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The Strategic Importance of Taiwan to the United States and Its Allies: Part Two – Policy since the Start of the Russia-Ukraine War

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ABSTRACT: Taiwan has become increasingly important to the United States and its allies as the Russia-Ukraine War has united democracies against authoritarian expansionism and indeed has developed an international democracy-authoritarianism dynamic in global affairs. Part one of this article clearly outlined the geopolitical, economic, and soft-power reasons why Taiwan is strategically important. Part two reviews the development of US and allied policy statements on Taiwan—from the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 to the present—and provides policymakers and military strategists with incremental but realistic recommendations for understanding the current dynamic of the region and fashioning responses to deter further authoritarian aggression.

Keywords: Taiwan, China, Russia, Ukraine, *National Security Strategy*, Biden

Toward the end of 2022, Congress passed, and the president signed, the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which includes a section titled the “Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act.”¹ That section authorizes \$2 billion in grants and loans annually to Taiwan for five years and authorizes \$1 billion a year for military stockpiles to be sent to Taiwan in case of an emergency.² The significant and unambiguous increase in funding and materiel support signals concern over Taiwan’s defensive needs, but the reasons for that anxiety are not so clearly articulated.

The Russia-Ukraine War has increased uneasiness that authoritarian regimes such as China will take advantage of the United States’ and Europe’s concentration on Ukraine to take action against their rivals,

1. P.L. 117-263, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, H.R. 7900 (2022), <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/download/fy23-ndaa-bill-text>; and Jim Gamarone, “Biden Signs National Defense Authorization Act into Law,” U.S. Department of Defense (website), December 23, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3252968/biden-signs-national-defense-authorization-act-into-law/>.

2. John Feng, “Joe Biden Prepares to Sign Off on \$10Bn Taiwan Security Package,” *Newsweek* (website), December 8, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-national-defense-authorization-act-2023-taiwan-security-defense-bill-china-1765635>.

such as Taiwan, if not properly deterred. These concerns appear justified, given that China's response to the National Defense Authorization Act involved sending even more warplanes and warships around Taiwan than their past responses to the United States' and Taiwan's perceived "provocations."³ More recently, China reacted to a visit by the then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan by conducting extensive military exercises—including launching missiles over northern Taiwan—and had a similar reaction to current Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy's meeting with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen in April. It would behoove military planners to familiarize themselves with the strategic environment quickly, should tensions over the waters and airspace surrounding Taiwan increase further.

The war in Ukraine has brought to light subtle changes in diplomatic wording and incremental maneuvers from the previous US position articulated in the One China Policy (OCP). Some policy reinterpretations are grounded in fundamental changes to Taiwan's domestic politics, that is, what the people of Taiwan want from their relationship with the United States and China. While part one of this article reviewed the factors that make Taiwan strategically important, part two will make the case that the United States has begun to shift its policy in how it regards Taiwan while also trying to avoid military confrontation. Through a review of US policy toward Taiwan from the Nixon administration to current official statements brought on in part by the Ukraine conflict, this article provides policymakers with thoughts on how to manage this delicate balance.

The US One China Policy

The origins and dynamics of US-China relations are shaped by the US One China Policy, which can only be explained in the historical context that led to Taiwan becoming a de facto independent state.⁴ In 1911, as imperial governance in China collapsed, and colonial powers took advantage during China's "century of humiliation," revolutionaries founded the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan) to take its place.⁵ Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek led the effort to unite China from what

3. Jennifer Jett, "China Sends 71 Warplanes and 7 Ships toward Taiwan in 24 Hours," *NBC News* (website), December 26, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-taiwan-us-defense-spending-bill-rcna63221>.

4. For more information on the US One China Policy, see Luke P. Bellocchi, "Innovation in Education – The U.S. One China Policy: A Primer for Professional Military Education Faculty," *Campaigning: The Journal of the Joint Forces Staff College*, Joint Forces Staff College (website), May 11, 2022, <https://jfsc.ndu.edu/Media/Campaigning-Journals/Academic-Journals-View/Article/3026633/the-us-one-china-policy-a-primer-for-professional-military-education-faculty/>.

5. *Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on "China's Narratives Regarding National Security Policy"* (2011) (testimony of Alison A. Kaufman, China Analyst, Center for Naval Analyses), <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf>.

had devolved into “warlording” states, including confronting a significant communist military force led by Mao Zedong. As World War II broke out, the ROC was an important US ally, but political infighting, logistical challenges, and noncooperation with communist forces worked against significant challenges to the invading Japanese. These issues undercut Allied confidence in Chiang’s capability and weakened postwar support.⁶ After Japan’s surrender, Chiang quickly became re-embroiled in a civil war against Mao’s communist forces. Ultimately, the communist forces prevailed and founded the People’s Republic of China (PRC, China). Chiang’s remnant forces retreated to Taiwan, along with a significant refugee population, to join a larger indigenous population on the island. Taiwan had been an integral part of the Japanese Empire since the late 1800s until Japan relinquished its claim to it and other possessions under the terms of surrender to the Allies and the Treaty of Peace with Japan (though the sovereignty of these possessions was left undetermined).

At this point, most other countries, including the United States and the United Nations, recognized only the ROC government as the legitimate government of China. In 1972, however, President Richard Nixon visited Beijing to capitalize on the rift between the communists in the PRC and the Soviet Union. Although a joint communiqué was issued at the end of the visit, no formal diplomatic relations were established between the United States and the PRC. The communiqué stated, in part, that the United States only acknowledged the Chinese position that Taiwan was part of China (wisely leaving wiggle room on the issue of Taiwan’s status). This acknowledgment is repeated in two subsequent communiqués, one of which established formal diplomatic relations. Conceding the need for the United States to deal directly with the world’s most populous nation, President Jimmy Carter recognized the PRC in 1979 as the sole government of China, and he relinquished ties to the ROC government in Taiwan, which included abrogating the mutual defense treaty in force at the time. Subsequent statements continued to acknowledge the Chinese position on the sovereignty of Taiwan but also confirmed the US commitment to sell arms to Taiwan out of concern that a former ally, a noncommunist state, and a strategically important island would fall to China. Ever since, Taiwan has, in effect, been a *de facto*, separately governed entity that has continued to trade internationally while only being diplomatically recognized by a handful of countries.

6. Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II 1937–1945* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2023), 296–314; and “Forgotten Ally? China and the United States in World War II” (slideshow), *CNN* (website), September 1, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/08/31/asia/gallery/china-us-cooperation-ww2/index.html>.

The US One China Policy, the foundation for diplomatic relations between China and the United States, is confusing because of its nomenclature. The White House often refers to it as “our” One China Policy, which implies a Chinese-US agreed-upon understanding, when in reality, “our” only refers to US policy. While the joint communiqués have a mutual understanding that there is one China (not an East, West, or some other China), the part that is not agreed upon is the status of Taiwan. In fact, China officially refers to the understanding as the “One China Principle,” so it is better to understand “our” (meaning the United States) One China Policy as created by and belonging to the United States.

The US One China Policy is almost always now stated by the White House in conjunction with the Taiwan Relations Act, joint communiqués, and the Six Assurances. The Taiwan Relations Act, passed when diplomatic relations were severed with the ROC, provides that the United States will continue to sell arms to Taiwan, with the expectation that any resolution of the Taiwan question would be peaceful; it also establishes unofficial institutions to continue quasi-diplomatic relations with the government in Taiwan. In 1982, then President Ronald Reagan provided the “Six Assurances” to Taiwan via diplomatic cable, which included a commitment to continued arms sales and a statement that “there is no change in our longstanding position on the issue of sovereignty over Taiwan.” These assurances have been repeated in subsequent administrations. President Bill Clinton also stated—and his statement has been repeated—that any US resolution of the sovereignty issue would be made with the assent of the people of Taiwan.⁷

Although officials often state there is no change in policy, these other documents and statements refine the OCP without directly contradicting it. The construct of the OCP, however, appears to have changed since the original reason for negotiating a *détente* with the PRC—to have a buffer against the Soviet Union—is no longer part of the strategic environment. Instead, fundamental changes in Taiwan have transformed the country into a vibrant democracy whose populace views itself as distinctly Taiwanese.

