

Pro-independence president inaugurated in Taiwan

Ben McGrath
21 May 2024

On Monday, Lai Ching-te was officially installed as the new president of Taiwan following his election in January. In his inaugural address, Lai, of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), demonstrated that his government will continue the policy of his predecessor which will only deepen tensions with Beijing in line with the US war drive aimed at goading China into a conflict.

In his speech, Lai made numerous provocative statements about Taiwan as a sovereign nation and called on Beijing to engage with Taipei “under the principles of parity.” He declared, “The Republic of China [i.e. Taiwan] and the People’s Republic of China are not subordinate to each other. All of the people of Taiwan must come together to safeguard our nation; all our political parties ought to oppose annexation and protect sovereignty; and no one should entertain the idea of giving up our national sovereignty in exchange for political power.”

These statements are a direct challenge to the One China policy, which has governed cross-strait relations for decades and states that Taiwan is a part of China. This situation arose following World War II when Taiwan, a former Japanese colony, was reunited with China. When the Chinese Nationalists fled to Taiwan in 1949 during the Chinese Revolution, the US protected them by sending its Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait. Since 1979, Washington has de facto recognized the One China policy when it ended formal diplomatic relations with Taipei and recognized Beijing.

However, Washington now encourages Taiwanese politicians like Lai to reject reunification with mainland China. Beijing has made clear it will not accept an independent Taiwan as it would allow for the basing of US troops only 180 kilometers (112 miles) from the

mainland and set a precedent for the carving up of Chinese territory. Beijing has also declared that while it pursues the peaceful reunification with Taiwan, it will use force if Taipei ever formally declares independence.

Lai is following the position of outgoing President Tsai Ing-wen who claimed that Taiwan was already a sovereign nation and therefore had no need to declare independence. He stated on Monday that since the first democratic election of the president in 1996, “the Republic of China Taiwan [has been] a sovereign, independent nation in which sovereignty lies in the hands of the people.”

In response to Lai’s address, Chen Binhua, spokesman for Beijing’s State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, declared on Monday, “Our determination to resolve the Taiwan question and realize national reunification is as solid as a rock, our ability to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity is unshakable, and our actions to fight against ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist activities and external interference are resolute and powerful.”

Lai comes to office after serving as vice president from 2020 to 2024 under Tsai, who during her eight years in office, increased cooperation with Washington and strengthened the Taiwanese military in preparation for war. Taking over as vice president is Hsiao Bi-khim, Taipei’s representative in the US between 2020 and 2023. Hsiao has been aggressively anti-Beijing and has numerous connections to the US government. Lai’s cabinet includes other former Tsai officials, including Joseph Wu, who will shift from foreign minister to secretary-general of the National Security Council. He is replacing Wellington Koo who is now defense minister.

The dangerous game Lai and the DPP is playing with

Beijing, backed by the US, does not have widespread support in Taiwan, despite claims to the contrary in the Western media. There are deep concerns over a war with mainland China, reflected in the fact that Lai was elected with only 40.05 percent of the vote. His opponents, Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang (KMT) and Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) received 33.49 percent and 26.46 percent of the votes respectively. The KMT supports closer relations with Beijing while the TPP attempts to split the difference between the KMT and the pro-independent DPP, often critical of the latter's anti-Beijing stance.

Furthermore, the DPP does not have control of the Legislative Yuan, losing its majority during the January election. The KMT now holds 52 seats in the 113-seat body and are joined by two so-called independents. The DPP holds 51 seats while the TPP holds eight.

In spite of this, Lai is pushing ahead with the anti-Beijing alliance Taipei has forged with Washington. In his speech Monday, Lai claimed that Beijing's actions in and around the South China Sea were "the greatest strategic challenges to global peace and stability." He praised Washington's massive military spending bill that allocates \$US8.12 billion for the Indo-Pacific, part of a package totaling \$US95 billion, which also provides funding for war in Ukraine and Israel's genocide in Gaza.

A total of \$US3.9 billion will be provided to "Taiwan and regional partners." This includes \$US2 billion in direct military funding from Washington's Foreign Military Financing program, typically reserved only for sovereign nations. The Biden administration used this program for the first time last August to finance Taiwan's military. Lai claimed this military spending would "provide the Indo-Pacific region with additional security and assistance, thereby supporting the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken echoed these remarks, saying, "We look forward to working with President Lai and across Taiwan's political spectrum to advance our shared interests and values, deepen our longstanding unofficial relationship, and maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

The US also sent an "unofficial" delegation to the inauguration, which no doubt worked to ensure Lai's administration would continue where Tsai's left off. It included Richard Armitage, who served as deputy

secretary of state under George W. Bush. Armitage is an anti-China hawk who has taken part in other delegations to Taiwan. He was joined by Laura Rosenberger, the head of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), which serves as Washington's unofficial embassy; Brian Deese, a former director of the Biden administration's National Economic Council; and Richard Bush, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and former chair of the AIT.

These references to "peace and stability" are deliberately provocative. It is repeated now ad nauseum by Washington and its allies to demonize Beijing and further challenge the One China policy. While Washington carries out belligerent actions, as it did on May 8 when it sent the guided missile destroyer USS Halsey through the Taiwan Strait or by the expanding war games that regularly take place throughout the region, any response from Beijing is denounced as illegitimate and an infringement on Taiwanese "sovereignty."

In addition, one only has to look at the destruction the US has caused in Ukraine and Gaza to see what Washington and its allies mean by "peace and stability." Lai expressed his support for US imperialism, declaring that "Russia's invasion of Ukraine and conflict between Israel and Hamas continue to shake the whole world." In other words, he ignored Washington's role in stoking the war in Ukraine as a means of subordinating Russia as well as legitimizing Israel's genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza, which has killed more than 35,000 people, mostly women and children.

In reality, it is Washington that is responsible for the rising tensions by massively arming Taiwan, conducting visits by high-level officials, and promoting Taiwan's separate participation in international bodies like the World Health Organization. These provocations and the escalation of the danger of war in the Indo-Pacific will only continue under the new Lai administration.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)