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The Biden Administration has revealed its security assistance policy for a new era of great power competition. As military tensions continue to mount in the Taiwan Strait, the announcement of a new approach towards security assistance comes at a critical juncture and has obvious implications for Taiwan—a significant beneficiary of US security assistance, particularly in the form of arms sales. During the unveiling of the new policy at a Senate hearing on March 10 entitled “[Examining US Security Cooperation and Assistance](#),” Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Jessica Lewis underscored how the United States was “working hand-in-glove with Taiwan to strengthen that brave island’s defense and deterrence—and this Administration intends to deepen and expand that cooperation in the months and years ahead.” Three elements appear to be at the forefront of the Biden Administration’s approach: an emphasis on speed of arms deliveries, asymmetric capabilities, and a whole-of-society strategy.

Although commonly associated with arms sales, security assistance does not only involve the sale of military arms. In fact, [security assistance](#) includes all arms, equipment, supplies, training, and support. With the shift from the global war on terror to great power competition, there has been an understandable push to recalibrate the role of security assistance in overall US foreign policy goals, with some even [calling for a major overhaul](#). Security assistance practices and policy should be routinely reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and a major feature of the Trump Administration’s important mark on security assistance to Taiwan was its [decision](#) to do away with the controversial practice of “packaging” arms sales that had become common under prior administrations. Since 2017, the United States has [provided](#) USD \$18 billion in security assistance

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to Taiwan, and USD \$2.3 billion in direct commercial sales. Still, traditional arm sales have tended to be the primary focus.

### ***Taiwan as the “Pacing Scenario” and the Focus on Asymmetric Capabilities***

At a recent Congressional hearing, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs [Ely Ratner](#) noted that China is the “pacing challenge” for the Department of Defense and that Taiwan is the “pacing scenario.” As the Pentagon’s top Asia official [stated](#):

*“Consistent with our commitment to our “One-China Policy,” Taiwan Relations Act, the Three Joint Communiqués, and the Six Assurances, we are focused on maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. With the PRC as the pacing challenge, Taiwan is the pacing scenario. We aim to deter and deny PRC aggression, through a combination of Taiwan’s own defenses, its partnership with the United States, and growing support from like-minded democracies.”*

Undergirding Ratner’s comment is the Biden Administration’s emphasis on “integrated deterrence” as its overarching approach to defense. The Administration is increasingly applying this principle to Taiwan, with an emphasis on the three elements of strengthening Taiwan’s own defense capabilities, deepening bilateral cooperation with the United States, and encouraging more support from third parties.

The first element involves a longstanding debate about the proper focus of Taiwan’s defense acquisitions, which centers on what the island needs to most effectively defend itself. Traditionally, this discourse has been divided between those emphasizing the need for Taiwan to acquire conventional platforms, and those placing an absolute emphasis on asymmetric capabilities. However, the trend in this debate has shifted considerably in recent years as concerns over the imminence of China’s invasion threat have moved to the center stage. As a result, a consensus has coalesced around the urgency for Taiwan to develop asymmetric capabilities to enable it to forestall a Chinese invasion long enough for external actors—namely the United States—to intervene. [According to one Taiwanese defense expert](#),

among the 18 US arms sales that have been approved since Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) was elected president in 2016, 16 contributed to Taiwan’s asymmetric warfare capabilities.

Indeed, there appears to be continuity between successive US administrations in their emphasis on the need for Taiwan to focus on developing asymmetric defense capabilities. In a recent interview with the [Wall Street Journal](#), Matt Pottinger, the deputy national security advisor under the Trump Administration, observed that President Tsai “has made significant progress in really taking charge of the military services that she commands and getting them to focus on truly asymmetric capabilities, by which I mean ones that are not only quite lethal to China, but also quite affordable for Taiwan.” Building on this, he [argued](#) that the Taiwanese “need to show China that the war doesn’t end at the beaches. It will continue in the ports, in the cities, in the countryside and in the mountains.” [According to Lewis](#), there are five elements for what “asymmetric” means: systems that are cost-effective, mobile, resilient, decentralized, and defensive in nature. Lewis went further and explained that the following capabilities were, in the Administration’s view, asymmetric: intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), short range air defense, coastal defense cruise missile (CDCM), and naval sea mines. Interestingly, the assistant secretary also included reserve reforms and underscored how the US National Guard is now working with Taiwan. [1]

### ***The Need for Speed***

The Biden Administration’s roll-out of its security assistance policy has been accompanied by outreach to the US defense industry to outline its defense trade priorities for Taiwan. The administration has provided guidance to the industry as to what it would likely approve and deny in order to support its overall approach to Taiwan, and included a request to help expedite arms sale deliveries to Taiwan. Taiwan’s defense minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正), has [warned](#) that “China has the capability to invade Taiwan now,” and *will be capable of* mounting a full-scale invasion of Taiwan by 2025. However, most recently signed contracts are marked for delivery in the latter half of this decade.

