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# Ukraine's War is affecting China's Foreign Policy Approach to Taiwan



Illustration: Henry Wong

Image Credit: South China Morning Post<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3169963/why-beijing-thinks-taiwan-different-ukraine>

Image Credit: South China Morning Post<sup>2</sup>

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## Introduction

Since 1979, the Taiwan Relations Act has guided the United States' approach to cross-strait relations. As the PRC led by Xi Jinping looks to break through the status quo into a future favorable to China, the U.S. must envision a new approach toward protecting its most valuable partner in East Asia. Meanwhile, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its lackluster results will have a direct influence on how China manages a possible invasion. It is now up to the United States to muster a stronger commitment to the defense of Taiwan, as the PRC grows in power and Xi Jinping continues his unprecedented third term as President.

## The Current Forecast

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3169963/why-beijing-thinks-taiwan-different-ukraine>

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On June 18th, 2023, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken met with Chinese President Xi Jinping, along with the Director of CCP Central Foreign Affairs Office Wang Yi, and Foreign Minister Qin Gang. During their meeting, Blinken emphasized that “there has been no change to the U.S. one-China policy, based on the Taiwan Relations Act”.<sup>4</sup> The United States is looking for a peaceful end to the conflict, but as the status quo continues to weaken as China grows in strength, it is unlikely that the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 will continue to be an effective cornerstone of U.S.-China relations. It is important to note that during their meeting both sides re-emphasized their desire for a peaceful resolution. Moreover, Xi Jinping said nothing about the urgency of the reunification of China during the 20th Annual National Congress of the CCP in October 2022. However, CIA Director William Burns said that “We know as a matter of intelligence that he’s (Xi Jinping) instructed the People’s Liberation Army to be ready by 2027 to conduct a successful invasion.”<sup>5</sup> This does not mean an invasion is imminent, but instead that China is prepared to unify with Taiwan by any means necessary.

### **Ukraine and Taiwan: how do they compare?**

While Ukraine and Taiwan may look similar on the surface, both being countries struggling for their independence against a larger, neighboring country, an in-depth comparison shows how differently the two countries must be approached by the United States. While Ukraine is bordered by allies such as Poland and Slovakia, Taiwan has no such neighbors. Taiwan is an island on the western edge of the Pacific Ocean, so it has no immediate and direct support. This is simultaneously a disadvantage and an advantage, as the island has been historically proven to be incredibly hard to invade due to its isolation and mountainous terrain. Taiwan is also of considerable economic interest to the United States, being a top-ten trading partner, alongside being one of the biggest high-end electronic exporters in the world. While the U.S. defends its democratic values by supporting Ukraine, there is both cultural and economic incentive to defend Taiwan from any possible PRC invasion. It will be important for Taiwan to look at the successes of Ukraine to navigate its future, namely, how to utilize its independent identity to garner international support.

### **China’s Involvement and Partnership with Russia**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-visit-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china-prc/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/wouldnt-underestimate-xis-ambitions-taiwan-003837030.html>

Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Putin and Xi announced that "Friendship between the two States has no limits."<sup>6</sup> and has since reaffirmed this in Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow in March 2023. Both countries look to undermine the United States' influence, but Xi did not speak on supporting the Russia-Ukraine war militarily. Instead, Xi Jinping hopes China can broker peace negotiations between the two countries, calling for a Russia-Ukraine ceasefire without putting blame on Russia and instead focusing on NATO's lack of respect for "Russian sovereignty".<sup>7</sup> China is one of the few countries that has not condemned the Russian invasion, along with Belarus, North Korea, and others.<sup>8</sup> While China holds steadfast to its commitment to Russia, the Russian invasion has yet to definitively play out, as what was supposed to be a quick and decisive victory has turned into a sluggish stalemate. Unlike Putin, Xi Jinping is still open to a peaceful resolution and continues to push it as the best practical option.

### **The Likelihood of Future Conflict**

The Russia-Ukraine war has shown just how uncertain war is, regardless of perceived military power. Few expected the war to grind to a standstill, all the while Russia frantically looks to bolster its military and domestic support. This war might've given Xi Jinping an example of the costliness of war, and how it could drag down China's already slowing economic growth. If China does invade, Xi can expect heavy sanctions that would hurdle the world economy into a deep economic depression. Analysts believe in the case of a Chinese invasion, sanctions against China could cost the world economy over \$3 Trillion USD.<sup>9</sup> This would not look good domestically for Xi, as much of his support has been on the back of tremendous economic growth. However, Xi Jinping has promised to unify China in his lifetime, and as he reaches the last years of his life, his attention might turn more heavily towards Taiwan to garner nationalist support. It is important to consider the weight of this promise as Xi looks to solidify his power in the future.

### **Building a new U.S. Cornerstone**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2022-02-04%20China%20Russia%20joint%20statement%20International%20Relations%20Entering%20a%20New%20Era.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/23/china/china-position-political-settlement-ukraine-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/16/mapping-where-every-country-stands-on-the-russia-ukraine-war>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3224945/sanctions-against-china-case-taiwan-war-could-exact-us3-trillion-toll-global-economy-report-predicts>

China will continue to push the limits of the U.S.' dedication to Taiwan while offering economic incentives to countries that will support Xi's One China Principle. The number of countries officially recognizing Taiwan has dwindled to 13, while the U.S. has yet to make the list. As China grows in power and pressures Taiwan economically, the U.S. must think of innovative ways to support Taiwan and the Democratic Progressive Party. The DPP has been ardently anti-unification, while the rivaling Kuomintang Party has looked to strengthen economic ties with China. The U.S. must build a better cornerstone to guide relations and replace the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979. The U.S. needs to double down and re-emphasize its support for Taiwan, and to do so the domestic support for Taiwan within the U.S. must be strengthened. It will be important for lawmakers to emphasize the importance of Taiwan's continued independence, as a trading partner and a beacon of democratic hope. While the Russia-Ukraine war might act as a possible warning to China, it is unlikely to hinder any non-military efforts to reunify with Taiwan, which is why the U.S. must resolutely bolster its economic support in the face of the growing possibility of a Cross-Strait crisis.



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