Fundamental Changes in Taiwan’s Domestic Politics

Given that military hostilities with the PRC persisted after the ROC’s retreat to Taiwan in 1949, the ROC was governed under martial law until 1987. Taiwanese presidents Chiang Ching-kuo and Lee Teng-hui instituted major reforms to allow for free elections on the island. Since then,

7. See Bellocchi, “U.S. One China Policy.”

Taiwan has developed into a dynamic democracy that has seen the presidency change between political parties several times. Taiwan, an island about the size of Belgium populated by 24 million people, has a diverse ethnic composition, which significantly impacts Taiwan's electoral politics.

Although Chiang Kai-shek brought his army and a significant number of refugees to the island in 1949, most of the population of Taiwan had centuries-old genealogical roots as Taiwanese. Those who consider themselves Taiwanese or indigenous to the island have their own languages, most of which are believed to be related to Fujianese rather than Mandarin Chinese or are aboriginal and minority languages.⁸ In recent polls, more than 60 percent of Taiwan inhabitants describe themselves as “Taiwanese,” while less than 5 percent call themselves “Chinese,” and less than a third call themselves both.⁹ Other polls show that only 1.3 percent of the population has any desire to unify with China.¹⁰ Most Taiwan residents have indicated no interest in declaring formal independence for fear of provoking the PRC into a war. One might surmise, then, that should the PRC renounce the use of force in its relations with Taiwan, such polling would probably have quite different results.

In modern Taiwan, even the descendants of those who retreated to Taiwan in 1949 find fewer connections to mainland China, and many have called for declaring outright independence from China.¹¹ Although it is difficult to discern people's true preferences through polling that is influenced by PRC intimidation, polling toward independence increased significantly around 2019 and 2020, and the majority preference is for the status quo. In Taiwan's vibrant and free democracy, the Democratic Progressive Party has won the presidency four times—including the current administration of President Tsai Ing-wen—most recently on a platform that has declared Taiwan a de facto independent country for over 70 years. In the past, it appears the United States pressured the Democratic Progressive Party leadership

8. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Languages of Taiwan,” <https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan/Languages>; Reuters, “Gene Study Links Polynesians to Taiwan,” *NBC News* (website), July 4, 2005, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna8464488>; and Ka'iwakiloumoku Pacific Indigenous Institute, Digital Collection: *Pacific Conversations*, episode 5, “Indigenous Taiwan, Birthplace of Polynesian Languages and Pacific Navigation,” Ka'iwakiloumoku Pacific Indigenous Institute (website), February 21, 2022, <https://kaiwakiloumoku.ksbe.edu/article/pacific-conversations-indigenous-taiwan-birthplace-of-polynesian-language>.

9. National Chengchi University, Election Study Center, Data Archives, Taiwan/Chinese Identity, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961>.

10. John Feng, “Taiwan's Desire for Unification with China Near Record Low as Tensions Rise,” *Newsweek* (website), July 14, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/taiwan-china-politics-identity-independence-unification-public-opinion-polling-1724546>.

11. Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, “In Taiwan, Views of Mainland China Mostly Negative,” Pew Research Center (website), May 12, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/05/12/in-taiwan-views-of-mainland-china-mostly-negative/>; Chen Yu-fu and Jonathan Chin, “Nearly 90 Percent of Public Identify with Taiwan: Poll,” *Taipei Times* (website), August 11, 2021, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2021/08/11/2003762406>; and “Poll: Taiwanese Distance Themselves from Chinese Identity,” AP News (website), May 12, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-china-mao-zedong-international-news-asia-pacific-c8a1f7669442b2b86ddff1563c3bd0e9>.

to state that they would not formally declare independence or hold a referendum on the question in an apparent effort to stave off a PRC military reaction.¹²

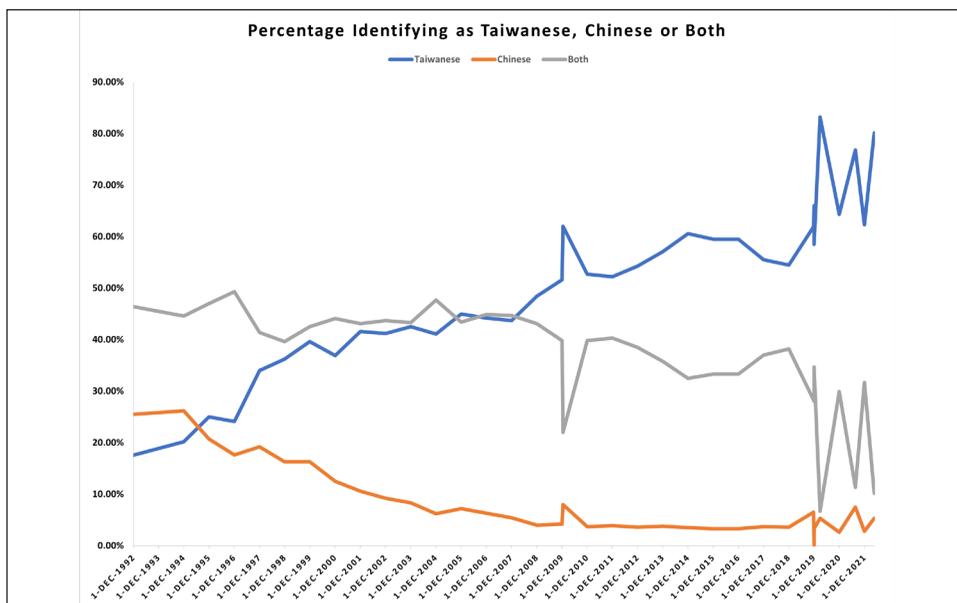


Figure 1. Taiwan population identification as Taiwanese, Chinese or both

(Data based on: Pew Research Center, “Most in Taiwan Identify as Taiwanese, but There Are Large Partisan Differences,” Pew Research Center [website], May 11, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/05/12/in-taiwan-views-of-mainland-china-mostly-negative/pg_2020-05-12_taiwan_0-11/; Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation, “April 2022 Public Opinion Poll – English Excerpt,” April 26, 2022, <https://www.tpof.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/20220426-TPOF-April-2022-Public-Opinion-Poll-%E2%80%93-English-Excerpt.pdf>; “Changes in Taiwanese/Chinese Identity [1992-2022],” Election Study Center, National Chengchi University [website], January 13, 2023, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&cid=6961>; and Commonwealth Magazine, 2010 and 2019 polls [as translated], <https://www.cw.com.tw/article/5098353>, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100323105730/>, <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2009/new/dec/16/today-t1.htm>.)

Any implication of or movement toward the recognition of Taiwanese sovereignty has historically generated violent responses from China. For example, in 1995, China conducted a series of so-called missile tests around Taiwan to intimidate the government against democratic liberalization.¹³ China took a similar approach in 1996, intending to warn the electorate against choosing a pro-independence candidate. The PRC intimidation

12. Monique Chu and Ko Shu-ling, “We Trust Chen on Plebiscite Pledge, US Institute Says,” *Taipei Times* (website), June 24, 2003, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2003/06/24/2003056520>.

13. Kristen Gunness and Phillip C. Saunders, *Averting Escalation and Avoiding War: Lessons from the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press [NDU], 2022), 8–36, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/3253834/averting-escalation-and-avoiding-war-lessons-from-the-19951996-taiwan-strait-cr/>.

efforts have often backfired, causing the population to distance itself from any PRC “overtures.”¹⁴

Most recently, the PRC engaged in a series of military exercises and missile tests around Taiwan in response to Pelosi’s August 2022 visit. Coincidentally, Taiwan held mayoral and county elections on November 26, 2022, which indicated mixed shifts in public opinion. Although some analysts found the result somewhat of a defeat for the ruling party, other analysts suggested the shift signaled a hesitance of the electorate to provoke military action over what some might say is a purely symbolic visit, despite growing defiance of China.¹⁵ Other analysts have characterized the elections as simply local, with outcomes shaped by regional problems—such as crime and traffic—and by local personalities.¹⁶ Regardless, it is not parochial politics but rather the international dynamics associated with large-scale conflict in Ukraine that have brought Taiwan’s democracy and sovereignty into focus.