### **Foreign Military Financing and Security Assistance**

The mention of cooperation between the US National Guard and Taiwan in Lewis' discussion of overall security assistance to the island is telling in regards to how the current US government may be considering security assistance to Taiwan in a more holistic manner, rather than limiting it to arms sales.

Both the Department of Defense and the Department of State have independent authorities to provide security assistance. While the Defense Department's account makes up the bulk of security assistance programs, the State Department contributes to long-term capacity building through [Foreign Military Financing](#) (FMF), for which approximately USD \$6 billion is appropriated annually. Currently, around 80 percent of this funding goes to just three countries: Israel, Egypt, and Jordan. Around 93 percent of the remaining USD \$1 billion of FMF is heavily earmarked, which limits the State Department's flexibility and discretion. The State Department receives around USD \$3 billion annually for [other security assistance programs](#), such as professional military education, peacekeeping, and counter-narcotics operations.

In a two-pronged effort to provide Taiwan with more security assistance while encouraging it to rapidly adopt more asymmetric capabilities, several members of Congress have introduced legislation that would include Taiwan in the State Department's FMF programs, all of which would require that the funds be spent on acquiring asymmetric capabilities. One such bill is the [Taiwan Deterrence Act](#) introduced by Senator James Risch (R-ID). Specifically, Section 202 of the bill would appropriate USD \$2 billion to State for each of the fiscal years between 2023 and 2032. This funding would go towards FMF grant assistance programs for Taiwan—with conditions such as Taipei committing to match spending—as well as formal agreements between the United States and Taiwan to conduct joint long-range planning for capability development and the expenditure of such amounts.

### **Grumbings in the Defense Community**

While sharpening the focus on Taiwan's development of

asymmetric capabilities has broad bipartisan support, not everyone in the defense policy community seems satisfied with the current approach. [There are grumbings among some defense experts](#) and former defense officials that the definition of asymmetry set by the Biden Administration is too restrictive, and could severely limit a broad range of capabilities that Taiwan's defense establishment wants and arguably needs. Perhaps even more importantly, it is not clear whether the United States and Taiwan share a definition of asymmetry. Some critics argue that the Biden Administration is putting the cart before the horse. As Daniel Blumenthal, a senior fellow and director of Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, tweeted in a critique of the current discourse on Taiwan's defense:

*“DC devolved into operational military ideas about what allies ‘should do’ to help Taiwan. None have political/diplomatic basis to do anything. PRC using all tools to persuade others to stay out of fight against ‘separatists.’ We have not answered.*

*Worse yet DC coalescing on the term ‘asymmetric’ for Taiwan. Which is purely academic and lazy thinking. Taiwan/US need a coalition force structure that can undermine coercion, sink navy, destroy invasion force etc. Need to be specific about roles and missions.”*

As noted in a 2021 study by the [Center for American Progress](#), “countries that receive US military systems are not just buying equipment off the shelf; they are entering into a longer-term relationship with that country for training, maintenance, and sustainment.” So the bigger-ticket conventional platforms, which critics often point to as a sign of Taiwan's lack of seriousness in its defense due to their perceived low survivability in the event of a military conflict, would arguably require more training, maintenance, and sustainment. In turn, this could help to build deeper connective tissues between the two military establishments at a time when such connections are limited and curtailed by restrictions.

### **Conclusion**

At the Senate hearing, Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), chair

of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, asked a pointed question to the Biden Administration officials: “Does the US and Taiwan have a shared understanding [and] operational definition for ‘asymmetric’?” Lewis’ response was telling. Acknowledging the aspirational quality of ongoing discussions, she [stated](#): “We are working on that with them today [...] We have a much deeper understanding of that right now.”

While it is unrelated to whether the United States would militarily intervene in Taiwan’s defense in the event of a military conflict, the Biden Administration’s new security assistance policy has clearly placed Ukraine as a central reference point in terms of security assistance for Taiwan, with the added emphasis on the need to cultivate a population that is ready to fight. Therefore, assisting Taiwan in the development of its reserve force could be an important feature in the overall whole-of-society approach of security assistance to the island. Prospective foreign military financing for Taiwan, if passed and properly funded by Congress, could be appropriately tailored to support the rapid development of asymmetric capabilities—such as the reserve force and an additional territorial defense force, as recently [proposed](#) by Adm. (ret.) Lee Hsi-Ming (李喜明) and Michael Hunzeker.

