

On the Brink?: An Analytical Overview of China-Taiwan and Lessons from Ukraine

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Table of Contents

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>SECTION 1 - HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF CHINA AND TAIWAN: CONTEXT AND RELATIONS BEYOND THE DISPUTE.....</u>	<u>3</u>
1.1 - COMMERCIAL RELATIONS.....	3
1.2 - POLITICAL RELATIONS	4
<u>SECTION 2 - POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHINA AND TAIWAN: DOMESTIC POLITICS AND INTERNAL SITUATION.....</u>	<u>8</u>
2.1 - DOMESTIC OPINION OF THE WAR IN TAIWAN	8
2.2 - CHINESE DOMESTIC SENTIMENTS TOWARDS TAIWAN	9
2.3 - CHINESE RESPONSE TOWARDS UKRAINE.....	11
2.4 - HOW THE USA OR OTHER STATE ACTORS AFFECT POST-UKRAINE CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS	12
2.5 - CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	12
<u>SECTION 3 - GEOPOLITICAL OR FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE DISPUTE: SOUTH CHINA SEA, INTERESTED ACTORS AND TENSIONS DEVELOPMENT</u>	<u>14</u>
3.1 - SOUTH CHINA SEA: THE 2016 UNCLOS RULING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS	14
3.2 USA’S ROLE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRC AND TAIWAN.....	17
3.3 PRC’S RECOGNITION AND A SHIFT IN US POLICY	19
3.4 US RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN	19
3.5 ONE CHINA POLICY VS. ONE CHINA PRINCIPLE	20
<u>SECTION 4 - FORECAST OF THE CHINA-TAIWAN DISPUTE: WHAT MAY HAPPEN?.</u>	<u>21</u>
4.1 HISTORICAL FORECAST	21
4.2 POLITICAL FORECAST	23
4.4 MILITARY FORECAST.....	26
<u>CONCLUSION: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE UKRAINE AND TAIWAN CASES.....</u>	<u>29</u>



Introduction

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This public report provides a detailed analysis of China and Taiwan in order to develop a nuanced forecast of the potential dispute and a reflection on how the Russian invasion of Ukraine might impact, parallel, or inform the rising tensions of a China-Taiwan conflict. The report covers a historical, political, and geopolitical analysis of China and Taiwan, followed by a multifaceted forecast of what may happen and a compare-contrast conclusion of Taiwan with Ukraine.

- First, ‘Historical Analysis of China and Taiwan’ outlines the historical relations of the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China in terms of commerce and politics, exploring how external factors have altered the evolving China-Taiwan affairs. The section provides a thorough history of the imminent close economic ties and diverting interpretations of the governmental status between Mainland and Taiwan.
- Second, ‘Political Analysis of China and Taiwan’ examines firstly what the domestic politics within China and Taiwan are reflected upon their population’s sentiments towards the war in Taiwan and Ukraine independently. Moreover, the section analyses the entrenched effects of other state actors, such as the United States, on the highly tense Mainland-Taiwan relations.
- Third, ‘Geopolitical or Foreign Policy Analysis of the Dispute’ assesses the contributing events to the China-Taiwan conflict from, the South China Sea to the United States role and presence in the Cross-Strait relations that have recently stirred up a firestorm after Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan on August 2nd, 2022. The section delves into the continuously evolving tensions and crises of Beijing and Taipei’s changing diplomatic and military responses.
- Fourth, ‘Forecast of the China-Taiwan Dispute’ scrutinises the historical, political, and military projections and forecasts of the potential unfolding of events of China in Taiwan based on the overall analysis of the report



Section 1 - Historical Analysis of China and Taiwan: Context and Relations Beyond the Dispute

Jayme Teoh, Ruy Scalamandr  and Yueh Chen

Relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) can be understood as standing upon two foundational pillars – commerce and politics. Commerce, understood as the interactions of private firms and semi-formal institutions, have long been established between the two polities on either side of the Strait of Taiwan since the dawn of Deng Xiaoping's [economic reforms](#), which introduced the PRC's first special economic zones (SEZs). On the other hand, political relations refer to the formal relations between the two polities. In this case, the 1992 Consensus is the primary focal point as it effectively underlines most of PRC-ROC relations in the post-Cold War era, crucial in understanding how the two polities have conducted affairs with one another beyond the business interests of private entities. External pressures from the United States have added additional strain to PRC-ROC relations, which were most significantly altered during the Trump administration.

1.1 - Commercial Relations

SEZs marked the start of the PRC's market liberalisation and integration into the global capitalist economy. SEZs are designated 'free zones' that operate under special financial and customs regulations. Currently, the PRC [operates seven SEZs](#) in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, Xiamen, Hainan (province), Shanghai, and Tianjin-Binhai. This is in addition to similar export-oriented districts, which include export-processing zones (EPZs), high-tech industrial zones (HIDZs), or economic and technological development zones (ETDZs). The birth of all of these different types of trade facilitation areas has proven to be vital in the PRC's take-off as a critical player in the global economy and opening doors for foreign investors and trade partnerships worldwide.

On the other side of the Strait of Taiwan, the ROC began its journey to liberalisation in the latter stages of the Cold War. In 1987, after nearly 40 years of martial law, Taiwan started its [path to democracy](#). In so doing, restrictions on relations with the PRC also eased, and the opportunity window of PRC-ROC ties and trade opened up. According to the [Taiwanese government](#), the value of cross-Strait trade totalled US\$166 billion in 2020. Trade with the mainland has actually become the ROC's largest trade surplus, and in 2021 this surplus totalled [US\\$104.7 billion](#). Hence, despite the ongoing political tension, trade across the Strait of Taiwan is especially lucrative for the ROC.



The Taiwanese economy consists mainly of [service sector activity](#), and it is not uncommon for Taiwanese firms to run operations in the PRC. A widely cited example of a Taiwanese firm with operations in the PRC is Foxconn, otherwise known as Hon Hai Precision Industry Company, Ltd (HHPI). HHPI is a [contract manufacturer](#) in the electronics industry, manufacturing an array of hardware and final products for world-renowned brands such as Apple, Samsung, and Sony. The firm runs [30 production facilities](#) in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Last year HHPI ranked twenty-second in the [Fortune 500](#), raking in US\$3.46 billion in profit, and within the PRC alone, Foxconn/HHPI employs around [1.2 million people](#).

Foxconn/HHPI is just one example of many Taiwanese firms, including Yue Yuen industrial holdings, United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC), and Asus maintaining operations on the mainland. These private business operations and ROC-PRC FDI, in general, are evidence of a mutually beneficial trade relationship. While the PRC enjoys increased employment and exposure to the various service and manufacturing sectors, the ROC enjoys a steady trade surplus and revenues for private firms from its Mainland operations. However, considering the economic, military, and political disparities between the two polities, it is evident that the ROC is exposed to a greater risk than the PRC. Even if Taiwanese firms operate within the PRC via an offshore shell company, the physical trade and tangible economy in Taiwan will suffer. Therefore, it is paramount to understand how the PRC and ROC conduct politics with one another, given the ROC's long-standing question of recognition and sovereignty.

1.2 - Political Relations

In response to the political turmoil of the Chinese Civil War, The KMT regime passed the [Temporary Provisions against the Communist Rebellion](#) in 1948, establishing martial law in Taiwan and limiting political freedom. After 1949 and throughout most of the Cold War, Taiwan enjoyed considerable international recognition as the ROC due to the US's strong military and political support. PRC, on the contrary, was overwhelmed by domestic issues such as the [Great Leap Forward](#) and the [Cultural Revolution](#). However, the cross-strait relations witnessed a critical turning point in 1971 when the PRC garnered enough votes in the UN General Assembly and passed the [United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758](#), removing Taiwan as the ROC and admitting the PRC as the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations. This followed a series of events that shifted the political power to the PRC, such as US President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 and the signing of the [first US-Sino Joint Communiqué](#).