The Russia-Ukraine Conflict’s Effect on the Taiwan Straits Situation

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed the dynamic between China, Taiwan, and US allies in the region. Start with the widely held premise that PRC President Xi Jinping holds a near-dictatorial grasp on China greater than any other leader since Deng Xiaoping and that Xi’s foreign policy decisions are probably made with little or no resistance from his advisers.¹⁷ It is clear that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Xi discussed Putin’s plan to invade Ukraine beforehand and that Xi believed Putin’s assessment that the invasion would be a *fait accompli* within days of its start.¹⁸ There may have even been an implied level of at least rhetorical support (despite China’s constant visceral attacks on any entity it sees as violating its sovereignty

14. Amy Qin and Amy Chang Chien, “‘We are Taiwanese’: China’s Growing Menace Hardens Island’s Identity,” *New York Times* (website), January 22, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/19/world/asia/taiwan-china-identity.html>; and Feng, “Taiwan’s Desire for Unification.”

15. Nathan Batto, “Reactions to the 2022 Elections,” *Frozen Garlic* (blog), November 28, 2022, <https://frozengarlic.wordpress.com/2022/11/28/reactions-to-the-2022-elections/>; Brian Hioe, “Are the 2022 Election Results Simply a 2018 Redux?,” *Taiwan Insight* (website), University of Nottingham: Taiwan Studies Programme, November 29, 2022, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2022/11/29/are-the-2022-election-results-simply-2018-redux/>.

16. Batto, “Reactions to the 2022 Elections”; and Hioe, “2018 Redux?”

17. Sue-lin Wong, “Xi Jinping: The Making of a Dictator,” *Economist* (website), October 19, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/1843/2022/10/19/xi-jinping-the-making-of-a-dictator>; Voice of America (VOA), “US Officials Agree: China’s Xi Is a Dictator,” VOA News (website), June 25, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-officials-agree-china-s-xi-is-a-dictator/7152326.html>.

18. Grant Newsham, “Xi Jinping Might Think He Can Handle His Own ‘Ukraine,’” *Diplomat* (website), July 12, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/xi-jinping-might-think-he-can-handle-his-own-ukraine/>.

and interfering in internal affairs due to China's "century of humiliation").¹⁹ Xi made assumptions about Russian credibility and capability and is now in a quagmire of his own making. China now finds itself weighed down in several ways. Its partner Russia is being economically drained by a war it can ill afford to wage; the fact that China might gain some short-term economic benefits from buying cheaper Russian raw materials does not balance against the fact that its partner is somewhat incapacitated.

Further, China has prided itself on waging what it calls the Three Warfares, one of which is lawfare—however, it now finds itself on the moral low ground with regard to its long-standing arguments on sovereignty.²⁰ If the goals of invasion had been accomplished quickly, the invasion might have just become a footnote in history, and there might have been a world condemnation, but little more than symbolic. Prior to the invasion, Xi may have thought the invasion of Ukraine would serve as a test case for what would happen if the PRC were to take Taiwan by force. According to the CIA, Xi has ordered the PLA to be prepared to invade Taiwan by 2027, and China has conducted plenty of military exercises around Taiwan over the years.²¹ Xi might hope for a rapid takeover followed by condemnation but little else in terms of real impact on China. Based on what happened with the Tiananmen Square incident, there might have been symbolic sanctions of one sort or another, but the United Nations would be stalemated, as China and Russia maintain permanent veto power on the security council.²² So far, the world reaction

19. Edward Wong and Julian Barnes, "China Asked Russia to Delay Ukraine War until after Olympics, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times* (website), March 2, 2022; "President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin Sign Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation for the New Era and Stress Settling the Ukraine Crisis through Dialogue," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (website), March 22, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202303/t20230322_11046088.html; and Kaufman testimony.

20. See Department of Defense (DoD), *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2011: A Report to Congress Pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2011).

21. Matt Salmon and Shay Stautz, "American Power and the Defense of Taiwan," Foreign Policy Research Institute (website), March 9, 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/03/american-power-and-the-defense-of-taiwan/>; Michael Martina and David Brunstrom, "CIA Chief Warns against Underestimating Xi's Ambitions toward Taiwan," February 2, 2023, Reuters (website), <https://www.reuters.com/world/cia-chief-says-chinas-xi-little-sobered-by-ukraine-war-2023-02-02/>; and Bonny Lin et al., "Tracking China's April 2023 Military Exercises around Taiwan," *China Power Project*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (website), last updated May 11, 2023, <https://chinapower.csis.org/tracking-chinas-april-2023-military-exercises-around-taiwan/>.

22. Ted Galen Carpenter, "George H. W. Bush's Shameful Kowtow to China: A Cautionary Tale," Cato Institute (website), May 27, 2020, <https://www.cato.org/commentary/george-hw-bushs-shameful-kowtow-china-cautionary-tale>; and Richard C. Bush, "Commentary: 30 Years after Tiananmen Square, a Look Back on Congress' Forceful Response," Brookings (website), May 29, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/05/29/30-years-after-tiananmen-square-a-look-back-on-congress-forceful-response/>.

has certainly been to warn the PRC against attempting such a scenario with Taiwan, which is discussed later in this piece.

Nonetheless, Europe is distracted by a major invasion in proximity to the borders of its major powers, and they are exhausting their supply of armament grants to Ukraine. Moreover, Taiwan is far from Europe, and the European Union is the PRC's largest trading partner (and vice versa), reaching €1.9 billion daily so that any sanction would be a double-edged sword for Europe's economy.²³ The fact that there is so much trade with China might appear to prevent intervention, but it also means many countries have a vital stake in deterring a conflict. Any protracted conflict over Taiwan will plunge the world economy into a tailspin. The war in Ukraine directly involves two major economies, but not the world's top three, plus a host of other tiger economies in the region, such as South Korea.²⁴ Cooler heads and those with economic interests in China are keenly aware of these facts and almost definitely prefer to avoid conflict over something they see as inevitable—unification with Taiwan. Like other countries in the region, if China's economy continues to grow, Beijing believes at least those entities in the immediate region will become clients of China (much as in ancient times when China was known as the Middle Kingdom). Whether Xi is that patient is another matter.

Xi has shied away from any overt support of Russia and scrambled to shore up China's diplomatic position. He has refrained from supplying Russia with armaments or military supplies, and even recently, he has stated plainly that the PRC opposes the use of any kind of nuclear weapon in the conflict. It is hard to calculate what domestic political pressures might lead Xi to advance an invasion plan, regardless of the lessons discussed above. Even the People's Liberation Army—which many speculate is far more realistic about its ability to invade Taiwan—may simply follow orders in the current system (much like some would say the Russian military did with Putin's invasion orders).²⁵ Thus, the world reaction to the Ukraine situation might ring loudly among PRC leadership, but that does not mean it has had the same effect on Xi himself. Further, as President Joe Biden's statements and other policy statements appear to be moving Taiwan further from reach, Xi may be considering other factors.

23. Büşra Toprak, "EU-China Relations: Rivals or Partners?," *Politics Today* (website), November 11, 2022, <https://politicstoday.org/eu-china-relations-rivals-or-partners/>.

24. Caleb Silver, "The Top 25 Economies in the World," *Investopedia* (website), September 1, 2022, <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>.

25. Carl Ford, former Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research (INR), Comments to Joint Forces Staff College, November 2022; and Andrew Scobell, "China's Calculus on the Use of Force: Futures, Costs, Benefits, Risks, and Goals," in *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*, ed. Joel Wuthnow et al. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2022), 65–84, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/crossing-the-strait/crossing-the-strait.pdf>.

Policy Statements since Ukraine

There have been numerous other changes since the war in Ukraine started—in many ways driven by the war and changes in the strategic environment. First, US policy statements and the publication of the first full Biden-Harris administration *National Security Strategy* (NSS) indicate an immediate focus on the Taiwan question and subtle changes in policy. Second, in August 2022, the PRC reacted vehemently against Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan by raining missiles over and conducting a mock blockade of the island. Then, in October 2022, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held its 20th National Congress, in which Taiwan was mentioned numerous times as a strategic imperative for the PRC. Japan and Australia have recently made more far-reaching statements about the defense of Taiwan than ever before. Lastly, reactions from Europe have mimicked these regional allied statements, again in contrast to their disjointed and passive reactions in the past. While the significance of all these statements is not to be understated, they instead indicate an escalation from an issue that many in the past wished would quietly go away to what could be a calamitous collision course.