The new security assistance policy also highlights the essential factor of speed. At the closing statement of the hearing, Senator [Bill Hagerty](#) (R-TN) made the following comment on Taiwan’s asymmetrical capabilities, again with reference to Ukraine: “...we’re seeing from Ukraine the need and the desire to have our friends and allies equipped sooner than later. As we see the threat continue to mount from China [...] we need to move quickly and not be looking at this in hindsight but to be prepared [...] [in] how we would incorporate that, particularly with a focus on Taiwan.”

Even as the emphasis of the Biden Administration’s new security assistance policy for Taiwan is focused on speed, asymmetric capabilities, and a whole-of-society strategy, it is absolutely essential that the United States and Taiwan arrive at a shared operational definition of what “asymmetric” means. Despite regular consultations, there is an interrelated political element to the security relationship

that must be simultaneously addressed. As the Biden Administration moves forward in its holistic approach to security assistance towards Taiwan, it is critical that it carefully considers the political-military elements in the implementation of its policy.

**The main point:** The Biden Administration has unveiled a new security assistance policy for Taiwan with the emphasis on speed of arms delivery, asymmetric capabilities, and whole-of-society approach.

[1] The overwhelming emphasis on asymmetric capabilities is reflected in the fact that the United States has denied two potential arm sales worth over USD \$3 billion because the US did not consider them asymmetric. For instance, Taiwan’s request to purchase MH-60R anti-submarine helicopters was [denied](#) because the Biden administration deemed that the rotorcraft did not contribute to Taiwan’s asymmetric combat capability.

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## Lessons for Taiwan from the Russia-Ukraine War, Part 1: The Importance of Mobilization and Logistics

By: Eric Chan

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The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has sparked significant commentary along the theme of “[Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow](#).” These articles usually focus on the superficial similarities in the strategic threat environment that Ukraine and Taiwan face, given their proximity to hostile powers and lack of official membership in any security bloc. The operational environments of the two countries, however, are drastically different. Both countries have their own specific environmental/geopolitical advantages

and disadvantages *vis-à-vis* their adversaries. Having said that, there are a number of useful strategic and operational lessons that Taiwan can take from the current war, when properly adapted.

These lessons complement the previous [lessons learned from the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan War](#). In that conflict, the Azeris [effectively used UAVs and decoys](#) to conduct flexible strikes and to complicate enemy targeting. Reports from the current war have validated this approach, exemplified by the [numerous successful strikes by Ukraine's TB-2 UAVs](#) against Russian convoys, as well as the inability of the Russian Aerospace Force to properly [identify and target Ukrainian air defense](#) (for instance, wasting limited precision guided munitions by [striking non-operational aircraft parked in the open](#)). Moreover, the larger scale of the current war has provided additional useful data.

At the time of this writing on March 17, the Ukrainians have forced a greatly superior (at least on paper) Russian force into a grinding stalemate. The Ukrainians still hold their capital of Kyiv, the primary objective of the Russian offensive. Ukraine's fierce resistance and targeting of Russian logistics have stalled the offensive and resulted in severe, outsized losses for the Russian force. This operational stalemate, when combined with the extremely severe Western economic sanctions that have been brought to bear, may very well break Russian military power and lead to political turmoil or even a "color revolution" inside Russia. The PRC, of course, is taking its own lessons from the conflict; thus, it is important that Taiwan military planners look at the methods that not only address current concerns, but also mitigate likely PRC adaptive responses.

### ***Rapid Mobilization and the KISS Principle***

One of the key drivers of the Russia-Ukraine War was Russian President Putin's perception that Ukrainian President Zelenskyy's [pre-war unpopularity](#) meant that the Ukrainian population would be acquiescent to a [rapid shock and awe campaign](#) to remove the Ukrainian leadership, followed by the establishment of a puppet state. In short, Putin was preparing for a state security raid *writ large*, a "special military operation" versus a full-blown war. This strategic-level miscalculation led to a number of serious operational

problems for the Russian military: first, the number of troops mobilized for the war was [insufficient for either active warfighting or counterinsurgency operations](#); second, [the invasion plan was overly-complex](#); third, it employed a [vastly insufficient logistics enterprise](#) that assumed rapid termination. All three problems exacerbate each other, which has led to long operational pauses—and thus vulnerability to hit-and-run attacks.