The tense relationship between China and Taiwan began to ease when Taiwan ended its Martial Law and permitted [Mainlanders \(those who fled to Taiwan in 1949\) to visit their family members in mainland China in 1987](#). Following the normalisation of cross-strait communications, Taiwan and China established their own institutions to handle the semi-



governmental contacts between both countries. Taiwan founded the [Strait Exchange Foundation \(SEF\)](#), and China established the [Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits \(ARATS\)](#). The PRC-ROC political relations deteriorated rapidly when Chen Shui-bian became the president in 2000; an ardent supporter of the independence of Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian presented the idea of ['One Country on Each Side' \('一邊一國'\)](#) during a recorded conversation in 2002, which emphasised that the PRC and ROC are different countries. It was not until 2008 that the bilateral relations began to improve again. Chen Shui-bian's successor, Ma Ying-jeou, held a series of [high-level cross-strait talks](#) between 2008 and 2012, where PRC and ROC agreed to resume cross-strait charter flights and sign the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). The bilateral relations reached a new height when Ma Ying-jeou and Xi Jinping held a historic meeting in Singapore in 2015, the first of its kind since Kuomintang (KMT) fled to Taiwan in 1949.

Beijing claims that Taiwan is bound by an understanding known as the [1992 Consensus](#), which was agreed upon by both representatives from the CCP and the KMT. However, the two sides have different interpretations of the consensus. The KMT regards the consensus as "one China, different interpretations" ("一中各表, 一個中國各自表述"), while the PRC's position is that there is one China that includes Taiwan, of which the PRC is the sole legitimate representative. Despite these differences, the framework for this agreement emerged from a mutual recognition that the cross-strait relationship existed within an irresolvable conflict in the near future. This mutual understanding functioned as a limit on the scope and implications of the cooperative efforts between the PRC and ROC because both sides adhered to the overarching one-China principle while [maintaining the status quo](#).

In recent years, [the 1992 Consensus](#) has lost relevance, especially since both governments have decided to move beyond the agreement. The current Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan disagrees with the notion of one China and therefore rejects this consensus. On the other hand, Beijing has become more hostile towards Taiwan, as seen in China's escalating [warmongering rhetoric](#) towards Taiwan and US involvement and [increasing Chinese military activity](#). This has been especially the case since President Xi argued that the Taiwan "problem" [could not be passed down](#) to future generations. Thus, he has begun using his administration to take a firmer stance on cross-border relations to not stray from his promise. Top CCP officials have also indicated a [possible shift](#) in the PRC's Taiwan policy at the 2022 Party Congress, though details remain ambiguous.

The political relations began to deteriorate rapidly when Tsai Ing-Wen became the president of ROC in 2016. Out of internal political considerations as well as personal preference, Tsai [rejected](#) the 1992 Consensus and called Beijing to face the existence of the ROC and the belief in the democratic system by people in Taiwan and to manage relations on that basis. In response to Tsai Ing-Wen's stricter stance on China, Xi Jinping [suspended official cross-strait communications](#) and reduced the number of Chinese tourists to Taiwan. Additionally, Beijing [reversed its previous practice](#) of allowing the former KMT



representatives to participate in the annual meetings of the World Health Assembly (WHA) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Diplomatic relations between the PRC and ROC further deteriorated after then President-elect Donald Trump decided to take a phone call from Tsai in December 2016, an unprecedented move by any US President since 1979.

The US involvement in PRC-ROC relations has exacerbated existing tensions. Professor of Peking University's School of International Studies and member of the Chinese Standing Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee, [Jia Qingguo](#), notes that Trump's administration was particularly straining in the relationship because (1) Trump's close policy circles included individuals who were either very pro-Taiwan or intensely opposed to PRC, (2) the Trump-Tsai call provoked the PRC, and (3) Trump deliberately provoked China on Taiwan through arms sales, upgrading official contacts with Taipei and dispatching more warships and military aircraft to the Taiwan Strait. Trump's Taiwan policy has been largely maintained throughout his presidency, and Taiwanese officials were initially apprehensive about the incoming Biden administration in 2020 and how it might affect US-Taiwan relations. However, the Biden Administration has not altered developments in the Taiwan Strait in any meaningful way, with Taipei continuing to seek closer relations with Washington to secure its defiance of pressure from Beijing. Biden has explicitly told President Xi that the US [opposes efforts to change Taiwan's status quo](#) and will continue to oppose unilateral efforts that may undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

More recently, China warned the United States that it would take ['forceful measures'](#) if the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan in August. Following Pelosi's decision to follow through with her visit to Taiwan on August 2, 2020, Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi condemned Pelosi's visit as a [violation of the "one China" policy](#) and that punishments are set to be ensured. On the military front, China's PLA said it would be conducting [live-fire drills](#) the same week of Pelosi's visit on six swaths of the sea surrounding Taiwan. This could mark a new stage of brinkmanship and escalate the possibilities of military confrontation. On the economic front, China has unleashed a slew of retaliatory restrictions aimed at Taiwan, such as the suspensions of [natural sand](#) and [citrus fruit](#) exports to Taiwan. Zhao Lijian, the spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that the visit would [damage US-China relations](#) and send a dangerous signal to pro-independence activists within Taiwan.

The outbreak of the Coronavirus in Wuhan also has negative impacts on the bilateral relationship. After the virus outbreak in December 2019, Taiwan accused China of hindering the global response to COVID, stating that Taiwan informed the WHO of the [possibility of human-to-human transmission](#) of the virus before the global pandemic outbreak. However, the WHO [endorsed China's statement](#) that the possibility of human-to-human transmission was neglectable. Although other countries praised the Taiwanese government for its [effective response](#) to the virus, Ma Xiaoguang, spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office,



praised China's 'zero-covid' policy and criticised Taiwan's decision to coexist with the virus. When asked about his remarks on Taiwan's strategy, the Taiwan Affairs Office spokesman said, you can calculate how many people will lose their lives.' In response to Ma's remarks, Su Tseng-chang, the Premier of Taiwan, also criticised China's 'zero-covid' policy and ensured that Taiwan 'will not lock down the country and cities as cruelly as China.'



Section 2 - Political Analysis of China and Taiwan: Domestic Politics and Internal Situation

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Amid the heightened cross-strait tensions, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has undoubtedly added fuel to this regional geopolitical hotspot. Given the widely discussed analogies between Ukraine and Taiwan of facing an authoritarian threat over their sovereignty, the ongoing war has shaped the sentiments towards Ukraine in both Beijing and Taipei. Meanwhile, geopolitical unpredictability, including the US strategic ambiguity of whether to defend Taiwan and the uncertainty of Japan's rapport, also weave into the embroiling tension across the Taiwan Strait. This section provides an overview of how the Russia-Ukraine war has influenced internal sentiments across the Taiwan Strait - both toward each other and toward the war - and an analysis of how the international powers, especially the US and Japan, interact with the intensified sentiments.

2.1 - Domestic Opinion of the War in Taiwan

In Taiwan, concerns of an assault emulating Russia's invasion of Ukraine lurks as the West failed to deter the attack. [Recent polls](#) indicated that 37.4% of the Taiwanese public believes China could resort to military forces to invade Taiwan compared to [26.6% prior to the war](#), showing a nearly 10% surge in concern for a Chinese invasion after Russia's attack. [The public opinion](#) on the sovereignty of Taiwan also changed dramatically after the outbreak of the war: 52.8% of Taiwanese support the independence of Taiwan, compared to 45.3 % before the war.

Meanwhile, while over 70% of the population would go to war for Taiwan, [confidence in the US coming to its defense against a Chinese invasion has plunged](#) by 17%, from 57% to 40%, as NATO denied sending troops to Ukraine. This suggests that the Ukraine war has not dampened Taiwanese citizens' determination to defend their homeland despite dwindling public faith in international allies. Regardless, during the US House Speaker Pelosi's recent visit to Taiwan, the US congressional delegation was primarily met by a [warm welcome and gratitude of the Taiwanese people](#) for their solidarity despite the potentially dangerous fallout of the visit and [China's military drills tantamount to a maritime and aerial blockade](#).

As the perceived reality of the possibility of a Chinese invasion grew among citizens, the Taiwanese government took a stand as a member of the global democracy alliance against the front against an authoritarian threat by standing in solidarity with Ukraine. Condemning the invasion, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it regretted Russia's use of force "[instead of resolving disputes through peaceful and diplomatic negotiations,](#)" likely



alluding to Beijing's intimidation to act militarily against Taipei. Joseph Wu, the Taiwanese Foreign Minister, also compared the situation in Ukraine with Taiwan and regarded Ukraine as [“an inspiration to the Taiwanese people in facing threats and coercion from authoritarian power.”](#) Discussion of Taiwan's military preparedness against a possible invasion - such as reshaping an asymmetric defence, scaling up arms procurement deals, and extending military conscription - came under the spotlight of political debates. During his visit to Taiwan, Mark Esper, the former Secretary of Defence during the Trump administration, suggested that the United States should [abandon its ‘strategic ambiguity’](#) in case of a Chinese invasion. He also [suggested](#) that Taiwan (ROC) should reinforce its asymmetric warfare capabilities, raise its defence budget to over 3% of its total GDP, and extend the enlistment period to one year.