US Policy Statements and the *National Security Strategy*

US policy statements on Taiwan have ranged from what the president has stated on the topic to the more formal *National Security Strategy* issued by White House staff.

The President’s Statements

One of the clearest policy statements on national security is what the president says about it. Notably, on four occasions in the past two years, President Biden has stated that the United States has a commitment to defend Taiwan—and it is worth noting that President George W. Bush made a similar declaration in 2001.²⁶ Less than a month after Pelosi’s visit, Biden provided the strongest of these assurances in response to a question from CBS News about whether “US forces, US men and women, would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.” He stated: “Yes, if in fact, there was an unprecedented attack.”²⁷ Some pundits at first dismissed his words

26. Kelly Wallace, “Bush Pledges Whatever It Takes to Defend Taiwan,” *CNN* (website), April 25, 2001, <https://edition.cnn.com/2001/ALLPOLITICS/04/24/bush.taiwan.abcf/>.

27. “Biden Tells 60 Minutes U.S. Troops Would Defend Taiwan, but White House Says This Is Not Official U.S. Policy,” *60 Minutes Overtime, CBS News* (website), September 18, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/president-joe-biden-taiwan-60-minutes-2022-09-18/>, as quoted in Frances Mao, “Biden Again Says US Would Defend Taiwan if China Attacks,” *BBC* (website), September 19, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62951347>; and Kevin Liptak, “Biden’s Past Promises for US to Defend Taiwan under Microscope in Meeting with China’s Xi,” *CNN* (website), November 14, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/13/politics/joe-biden-taiwan/index.html>.

as offhand remarks, and the White House press office continually voiced that there had been no change in policy.²⁸ When a president makes the same commitment four times, it is hard to dismiss its meaning flippantly. The official statements that no policy change had occurred provide plenty of wiggle room—they neither contradict the president’s statement nor the US One China Policy. Although the United States abrogated the mutual defense treaty it had with the government of Taiwan in 1979, nothing in the communiqués prohibits a unilateral decision to defend Taiwan. Reinforcing the president’s statements is the latest National Security Strategy.

Interim National Security Strategy

One of the biggest indicators of national policymakers’ concerns over an issue is in what light the concern is mentioned in the *NSS* if it is mentioned at all. In the *Interim NSS*, published in 2021 before the Ukraine conflict started, Taiwan is mentioned only once:

We will support Taiwan, a leading democracy, and a critical economic and security partner, in line with longstanding American commitments. We will ensure that U.S. companies do not sacrifice American values in doing business in China. And we will stand up for democracy, human rights, and human dignity, including in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet.²⁹

This quote would indicate that at the time, the administration believed Taiwan to be an important enough issue to include in the *NSS* (by far, most countries are not usually not mentioned at all), but there is no indication of how critical an issue it is. Rather, the focus is on the need to support democracy and human rights. Although the implication is that the policy will *ensure* (rather than just assure) the restriction of US company dealings in China, there are no specifics. It is unclear whether any redlines would trigger such action.

Current National Security Strategy

In contrast, the latest *NSS*, published in October 2022, makes seven statements regarding Taiwan—the character of which is more drastic and designed to maximize deterrent effects against China to take action in any way similar to Russia’s action

28. Kevin Liptak, “Biden’s Past Promises for US to Defend Taiwan under Microscope in Meeting with China’s Xi,” *CNN* (website), November 14, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/13/politics/joe-biden-taiwan/index.html>.

29. Joseph R. Biden Jr., *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: White House, March 2021), 21, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/>.

against Ukraine. The first statement in the 2022 *NSS* implies that the White House expects NATO and the EU to counter PRC aggression in an “active” way (see quote below). What “active” means and how the United States will get European countries to comply is not clear, but it seems to be having an effect, which will be discussed later.

U.S. interests are best served when our European allies and partners play *an active role* in the Indo-Pacific, including in supporting freedom of navigation and maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.³⁰

Europe

There has been discussion in the national security policy arena about at least individual members of NATO taking a larger part in Asian affairs.³¹ Regardless of the effect, the National Security Council is clearly reminding Europe that instability and conflict in major commercial shipping lanes will affect them in no small manner. With global integration, crippling economies in Asia would almost certainly turn the world economy into a Charybdis—especially during COVID-19 recovery and the costs created by the war in Ukraine. Most economies that have provided debt-driven stimulus in recent years are well-aware that the global economy is teetering on a delicate balance.³²

Moreover, with the United States and European allies’ attention on supplying Ukraine with large-scale armaments, there is a concern that China may take advantage of a perceived lack of allied and partner military capacity to gain a foothold in Taiwan. The United States, therefore, is urging Europe to remain steadfast because another deterrence failure would be a blow to democracy and the economy worldwide.

We have an abiding interest in maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, which is critical to regional and global security and prosperity and a matter of international concern and attention.³³

30. Joseph R. Biden Jr., *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, October 2022), 17, (author emphasis added) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/8-November-Combined-PDF-for-Upload.pdf>.

31. Henry Foy, “NATO Holds First Dedicated Talks on China Threat to Taiwan,” *Financial Times* (website), November 30, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/d7fa2d2b-53be-4175-bf2b-92af5defa622>; and Marshall Reid, “Recent NATO Debate Highlights the Growing Transatlantic Dialogue on Taiwan,” *Global Taiwan Brief* 7, no. 24 (December 2022): 7–9, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/12/recent-nato-debate-highlights-growing-the-transatlantic-dialogue-on-taiwan/>.

32. Hannah Ward-Glenton, “IMF Cuts Global Growth Forecast for Next Year, Warns ‘The Worst Is Yet to Come,’” *CNBC* (website), October 11, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/11/imf-cuts-global-growth-forecast-for-2023-warns-worst-is-yet-to-come.html>.

33. Biden, *National Security Strategy*, 24.

In this second mention of Taiwan in the *NSS*, the emphasis is again on global security and prosperity. This quote also provides a level of concern—critical. Any dictionary could provide an appropriate definition to apply here, but generally, *critical* would indicate a situation that could potentially bring about negative consequences and chain reactions.

We oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side, and do not support Taiwan independence.³⁴

Status Quo

This wording has been used before, as demonstrated in prior *NSS* and White House statements. In simple terms, this language has been telegraphing to the PRC not to invade Taiwan and telegraphs to Taiwan not to declare independence. It could also be seen as a quid pro quo: if the PRC does not attempt to take Taiwan (by whatever means), the United States will pressure Taiwan not to seek formal independence. Whether this status quo is an acceptable bargain for either side is questionable.

On the PRC side, we can speculate that at least some see the absorption of Taiwan into China as an inevitability and see no reason to send the region into a military conflict (especially those who have a stake in economic stability). In other words, the “status quo” is a moving strategic environment that favors the PRC, assuming the PRC’s economy continues to grow at a rapid rate (alongside its military capability) and nearby economies get absorbed into its economic orbit. Indeed, one might ask if the above statement reflects a traditionally short-term US interest in avoiding armed conflict while knowing time and authoritarian gray-zone tactics weigh adversely.

There is analysis, however, that some elements in the PRC are calling for immediate action on the Taiwan question.³⁵ In any case, the PRC has no qualms about pushing the envelope with military incursions, engaging in gray-zone tactics, or otherwise trying to coerce Taiwan into accepting a political arrangement with the PRC—all designed to co-opt Taiwan into China sooner.

On the Taiwan side, most of the population appears to want to avoid any military conflict with a nominal declaration of independence but feel bullied by their giant neighbor and believe they should have the freedom to decide their destiny. A significant portion of the population is calling for more independent recognition on the international stage and protection against PRC incursions.

34. Biden, *National Security Strategy*, 24.

35. Chen Yu-fu and Kayleigh Madjar, “MAC Says China Plans to Ramp up Unification Call,” *Taipei Times* (website), November 23, 2021, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2021/11/23/2003768355>.