Ukraine was fortunate in that its adversary's poor strategic assumptions and operational design provided valuable time to raise, train, and equip Ukrainian Territorial Defense Force units. The Territorial Defense Force has proven to be a strategic asset for Ukraine, but not strictly in a military operational sense: the organization was officially instituted a mere month before the invasion, with [rifles being handed out en masse](#) to a flood of volunteers *after* the beginning of the Russian invasion on February 24.



*Image: Ukrainian reservists training with cardboard rifles, February 5, 2022. The late mobilization, organization, and equipping of reserves meant that the Ukrainian Territorial Defense Force did not significantly deter Russia prior to the invasion. (Source: [Politico EU](#))*

Despite the training and equipment shortages, however, the Territorial Defense Force has been instrumental in demonstrating to a global audience the depth of Ukrainian resiliency and resistance. This in turn allowed Ukraine to [win the information war](#) and gain global sympathy—and more importantly, to spur global support in the form of volunteers, money, arms, and sanctions against the Russian government. With time, the operational benefits will increase, as the reservists gain the weaponry, organization,

and combat experience necessary to provide the Ukrainian regular force with the ability to sustain itself against attrition.

Taiwan cannot assume its adversary will make these same mistakes. In fact, many of the lessons the PLA will likely take from the conflict mirror the historical [issues that the PLA faced](#) in its 1979 war against Vietnam. The likely result will be the PLA designing a simplified, high-intensity plan of attack to further reduce the time window for Taiwan and US/allied forces to prepare, with no illusions of winning hearts and minds. Thus, Taiwan must step up preparations for ensuring its own effective [territorial reserve force](#), both for strategic deterrent purposes and for operational use.

This means abiding by the “*keep it simple, stupid*” (KISS) principle of practicing a simplified regimen of ground familiarity, firearms training, and hit-and-run tactics against second echelon/logistics convoys. This also means demonstrations of the ability to rapidly mobilize, equip, *and then disperse* the territorial force prior to hostilities. While the sight of [thousands of Ukrainians lining up](#) to volunteer and pick up small arms was a potent demonstration of Ukrainian resolve, it also represented a high risk of enormous casualties and panic if the Russian Aerospace Forces had the capability to rapidly target the crowds. In Taiwan’s case, ensuring that the civilian population does not panic is even more crucial than for Ukraine, given the far more constrained logistics environment.

### ***Stockpile, Stockpile, and Stockpile Some More***

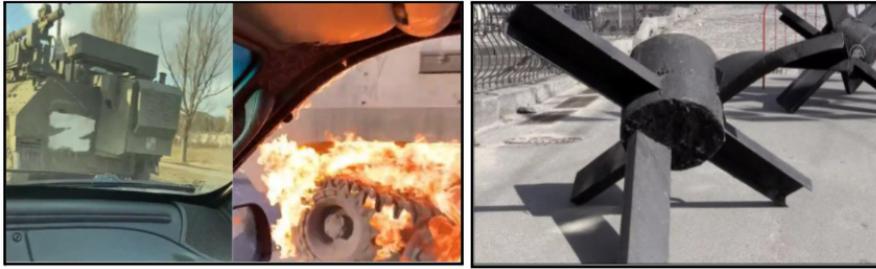
One of the most impressive Ukrainian feats of the war has been maintaining a functioning system of logistics, [particularly its railnet](#). This railnet has been instrumental in allowing for a massive flow of refugees out of Ukraine, while bringing in [volunteers](#) and [weapons](#) from all over Europe. The lack of [effective Russian airpower/missile strikes](#) on the Ukrainian railnet has allowed [Ukrainian repair teams to keep pace with the damage](#). Railroads have been crucial to keeping the Ukrainian war effort going, as even the [massive US/UK airlift of anti-tank weaponry](#) just prior to hostilities has proven insufficient. In the week following the start of the war, the [United States and NATO pushed a further 17,000 anti-tank weapons into Ukraine via rail](#), and a fur-

ther US package of weapons and military equipment was pledged in mid-March. [1] Ukrainian logistical superiority has been crucial to maintaining warfighting capability and morale, especially against an opponent that has repeatedly [run short on both food and fuel](#).

