

Opinion Taiwan is urging the U.S. not to abandon Ukraine



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Some Republicans want to scale back U.S. military support for Ukraine, insisting that Taiwan's defense should take priority. But those who claim to be for protecting Taiwan ought to listen to its leaders. They say the island's security depends on Washington standing firm in its support for Kyiv.

The notion that the United States must choose between fully supporting Ukraine or building up the defense of Taiwan has migrated from Fox News into the mainstream Washington foreign policy discussion. Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) has led the charge by arguing that extensive U.S. military aid to Ukraine detracts from the more urgent task of arming Taiwan to deter a Chinese invasion.

But if Taiwanese leaders don't agree that that's true, shouldn't U.S. policymakers factor that into their analysis? Do these Republicans really think they understand Taiwan's interests better than the Taiwanese?

"Ukraine's survival is Taiwan's survival. Ukraine's success is Taiwan's success," Taiwan's representative in Washington, Bi-khim Hsiao, told the [McCain Institute's Sedona Forum](#) last weekend. "Our futures are closely linked."

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The Taiwan argument is only the latest justification made by those on the right who want to reduce U.S. support for Kyiv. During a [recent speech](#) calling for the defense of Taiwan, Hawley said that as a first step, "We should cut off U.S. military aid to Ukraine." Following Hawley's lead, self-proclaimed "[realist](#)" think-tankers assert that U.S. support for Ukraine has no deterrent effect on Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"Ukraine is not going to drive Beijing's decision whether to attack Taiwan. Instead, what's most critical for deterring a war over Taiwan is the military balance in Asia," former Trump administration Pentagon official Elbridge Colby [argued](#) during a recent Hudson Institute debate.

Again, Taiwan's leaders beg to disagree. Hsiao said Taiwan doesn't want to be an "excuse" for pulling the plug on aid to Ukraine. If the West abandons the Ukrainians now, she said, that will signal to the Taiwanese people that they are alone, which plays into Beijing's propaganda.

"Support for Ukraine is relevant to us because, first of all, ultimately it helps to deter. It imposes costs on the aggressor," Hsiao said. "International support for Ukraine is also essential in affirming the credibility and reliability of the United States and your allies."

Congress will face another decision about whether to provide large amounts of aid to Ukraine this autumn. Former president Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, the early favorites for the 2024 GOP nomination, have already questioned continued U.S. aid to Ukraine.

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Plenty of prominent U.S. officials — some top Republicans among them — agree with Hsiao that the Ukraine effort isn't undermining the defense of Taiwan. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) told me during an interview that he discussed lessons learned in Ukraine with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen last month in California.

"I don't think there's a tension [between aiding Ukraine and Taiwan]," McCarthy said. "What we need to do is expand the [weapons] manufacturing base here in America."

To be sure, there is some overlap between the weapons being sent to Ukraine and those that Taiwan needs, such as Stinger anti-aircraft systems. But as many have pointed out, a conflict over Taiwan would not look like a Ukraine-style ground war. A war involving Taiwan would depend more on the U.S. Navy and Air Force, as well as hybrid warfare tools that are used in information and cyber operations.

It's true that U.S. arms sales to Taiwan are lagging, and the Biden administration should do more to speed things up. But American military leaders in Asia are not calling for reducing military aid to Ukraine. They are calling for more concurrent investment in U.S. military capabilities in the Pacific.

"I do believe we can do both," Indo-Pacific Command chief Adm. John C. Aquilino testified to Congress last month. "I believe we have to do both to maintain the peace."

Overall, the notion of abandoning Ukraine to focus on Taiwan makes little sense because, unless Ukraine succeeds, the war in Europe will likely worsen — requiring more U.S. involvement, not less.

"Saying that we should prioritize Taiwan over Ukraine is like arguing that the firetruck should be parked at a house down the street to guard against a fire breaking out in the future instead of knocking down the fire at the burning house," said John Walters, the president of the Hudson Institute, at his group's debate.

Those who argue for abandoning Ukraine on Taiwan's behalf are, in effect, claiming to be more pro-Taiwan than the Taiwanese. That is arrogance, not prudence. Taiwan's leaders understand how to deter China and protect their country's security better than GOP politicians and think-tankers.

Beijing's extensive help for Vladimir Putin's war effort shows that Xi believes a Ukrainian victory is bad for China. Russia and China are colluding in their support for autocratic aggression. The United States, Europe, Ukraine and Taiwan must all stand together to oppose them.