2.2 - Chinese Domestic Sentiments Towards Taiwan

On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, to the majority of the Chinese population, Taiwan is regarded as an inseparable territory of China and a symbol of China's century-long humiliation before the PRC's formation in 1949. Any effort to split the province away from China is unacceptable and an offence to the Chinese people. It is noteworthy that Chinese public opinion held a relatively positive attitude toward the cross-strait issue when pro-China Ma Ying-jeou was the President of Taiwan. However, even through periods of positive relations between the PRC and Taiwan, the issue of reunification remains critical to the Chinese public. [According to a survey in 2013](#), 51.6% of Chinese citizens support a swift unification with Taiwan. In terms of the way to achieve unification, [82.1% of interviewees](#) prefer peaceful negotiations, whereas 6% prefer to take over Taiwan by force. However, this percentage has recently changed, given the rising tides of Chinese nationalism, which will be later explored.

Moreover, growing commercial relations across the Taiwan Strait have undoubtedly led to significantly increased societal contact between the PRC and Taiwan. Some have [argued that these contacts lay the basis for future political reconciliation](#) and perhaps even reunification. Regarding the commercial relations between China and Taiwan, [38.2% of interviewees](#) believed that Taiwan benefited most from the recent social, economic, and political exchanges. However, the last decade or so has witnessed the mainland Chinese public losing patience towards “peaceful reunification” with Taiwan. Since Tsai Ing-wen's re-election in Taiwan in 2020, Chinese state media has expressed their disappointment with the results citing that the [election was rigged](#), criticising Washington for electoral interference, and reiterating Beijing's consistent and rigid stance against any pro-independence movement in Taiwan. This disapproval was reinforced by [vocal groups of Chinese netizens](#) that have expressed their disappointment over China's policies and called for Beijing to unify the island with the “motherland” by force.



Over the past few years, China's rising nationalism has been reflected in its cyberspace. Since 2015, a new wave of cyber-nationalists has emerged on the internet known as the ['Little Pink' \(小粉红\)](#). The term 'Little Pink' materialised after the “cross-strait memes war” (两岸表情包大战) in 2016 during Taiwan's pro-independence president Tsai Ing-wen's election. On January 20, Chinese internet users bombarded the Facebook pages of Tsai and Taiwan's pro-independence media outlets with memes defining Taiwan as a province of China while accentuating their love and dedication to mainland China and the CCP. In line with the CCP's increasingly aggressive stance towards the Taiwan issue, significant segments of the Chinese opinion are growing disillusioned with “peaceful unification” and the status quo in Taiwan. Instead, they are starting to embrace the idea of using force. In assessing the Chinese' public opinion on Taiwan, former director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Institute of Taiwan Studies, Zhou Shihuai, stated that the [“\[m\]ainland Chinese will be very happy to see the PLA take action to punish a 'pro-independence Taiwan.'”](#) The actions of Taiwanese independence groups have frustrated those in mainland China that the Taiwanese identity is deepening while fewer Taiwanese consider themselves Chinese. Therefore, there is a growing sense of urgency among the Chinese public for the reunification of Taiwan.

[A 2019 survey](#) covering nine major Chinese cities shows that 53.1% of respondents support armed unification, 39.1% oppose it, and 7.8% give indecision “I don't know.” Many Chinese nationals are in favour of using force for reunification with Taiwan, which is not surprising given the rise of radical nationalism in the PRC in recent years. This change is drastic from the 2013 survey previously mentioned, where only 6% of its interviewees favoured a forceful reunification with Taiwan. [In a 2016 Harvard Ash Centre survey](#), 95.5% of respondents were either “relatively satisfied” or “highly satisfied” with Beijing.” This also demonstrates the Chinese public's confidence in the government and their increasingly firm stance toward the Taiwan issue. However, [many observers](#) view rising nationalistic sentiments and popular support for armed unification as a double-edged sword for Beijing. The rise of Chinese nationalism has seen more aggressive radical Chinese citizens in its response to the Taiwan issue, and National University of Singapore Research Fellow Qu Dongtao cautions against this rise of radical nationalism, citing its potential danger to the peace between China and Taiwan. While strong nationalism legitimises the CCP's authority and foreign policies, the radicalisation of such nationalism may impose unwanted pressure on Beijing. Therefore, the Chinese government must tread carefully between flaming and managing popular nationalism and its foreign policy towards Taiwan.

Following Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan earlier this month, analysts have noted the backlash from Beijing this time is even [louder and more threatening](#). The PRC's subsequent military drills in the six seas surrounding Taiwan included multiple warplane incursions into the [Air Defence Identification Zone \(ADIZ\)](#) and the PLA firing almost a dozen Dongfeng ballistic missiles, with at least five [missiles landing within Japan's](#) exclusive economic zone. Additionally, China has already announced several economic sanctions to punish Taiwan for



Pelosi's visit, such as [blocking](#) thousands of food imports from Taiwan and halting natural gas to Taiwan. Beyond military measures and economic sanctions from the Chinese government, public sentiment in China also reflects immense anger and frustration towards Pelosi's visit. There were [signboards](#) at railway stations and in-store screens, as well as [cyber-attacks](#) targeting the Taiwanese official departments and the hacking of local stores in Taiwan to display messages calling Pelosi a "warmonger." It is uncertain if Beijing will increase its military pressure on Taiwan but given the harsher rhetoric it has used in recent years, it will not be unsurprising if the PRC follows through with some of its threats. Taiwan will bear the brunt of China's response to Pelosi's visit, and Beijing's harsh response will further alienate the Taiwanese people, making its goal of reunification more distant. As both the Chinese public and government have been more open to forceful reunification, it raises the question of whether President Xi will rely on more coercive measures and use force in the near future.

2.3 - Chinese Response Towards Ukraine

Meanwhile, Chinese leaders have most certainly been reflecting Russia's playbook in Ukraine and adjusting accordingly. A reflection of the authority's attitude towards the war is seen in the Chinese state media calling the analogy between Ukraine and Taiwan a strategic fabrication, claiming Taiwan is an "inalienable part of China." Wang Yi, the Chinese Foreign Minister, also called it a ['double standard'](#) to conflate the issues of Ukraine and Taiwan and regarded Taiwan as a domestic issue of China, whereas the Ukrainian war is a conflict between two sovereign states. Similar claims have been forcefully announced following Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang calling the US ["the 'biggest destroyer' of the Taiwan Strait" and](#) China's MOFA spokesperson warning that all consequences arising from the trip ["must be borne by the US side and the 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces."](#) The Chinese President Xi Jinping went as far as to warning US President Joe Biden not to ["play with fire"](#) over challenging China's territorial integrity and to abide by the One China Principle, using language that refers to Taiwan as part of its sovereignty.

However, many among the Chinese public have drawn immediate parallels between the Ukraine invasion and Taiwan. [Many netizens](#) have ramped up postings on Taiwan ever since the start of the Russian invasion, stating comments such as "Hey, little Taiwan... Let Ukraine be a warning to you!" and that Ukraine is "a blueprint for taking back Taiwan by force." As previously mentioned, the rise of Chinese nationalistic sentiment has become, at times, dangerous for the Chinese government. Even before the Ukraine invasion, Beijing has tried to [calm the nationalist](#) fervour for calls for an invasion of Taiwan. Now more than ever, the Chinese government is careful in [managing popular nationalism](#) while avoiding criticisms of Russia in the social media sphere. Posts glorifying the war and those criticising Russia are getting quietly deleted.



2.4 - How the USA or Other State Actors Affect post-Ukraine Cross-Strait Relations

As both sides of the Taiwan Strait are drawing lessons from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, how the rest of the world, especially the United States, reacts to the Ukraine war has also posed great influence over the post-Ukraine sentiments on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Earlier in May, U.S. President Joe Biden [vowed unequivocally to defend militarily in the event of a Taiwan Strait conflict](#), departing from the traditional strategic ambiguity of the [US One China Policy](#). However, [the US Department of State](#) swiftly reversed Biden's comment as a policy shift, reiterating the US longstanding strategic stance that opposes any unilateral change to the status quo across the Taiwan Strait remain unchanged. The US strategic preference for the status quo regarding the cross-Strait relation, along with NATO's reluctance to send troops into Ukraine, manifests that the US sees avoidance of any form of military conflict with nuclear power in its best interest. This explains the [dwindling confidence](#) of the Taiwanese public in the US coming to its defense after the Ukraine war and can embolden China's ambition and aggression toward Taiwan.

