

US foreign policy

Top US air force general predicts China conflict in 2025

Leaked memo from General Mike Minihan comes as tension remains high over Taiwan



President Joe Biden has on four occasions said he would order the US military to intervene if China attacked Taiwan © REUTERS

Demetri Sevastopulo in Washington 7 HOURS AGO

A top American air force general has predicted that the US and China will probably go to war in 2025, in the most dramatic warning yet from a senior military officer about the likelihood of a conflict over Taiwan.

General Mike Minihan, head of US Air Mobility Command, said the two military powers were likely to end up at war because of a series of circumstances that would embolden Chinese president Xi Jinping.

“I hope I am wrong. My gut tells me we will fight in 2025,” Minihan wrote in a private memo to his top commanders obtained by NBC news and seen by the Financial Times.

“Xi secured his third term [as Communist party general secretary] and set [sic] his war council in October 2022. [Taiwan’s presidential elections](#) are in 2024 and will offer Xi a reason,” Minihan wrote. Minihan added that the 2024 presidential elections in the US would create a “distracted America” that would benefit the Chinese president.

“Xi’s team, reason, and opportunity are all aligned for 2025,” he concluded.

The memo comes as tensions remain very high over [Taiwan](#), a democratically ruled

country over which China has long claimed sovereignty. Minihan's comments are the starkest prediction from a senior military commander and a rare instance of a top officer suggesting so clearly that the US would respond to a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

The comments come one week before secretary of state Antony Blinken is due to become the first cabinet secretary from President Joe Biden's administration to visit China.

China has over the past two years been flying larger sorties of warplanes near Taiwan. Last August, the Chinese military conducted large-scale exercises that included firing missiles over Taiwan in response to then US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visiting Taipei.

Underscoring the tension, Biden has on four occasions said he would order the US military to intervene if China attacked Taiwan. His warnings appeared to change a longstanding policy known as "strategic ambiguity" under which Washington does not say whether the US military would intervene in a conflict over Taiwan.

Over the past two years, several US military commanders have given rough timelines for possible Chinese military action against Taiwan. In March 2021 Admiral Philip Davidson, then head of US Indo-Pacific command, said China could attack Taiwan by 2027, in comments that elevated concern in the US and around the Indo-Pacific about a threat to Taiwan.

Last October Admiral Michael Gilday, head of the US navy, said the Pentagon had to be prepared for military action at any time.

"When we talk about the 2027 window, in my mind that has to be a 2022 window or potentially a 2023 window," Gilday told the Atlantic Council, in comments dismissed by some as a clumsy effort to remind the military that it always had to be prepared to fight at any time.

As head of Air Mobility Command, Minihan oversees air-related logistics across the US military. The four-star general previously served as deputy head of Indo-Pacific Command, which would be directly responsible for commanding US forces in any conflict with China.

Eric Sayers, a former Indo-Pacific command adviser, said Minihan had been at the "tip of the spear" in the Pacific for more than a decade and understood the China threat "better than almost anyone in uniform".

"The language in the memo is stark and will make some uncomfortable, but memos of

this sort are neither drafted for public consumption or as a sophisticated intelligence assessment of the potential for conflict,” said Sayers.

He said people should interpret the document as “controlled correspondence to Minihan’s subordinates that he expects them to act with a sense of urgency to enhance the command’s readiness”.

The Pentagon and White House did not comment.

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