side perceive advantages from retaining a degree of ambiguity as to the authoritativeness of the signals it sends? As for military signals, how can the two sides prevent them from being perceived as escalatory? Are there ways to ensure that as these military signals become increasingly frequent and "noisy" (in the sense of the increasing number of military actors involved), they are not misinterpreted? An additional question raised by this research is the nature of the relationship between back-channel communications and signaling. Although not captured in the timeline of public statements and events, back-channel communications are ongoing before, during, and after a US-China crisis. How these private messages and signals impact the crisis is likely significant but impossible to capture in this report.

Appendix

Timeline of Chinese and US Actions

April 6–August 31, 2022

CHINESE ACTIONS

April 7

(Posted 17:19 GMT) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced sanctions on 28 officials of the Trump administration.

(Posted 15:23 GMT) State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi makes clear China's position on a potential Pelosi visit, saying it would be a "malicious provocation against China's sovereignty and gross interference in China's internal affairs, which will send an extremely dangerous political signal to the outside world" and that "China will surely make a firm response and all the consequences will be borne by the US side."

July 19

(Posted 09:45 GMT) MFA spokesperson says Pelosi's visit will have a "severe negative impact on the political foundation of China-US relations. . . . We urge the US side to adhere to the one-China principle and the stipulations in the three China-US joint communiqués. The US must not arrange for Speaker Pelosi to visit the Taiwan region."

US ACTIONS

April 6

(Posted 11:48 GMT) Fuji News Network first reports that Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi is scheduled to visit Taiwan. commitment to Taiwan was "rock solid."

April 7

(Posted 14:57 GMT) Pelosi's spokesperson Drew Hammill says on his personal Twitter account that Pelosi tested positive for COVID-19. Therefore, the trip to Asia is postponed.

July 19

(Posted 03:51 GMT) The Financial Times first reports that Pelosi plans to visit Taiwan in August.



July 20

President Joe Biden tells reporters that military officials believe Pelosi's trip to Taiwan is "not a good idea right now but I don't know what the status of it is."

July 21

MFA spokesperson stresses that China has repeatedly stated its position on firmly opposing Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, saying "should the US side insist on making the visit, China will act strongly to resolutely respond to it and take countermeasures."

July 26

Ministry of Defense (MOD) spokesperson urges the US side to "take practical actions to fulfill its commitment of not supporting 'Taiwan independence,' and must not arrange for Pelosi to visit the Taiwan region."

July 28

President Xi speaks by phone with President Biden. "President Xi elaborated on China's principled position on the Taiwan question...The position of the Chinese government and people on the Taiwan question is consistent...resolutely safeguarding China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity is the firm will of the more than 1.4 billion Chinese people....public opinion cannot be defied. Those who play with fire will perish by it. It is hoped that the US will be clear-eyed about this. The US should honor the one-China principle and implement the three joint communiqués both in word and in deed."

July 28

President Biden and President Xi hold a virtual meeting. Biden tells Xi that US policy on Taiwan has not changed and that Washington "strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

July 29

Former Global Times editor Hu Xijin tweets that “if US fighter jets escort Pelosi’s plane into Taiwan, it is [an] invasion. The PLA has the right to forcibly dispel Pelosi’s plane and the US fighter jets, including firing warning shots and making tactical movement of obstruction. If ineffective, then shoot them down.”

August 1

Posted 13:05 GMT) MFA spokesman stresses that the “Chinese side has repeatedly made clear our serious concern over Speaker Pelosi’s potential visit to Taiwan and our firm opposition to the visit. We will take firm and strong measures to safeguard our sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

August 1

(Posted 23:30 GMT) China’s UN ambassador, Zhang Jun, elaborates on China’s positions on the Taiwan question and Speaker Pelosi’s potential visit to the region. “Such a visit is apparently dangerous and provocative.”

August 1

(Evening local time) According to Taiwan media, The General Administration of Customs suspends import of more than 100 Taiwanese food products.

August 2

(Late night local time) The MFA summons the US ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns, to “lodge stern representations and strong protests” against Pelosi’s visit to China’s Taiwan.

July 31

Pelosi’s office releases an announcement that Pelosi will lead a congressional delegation to the Indo-Pacific and visit Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan. The press release does not include Taiwan in the itinerary.

August 1

(Posted 17:54 GMT) National Security Council (NSC) Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby says, “there’s no reason for Beijing to turn a potential visit consistent with longstanding US policy into some sort of crisis or use it as a pretext to increase aggressive military activity in or around the Taiwan Strait.” US actions “break no new ground.” This potential visit has precedent and would not change the status quo.

August 2

(Arrival approx.14:40 GMT) The US congressional delegation led by Pelosi arrives at Taipei Songshan Airport. Pelosi issues a press release through the Speaker’s office announcing that her visit to Taiwan is a sign of the United States’ “unwavering commitment to supporting Taiwan’s vibrant democracy.”

August 2

(Posted 15:20 GMT) People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command (ETC) spokesperson says ETC will conduct a series of joint military operations around the Taiwan Island from the evening of August 2.

August 3

(Posted 6:33 GMT) The PLA ETC conducts joint combat exercises and training in the waters and airspace around Taiwan Island.

August 4

(Posted 07:20 GMT) The PLA ETC conducts long-range live-fire drills in the Taiwan Strait.

August 4

(Posted 08:22 GMT) State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi firmly refutes the Taiwan-related statement issued by the foreign ministers of G7 while at the East Asia Summit Foreign Minister's Meeting in Phnom Penh.

August 5

(Posted 09:31 GMT) The PLA ETC continues joint combat exercises and training around Taiwan island.