Another critical regional power at play in Japan. A firm ally of the US and the cornerstone of the [“democratic front”](#) in East Asia, Japan has had territorial disputes and geopolitical wrestling with both Russia and China. For the past decade, [Japan has pivoted its foreign policy](#) from avoiding clarity in response to a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan to calling the democratically-ruled island an [“important partner”](#) with shared values against a more aggressive China under the leadership and influence of Shinzo Abe, Japan's late Prime Minister and a steadfast supporter of Taiwan. Thus, the sudden passing of Shinzo Abe casts uncertainty on future political discourses on cross-Strait relations in Japan and whether Abe's legacy of a pro-Taiwan Japan would last. While Taiwan mourned the loss of a staunch friend, China slammed Taiwanese Vice President Lai's paying respect to Abe's memorial as an act of [political manipulation](#), showing strong disagreement about closer ties between the two sides. Beijing will likely seek to take advantage of the [post-Abe vacuum](#), where a powerful Japanese politician in the succession of Abe's support for Taipei is absent, to nudge Tokyo into leaning toward a China-friendly position, in turn adding fuel to China's belligerence against Taiwan in the post-Ukraine war era if the regional democratic power shifts its political rapport.

2.5 - Concluding Remarks

While Ukraine's reality is not of physical or geopolitical proximity, it is manifest that both sides of the Taiwan Strait have had sentiments inspired and lessons learned from the Ukraine war. The repercussions of the Ukraine war have rippled beyond the Taiwan Strait to East Asia's regional stability. In China, rising popular nationalism has placed a more



considerable emphasis on hastened unification with Taiwan, even if this resorted to using force. The Chinese public has ridden the wave of the Ukraine invasion by equating it to its issues with Taiwan, demonstrating a more aggressive stance. This is a prominent cause of concern for Taiwan, especially given the public's waning confidence in the US as an ally. However, Beijing has been careful about handling the Ukraine crisis, thereby increasing its censorship efforts in the public sphere and attempting to calm the flames of nationalism and calls for an invasion. The Taiwan issue has also been greatly influenced by the region's precarious and fluctuating geopolitical landscape, such as the US dedication to defending Taiwan and the recent political developments in Japan. This has also affected public sentiments regarding reunification issues in both the PRC and Taiwan. The Chinese government has had to be especially careful in treading between the rising nationalistic sentiment domestically and ways to avoid aggravating Taiwan and its allies.



Section 3 - Geopolitical or Foreign Policy Analysis of the Dispute: South China Sea, Interested Actors and Tensions Development

Laveesh Sharma and Shivam Shekhawat

3.1 - South China Sea: The 2016 UNCLOS ruling and its implications

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) pronounced a historic decision in July 2016, adjudicating China's claims opposite the Philippines in the South China Sea. Most importantly, [the arbitral Tribunal](#) rendered the "historic rights" claimed by China (in the form of the [9-dash line](#)) within the entirety of the South China Sea irreconcilable and incompatible with the internationally-agreed Convention. The Tribunal concluded that historically the islands in the South China Sea were used by fishermen and navigators of other States, "there was no evidence that China had historically exercised [exclusive control](#) over the waters or their resources." The issuance of this statement effectively negates Chinese claims to the archipelagos/islets in the sea area within the ["nine-dash line."](#) Comprehensively the judgement examined the legality of claims over the Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal, stipulating that under the Convention, "islands generate an [exclusive economic zone](#) of 200 nautical miles and a continental shelf," but when it comes to rocks that do not account as habitat for humans or part of the economy "shall have no exclusive zone or continental shelf." Historically, the Spratly Islands were used for economic activities by fishermen in the region that were ["transient and extractive in nature,"](#) which, per the UNCLOS Convention, does not constitute a community settlement. Therefore, the Spratly Islands collectively are incapable of generating maritime features. Whereas at the Scarborough Shoal, traditionally, fishermen from the Philippines, China, and other countries enjoyed acknowledged and customary fishing rights for a long time. According to [the Tribunal](#), "because Scarborough Shoal is above water at high tide, it generates an entitlement to a territorial sea, however, its surrounding waters do not form part of the exclusive economic zone," and the Convention did not explain the traditional fishing rights.

The [UNCLOS Tribunal](#) further noted how several features claimed by PRC were heavily modified by man-made structures, land reclamations, construction of airstrips, and seaports. The Tribunal categorically adjudges the sea features on their natural condition and bases its evaluation on historical records. The verdict would have carried a significant shot in the arm for the then Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who assumed power only in June 2016. But soon after his swearing-in ceremony, in a broadcasted cabinet address, he affirmed that his government would be inclined to have a ["soft landing"](#) with China. The former President Duterte remarked, "what if, in the face of these circumstances, China will dig in and



put us to the test, again disallowing our fishermen from fishing in Scarborough Shoal.” While speaking at a news conference in 2019, Duterte acknowledged being [powerless](#) to get Beijing to honour the UNCLOS Tribunal ruling. He stated that the only solution short of going to war was to remain still in the situation and exclaimed the issue “will be just like a [sore thumb](#) that sticks out painfully every day.”

Rodrigo Duterte’s successor was elected in June 2022, the new Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Among his initial decisions, he sought a [review and renegotiation](#) of China-backed projects in the railways sector. These were later considered withdrawn after the Chinese government did not respond to funding requests by the previous Duterte government. The Philippine government [terminated](#) the joint energy exploration with China in the South China Sea region, while another proposed project is yet to take off. In this way, China preconditioned the Philippines to set aside the international tribunal ruling to advance in developing energy resources, which is regarded as of paramount importance to the country. Taking the cue from the past regime, the Marcos administration has [strengthened its resolve](#) to protect its territory and sea features, deploying more patrol boats and coast guard ships to protect its fishermen within its exclusive economic zone. Marcos has been vocal about [upholding](#) the 2016 arbitration court ruling in favour of his nation, his Foreign Secretary has notably [remarked](#) how since the findings are not upheld for “denial and rebuttal,” the administration decided to “firmly reject attempts to undermine it (which would) erase it from law, history and our collective memories.”

The collective association of the smaller nations in the region, the ten-member ASEAN, has made ineffective efforts to mark a unified stance on this issue. As Mark Valencia, a renowned expert on maritime affairs, puts it, “ASEAN has no official [position](#) in the South China Sea disputes,” and it instead serves as a centrist political platform offering a multilateral forum toward facilitation by peaceful means. As a key player and stakeholder in the region, the member states have deviating views on the matter as, for instance, it does not affect them equally. Countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Brunei, Singapore, Myanmar, and Laos share burgeoning ties and have not confronted Beijing. Conversely, there have been instances of [tensions](#) within the bloc, where a Vietnamese boatman was killed by the Malaysian coast guard when it encroached on its waters. As a unit bloc marred by its own indifferences, ASEAN cannot unilaterally change the situation. Thus, the presence of an [“external balancer”](#) is essential, most fittingly one like Japan, India, or Australia.

Notwithstanding some ASEAN states’ bonhomie with China, cracks are beginning to emerge. Beijing’s latest victim of its [“debt trap diplomacy,”](#) right after Sri Lanka, appears to be Laos which is facing an unbearable economic and financial crisis. As part of Beijing’s ambitious and challenging Belt and Road Initiative, it has delivered [infrastructure projects](#), such as the high-speed train network handed over to the Laos government. Much of its infrastructure, like dams, roads, and railways, was backed financially by China. Still, external factors like COVID-19, the Ukraine-Russian war, and its resultant implications on trade,



soaring inflation, and its mounting debt are fast turning the island nation into risking a [default](#). For instance, the credit rating agency Moody's [downgraded](#) the country's credit rating and cited a 'high' risk of default and "insufficient coverage of external debt maturities by forex reserves." This is significant given the recent events in Sri Lanka, where thousands of protestors raided the Presidential palace forcing the Head of State, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to [flee the country](#) to the Maldives. All in all, this sets a negative precedent for China's development loans.