The leadership of Taiwan is aware that this recognition cannot be done without support from major powers, in an affront to the PRC. In response, there appears to be support—at least from the United States—of the idea that Taiwan should have a seat at places like the World Health Organization to handle pandemic issues.³⁶ The statement above indicates that a de facto independent Taiwan and minor pushes for international recognition are acceptable for the foreseeable future.

We remain committed to our one China policy, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the Three Joint Communiqués, and the Six Assurances.³⁷

Again, the United States clearly specifies “our” OCP (as opposed to a US-China OCP) but, as has been the trend, mentions the Taiwan Relations Act and Six Assurances along with it. The statement raises arguments over whether there have been changes to our OCP over different administrations. Arguably, there have been statements that seem to favor closer relations with China at the expense of Taiwan or in its favor, and much of this dialogue was tainted by anachronistic perceptions of the ideology of the government in Taiwan when it was under martial law. Since Taiwan has become an open democracy, this attitude has seemed to change, and there appears to be more bipartisan consensus. Other scholarly works review whether changes in policy have been made. It might be fair to say that the basic components of the policy remain intact: the acknowledgment (rather than recognition) of the Chinese position that Taiwan is part of China, the United States’ continued provision of arms for Taiwan’s defense, and the pursuit of a peaceful resolution of the issue.

Strategic Context

What has changed is the strategic context of previous statements. That Taiwan is now a full-fledged democracy with a population that overwhelmingly identifies as separate from China is one such change. Harsh political crackdowns on Hong Kong have completely undermined China’s olive branch to treat Taiwan according to a “one-country, two-systems” manner. The military balance across the Straits 40 years ago ensured Taiwan could defend itself and avoid blockade and harassment. Now, China can sustain long-term blockades and attacks if needed, and the development of its blue-water navy is sure to increase this capability. This change has also startled regional actors into increasing their defensive resources. The economic growth of China and the international interdependence that goes with it mean armed conflict in the region will have global consequences.

36. Nike Ching, “US Rallies Support to Back Taiwan’s WHO Bid,” VOA News (website), May 6, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_us-rallies-support-back-taiwans-who-bid/6188834.html.

37. Biden, *National Security Strategy*, 24.

So, in effect, to avoid short-term conflict, it seems a convenient claim that there has been no change in policy, but as the United States pivots its attention to Asia, and as political maneuvers are made, one might surmise that this suggestion may not last long and may question whether the United States will be left with fewer options in the long term.

And we will uphold our *commitments* under the Taiwan Relations Act to support Taiwan’s self-defense and to maintain *our* capacity to resist *any* resort to force or coercion against Taiwan.³⁸

Commitments

In the *NSS*’s last mentions of Taiwan, the word *commitments* conveys the idea that there is more to the US relationship with Taiwan than occasional arms sales. Moreover, using the word *our* regarding commitments and capacity might imply there is an *allied capacity* (rather than just a US capacity) to resist force against Taiwan. This statement might also imply that the United States recognized or prearranged a joint allied response. The last phrase, “to resist any resort to force or coercion,” implies *any* use of force—such as the recent mock blockade and missile demonstration—however brief, would lead to the increased armament of Taiwan (and indeed it has).³⁹ The FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act authorizes \$12 billion in grants and loans for Taiwan over the next five years to buy US arms.⁴⁰ Note that the unclassified version of the *National Defense Strategy* also discusses the US position to support Taiwan in countering the PRC’s increasingly aggressive coercive activity.⁴¹ Lastly, it is also worthy of note that this *NSS* definitively refers to the Senkaku Islands as part of Japan (“We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the defense of Japan under our mutual security treaty, which covers the Senkaku Islands”). Since PRC military exercises around Taiwan come so close to these islands, any misdirection could lead to an activation of this commitment.

38. Biden, *National Security Strategy*, 24 (author added emphasis)..

39. Kathrin Hille, “China’s Military Response to Pelosi Visit Raises Escalation Fears,” *Financial Times* (website), August 3, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/4c97b3c5-bf30-4971-ba7c-9ad5e74389b7>.

40. P.L. 117-263.

41. DoD, *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

Table 1. Comparison of statements on Taiwan in each *National Security Strategy* from 2002–22

Past National Security Strategies					
Biden NSS Year 2022	U.S. interests are best served when our European allies and partners play an active role in the Indo-Pacific, including in supporting freedom of navigation and maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.	We have an abiding interest in maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, which is critical to regional and global security and prosperity and a matter of international concern and attention.	We oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side, and do not support Taiwan independence.	We remain committed to our One China policy, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the Three Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances.	And we will uphold our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to support Taiwan's self-defense and to maintain our capacity to resist any resort to force or coercion against Taiwan.
Biden NSS Year 2021 <i>*Interim NSS</i>	We will support Taiwan, a leading democracy, and a critical economic and security partner, in line with longstanding American commitments.				
Trump NSS Year 2017	We will maintain our strong ties with Taiwan in accordance with our "One China" policy, including our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide for Taiwan's legitimate defense needs and deter coercion.				
Obama NSS Year 2015	No mention				
Obama NSS Year 2010	We will "encourage continued reduction in tension between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan."				

Table 1. Comparison of statements on Taiwan in each *National Security Strategy* from 2002–22 (continued)

Past National Security Strategies					
G. W. Bush NSS Year 2006	Our assistance efforts will also highlight and build on the lessons learned from successful examples of wise development and economic policy choices, such as the ROK, Taiwan, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia, Chile, and Botswana.	China and Taiwan must also resolve their differences peacefully, without coercion and without unilateral action by either China or Taiwan.			
G. W. Bush NSS Year 2002	When we see democratic processes take hold among our friends in Taiwan or in the Republic of Korea, and see elected leaders replace generals in Latin America and Africa, we see examples of how authoritarian systems can evolve.	The United States has led the way in completing the accession of China and a democratic Taiwan to the World Trade Organization.	... we have profound disagreements [with PRC]. Our commitment to the self-defense of Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act is one.		

To contrast and review some recent *NSS* statements on Taiwan, the Trump administration made this mention in 2017:

We will maintain our strong ties with Taiwan in accordance with our “One China” policy, including our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide for Taiwan’s legitimate defense needs and deter coercion.⁴²

This statement is more or less the same as the statements above, though it does frame the relationship with Taiwan as having “strong ties.” Notice the statement does not mention the Six Assurances or the communiqués, and “One China” is in quotes, whereas the current *NSS* does not capitalize

42. Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, December 2017), 47, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

“one.” In either case, the TRA is mentioned, and the change in its traditional label might indicate a change in formality or adjustment.

During the Obama administration, the 2015 *NSS* did not mention Taiwan at all, and the 2010 *NSS* simply stated that we would “encourage continued reduction in tension between the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan.” Although the Obama administration made statements (though scant action) concerning the need to pivot foreign policy toward Asia, presumably because of a rising PRC, what role Taiwan would play in the envisioned scheme of this pivot is not clear, except to avoid provocation.

In the 2006 *NSS* from the George W. Bush administration, there are three mentions of Taiwan:

Our assistance efforts will also highlight and build on the lessons learned from successful examples of wise development and economic policy choices, such as the ROK, Taiwan, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia, Chile, and Botswana.

China and Taiwan must also resolve their differences peacefully, without coercion and without unilateral action by either China or Taiwan.⁴³

The 2002 *NSS* from the same administration has four mentions of Taiwan:

When we see democratic processes take hold among *our friends* in Taiwan or in the Republic of Korea, and see elected leaders replace generals in Latin America and Africa, we see examples of how authoritarian systems can evolve.

The United States has led the way in completing the accession of China and a democratic Taiwan to the World Trade Organization.

. . . [W]e have profound disagreements [with the PRC]. Our *commitment* to the self-defense of Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act is one.⁴⁴

43. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, March 2006), 34, 42, <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2006.pdf>.

44. Bush, *National Security Strategy*, 3, 18, 28 (author emphasis added).

These statements together indicate a position more closely related to the current one, emphasizing peace but also a commitment to Taiwan and a recognition of Taiwan's status as a successfully developed democracy. It also seems to imply that if Taiwan can transform into a democracy from an authoritarian regime, so could the PRC (and what an example Taiwan could be to the people of the People's Republic).