One of the obvious lessons for the PRC would then be to ensure a higher level of systematic strikes against Taiwan’s logistics infrastructure. The PLA Rocket Force has [considerably more missiles](#) than the Russian Aerospace Force, while the much smaller land mass/transportation networks of Taiwan versus Ukraine means that it will be difficult, if not impossible, for Taiwan to replicate Ukraine’s achievement of maintaining resilient logistics under attack. Even assuming partner support, weaponry, food, and fuel will all need to be airlifted or shipped across the Pacific at extreme risk, more slowly and on a smaller scale as compared to rail. Additionally, it will be difficult for the various regions in Taiwan to provide mutual support and sanctuary to one another in the way western Ukraine (which as of this writing has been mostly untouched by the war) provides for Kyiv and eastern Ukraine.

For Taiwan, this means that stockpiling is of the highest necessity, both for operational warfighting and to demonstrate the ability to sustain a war of indeterminate length. The first order of priority should be to ensure large, distributed stockpiles of small arms ammunition, water, food, medicine, and fuel to last for a minimum of 30 days. The ongoing Russian attack against Kyiv and the siege of Mariupol, both of which have lasted for over three weeks, have demonstrated that while it is extremely difficult for an opponent to outright capture a city against determined opposition, it is also difficult for defenders to [resupply and evacuate civilians under fire](#). The situation would be even worse for Taiwan, as Taiwan would not be in a position to evacuate [millions of civilians](#) via rail to safer areas on-island or to friendly neighbors.

The second order of priority is to build up stockpiles of anti-tank weaponry, portable anti-aircraft systems, mines, and rapidly deployable anti-armor obstacles/barricades. This will reduce the necessity of the populace needing to make and use homemade Molotov cocktails and anti-ar-



*Images: On left, Ukrainian civilians throw a Molotov cocktail through a car window at a Russian armored personnel carrier, February 28, 2022. On right, residents of Kyiv haul out World War II anti-tank obstacles from the city museum, March 11, 2022. By stockpiling and professionalizing a territorial defense force, Taiwan can avoid ad hoc (and often extremely dangerous) resistance methods. (Source: [The Independent](#), [Museum Next](#))*

mor obstacles. In Kyiv's case, the failure of the initial Russian air assault and the subsequent stalling of the Russian armored column on the outskirts of Kyiv bought the defenders [several weeks to fortify the city](#). Having pre-built obstacles and barricades would allow Taipei's defenders to do the same in a matter of hours, versus days.

### **Conclusion**

[In a previous article](#), I discussed how Western observers had an unrealistic dream of "Fortress Taiwan," and that absent major shock, both the West and Taiwan had to flexibly work with the systems they have to maximize deterrence. The massive, unprovoked invasion of Ukraine could be considered such a shock, and Taiwanese society is responding [by calling for greater self-reliance and resiliency](#). This watershed moment should be seized upon by both the Taiwanese government and society to decisively increase readiness, with the example of [Germany's massive one-time defense boost and heightened long-term defense spending](#) in mind. The end result would not just be a stronger military, but a drastically more resilient society, able to shrug off PRC gray zone/psychological warfare. By learning the lessons of Ukraine today, Taiwan can avoid being the target tomorrow.

In my next installment, I will discuss additional lessons from the war, including the role of mission command and the criticality of airpower.

**The main point:** The Russia-Ukraine War has provided many lessons on how a smaller power can offset and outlast a stronger power. These methods include mobilizing an

entire populace to outnumber an expeditionary force, and taking advantage of stockpiling to achieve logistical superiority.

[1] As the Russian offensive switches to indiscriminate air and artillery strikes, the United States is providing Ukraine with more sophisticated anti-aircraft and loitering munitions systems. On March 16, the Biden Administration [announced](#) an additional package of emergency security assistance to Ukraine, which included 800 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles; 9,000 anti-armor weapons; 100 tactical UAV systems; and various small arms, ammunition, and body armor.

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## **The CCP's "Taiwan Work" Surrounding the Winter Olympics and the Annual "Two Sessions"**

By: John Dotson

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In February and early March, the People's Republic of China (PRC) conducted two major political events, both of which played noteworthy roles in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP, 中國共產黨) ongoing political propaganda and united front "Taiwan work" (臺灣工作). The first of

these was the Beijing Winter Olympics, held from February 4–20—which, like the earlier 2008 Summer Olympics, was the occasion for heavy-handed propaganda regarding the “[harmonious, peaceful, and loving](#)” nature of the Chinese state, as well as widespread international criticism of Beijing’s [human rights abuses](#). The second of these events was the “Two Sessions” (兩會), one of the major milestones in the PRC’s annual public political calendar. The “Two Sessions” consist of the simultaneous annual meetings of the PRC’s National People’s Congress (NPC, 全國人民代表大會), the country’s rubber-stamp legislature that codifies CCP policy directives into law; and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中國人民政治協商會議), a nominal political advisory body that serves as the centerpiece of the CCP united front architecture, as well as a stage-managed forum for prioritized CCP propaganda themes. The “Two Sessions” are always worth watching for their signals on future policy directions, and this year’s meetings, held from March 4–11, were no exception—although they were perhaps more revealing for what they did not say, rather than for what they did.

