

POLICY MEMO

Empowering Ukraine Prepares Us for China

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China is America's number one adversary due to Beijing's willingness and capability to undermine US security, freedom, and prosperity. One pressing way China could strike a blow against US interests would be to violently force Taiwan to unify with mainland China. Doing so would immediately cause a global recession and rupture the US alliance architecture in the Pacific. It would also clear the way for China to contest US interests in the global commons far beyond the region. Some policymakers who are rightly concerned about the threat China poses to Taiwan argue that the United States should stop aiding Ukraine and instead divert attention, support, and weapons to Taiwan. While proponents of this argument are right to convey a sense of urgency and focus on some points that are true, their position overlooks key facts that make its simplistic zero-sum formulation unrealistic and self-defeating. For example, their argument does not sufficiently grapple with the connection between the China and Russia threats to US interests and allies,¹ the responses of allies and how their perspectives affect outcomes, and the way the US budgetary and weapons delivery systems function.

China and Russia Threats to Key US Interests

China and Russia have chosen to collaborate to undermine the United States and its allies and interests, even though for decades US administrations sought a "Russia reset." Chinese leader Xi Jinping has reiterated his support for Russian leader Vladimir Putin multiple times in recent years,² including before and after Russia's full-scale and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. China would gain from a Russian victory in Ukraine—as defined by Russian gains of Ukrainian territory that would allow Moscow to conduct gray-zone operations against NATO nations along the new front, including Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Romania.

The United States and Europe conduct over \$1.5 trillion in trade annually,³ making the transatlantic economy the largest in the world. So America will still have an interest in making certain that Europe remains stable and that ports and trade routes stay open, accessible, and safe. As Hudson scholars Peter Rough and Luke Coffey write:

Some of America's oldest (France), closest (United Kingdom), and most reliable allies (central and eastern Europeans) are in Europe. The North American and European continents are also closely linked economically. These two landmasses account for approximately 45 percent of the global economy. Last year, the US and Europe were each other's largest export markets. Forty-eight of the 50 states—including the Pacific Ocean states of California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii—exported more to Europe than to China. Year after year, the US and Europe are also each other's top source of foreign direct investment. Europe's security and stability, which Russia now threatens, bring untold benefits to the US economy and, by extension, the American worker.⁴

Moreover, the United States will need to remain committed to ensuring the safety and security of the NATO alliance, and a Russian victory over Ukraine would put NATO nations at great peril.

A victorious Ukraine, along with a strengthened eastern front of NATO, would provide a bulwark against further Russian aggression. A confident and stable NATO would present nations near the Russian border with more realistic opportunities to assist the United States in across-the-government efforts to weaken, compete with, and sometimes confront China. If Russia were to prevail, China would have greater leverage over Europe and would be the biggest benefactor of Russia's success.

More than one year into the unprovoked full-scale Russian invasion, support from the US and its allies has allowed Ukraine to devastate the Russian military. According to reports, Ukraine has destroyed more than half of Russia's armored vehicles,⁵ exacted 200,000 casualties including significant portions of its most knowledgeable officer and

noncommissioned officer corps,⁶ and decimated Russia's special (*spetsnaz*) forces.⁷ The Ukrainian successes have been so great that a bipartisan coalition of elected officials—including Senators Tom Cotton (R-AR), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Roger Wicker (R-MS), and Angus King (I-ME)—sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin urging him to implement an update of the Department of Defense's warfighting requirements for confronting Russia in Europe.⁸

Responses of Allies and Their Important Perspectives

The United States is the most powerful nation supporting Ukraine's defense, but it is neither alone nor the only source of support. The United States continues to be a coalescing force, meaning its support and commitment encourage other nations in Europe to provide more support in ways that benefit the United States and the entire NATO alliance. US engagement has led to or assisted in increasing support for Ukraine and bolstering deterrence measures for NATO members on the eastern front. For example, Poland is increasing its defense spending to 4 percent of gross domestic product while simultaneously encouraging NATO allies to boost their defense spending to 3 percent of GDP.⁹ Senior Polish officials continue to publicly nudge the largest economy in Europe, Germany, to send more weapons and ammunition to Ukraine. Estonia has provided Ukraine with more than 1 percent of its GDP in military assistance.¹⁰ The nearly \$396 million sent in aid is about half of Tallinn's defense budget, making Estonia the most assertive supporter of Ukraine relative to its size.