Pelosi's Trip to Taiwan

On August 2, 2022, China reacted vehemently to Pelosi visiting Taiwan, the first speaker of the United States House of Representatives to visit the island since Newt Gingrich, who went in 1997. Back then, the PRC response was purely rhetorical and seemed to indicate that it did not care about legislative branch visits.

This time, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said: "Those who play with fire will perish by it. We would like to once again admonish the U.S. that we are fully prepared for any eventuality and the PLA will never sit idly by."

These words were followed up by military action between August 4 and 7. The PRC military forces conducted a temporary or mock blockade of Taiwan, and numerous missiles were shot above and over the capital city, Taipei. These actions involved naval deployments around Taiwan, live-fire drills, ballistic-missile launches over Taiwan, and increased air sorties. Figure 2 shows six of seven zones that the PRC announced would include military drills during these days. These zones include some of the most utilized commercial waterways and aviation lanes in the region. A PRC carrier group with a nuclear submarine passed through the Taiwan Straits and engaged in live-fire drills.

The PLA fired 11 missiles into areas around Taiwan, with four of them flying above the island's populated areas. Japan complained that for the first time, several of the missiles landed in its exclusive economic zone in the Yaeyama Islands.

Meanwhile, the United States sent the USS *Ronald Reagan* carrier strike group to conduct military operations in the nearby Philippines Sea (but canceled a test of the Minuteman II missile). During the Pelosi trip, the USS *Tripoli*, with 20 F-35 stealth fighters on board, patrolled near Taiwan. On August 7, Taiwan announced live-fire exercises in Pingtung County.

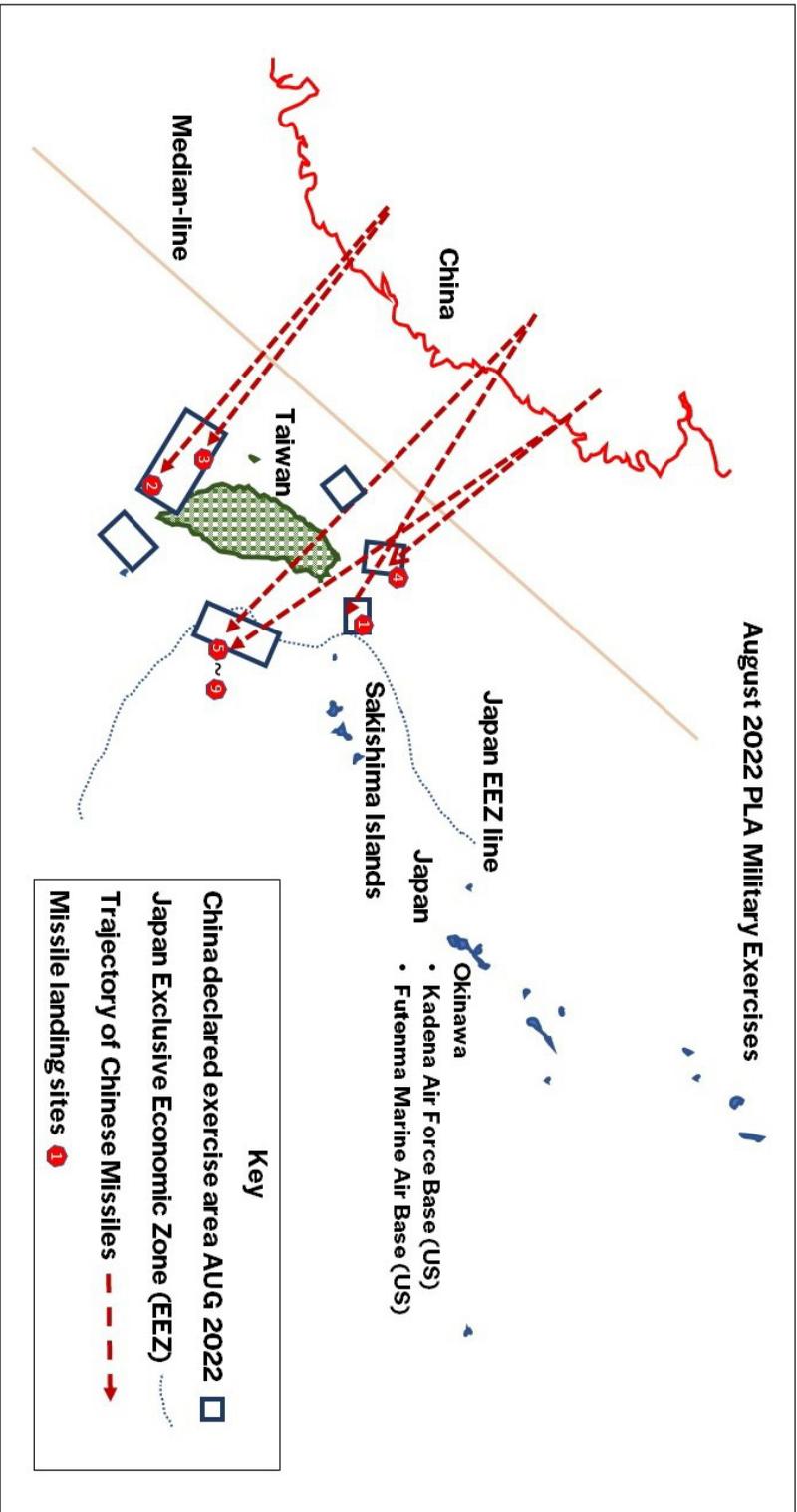


Figure 2. Location of PRC military drills surrounding Taiwan after Pelosi's trip
(Based on the following sources: PRC state media and Japan Ministry of Defense data)

A number of other more minor drills were announced days later. The White House summoned the PRC ambassador to complain officially about the reckless behavior and the danger it posed to international shipping in response to a peaceful visit, while the PRC summoned the US ambassador to complain about Pelosi's visit. A National Security Council spokesperson stated:

We felt it was important to bring the ambassador in, to make clear our positions about their provocative actions . . . [and] we condemn the military actions. We also made clear to the ambassador that Beijing's actions are concern not only to us, but to Taiwan and to the rest of the world. And made clear that—we wanted to make sure that he knew how much the international community was also opposed to this.

Kevin McCarthy, the newly elected speaker of the United States House of Representatives, met with Tsai on April 5, 2023, in California. China again responded with bellicose rhetoric and military drills held around Taiwan, though only for three days this time. Perhaps PRC leadership believed it had to respond somehow but became wary of the global response to military drills in August.

People's Republic of China – Chinese Communist Party 20th National Congress

In October 2022, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held its 20th National Congress. In its report, Taiwan was mentioned numerous times as a strategic imperative for the PRC:

In response to separatist activities aimed at “Taiwan independence” and gross provocations of external interference in Taiwan affairs, we have resolutely fought against separatism and countered interference, demonstrating our resolve and ability to safeguard China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to oppose “Taiwan independence.”

We have put forward an overall policy framework for resolving the Taiwan question in the new era and . . . [w]e have resolutely opposed separatist activities aimed at “Taiwan independence” and foreign interference.

[P]olicies of peaceful reunification and *One Country, Two Systems* are the best way to realize reunification across the Taiwan Strait; national reunification with people from all political parties, sectors, and social strata in Taiwan, and we will work with them to promote peaceful development of cross-Strait relations.

We will continue to strive for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and the utmost effort, *but we will never promise to renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary.*

We will stand closely with our Taiwan compatriots, give firm support to patriots in Taiwan who desire unification, and join hands to keep pace with the trends of history.⁴⁵

These statements are not new, per se, but they vehemently single out Taiwan's independence forces, and the implication is that outside interference is solely to blame for this attitude. In other words, there is a vehement reaction to any suggestion that anyone in Taiwan would want to be anything but part of China. After all, the so-called patriots who desire unification are the ones who recognize China's view that the trend of history is for China to become the Middle Kingdom once again (that is, that all political entities will wish to be in its favor if not a part of it). The means the PRC proposes are through cultural exchanges and the like and the repeated offer of "one country, two systems"—something now well beyond an acceptable solution for Taiwan, given the recent suppression in Hong Kong.

Compared to the previous CCP National Congress report, the tone has become exasperated. For example, the previous report states, "We have made fresh progress in work related to Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan," responded "as appropriate . . . to separatist movements," and "safeguarded peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."⁴⁶ The tone consistently advocates a peaceful solution and *force* with regard to Taiwan is not mentioned.