Elsewhere China, the sleeping giant, albeit a little awake, is traversing through Asia's neighbourhood, making [claims and counterclaims](#) over land and sea borders. In addition to the India-China dispute across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and BRI, lately, there are [reports](#) backed by satellite images of a substantial build-up of the East of Doklam plateau (with strategic interest to India) on the Bhutanese side, with the creation of a village populated with houses and vehicles parked up front, along with an all-weather carriageway.



Per the images, there seems to be planning to construct another village further south of the region. This same tactic was adopted by China when it [encroached upon Nepalese land](#) in the district of Humla situated far west of the country. According to [reports](#), there has been the construction of buildings and arrangement of surveillance activities by Chinese security forces. The Nepalese farmers are not allowed to take their cattle grazing anymore on the land they once moved freely. Official protests by the government and demonstrations have failed to yield any result, with the Chinese embassy in Nepal issuing a [statement](#) that said, "there is no dispute at all. It is hoped that the Nepali people (will) not be misled with false individual reports."

In the wholeness of Beijing's overtures in Asia, it is embroiled with 17 nations in border disputes over the land and sea. And given how the global events are unfolding, from the American troops' abrupt departure from Afghanistan to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the collapse of Sri Lanka's economy, and, what seems to be now, the probability of Laos defaulting, the Asian continent is on tenterhooks. Under these circumstances, the likelihood of



Chinese adventurism or indulgence in imprudent actions within the region remains slim. The PRC has too much on its plate: its economic slowdown and financial recovery still reeling from COVID-19, its loans going bad to countries under the Belt & Road Initiative projects, and how recently it was hit by the biggest-ever [banking scandal](#) which left thousands of citizens deprived of their savings and funds. Coupled with this, Beijing's standoff with India on LAC spanning two years now has inflicted a [crackdown](#) on Chinese firms, having banned 54 Chinese mobile apps due to security concerns. To inflict damage economically, the Indian government's income tax department has been raiding offices of Chinese tech conglomerates like Huawei, Xiaomi, and Vivo for alleged [tax evasions](#), followed by asset seizures and legal actions. In a bid to become independent from Chinese imports and self-reliant, India's government adopted a [“vocal for local”](#) initiative. After a year of its implementation, the move has kickstarted a domestic ecosystem in devising new apps as replacements for Chinese ones, broken away dependence on Chinese markets for [toy imports](#), and hiked customs duty on Chinese raw materials, thereby cultivating local alternatives. As an economic [analyst](#) puts it, “the banning of apps were actual steps (meant to hit China “where it hurts”); henceforth, a lot of these apps lost money as they had deep roots in India.”

As Sethurathnam Ravi, economist and former chairman of Bombay Stock Exchange, points out: “this is the first time India has adopted [economic warfare](#) as a policy.” Following the Chinese incursions, the Indian premier Narendra Modi adopted a [tough posture](#) channelising thousands of armed forces across the Line of Actual Control while also levying financial costs upon Beijing to attract multinationals to manufacture and invest in India. Affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, many MNCs suffered stringent lockdown measures and disruptions in business. Intending to lock into this opportunity, the Indian regime [announced](#) a slew of measures to woo those firms planning to move operations from China. Faced with domestic and external pressures, peace and tranquillity in its immediate neighbourhood, a stable Asia, is in China's best interest.

3.2 USA's Role in the Relationship between the PRC and Taiwan

Any understanding of the cross-strait dispute cannot preclude the role of the United States of America, notwithstanding the party in power in Washington. The ‘Taiwan question’ is central to the relationship between the People's Republic of China and the US, more so amidst the current changes in the world and the accelerating degradation of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

On his [maiden visit to East Asia](#) in May, US President Joe Biden was asked if Washington would defend Taiwan militarily, to which he responded in the affirmative. This response led to a flurry of questions about the apparent change in the [US policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’](#) and whether its commitment to the island nation has been upgraded to suit the



present realities. This was the third time the President swayed from the official US policy. Still, the situation was downplayed, and the Secretary of State [Anthony Blinken](#) reaffirmed Washington's commitment to the 'One China policy.' Only two months later, the dynamics between the two powers are again fraught with tension- a consequence of the recently concluded visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taipei as a part of her trip to countries in East Asia, including Japan and South Korea.

While Pelosi's visit was [not the first time a House Speaker](#) visited the island, its timing in the present context - with the war in Ukraine and the increased hostilities between Beijing and Washington - is crucial. Since the [declaration of her intention to visit the island](#) in the last week of July, the Biden administration, in a bid to thwart the heightened Chinese rhetoric, downplayed its importance and dissociated the White House from the actions of the Congress leader, who, as the leader of a separate wing of the government was entitled to her own politics. While in Taiwan, [Pelosi held talks](#) with Tsai Ing-Wen, the President, addressed the legislature, met leaders across party lines, and was [awarded the 'Order of Propitious Clouds with Special Grand Cordon.'](#) She reiterated US commitment to the island but also clarified that her trip was [not intended to change the status quo in the region](#). Taiwan also committed its support to ensure security against the Taiwan strait and [peace and stability in a free and open Indo-Pacific area](#).

Apart from publicly chiding the US for undermining PRC's sovereignty and ["hollowing out"](#) the 'One China policy,' Beijing complemented this by taking [actions on the ground](#) - both economic and military. The Eastern Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) began [live-fire drills in six regions surrounding Taiwan](#) a day after Pelosi's visit, on August 4th, which was expected to be concluded on the 7th of August. The drill, effectuating an aerial and naval blockade of the island, was also the first time the Chinese aircrafts and warships crossed the median of the Taiwan strait with conventional missiles fired into the east traversing the island. As per [Chinese analysts](#), the drills were intended to normalise activities of this sort and magnitude in the strait, an aspect of PRC's 'salami slicing' techniques to retain its influence in the region. This fear about a possible normalisation of activities of this sort was further cemented when the drills did not stop last Sunday, continuing this week, and [Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence reported](#) the presence of 13 PLA Navy vessels and 39 aircrafts on Monday of which 21 crossed the median line again.

While the trip did come as a respite for Taiwan amidst the growing isolation of the island at the PRC's whim, it is debatable if there would be a positive spill over in the strategic environment. Even though the Taiwanese navy refused to engage with the Chinese provocations, it urged the international community to [speak against Beijing's transgressions](#). Beijing took [further actions against Washington](#), cancelling three fundamental dialogue mechanisms and postponing others, further denting any prospect of a reconciliation.



3.3 PRC's Recognition and a Shift in US Policy

In a process started by the Nixon administration in 1971-72, with the passage of the [Shanghai Communiqué](#), the United States switched its recognition from the Republic of China, [formally recognising](#) the People's Republic of China in 1979, acknowledging the '[One China policy](#)' as opposed to the 'One China principle' that the PRC supports. The Carter administration pledged to have [unofficial relations](#) with the ROC leading to the establishment of the American Institute in Taiwan, the gateway through which the US manages its relationship with Taipei. To further solidify the bilateral relationship between the two, the [Taiwan Relations Act](#) was also passed in 1979, committing the US to assist Taiwan in augmenting its defence capabilities and building its capacity in case of an invasion or attack. The PRC considers the act was violating the 1982 communiqué between the two countries in which Washington committed to reducing arms sales to the island. The visit by Pelosi has also invited an [aggressive response](#) from Beijing which saw it as violating the past understandings between the two sides on the cross-strait dispute, a 'unilateral shift' in US policy, and its interference in the internal affairs of the PRC.

3.4 US Relations with Taiwan

With an increased focus on the Indo-Pacific in the past few years, the revival of Quad and America's renewed commitment to safeguard the peace and stability in the region, the importance of Taiwan to protect US interests as well as to become a bulwark against the hegemonising tendencies of the PRC has increased exponentially. While Taiwan's absence from the [Indo-Pacific Economic Framework \(IPEF\)](#), which came to fruition in May, was viewed with disappointment in certain quarters, the United States reiterated the importance of the bilateral relationship amidst growing threats from China.

For Washington, the two sides share '[similar values, deep commercial and economic linkages and strong people to people ties](#)' with Taipei being a partner in trade and investment, health, semiconductors and critical supply chains, science and technology, and advancement of democratic values. Taiwan's diplomatic presence in the country is through the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office, which has been organising an [Economic Prosperity Partnership dialogue](#) since 2020 to further cement the economic relationship between the two sides and identify new areas of cooperation. Taiwan is Washington's eighth largest trading partner, while Washington is its second, with total Taiwanese investment in the United States in 2020 reaching 137 billion USD.