August 2

(Posted 14:52 GMT) Washington Post prints a Pelosi op-ed titled "Why I'm Leading a Congressional Delegation to Taiwan," saying the visit should be viewed as showing the US stands with its democratic partner, Taiwan.

August 3

Pelosi's congressional delegation (CODEL) meet with Tsai Ing-Wen and visit the "Legislative Yuan" and the Human Rights Museum before departing in the evening.

August 3

The G7 Foreign Ministers issue a statement; "There is no justification to use a visit as pretext for aggressive military activity....It is normal and routine for legislators from our countries to travel internationally."

August 4

(Posted 19:20 GMT) During a press briefing, the White House announces that the US Navy aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan has been directed to remain near Taiwan to "monitor the situation," and that a planned test of the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile has been delayed to avoid escalating tensions.

August 4

The White House summons China's ambassador to the United States Qin Gang, condemning China's recent military actions as "irresponsible and at odds with our long-standing goal of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

August 5

Speaking to reporters in Cambodia, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken says, "China has chosen to overact and use Speaker Pelosi's visit as a pretext to increase provocative military activity in and around the Taiwan Strait."

August 5

(Posted 09:40 GMT) The MFA announces countermeasures in response to the Pelosi visit (the “3 cancellations” and “5 suspensions”).

August 5

(Posted 11:57 GMT) MFA spokesperson responds to a Reuters reporter’s question on Japan’s claim that five ballistic missiles were fired by China and landed in “Japan’s EEZ,” stating that Chinese authorities issued alerts in advance and that there is no such thing as “Japan’s EEZ.”

August 6

The PLA ETC continues joint combat exercises and training around Taiwan Island.

August 7

The PLA ETC continues joint exercises to test precision strike capabilities.

August 8

(Posted 14:22 GMT) The PLA ETC exercises continue. PLA extends military operations, announcing new exercises to engage in “joint anti-submarine and sea assault operations.”

August 9

Ambassador Qin refutes the US claim that China’s suspension of climate change talks is punishing the whole world.

August 10

(Posted 02:08 GMT) The white paper “The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era” is published.

August 10

(Posted 08:34 GMT) PLA ETC spokesperson announces that it has “successfully completed various tasks and effectively tested the integrated combat capabilities of the troops,” and will continue regular patrols.

August 5

(Washington Post, posted 19:20 GMT) NSC spokesman John Kirby in a statement to the media criticizes China’s Saturday (August 6 in China) actions, specifically addressing the halting of climate talks as being “fundamentally irresponsible.” China is “actually punishing the whole world because the climate crisis doesn’t recognize geographic boundaries and borders. . . It’s truly a global and existential crisis.”

August 8

(Reuters, posted 13:52 GMT) President Biden tells reporters he is not worried about Taiwan but is concerned about China’s actions in the region since Pelosi’s visit to Taipei.

August 14

(Posted 22:15 GMT) Liu Pengyu, spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in Washington, makes a statement against the CODEL visit, saying the United States “does not want to see stability across the Taiwan Straits.”

August 15

(Posted 05:41 GMT) Wu Qian, the PLA spokesperson says the visit of Congress members of the US, including Senator Markey, to China’s Taiwan region starting Aug 14 reveals the true face of the US as a spoiler and saboteur of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Wu says the PLA ETC’s multi-unit joint combat readiness patrols and real-combat drills in the water and airspace around the Taiwan island are a resolute countermeasure and solemn deterrent to the provocation of US-Taiwan collusion.

August 19

(Posted 11:42 GMT) In response to recent remarks made by Daniel Kritenbrink, a MFA spokesperson says, “China’s response to US provocation is legitimate, lawful, and justified. . . . China will not waver in defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The US must not miscalculate.”

August 14

After Pelosi’s visit, a CODEL led by Senator Ed Markey arrives in Taiwan.

August 15

(Posted 18:11 GMT) State Department spokesperson Ned Price says that “Members of Congress visiting Taiwan is entirely in line with our one — our longstanding ‘one China’ policy.” He also states that members of Congress and congressional delegations will continue to visit Taiwan.

August 17

Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink says China has used Pelosi’s trip as a pretext to change the status quo and its actions are part of an intensified pressure campaign against Taiwan that is expected to continue to unfold in the coming weeks and months.

August 18

The US aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan returns to Yokosuka, Japan.

August 19

(CNN, posted 23:17 GMT) US Ambassador to China Burns says in an interview with CNN that China needs to convince the rest of the world it will act peacefully in the Taiwan Strait.

August 21

Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb arrives in Taiwan.

August 22

Posted 03:25 GMT) MFA spokesperson responds to the “Wrongful Remarks by US Ambassador to China Concerning the Taiwan Region.”

August 22

(Posted 12:48 GMT) MFA spokesperson comments on the visit to Taiwan by Governor Holcomb, saying they have made “serious demarches to the US side.”

August 24

Chinese defense chief Wei Fenghe delivers a video speech at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Defense Ministers meeting stressing that “Taiwan is China’s Taiwan and the Taiwan question is China’s internal affair. China firmly opposes, condemns and takes resolute countermeasures to the US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to China’s Taiwan region” in early August.

August 25

The Chinese embassy in Washington issues a statement that Beijing will “take resolute countermeasures” in response to Senator Blackburn’s visit to Taiwan.

August 31

MFA Spokesperson says “China firmly rejects any official interaction between the US and Taiwan in any form and in any name” in response to a question about Governor Ducey’s trip to Taiwan.

August 25

US Senator Marsha Blackburn lands in Taiwan as part of a third US CODEL since the beginning of August.

August 30

Arizona Governor Doug Ducey arrives in Taiwan for a three-day trip.