### ***Propaganda and United Front Outreach Related to the Winter Olympics***

In the political realm, one of the cornerstones of CCP united front policy is engagement with political figures from the “[Deep Blue](#)” (深藍色) pro-unification spectrum of Taiwan politics. This was further demonstrated in a [meeting on February 5](#) in Beijing between Wang Yang (汪洋)—chairman of the CPPCC, and the CCP Politburo member with primary responsibility for the united front policy portfolio—and former Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) Chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱). Hung had traveled to Beijing to [attend the opening ceremonies](#) of the Olympics—after which she issued a [media statement](#) declaring that the successful hosting of the Olympics “demonstrated our Chinese people’s steadfast willpower” (展現了我們中華民族堅定的意志力), and that it was a “shared glory of our Chinese people” (我們中華民族共同的榮耀).

The official PRC [summary of the meeting](#) between Wang and Hung stressed the ethnic commonality of people on both sides of the strait, and that “the historical trend

of cross-strait reunification cannot be stopped by any force” (兩岸統一的歷史大勢任何勢力阻擋不了). It also stressed that differences across the strait could be addressed by “[democratic consultation](#)” (民主協商) involving “Taiwan’s various parties, organizations, and persons”—with the former phrase serving as a long-standing euphemism for addressing issues within the framework of the CCP’s united front system. [1] The closing of the Winter Olympics was bookended by a similar [virtual meeting](#) on February 21 between Wang and New Party (新黨) Chairman Wu Cheng-tian (吳成典), who was leading a delegation of persons from Taiwan to attend the closing ceremonies of the games. Wu was quoted as vowing that the New Party would “be the vanguard in igniting the flame of hope for the people of both the mainland and Taiwan in the course of national reunification.”



*Image: CPPCC Chairman Wang Yang (left center) and former KMT Chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (right center) meet in Beijing on February 5. (Image source: [Yahoo! TV / YouTube](#)).*

### ***Themes Relating to Taiwan at the PRC’s “Two Sessions”***

#### *The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference*

In relation to Taiwan, this year’s sessions of the [CPPCC](#) (convened from March 4–10) and the [NPC](#) (convened from March 5–11) were most striking for their lack of any new initiatives on Taiwan policy. Last year’s “Two Sessions” reinforced standard CCP themes regarding Taiwan—and most notably, included signals of a [future “national unification law”](#) (國家統一法) targeting the island, possibly intended to affirm or amplify aspects of the PRC’s 2005 [Anti-Secession Law](#). However, in the official messaging from this year’s meetings, Taiwan received mostly *pro forma* mentions. For example, in his official [work report](#) presented at

the opening of the CPPCC, Wang Yang mentioned Taiwan only once, in stating that the government would continue efforts to “strengthen united friendship ties with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese compatriots.” (Wang did provide, however, two further obligatory mentions of advancing “the complete unification of the motherland.”)

Another cornerstone of PRC policy towards Taiwan is the effort to amplify the status of [CCP-controlled front organizations](#) oriented towards Taiwan and the cause of “national reunification.” Among the most prominent of these front groups are the [Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League](#) (“*Taimeng*,” 臺灣民主自治同盟), one of the eight nominal “[democratic parties](#)” in the PRC system; and the All-China Federation of Taiwanese Compatriots (“*Tailian*,” 中華全國臺灣同胞聯誼會), a “[patriotic popular organization](#)” (愛國民眾團體) for Taiwan persons residing in the PRC. Representatives of these groups either spoke at the CPPCC proceedings, or else were cited by state media:

- *Taimeng* Vice-Chairman Zhang Zexi (張澤熙) delivered an address to the CPPCC on March 7. Per the [official CPPCC summary](#) of his comments, Zhang offered boilerplate comments that “Taiwan compatriots” would “undertake together the sacred mission of advancing the great revival of the Chinese nation [...] unceasingly advance cross-strait peaceful development, integrated development, [and] give an even firmer popular foundation for achieving the motherland’s complete unification.”
- *Taimeng* central committee member Jiang Liping (江利平) was [quoted](#) as calling for a “cross-strait common market” (兩岸共同市場), and stated that cross-strait integrated economic development must continue. In this, the “most important [consideration] is to promote feelings and identification with the nation [on the part of] Taiwan compatriots” (最重要的是增進臺胞對民族、國家的情感和認知認同).
- *Tailian* Vice-President Yang Yizhou (楊毅周) [commented](#) on the *Party’s Comprehensive Plan for Resolving the Taiwan Problem in the New Era* (新時代黨解決臺灣問題的總體方略) (see [previous GTB discussion here](#)), stating that it would “resolutely advance the peaceful

development of cross-strait relations.”