45. Xi Jinping, *Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* (Beijing: October 16, 2022), 3, 10, 51, 52 (author added emphasis), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202210/t20221025_10791908.html.

46. Xi Jinping, *Report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* (Beijing: October 18, 2017), 5, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf.

Xi, for his part, reiterated at the recent Congress that although the PRC is “striving for the prospect of peaceful unification with Taiwan,” China would never “promise to give up the use of force to take Taiwan,” and he encouraged the PLA to prepare for war and to ensure invasion capability by 2027.⁴⁷ American policymakers have warned that these statements are not to be taken lightly.⁴⁸ Thus, the hoped-for bargain intended to restrain Taiwan from de jure independence in return for China’s promise of nonviolent resolution has not yet been accepted—so much so that Xi appears to be rethinking the approach, as demonstrated by Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan.⁴⁹

Regional Allies’ Counterreaction to PRC Blockade Drills

Japan and Australia have made more far-reaching statements about the defense of Taiwan than ever before. As stated above, Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton said on November 13 that it would be “inconceivable that we wouldn’t support the US in an action if the US chose to take that action” with regards to Taiwan.⁵⁰ Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida described the PRC military exercises after Pelosi’s visit as a “grave problem.”⁵¹

In addition, allies and partners demonstrated solidarity by issuing a joint statement. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa condemned China’s military exercises after their in-person meeting in Phnom Penh, at the 55th ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting.⁵²

November 14, 2021, the United States and Japan held large-scale joint military exercises around the island of Tokunoshima with 36,000 soldiers representing the Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom in what some

47. Michael Martina and David Brunnstrom, “CIA Chief Warns against Underestimating Xi’s Ambitions toward Taiwan,” Reuters (website), February 2, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/cia-chief-says-chinas-xi-little-sobered-by-ukraine-war-2023-02-02/>.

48. Matthew Loh, “Xi Jinping Is ‘Preparing the Chinese People for War,’ Trump-era National Security Advisor Says,” Business Insider (website), January 3, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-national-security-adviser-mcmaster-xi-preparing-chinese-people-war-2023-1>.

49. Asia News, “Xi Set to Bid Farewell to ‘One Country, Two Systems’ Formula for Taiwan,” PIME Asia News (website), January 27, 2023, <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Xi-set-to-bid-farewell-to-one-country-two-systems-formula-for-taiwan-57619.html>; and Jianli Yang, “Will Xi Jinping Make Taiwan a New Offer?,” *Diplomat* (website), February 7, 2023, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2023/02/will-xi-jinping-make-taiwan-a-new-offer/>.

50. Colin Clark, “Aussies Would Join US to Defend Taiwan; Defense Minister Says ‘Inconceivable’ They Wouldn’t,” *Multimedia Report: Defense in Asia/Pacific*, Breaking Defense (website), November 15, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/11/aussies-would-join-us-to-defend-taiwan-defense-minister-says-inconceivable-they-wouldnt/>.

51. Thomas Maresca, “Japan Slams China’s ‘Grave’ Military Exercises over Taiwan; Nancy Pelosi Wraps Asia Visit in Tokyo,” *MSN* (website), August 5, 2022, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/japan-slams-china-s-grave-military-exercises-over-taiwan-nancy-pelosi-wraps-asia-visit-in-tokyo/ar-AA10kSBI>.

52. Press Trust of India, “US, Australia, Japan Urge China to Cease Military Exercises around Taiwan,” *Business Today* (website), August 7, 2022, <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/trends/story/us-australia-japan-urge-china-to-cease-military-exercises-around-taiwan-343975-2022-08-07>.

see as a response to the PRC's exercises.⁵³ Nevertheless, the US Department of Defense has had to admit that the PRC's incursions into Taiwan's air defense zone that doubled from the previous year to 1,727—including drones and nuclear-capable bombers—has become the “new normal,” implying there will be no immediate kinetic attempt to thwart them.⁵⁴

Reactions from Europe

Although European reactions to Chinese aggression in the Taiwan region were often sidelined in the past, since early last year, European countries and the European Union (EU) have seemed to recognize both the US position that the Taiwan question is a global concern and the call for greater pushback against China. In response to the PRC's reaction to the Pelosi visit, the EU Parliament condemned PRC exercises in passing resolution 424-14.⁵⁵ Although the EU sent its first-ever legislative delegation to Taiwan the year before, the Pelosi trip seems to have sparked a wave of defiant visitors to Taiwan, including Tennessee Senator Marsha Blackburn (who stated, “We will not be bullied”), Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey, Indiana governor Eric Holcomb, member of Japan's ruling party Keiji Furuya, French senators, and a delegation from Lithuania.⁵⁶ More high-level visits are scheduled in the near future.⁵⁷

53. Clyde Hughes, “US, Japan Hold Joint Exercise in Shadowed China,” United Press International (website), November 14, 2022, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/11/14/Japan-United-States-joint-exercise-China/7391668436430.

54. Mark Satter (@marksatter), “NEW: The Pentagon assesses that increased Chinese military posturing around Taiwan is the ‘new normal,’ prompted by Speaker Pelosi’s visit to the island in August,” Twitter (website), November 29, 2022, 4:50 p.m., <https://twitter.com/marksatter/status/1597709490325192704>; and Staff Writer with Agence France-Presse, “China’s Air Incursions into Taiwan Zone Doubled in 2022,” Defense Post (website), January 2, 2023, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2023/01/02/china-incursions-doubled-taiwan-2022>.

55. Ralph Jennings, “EU Seeks to Strengthen Taiwan’s ‘Silicon Shield’ as Military Tensions with China Threaten Chip Supply,” *South China Morning Post* (website), September 16, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3192759/eu-seeks-strengthen-taiwans-silicon-shield-military-tensions>.

56. Helen Davidson, “The Pelosi Effect: Foreign Delegations Queue Up to Visit Taiwan in Defiance of China,” *Guardian* (website), August 27, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/27/the-pelosi-effect-foreign-delegations-queue-up-to-visit-taiwan-in-defiance-of-china>; News Wires, “Delegation of French Senators Arrives in Taiwan,” France 24 (website), September 9, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20220907-delegation-of-french-senators-arrive-in-taiwan>; Al Drago, “Sen. Markey Leads Delegation to Taiwan, 12 Days after Pelosi Trip,” *USA Today* (website), August 14, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2022/08/14/taiwan-visit-markey-lawmakers-pelosi/10322870002/>; and Huizhong Wu, “EU Lawmakers Meet Taiwan Premier in First Official Visit,” AP News (website), November 3, 2021, last updated November 6, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-china-taiwan-european-union-tsai-ing-wen-7d3646b91187590f4edc34b4b3ea5d10>.

57. Jens Kastner, “Germany to Send Cabinet Member to Taiwan for First Time in Decades,” *Nikkei Asia* (website), December 22, 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Germany-to-send-cabinet-member-to-Taiwan-for-first-time-in-decades>.

In August 2022, the G7 foreign ministers and the High Representative of the European Union condemned the exercises:

We call on the PRC not to unilaterally change the status quo by force in the region, and to resolve cross-Strait differences by peaceful means. There is no change in the respective one China policies, where applicable, and basic positions on Taiwan of the G7 members.⁵⁸

Lastly, the reactions from Europe have mimicked these regional allied statements, again in contrast to their disjointed and passive reactions in the past. Sources indicate German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned Beijing during his recent trip there that there would be deep consequences to any military attempt against Taiwan. According to one source, “No Chinese leader has ever heard anything like this from a German chancellor on an issue of core interest to Beijing.” European Council President Charles Michel delivered a similar message on Taiwan when he met Xi a month later.