3.5 One China policy vs. One China Principle

For the People's Republic of China, "there is only one China in the world, Taiwan is a part of China, and the government of the PRC is the sole legal government representing the whole of China." While the US agrees on this policy's first and last aspect, the difference lies in its understanding of Taiwan being a part of China. Drawing from the three US-China joint communique, the TRA, and the six assurances, Washington acknowledges the One China Principle but rejects the unilateral change in status quo from either side, de jure independence for Taiwan, and supports the resolution of the dispute through peaceful means.

This strategic ambiguity on the part of the US, wherein it acknowledges but falls short of accepting, helps Washington in manoeuvring through its relationship with both entities. For Taiwan, the US iteration of the Taiwan relations act and the six assurances under its policy generate confidence in its support against Beijing. Whereas for the PRC, the disinclination to grant de jure independence to the island and commitment to the three joint communique between the two doesn't breach its red line on the dispute.

Under the administration of the previous US President, Donald Trump, while the Sino-US relationship kept degrading, the engagement with Taipei increased vigorously. The Trump administration sent many senior officials to the island, and the sale of arms also increased during his term, inching close to \$15 billion worth of arms in the second half of his presidency. His presidency also saw Taipei's inclusion in the US Indo-Pacific strategy. While there were fears that this policy would be discontinued after the coming of Biden, who would instead travel the path set by Obama, the US policy has more or less remained the same. The Biden administration has kept up its ante on China and has not wavered in its support for Taiwan. The brutal crackdown by the PRC in Hong Kong and Xinjiang and its revisionist claims, most notably its bid to re-shape the world order with a Sinocentric worldview, have hardened US public opinion about adopting a tough stance towards China.



Section 4 - Forecast of the China-Taiwan Dispute: What May Happen?

Albert John Welirang, Matheus Mora Machado and Ruy Scalamandr 

4.1 Historical Forecast

Underlying China-Taiwan relations is a history of conflict and mistrust, dating back to the Chinese Civil War, which spanned three decades between 1927 and 1949. The belligerent origins of the political tension between the PRC and ROC make the possibility of war or invasion too real, as the Chinese Civil War did not technically end on paper. Consequently, the lack of formal agreement between the belligerent parties means that, politically, there is excellent space for a relapse into conflict. Despite the underlying tensions and hostilities, however, both China and Taiwan do have formal relations. These relations can be primarily categorised as commercial and political, which, on the whole, depict contrasting narratives. While there is undoubtedly a history of political hostility at the international level, commercial cross-strait relations have been rather [lucrative](#) for firms on either side. Despite the difference in the nature of the relationships, the ongoing conflict poses opportunities and benefits for both parties.

Needless to say, the trade surplus Taiwan enjoys with the mainland is a significant benefit for Taiwan. Taiwanese firms have access to the [largest workforce](#) and exposure to an array of industries, including, but not limited to, manufacturing, real estate, tech, and textiles. As mentioned earlier in the report, this access to markets on the Chinese mainland has allowed some Taiwanese firms to break into the [Fortune 500](#). This type of economic power is not limited to regional boundaries, either. This competitive advantage gives Taiwan's economy some political insulation should tension with the PRC heat up.

However, if there is anything the Beijing Government has demonstrated in its meteoric rise to economic, military, and political might, it can scale up or match competitors in [manufacturing tech](#). That said, in 2018, the PRC made only [five percent](#) of the world's semiconductors, so if the PRC wishes to avoid being denied access to such a vital element of virtually every electronic, upscaling production of semiconductors is a priority for them. In addition, this is something Beijing is currently working towards, especially if the mainland decided to engage in a boots-on-the-ground conflict with Taiwan in order to avoid damning tech sanctions that are [currently limiting Russia](#) following the invasion of Ukraine. [The Made in China 2025](#) programme aims to internalise a vast majority of the PRC's semiconductor needs by 2025, meaning that the PRC will be more prepared to deal with any tech sanctions should the worst-case scenario materialise. It is difficult to assess whether this tech autarky that the PRC is working towards will be a sufficient causal parameter that will allow Beijing to invade the mainland in the not-so-distant future. Still, certainly, the success of the Made in China 2025



programme will limit the non-military reprimands the international community would be able to use to impede any such invasion.

In the political realm, relations between the PRC and the ROC are far more volatile and perhaps more conducive to escalation. As mentioned above, tensions between China and Taiwan are rooted in nearly a century of conflict. That said, there are great political benefits and (at present) minimal gain for both the PRC and the ROC to relapse into military conflict. For China, the threat of invading the island of Taiwan can be a great leverage tool to counteract or provoke the West, especially the United States. Although, the United States' *de facto* stance on Taiwan is a little unclear, and this is purposefully so. The US has used [strategic ambiguity](#) as a core pillar of its foreign policy on the matter. Even in the present moment, where tensions are high, President Biden's [affirmation](#) that the United States would defend Taiwan in the event of military aggression did not reflect a *de jure* change in US foreign policy. The Department of State explicitly states that "the United States does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan" [on their website](#), reaffirming the long-standing [One China](#) stance held by Washington. Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan further complicated the situation. The White House [did not approve](#) of the trip, but Beijing has still responded with [military drills](#) even within Taiwanese airspace. Therefore, the threat of invading Taiwan could be held over the United States in periods of conflict between the People's Republic of China and the United States. However, it is a high-risk game; toying too much with the threat of invasion could also trigger an unlikely reprimand from the United States.

Likewise, for Taiwan, or nationalist movements and parties in Taiwan, the ongoing conflict with the mainland is a potential vote-winner, as it was employed as a tactic by incumbent president Tsai Ing-Wen in [recent elections](#). This is particularly troublesome as the 1992 Consensus [continues to erode](#) and, as discussed earlier on in this report, the more United States-Taiwan relations flourish, the faster the window for a full-blown conflict with limited collateral between the PRC and ROC will close. Nonetheless, this may also be a source of urgency for China to prepare itself for a potential invasion, and if China is able to insulate itself adequately from foreign sanctions, then an escalation of the conflict is quite likely in the not-so-distant future.

To summarise, the health of economic and political relations between the PRC and ROC has seen better days. The economic benefits of private business activity on both sides of the Strait of Taiwan are undoubtedly significant, but the mainland is unlikely to face long-term shocks even if it were to cut those ties. On the other hand, Taiwanese firms and business owners operating on the mainland would have some more severe problems. On the political front, relations have been all but friendly, despite a period of *détente* since more or less the end of the Cold War and the election of Tsai Ing-Wen of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as president of Taiwan in 2016. If there is to be an invasion of Taiwan, it would depend on more than just relations between the PRC and ROC, but also on the ability of the United States and the international community to intervene via sanctions or military action in



the event of such a conflict. Considering the invasion of Ukraine has triggered some of the most aggressive [economic sanctions](#) on Russia from the West, it demonstrates that the United States and NATO are primarily committed to defending their borders and values beyond those borders. Whether this commitment will deter a conflict between the PRC and ROC depends mainly on the state of world politics and the global economy whenever China decides the time is ripe for an invasion of Taiwan.

However, if parallels are to be drawn to the invasion of Ukraine, Beijing would also need to be economically, politically, and technologically protected from Western sanctions at the very least. This is likely to be towards the end of the current decade as Beijing has yet to achieve its Made in China 2025 goals, assuming the ongoing [Chinese debt crisis](#) does not significantly damage the PRC's economic and political fibres. Thus, the end-of-decade deadline for a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is unlikely to change, despite the increase in short-term tensions following Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, [according to the Pentagon](#).

4.2 Political Forecast

Political relations between both China and Taiwan are reaching new heights. With the current political climate, cross-strait relations will significantly deteriorate in the coming years. While the actuality of a conflict occurring in the near future cannot be ruled out, it seems likelier to look at two factors that are quickly making cross-strait relations increasingly dangerous. Firstly, growing ideological differences with China pursuing its One China policy have led to the increasing militarisation of both sides. Secondly, Taiwan's increasing reliance on the United States quickly brings the US and China closer into each other's orbit. The only certainty we have is twofold - China will continue to grow economically and militarily, soon enabling it to challenge Taiwan and the United States militarily. Strong statesmanship will be needed between China and the USA to dictate and negotiate some middle ground if the worst-case scenario is to be averted.