- *Taimeng* standing committee member Luo Shaming (駱沙鳴) similarly [praised the plan](#) for “deepening cross-strait integrated development” (深化兩岸融合發展), and asserted that resolving the Taiwan problem is now “entering active voice, [and] becoming progressive tense” (進入主動式、成為進行時).

#### *The National People’s Congress*

One of the centerpieces of the annual NPC meeting is the official *Government Work Report* (政府工作報告) delivered by the premier, the administrative head of government (as nominally distinct from the Party). In [this year’s report](#), presented by PRC Premier Li Keqiang (李克強), Taiwan was mentioned in only one passage near the end:

*“We must persist in the fundamental policies for Taiwan work, implement the Party’s Comprehensive Plan for Resolving the Taiwan Problem in the New Era, insist on the “One China Principle” (一個中國原則) and the “1992 Consensus” (九二共識), advancing the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and unification of the motherland. Resolutely oppose the “Taiwan independence” separatist path, [and] resolutely oppose interference by external forces. Compatriots on both sides of the strait should work together with common spirit, sharing in the glorious enterprise of national revival.”*

Li added to these comments at an [official press conference](#) held at the conclusion of the NPC on March 11, in which he criticized “separatist activities aimed at ‘Taiwan independence,’” and advocated for “the peaceful growth of cross-strait relations [to] share the benefits of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”



Image: CPPCC Chairman Wang Yang meeting with the appointed representatives of the “Taiwan Province” delegation at the NPC, March 9. (Image source: [Tailian](#))

Wang Yang also made an appearance at the NPC, at a March 9 meeting with the “Taiwan Province” delegation. People’s Daily provided an [official summary](#) of the meeting, which offered a recitation of familiar platitudes about upholding the “One-China Principle,” “resolutely opposing interference by foreign forces” (堅決反對外部勢力干涉), and the need for all Chinese to “work hand-in-hand for the great enterprise of unifying the motherland” (攜手共促祖國統一大業). This summary offered nothing new, but the sight of the appointed delegates dutifully taking notes on Wang’s comments made clear Beijing’s expectations.

PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) offered further commentary on Taiwan at an NPC [press conference](#) held on March 7. Wang asserted that there was no valid comparison between the situations of Taiwan and Ukraine—on the grounds that the dispute between Russia and Ukraine was a conflict between countries, whereas “Taiwan is an inseparable part of Chinese territory.” Wang also followed standard messaging that blamed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) for all problems in cross-Strait relations, while offering a dual swipe at both Taiwan’s government and the United States. Specifically, he asserted that “embracing foreigners while ‘scheming for independence’ is a dead-end, [and] ‘using Taiwan to restrain China’ is doomed to fail [...] in the end Taiwan will return to the bosom of the motherland” (“挾洋謀獨”沒有出路, “以台制華”註定失敗, 臺灣終將會回到祖國的懷抱).

## Conclusion

The ruling authorities of the CCP will inevitably attempt to use any major public event as a means to bolster their authority, and to further promote the Party’s prioritized propaganda narratives. This is particularly true in regards to a high-priority issue like Taiwan, which Beijing continues to claim as an “inseparable” part of China’s national territory. As such, during the Winter Olympics, the CCP sought to publicize the [controversy surrounding skater Huang Yuting](#) (黃郁婷), as well as the stage-managed meetings with “Deep Blue” political figures, to play up a narrative that the people of Taiwan—as distinct from Taiwan’s government—are filled with pride in their Chinese identity and eager for unification under the aegis of the PRC. By comparison, the official proceedings of the “Two Sessions” were noteworthy in part for their lack of any substantive discussion of Taiwan issues, beyond recitation of familiar themes and boilerplate slogans. There were no new Taiwan-related policy initiatives unveiled, and no signaling of future legislation along the lines of the [“national unification law”](#) that attracted speculation at the 2021 NPC. [2]

However, this in itself may be significant. It is likely that the lead-up to the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress later this year (where Xi Jinping (習近平) is expected to assume *de facto* lifetime tenure as party general secretary), as well as the botched Russian invasion of Ukraine, are engendering greater caution in the higher decision-making circles of the party. This suggests that the CCP leadership will likely maintain its hardline stance on the thorny issue of Taiwan—and continue “gray zone” pressure and subversive united front activities—while deferring any new policy initiatives until both the domestic and international political environments have made themselves clearer.