The United States and its European allies are not the only ones who believe that supporting Ukraine against Russia's invading forces is prudent. Indo-Pacific allies have also aided Ukraine's defense and vocally linked enabling a Ukrainian victory with ensuring Indo-Pacific security. Taiwan provided early humanitarian assistance, offered training programs to the Ukrainians, and in late 2022 pledged another \$56 million to help Ukraine finance rebuilding and recovery efforts.¹¹

Moreover, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen has frequently and publicly drawn parallels between Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and China's increasingly bellicose threats to Taiwan's sovereignty.

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a wake-up call to us all, and served as a reminder that authoritarianism does not cease in its belligerence against democracy," the Taiwanese president stated last month in New York.¹²

When Vladimir Putin welcomed Xi Jinping for a three-day state visit to Moscow earlier this spring, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida made an unannounced trip to Ukraine. Kishida welcomed Volodymyr Zelenskyy to virtually participate in the upcoming G7 summit in Hiroshima,¹³ pledged to supply Ukraine with \$30 million worth of nonlethal equipment through a NATO fund, and released a joint statement demanding Russia withdraw all forces "immediately and unconditionally."

Another American ally, South Korea, has aided Ukraine with \$100 million in humanitarian assistance and recently reached an agreement to lend 500,000 rounds of 155mm artillery shells to the United States—allowing Washington greater flexibility to supply Ukraine with ammunition.¹⁴

Functioning of the US Budget and Weapons Delivery Systems

Not a single weapon the United States has delivered to Ukraine was scheduled or intended to go to Taiwan. To date, Taiwan has been supported through Foreign Military Sales (FMS), like other nations that buy weapons from the United States. The entirety of the FMS backlog existed before a shot was fired in Ukraine. Because Taiwan is currently not being invaded, weapons deliveries have moved at a peacetime pace and have run into various bureaucratic and diplomatic challenges in addition to supply chain bottlenecks. Taiwan has chosen to purchase certain types of US weapons, and the United States has worked with Taipei to choose the

most appropriate weapons that would be most conducive to deterring a PRC invasion and then fending off that invading force if deterrence were to fail. Given the sensitivity of the US-Taiwan relationship, achieving progress through FMS has been exceedingly difficult.

In contrast, America is arming Ukraine with weapons through the presidential drawdown authority, which allows us to send weapons already in US stockpiles. The US has also used Ukraine Security Assistance funding and Foreign Military Funding to purchase new weapons for Ukraine as well.

The Venn diagram of weapons that are most useful to Ukraine and Taiwan is complex. Principally, Ukraine needs long-range fires against ground targets and a mechanized/armored maneuver capability. By contrast, Taiwan needs anti-ship cruise missiles, sea mines, and many of the dispersed infantry capabilities that were useful to Ukraine at the beginning of the war, but are less so today. Some capabilities, like air defense, are badly needed in both scenarios.

However, where those high-demand weapon systems do compete for deliveries, they should go to Taiwan before any of the other nations in the FMS queue. For example, some Middle Eastern nations also have requested sales of the same weapons and are currently ahead of Taiwan in the FMS queue.¹⁵

Responding to political consensus in Washington and the demand signal from Taiwanese officials, there are encouraging signs that US defense companies are supporting creative ideas to ramp up production and weapons deliveries to Taiwan with a sense of urgency. In the coming weeks, around 25 US defense companies will send representatives to Taiwan to discuss joint production of weapons like drones and ammunition.¹⁶

Still, the reality is there is a high demand for US weapons for allies and partners across multiple regions. The United

States should seek to rebuild the defense industrial base so that it can produce the necessary weapons to meet the demand—quickly and at scale. Reestablishing the US defense manufacturing base will take years, but since Russia’s unprovoked war against Ukraine, there are encouraging indicators that the United States has sped up the production capacity of some of these key systems—and would not have done so had it not been for US support for Ukraine. Some examples include the HIMARS system,¹⁷ GMLRS,¹⁸ Stingers,¹⁹ and the Javelin.²⁰ So while there may still be a delay in delivering key systems to Taiwan, that wait is likely shorter now due to the United States sending these systems to Ukraine.

