

US arms Taiwan to prepare a Ukraine-style quagmire for China

Peter Symonds
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US President Biden's trip to Asia has brought the mounting tensions with China over Taiwan into sharp focus. For a third time since taking office, Biden emphatically declared that the US had a "commitment" to back Taiwan militarily in the event of a conflict with China—overturning decades of US policy.

When the US established diplomatic relations with China in 1979, and ended all formal ties with Taiwan, it adopted the One China policy—de facto recognising Beijing to be the legitimate government of all China, including the island of Taiwan. The corollary was "strategic ambiguity"—refusing to categorically commit to siding with Taiwan in a war with China. That policy was aimed not only at warding off aggression by China, but also at blocking provocative actions by Taiwan.

While the White House has insisted that there has been no change of policy, the US, first under Trump and now under Biden, has been deliberately undermining the status quo over Taiwan, the most potentially explosive flashpoint in Asia. Top-level visits to Taiwan, the open presence of US military trainers on the island, stepped-up arms sales and increased transits through the Taiwan Strait amount to calculated provocations against China.

Now having transformed Ukraine into a military quagmire to weaken and destabilise Russia, US imperialism is deliberately setting and baiting a similar trap for China in Taiwan. Drawing on the Ukraine war, open discussion is taking place in the media and in strategic and military circles about arming Taiwan for a protracted conflict with China.

An article in the *New York Times* yesterday reported: "US officials are taking lessons learned from arming Ukraine to work with Taiwan in molding a stronger force that could repel a seaborne invasion by China, which has one of the world's largest militaries. The

aim is to turn Taiwan into what some officials call a 'porcupine'—a territory bristling with armaments and other forms of US-led support that appears too painful to attack."

As in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, US war planning is dressed up as the defence of "democratic Taiwan" from Chinese aggression. While the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a reactionary response, the US armed Ukraine over years and then goaded and provoked a Russian attack. In the case of Taiwan, which Washington itself recognises as part of China, the US has any number of triggers that could provoke a conflict.

Any step by the government in Taipei to declare formal independence from China, and/or the growing incorporation of the island into the US sphere of influence poses a direct threat to Beijing. Taiwan is not only strategically located just off the Chinese mainland but its Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company has a virtual global monopoly on the production of high-end computer chips.

Buoyed by "success" in Ukraine, US plans for a protracted military conflict on Taiwan against the Chinese military are being rapidly advanced. As the *New York Times* explained: "American officials have been quietly pressing their Taiwanese counterparts to buy weapons suitable for asymmetric warfare, a conflict in which a smaller military uses mobile systems to conduct lethal strikes on a much bigger force, US and Taiwanese officials say."

The article added: "The American-made weapons that it has recently bought—mobile rocket platforms, F-16 fighter jets and anti-ship projectiles—are better suited for repelling an invading force. Some military analysts say Taiwan might buy sea mines and armed drones later. And as it has in Ukraine, the US

government could also supply intelligence to enhance the lethality of the weapons, even if it refrains from sending troops.”

Washington is not only “pressing” but insisting that Taipei buy weapons in line with the Pentagon’s war planning.

The *Financial Times* reported earlier this month that US deputy assistant secretary of state Mira Resnick told defence industry executives in March that the Biden administration wanted to “steer Taiwan more strongly” to buying weaponry for asymmetric warfare and would not allow US manufacturers to sell arms outside those parameters.

According to the article: “Washington has subsequently told Taipei that it would not approve the sale of 12 MH-60R anti-submarine helicopters if they were requested. The US has also blocked a Taiwanese plan to acquire E2-D early-warning aircraft.”

The mounting drumbeat in the US media and official circles over the acute “threat” of Chinese invasion speaks more to the timetable that the Pentagon war planners are working to than it does to any evidence of Chinese aggressive intentions. Taiwanese military analyst Su Tzu-yun told the *Financial Times*: “I believe that currently the possibility of China taking military action is very low.”

Nevertheless, war planning and debate is recklessly proceeding apace, not only on the military front but also for economic warfare against China. As the *New York Times* reported: “US officials are already discussing to what extent they could replicate the economic penalties and the military aid deployed in defense of Ukraine in the event of a conflict over Taiwan.”

The *New York Times* pointed out that the number of transits through the Taiwan Straits by US warships has increased to 30 since the start of 2020, supplemented by transits by allied warships from Australia, Britain, Canada and France. US arms sales to Taiwan also have increased, with more than \$23 billion in purchases announced since 2010, including \$5 billion in 2020 alone.

Those in US strategic circles are well aware that the steps taken by Washington over Taiwan are highly provocative and could precipitate conflict. In comments to the *New York Times*, analyst Bonnie Glaser, director of the Asia program at the US German Marshall Fund,

in a convoluted way, admitted as much. “Are we clear about what deters China and what provokes China?” she asked. “The answer to that is ‘no,’ and that’s dangerous territory.”

In the words of the *New York Times*: “President Biden’s strong language during a visit to Tokyo this week tiptoed up to provocation, Ms Glaser and other analysts in Washington said.” In other words, it is well understood in Washington that overturning “strategic ambiguity” could tip Asia into a war that, as in the case of Ukraine, has the potential to blow up into a conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

Washington’s deliberate baiting of China over Taiwan is part of its escalating confrontation with China that began with Obama’s “pivot to Asia.” For over a decade the US has sought to undermine Beijing diplomatically and economically, hand-in-hand with a massive military build-up throughout the region in preparation for war.

In its historic decline, US imperialism is desperate to weaken and destabilise potential challengers to its global position—Russia and above all China—and gain unfettered access to the immense resources and strategic position of the Eurasian landmass. As is demonstrated in Ukraine, it is doing so with criminal indifference to the devastation and huge loss of life that the war has produced so far. Now the US is preparing to do the same in Taiwan.



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