For the past 70 years since the end of the Chinese Civil War, China's historic goal has been to pursue its [One China policy](#). Politically, we have seen a more ambitious China emboldened by this rhetoric. We can point towards the [end of the 'one country, two systems' principle in Hong Kong](#), where the government introduced a [National Security Law](#) that effectively eroded civil liberties overnight in the territory. These freedoms have been enjoyed since 1997, when Hong Kong was handed over to China. But it was written into its constitution that it would be given up to 50 years to maintain a degree of autonomy before being brought under China's sphere. This deadline in 2047 came much earlier than expected for most people, and no doubt has sparked fears about the question of Taiwan and its future as the time quickly approaches. The eclipsing of Hong Kong under China only emboldened China to maintain its long-held goal of unification or reintegration. Taiwan shares some commonalities and



differences with Hong Kong. Since 1947 Taiwan has always been considered part of mainland China, whereas Hong Kong was ceded back to the Chinese in 1997. Taiwan also [officially holds no seat at the United Nations](#). Nevertheless, both Taiwan and Hong Kong have mutually enjoyed a degree of autonomy, holding their own separate Parliament and elections. What is certain, though, is that the question of unification over Taiwan would be politically tricky and militarily messy.

Currently, many are sceptical about whether peaceful unification is possible at all. The question of Taiwan, however, is something President Xi Jinping will not let go of easily. The potentiality of unifying China would cement his legacy as the unifier of China. Therefore, [Beijing has not ruled out the possibility of the use of force](#) as a last resort - while worrying; it also implies some measure of openness to negotiations or peaceful unification. But when it comes to politics, one's words and actions may not always align. While it appears the PRC may be open to some form of open negotiation, the reality is that since 2020 [China has stepped up a record 380 incursions](#) into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), not seen since 1996. This increased military activity across the Taiwan strait leads individuals like Admiral Phil Davidson, retired commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, to [suggest conflict as early as 2027 as part of the upcoming 100-year anniversary](#) of the founding of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). Fears such as the use of force are not entirely out of the question, especially with the increasing militarisation of both China and Taiwan. China, for instance, has a [cross-strait military build-up that is 25 years in the making](#), building over 100 advanced fighter planes each year and revamping its navy with 90 major ships and submarines in the past five years. It also possesses an arsenal of anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles capable of hitting Taiwan and US Navy vessels in American bases held in Japan, South Korea, and Guam.

On the other hand, [Taiwan's Parliament has approved more cash this year](#), an extra budget spent on anti-ship weapons. A lot has already been invested in coastal-defence missiles, sea mines, stinger and javelin missiles, and fast corvette warships. In 2019 [a £455 million deal](#) was agreed between the United States and the island of Taiwan to purchase the latest patriot missiles. This increasing build-up of arms is rapidly creating a modern China-Taiwan arms race, which further heightens tensions. However, in the coming years, we can expect China to assert its influence over Taiwan. Militarily, continued incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ may be a normalisation of Beijing's military dominance over the Taiwan strait. Economically, the People's Republic of China could rely upon a silent normalisation of affairs with Taiwan as its [economic prosperity is increasingly reliant on continued cooperation and economic integration with the ROC](#). Finally, the [increasing use of disinformation campaigns to sow distrust](#) between the Taiwanese government and its people benefits China in the long run. Indeed, as the PRC continues to build up its military capacity and economic wealth, we can only expect the balance of power to shift in China's favour as it hopes to resettle the current status quo.



In fact, while potentially analysed as a deterrent to Chinese aggression, Taiwan's build-up of arms and defense strategies may make things bloodier and costlier for both sides. Despite this, we must not forget that at the heart of increasing tensions between China and Taiwan is a broader geopolitical struggle between China and the US. The US often pays lip service to China's 'One China' policy but has [spent the last 70 years ensuring Taiwan remains separate from mainland China](#). This could be because Taiwan, for the US, stands in ideological defiance to China. After democratising itself in the 1980s, its own people have developed a separate identity; many [distinctly view themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese](#). Furthermore, the potentiality of China snuffing out Taiwan would mean losing a valued democracy in the region. It would also be a geopolitical disaster for two main reasons. First, it would effectively mark an end to American dominance in the Indo-Pacific akin to that of the '[Suez Crisis,](#)' which many [consider begging the end of British influence on the world stage](#). The same would be said for the US if Taiwan were to unify with China. Secondly, the economic fallout would be disastrous depending on how unification is achieved. The ROC's [vital semiconductor market remains extremely valuable](#) and years ahead of American and Chinese competitors. Any disruption to this industry would be economically troubling. In this way, the political stakes over Taiwan remain high for the USA as it represents an essential bastion of US influence and remains a cornerstone of the American shifting foreign policy to deter Chinese aggression and stifle Chinese influence in the region. After all, it was a military and [political gamble for the US to withdraw from Afghanistan](#) in a bid to keep China in check.

Lastly, the evolving lessons of the war in Ukraine will be something both China and Taiwan look toward from the side-lines. Both from the perspective of whether a politically unified Western approach can contain Russian aggression and the military tactics of holding a much better equipped and more significant force at bay. More importantly, politically, it appears the war in Ukraine holds a daunting lesson for the US that if a conflict is to end - let alone a war - a solution must be found diplomatically. Unfortunately, Nancy Pelosi's recent visit to Taiwan serves only to heighten tensions further between Taiwan and China, [disrupting an already fragile status quo](#). In the wake of her departure, Beijing announced military drills surrounding the island of Taiwan. Ms. Pelosi's [intentions may have been both personal and political](#); firstly, she is a known critic of the Chinese government, even protesting in Tiananmen Square in 1991 for the killing of protestors two years prior. Secondly, in her last term as speaker, she may hope the visit to Taiwan cements her legacy as an enduring reminder that the United States will not go easy on what it sees as 'Chinese aggression.' While her visit will clearly send repercussions throughout Beijing, we ought to be reminded that there is no easy way out for all parties. Catastrophe can be averted via skilful statesmanship and sustained talks.



4.4 Military Forecast

The main island of Taiwan is rugged, armed, and heavily urbanised. It is 394 kilometres long and 144 kilometres across its widest point and is home to 258 peaks over 3,000 metres in height. Separated from China by the Taiwan Strait, which has an [average width](#) of 180 kilometres, Taiwan proper has only 14 small beaches suitable for an amphibious invasion, all surrounded by cliffs and concrete jungles. In the north lies Taipei, the capital; in the centre, Taichung; in the south, Kaohsiung—these cities collectively form a natural defensive barrier that would require significant time and resources to overcome. Taiwan proper's geography renders the island a conquering force's worst nightmare.

Furthermore, the main island is home to 23.6 million people and 190,000 active-duty military Armed personnel, with a further 2 million in the military's reserve personnel. The Republic of China Forces' military hardware has been and will continue to be purchased to deny a Chinese amphibious invasion. That includes [411 fighter aircraft](#)—nearly half of which are modernised F-16 and French Mirage 2000 jets. On land, Taiwan will receive [108 M1A2T Abrams](#) main battle tanks purchased from the US in June. It is set to bolster its missile capabilities, crucial to deterring and fighting off an amphibious invasion, by purchasing 11 M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems and 400 Harpoon anti-ship missiles. Such missiles would play a crucial role in a confrontation with China by giving Taiwan the capabilities to readily sink Chinese ships and buy time for American naval and aerial reinforcements to arrive.

But the CCP has, since the turn of the century and especially since Xi Jinping's rise to power, [rapidly modernised the PLA](#), largely to seize Taiwan in mind. The PLA dwarfs the Republic of China Armed Force in size, hardware, and expenditure, making an invasion a real and perhaps not-so-distant threat, militarily speaking. Where the terrain is unfavourable, commanders planning an offensive generally attempt to attain a [5-to-1 superiority](#) over the target in terms of troop numbers. With a little over [2 million active-duty](#) personnel, the PLA has more than enough troops to meet and surpass that threshold. In June, the PLA also invested significantly in its navy, having debuted the conventionally powered [Fujian](#), the third of its aircraft carriers. Over the medium- and long-term, the PLA's achievements in anti-ship and hypersonic missile production and testing present significant threats to Taiwan's mainland defences and its allies' seaborne forces.