One German diplomat described the message to China as: “If you continue down the path of confrontation, then you are going to see more, and not less, engagement with Taiwan.”⁵⁹

Conclusion and Recommendations for Action

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has dramatically changed the strategic environment in the region surrounding Taiwan and focused the attention of world leaders on the strategic importance of Taiwan to the global economy and the league of democratic societies opposing authoritarian expansionism. Taiwan is geopolitically wedged between two democratic US allies—including the world’s third-largest economy—and lies along a vital commercial route for global shipping, making it a key control point for the PRC as it seeks to expand naval power into the Pacific. In addition, Taiwan serves as a beacon of democracy, especially to people in China, and as an example of a successfully transformed democratic society. Lastly, as a member of global democratic societies, the loss of Taiwan to the PRC—by whatever means—will signal to US allies a failure of America’s resolve. Japan has already

58. “G7 Foreign Ministers’ Statement on Preserving Peace and Stability across the Taiwan Strait,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (website), August 4, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press3e_000433.html; and Department of State, “G7 Foreign Ministers’ Statement on Preserving Peace and Stability across the Taiwan Strait,” Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State (website), August 3, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/g7-foreign-ministers-statement-on-preserving-peace-and-stability-across-the-taiwan-strait/>.

59. This section is primarily based on Noah Barkin, “Watching China in Europe – January 2023,” Asia Program, German Marshall Fund (website), January 2023, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/watching-china-europe-january-2023>.

decided to double its military budget in response to regional tensions and a possible perception of a weakened US response. As indicated in the current *NSS*, the United States expects Europe to engage and deter any PRC attempts to take advantage of a distracting Ukraine war, the depletion of war material, global economic fragility, and possible exhaustion to expand its “new normal” military encirclement of Taiwan. Although the 2022 CCP Congress continued to press for unification with Taiwan through outdated modes, the visit of Pelosi (and McCarthy’s meeting) and the PRC’s militaristic reaction have only caused Taiwanese and world leaders to become ever more defiant to its overtures. Russian aggression and the risk of tepid US commitments warrant renewed consideration of options to protect US interests in the region and deter authoritarian aggression.

The United States has, in debating degrees of “strategic ambiguity” versus “strategic clarity,” missed the point. Ambiguity and clarity are aligned with the gray zone. The United States should increase the development of its gray-zone strategies tailored to the pursuits of strategic interests—whether those interests are geopolitical, commercial, or ideological. China has effectively strategized and operated in the gray zone for more than a decade. The war in Ukraine has led to calls for increased political posturing to signal the West’s commitment to Taiwan, using the *NSS* to call on European partners to play an active role and to go beyond visiting Taiwan in defiance of PRC threats. Winning in the gray zone, however, will take more than a war of symbolism; it will require deft action.

The United States has made some recent incremental gray-zone moves by sending Marine guards to protect our de facto embassy in Taiwan (the American Institute in Taiwan, or AIT), increased arms sales, supported Taiwan’s entry into organizations that do not require statehood, and even enrolled Taiwanese students into its military staff colleges. The *NSS* calls for a strategy to expand our capacity to safeguard a strategically important island for the United States and its allies and to do so, the following modifications should also be considered (each of which could be developed in further studies):

1. Expand diplomatic agreements with Taiwan from trade and basic de facto embassy arrangements to include arms sales agreements that have exercise-level interoperability and joint force coordination in blockade- and invasion-type scenarios.
2. Set out the sales agreement terms for unofficial military-to-military protocol in the use of newly acquired arms.

3. Support further entry of Taiwan into organizations that require statehood or recast organizations to omit that requirement (for example, observer or regional status) or to create new organizations that represent democratic societies in dichotomy against authoritarianism (an international league of democracies).
4. Press further military engagements at military staff colleges—to include staff familiarization trips to Taiwan—to pursue mutual understanding of force structure.
5. Press allied nations such as Japan to engage in the same level of exchange described above (that is, Australia, Japan, and the Philippines should consider exchanging students at their military staff colleges, providing armament sales with trainers and operational exercises, upgrading their diplomatic presence and agreements to include military protocol, and supporting or creating official international organizations that advance democracy).
6. Encourage European allies and partners to play an *active role* in doing the same.

Taiwan, for its part, must consider extending and expanding its military reserve capability and its training for civilian resistance efforts (perhaps learning from NATO's newest membership applicant, Sweden, which has taught civil defense for years). This expansion would apply not only to its military but to its law enforcement and civil authorities as well.⁶⁰ It should actively engage in learning from other democracies on the front lines of authoritarianism, such as South Korea and Ukraine, about ways to bolster its reserve components and readiness for kinetic engagement, and thereby its willingness to fight and win. Like these cultures, it must demonstrate resolve if it wishes to deter conflict. It should devote a portion of its formal education and reserve capacity to becoming a weapons-familiar and defense-postured culture.

Taiwan's military must actively seek to learn interoperability and coordination with other nations to sustain itself in a conflict. If the people of Taiwan continue

60. See Anne-Françoise Hivert, "In Neutral Sweden, Civil Defense and Citizens Gear Up for Possibility of War," *Le Monde* (website), March 15, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/02/16/in-neutral-sweden-civil-defense-and-citizens-gear-up-for-possibility-of-war_6016004_4.html; and Jon Henley, "Sweden Distributes 'Be Prepared for War' Leaflet to All 4.8m Homes," *Guardian* (website), May 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/21/sweden-distributes-be-prepared-for-war-cyber-terror-attack-leaflet-to-every-home>.

to have commercial success and demonstrate a democratic way of life, they will go a long way toward resisting the forces of authoritarianism. They may also actively participate and urge their leaders to institute the measures above.

Part one of this article reviewed the basics of why Taiwan is strategically important, and part two demonstrates how this reality is reflected in US and Chinese statements and posturing. The first part reviewed four solid reasons the United States and allied nations should find Taiwan strategically important, from a realist and a liberalist perspective. First, it is militarily important because of its geographic proximity to two US allies, Japan and the Philippines, and an increasingly aggressive PRC that logically seeks a safe passage into the open Pacific for its growing blue-water fleet and wants to drive a geographic wedge between US allies. Besides having been the launch point for Japan's invasion of the Philippines during World War II, Taiwan also lies along the defensive First Island Chain and within anti-ship missile range of Japan's Senkaku Islands. Second, Taiwan's economy remains an Asian Tiger, with an economy four times larger than that of prewar Ukraine. Its semiconductor industry is recognized as producing 90 percent of the most sophisticated products in the global supply chain, disruption to which would halt downstream production and would cost over \$1 trillion per year.⁶¹ Over 88 percent of the world's largest container ships pass through the Taiwan Strait, with few viable alternative routes. Third, Taiwan remains a beacon of democracy for the people of China through its example and social media interactions in a common Mandarin language. Lastly, Taiwan has become a credibility watch point for US allies and partners, especially considering authoritarian expansion via the invasion of Ukraine. Other countries will question whether the United States can continue to guarantee freedom on the high seas or whether China's growing military capabilities will indeed challenge its primacy in the Pacific. Failure to deter further authoritarian expansionism will test US credibility for a liberal world order.

The second part of the article concentrated on how the Russia-Ukraine War has impacted how policymakers view Taiwan's strategic importance. It began with a quick review of the development of America's One China Policy and how its basis was grounded in reasons that no longer exist but seems to have adopted new developments that acknowledge Taiwan's homegrown evolution into a lively democracy. Besides Biden unmistakably stating four times that the United States is committed to Taiwan's security, the current NSS now plainly urges European

61. *To Receive Testimony on Worldwide Threats: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee* (2023) (testimony of Avril Haines, Director of National Intelligence), 86, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/23-44_05-04-2023.pdf.

allies to play an “active role” in maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait that is “critical to global security and prosperity.”⁶² Seven mentions of Taiwan adopt a stance that recognizes a democracy-authoritarianism dynamic in the international system partly brought on by the invasion of Ukraine.

In this background, high-level meetings between Tsai and Pelosi and later McCarthy have taken place. Rather than acquiescing to PRC protests as world leaders have done in the past, there has been increasing defiance over Chinese protests and military responses, with increasing official visits and recognition—perhaps reinforcing Xi’s miscalculation in supporting Russia’s invasion that has clearly backfired. Perhaps in part to solidify this miscalculation, the Biden-Harris administration has twice invited Taiwan to a summit of democratic nations; it remains to be seen whether the summit will become an organizational alternative to formal UN recognition of Taiwan’s legitimate democratic status. Regardless, it reinforces the statements and actions recognizing the strategic importance of Taiwan to the United States and its allies.

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62. Biden, *National Security Strategy*, 17, 24.

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