Washington is also providing Ukraine with other support, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), but the United States has plenty of capacity for both theaters. And the systems, experts, and operators involved in each theater are different.

What to Do

Below are five ways the US government can continue arming Ukraine while bolstering Taiwan’s defense.

1. Reform the law to speed up Taiwan’s weapons.

There is great bipartisan consensus that Taiwan is under enormous pressure from China and should receive those requested weapons immediately. In other words, this is a political decision that requires elected officials to change the system, and officials who are concerned about the speed of weapons delivery to Taiwan should join the officials already working to fix this. Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee Michael McCaul (R-TX) has announced that he will do all he can to lead legislative changes and pressure the White House to deliver weapons to Taiwan as rapidly as it delivers them to Ukraine.²¹ Similarly, Chairman of the House Select Committee on China Mike Gallagher (R-WI) has called for the Biden administration to speed up the delivery

of Harpoon missiles to Taiwan by rejiggering systems that already exist in the US stockpile to better suit the Taiwanese terrain.²² This effort would be similar to emergency measures taken to accelerate the delivery of weapons to Ukraine last year.

2. **Provide Ukraine with the weapons and operational leeway to succeed in a sustained counteroffensive that enables Ukraine to prevail.** Rather than continuing down the Biden administration’s risk-averse approach that slowly provides certain weapons, the United States should equip Ukraine to sustain a punishing counteroffensive to regain its territory and convince Moscow it should withdraw. Washington should provide Ukraine with weapons that are not spoken for and that the United States has plenty of—like the dual-purpose improved conventional munitions (DPICMs).²³ The president should also permit Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to take out Russian forces and logistics that are helping the invasion wherever they are located—including inside the Russian border. The Biden administration’s current strategy of forbidding Ukraine to do so provides Russians a sanctuary.
3. **Prioritize US foreign policy objectives.** The United States should be laser-focused on the most pressing threats and should not fall for the delusion that it can do all things everywhere, without limit and at a peacetime pace. While the United States would be wise to always keep an open hand to diplomatic opportunities, the United States should not withhold deployments of military capabilities to the Asia theater for fear of “provoking” China and foreclosing opportunities on other aims, such as on climate policy or new terms on trade. Nor should the United States withhold critical and timely deliveries of weapons to Taiwan for fear of possible retaliation by China.
4. **Fund the unfunded priorities list for US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM).** The \$3.5 billion in total unfunded priorities is significant, and Congress should authorize and appropriate those funds—but not at the

expense of the layered air defenses and munitions the United States is sending to Ukraine. The consequences of ending support to Ukraine would certainly overwhelm the relatively small financial gain from halting military aid to Ukraine.

- 5. Rebuild the defense industrial base.** We are in a new cold war against adversaries that are making a determined effort to undermine, weaken, impoverish, and humiliate the United States. After decades of bipartisan folly in foreign and military policy, America lacks a modern defense industrial base, has a Navy that is too small, and does not have enough shipyards. The challenges are great, but rather than take a defeatist and pessimistic view of the situation, the United States should make a clear-eyed and realistic assessment of the regional theaters that are integral to US security and prosperity, and then knuckle down and get to work.

Conclusion

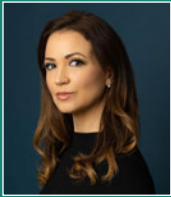
Ending support for Ukraine's defense would neither propel the United States to a swift pivot to the Pacific nor speed up weapons deliveries to Taiwan. But it would bolster Russia's ability to subjugate Ukraine, further weaken NATO's position against Russia, and possibly result in the direct invasion of NATO allies. A Russian success against Ukraine would be valuable to China and would further cement PRC power and leverage over Europe. It is not unreasonable to surmise that suddenly ending US support to Ukraine would also severely damage America's alliance relationships in Europe and Asia, as many countries have spent significant treasure and political risk to support Ukraine's success. Lastly, such an abandonment would communicate a lack of US resolve to stand firm against authoritarian imperialism—a message that would certainly be received with gladness in Beijing.

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