The PLA's recent military exercises around Taiwan in response to Nancy Pelosi's visit to the island have shed much light on what may be expected in case of a military confrontation. Chinese live-fire exercises were unprecedented in scale and geographical dispersion: whereas during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995 and 1996, the PLA fired missiles into two areas in the Taiwan Strait—both off the west coast of the island and bordering the Taiwan Strait median line—the PLA now fired into seven regions around the north, east, west, and southern Taiwanese coast. A [recent war game](#) being run by the Centre for Strategic and International



Studies in collaboration with retired American Navy officers and Pentagon officials predicts that such missile capabilities would destroy a significant portion of the American and Japanese fleets, assuming Japanese involvement. Notably, the PLA also engaged in a ‘[pre-blockade](#)’ demonstration by occupying six large areas around Taiwan that host many flight routes and shipping lanes. This would be key in a confrontation scenario, as China would work to isolate Taiwan from international trade and cripple the island by depriving it of basic war-time necessities, such as food, commodities, and armaments.

Notwithstanding, the PLA still has a way to go to make an invasion of Taiwan feasible. Arguably, the [primary weakness](#) of the PLA is its disjointed and centralised command structure, which prevents it from carrying out large-scale joint operations such as seizing Taiwan. In light of Russia’s operational struggles in Ukraine—a relatively simple undertaking in comparison to an invasion of Taiwan—the PLA will also have to improve the quality of its training and combat-readiness, and that will not make up for the fact that it last faced actual combat in the 20th century.

The PLA’s naval capabilities are also far behind the United States, which is certain to at the very least *de facto* support Taiwan militarily. The Fujian is unlikely to become operable for several years, as it must undergo sea trials and be equipped—even then, the US will have [11 aircraft carriers](#) to the [PLA’s three](#). That should prove an effective deterrent: notwithstanding the vastly improved standing of the PLA in the modern-day, during the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, the US successfully dispatched two aircraft carrier battle groups to deter Chinese aggression toward the ROC. Given that the PLA has since scaled up its naval forces to surpass the United States’ in terms of [the number of ships](#), the US is likely to despatch three or more aircraft carrier battle groups should an invasion occur.

However, a major downside for the US is its inability to conduct a ‘[systematic campaign](#)’ to undermine Chinese defences before approaching Taiwan proper in its defence. Although the United States will likely employ long-range missiles housed in submarines and bombers to soften the Chinese, the nearest American bombers are stationed in Guam, roughly 2,700km from Taiwan, and naval and aerial capabilities would have to swiftly capitalise on successful strikes through direct confrontation in the Taiwan Strait. As such, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies predicts that in a four-week conflict, the United States would have 900 fighter aircraft—about [half](#) of the Navy and Air Force inventory.

Before war breaks out, however, Washington is likely to step up its legal commitments – enshrined in the [Taiwan Relations Act of 1979](#) – to supply Taiwan with defence weapons “in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capabilities.” The PLA has set a new ‘[benchmark](#)’ for military exercises around Taiwan following Pelosi’s visit and, as US President, assertively affirmed the country’s commitment to Taiwan’s defence. As such, the former US Indo-Pacific Commander Phil Davidson predicts that the threat of a Chinese invasion will not [manifest until at least 2027](#). Indeed, war will likely



break out once the PLA is ready to invade and the political will and conditions for an invasion are present.



Conclusion: Comparing and Contrasting the Ukraine and Taiwan cases

Alessia Mazuelos

With the rising tensions in Taiwan from the so-called '[Chinese aggression](#)' in the Indo-Pacific region, many policymakers and scholars have not restrained from drawing numerous parallels between Ukraine and Taiwan, as well as Russia and China. However, the dominant narrative and opinion from both ends seem to fall onto The Diplomat's clear statement, "[China is Not Russia; Taiwan is Not Ukraine.](#)" Nonetheless, with the world watching the war in Ukraine after the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, many lessons can be reflected upon by leaders and experts. Therefore, to conclude the China-Taiwan dispute analysis and how the Russo-Ukrainian war has impacted, there must be an explicit acknowledgement of the differences and parallels between the two conflicts, the position of China in front of the war, and the lessons learned from Ukraine.

From the moment Vladimir Putin unleashed the war relying on Moscow's defensive messaging campaign that the '[constant threat](#)' that a Western-leaning Ukraine and expanding NATO justified the action, the motivations of Beijing to invade Taiwan in the near future have been heavily discussed. On the one hand, the Russian 'special military operation' holds as legitimate core interests, [according to the Kremlin](#), their sphere of security, Russia's sovereignty over annexed Crimea, the demilitarisation and alleged 'de-Nazification' of Ukraine, and the assurance of its neutrality. On the other hand, the [military response](#) from China to the visit of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called upon opinions claiming that the Taiwan Strait might soon materialise a [more severe security crisis](#) attempting to compare the Western presence and influence in the sphere as a threat imminently demanding of a response. After all, the importance of Chinese claims over the island of Taiwan mirroring Russian interests over Ukraine is inevitable to see. For instance, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi confidently claimed on [7 March 2021 in a press conference](#) that "Taiwan will eventually return to the embrace of the motherland."

Similarly, in [2021 Putin's essay *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*](#) revealed his genuine belief and position regarding the 'undeniable' unity of Ukraine and Russia is deeply rooted in a shared identity, history, and ancestry. But, although China and Russia relate in their historical single-party authoritarian hegemony over their neighbours and a "[Taiwan/Ukraine comparison is useful, \(it is\) not accurate.](#)" This is because after analysing China-Taiwan history, international relations, and domestic politics, the complexity compared to Russia-Ukraine is evident as [Taiwanese internal politics threaten](#) the economic interdependency between Beijing and Taipei.

Thus, just as expert [John Wagner Givens described](#), while for Putin, there is a lot to gain from invading Ukraine and relatively little to lose (even after the economic repercussions from war costs and sanctions), for Xin Jinping, this is the opposite. For instance, the '[One China](#)' policy starts with the significant distinguishing factors between Ukraine and Taiwan as it represents a diplomatic acknowledgement formally recognising Sino-US relations and excluding Taiwan. This policy builds from the '[One China](#)' principle, which refers to China's insistence on Taiwan as an "inalienable part of one China to be reunified one day," meaning



that whereas Ukraine is a sovereign independent state, Taiwan's status remains unclear to this day. Additionally, the ethnic distinction in ratios and percentages between the Republic of China with the People's Republic of China and Ukraine with Russia are too substantial to attribute more intricacy to the Taiwan Strait. [The Government Portal of the Republic of China](#) uncovered a shocking 95% of the Taiwanese population as part of the Han Chinese ethnicity and ancestry, which is reflected in the culture, religion, and language.

However, in the case of Ukraine, even if the second largest ethnic group is Russian, it only accounts for [17.2%](#). Only some regions are supposedly Russian majority, such as Crimea, [annexed in 2014 into the Autonomous Republic of Crimea after self-determination through a 'referendum,' with 60%](#) of its population consisting of ethnic Russians in 2001. This evidences that the case of Ukraine and Taiwan differ from many different angles and views. Aside from that, China and Russia are also far from similar. China is considered to have [the second largest GDP globally](#), with a much higher percentage of its GDP attributed to the United States compared to Russia's economy. This is due to China's ongoing economic growth being vitally [connected to the world economy](#), which is where Russia juxtaposes. Therefore, a potential invasion of Taiwan, in comparison to the invasion of Ukraine, represents a real vulnerability to China's economy because it holds strong interdependence as ['the World's Top Trader'](#) that was not the case for Russia entering Ukraine.

Finally, the fears and possible risks of a Taiwan Strait dispute-breaking outcome from a mistaken attempt to link the Ukraine question with the ['Taiwan question'](#) where separatism, peaceful reunification, and independence have different dimensions and meanings. This way, the strategic priorities for Moscow are different from those held by Beijing, as reflected by Shanghai Global Institute International Relations professor [Tiejun Zhang](#). The former felt a sense of urgency in the short term, and the latter maintained a long-term mission of keeping peaceful relations and the environment in the international order. On top of that, the different regional hegemony held by each continental power places an additional determinant strategic difference between Russia and China where the first one is positioned in ['the East European fault line'](#) with Ukraine, and the second one is in ['the East Asian fault line'](#) with Taiwan. Retrospectively, beyond the shallow comparison that there are power asymmetries and stronger neighbours with increasing aggression towards a weaker neighbour, as it happens for Russia-Ukraine and China-Taiwan, the linkages are premature and unsound. Despite this, the interaction between the two cases seems to come from the United States as a ['primary nexus,'](#) whether it is from foreign relations with Ukraine and Taiwan, respectively, or Western expansion, pressure, and even retaliation. Besides the clear-cut dissimilarities between China and Russia, Beijing and the rest of the world will remain at the edge of seeing how the war in Ukraine unfolds. The possibility of history repeating itself is always a rational forecast to contemplate.



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