**The main point:** The Winter Olympics held in Beijing in February, and the annual “Two Sessions” conducted in March, both provided opportunities for Beijing to conduct further propaganda and united front “Taiwan work” directed at the island. However, the lack of any substantive new statements on Taiwan policy at the “Two Sessions” suggests that the CCP leadership is adopting a restrained policy posture in the lead-up to this year’s 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

[1] Per official party definition, “democratic consultation” (民主協商) is a key concept of the CCP’s united front work, and “is an important method for implementing long-term multi-party cooperation under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party” (是實行中國共產黨領導下的多黨派長期合作的一種重要方法。) See: “民主協商” (“Democratic Consultation”), CPPCC, Sep. 26, 2011, <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/2011/09/26/ART11317001118796947.shtml>.

[2] Some [media outlets](#) picked up on Li Keqiang’s mention of “resolving the Taiwan problem in the new era” as a possible new indicator of intent to force unification during the nearer-term tenure of Xi Jinping; however, the “[comprehensive plan](#)” slogan has circulated since at least November 2021, and its usage by Premier Li appears to reflect continuing use of official phraseology rather than a shift in policy.

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## The War in Ukraine: Troubling Lessons for Taiwan

By: Michael Mazza

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As Taiwan watches developments in Ukraine with great interest, it can perhaps take solace in global efforts to isolate Moscow. The West, broadly defined, is moving with astonishing speed to cut Russia off from the international economy, and while Russia’s isolation is not absolute, there has been surprisingly little hemming and hawing in Europe about picking sides. From one point of view, then, the implications of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine should reassure Taiwan’s people—that they can hold off a bigger, and supposedly stronger, military; that China would face severe punishment should it opt to use force; and that Taiwan will not be alone. From another perspective, however, there is

much reason for concern. Indeed, Taiwan may draw a perhaps counterintuitive lesson from current events: that it may one day have to face a formidable enemy without the kind of support that Ukraine is receiving today.

### *Can Taiwan Count on Europe?*

As viewed from Taipei, deepening interest in and concern for Taiwan in Europe has been a positive development in recent years. Diplomatic ties are [blossoming](#), and the value of EU-Taiwan [trade](#) increased by nearly 45 percent between 2010 and 2020. As I noted recently in [The Bulwark](#), “a diversity of economic partners weakens China’s economic leverage *vis-à-vis* Taiwan, while a diversity of diplomatic partners complicates China’s decision-making regarding aggressive action against Taiwan.” Meanwhile, the [European Union](#) and the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#) (NATO) have been paying closer attention to developments across the Indo-Pacific region, while individual countries like the [United Kingdom](#) and [France](#) have adopted new approaches to the region.

In the event of a crisis, what will all this mean in practice? Taipei might reasonably hope that the international opprobrium directed at China would be akin to that now aimed at Russia. Certainly, such an outcome seems more realistic now than it did before Putin launched his war in Ukraine. But there are reasons for concern.

Russia, a country of 144 million people, had an economy slightly [smaller](#) than Australia’s (population: 26 million) in 2020. China’s economy was more than 10 times larger than Russia’s that year. In 2021, China was the EU’s [largest](#) trading partner, accounting for 16.1 percent of the EU’s total trade. Russia, right next door, accounted for only 4.8 percent of total EU trade, coming in behind the United States, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland. China accounted for 22.4 percent of the EU’s imports and 10.5 percent of its exports, compared to 5.6 percent and 4.1 percent, respectively, for Russia.

Rather than take heart from the EU’s economic isolation of Russia, the EU’s continued import of Russian energy resources should give Taipei pause. Russia is the EU’s primary [supplier](#) of crude oil (accounting for 27 percent of EU im-

ports in 2019), natural gas (41 percent), and coal and other solid fossil fuels (47 percent). In other words, the EU has been hesitant to take those steps from which its member nations' economies will suffer most. If China uses force against Taiwan, will European nations conclude that they can withstand the economic consequences of treating Beijing like they have Moscow in recent weeks?

Just as importantly, will European nations conclude that those economic consequences are worth incurring? For Europe, different security concerns are at play in the two scenarios. Russia's war in Ukraine is an unambiguous threat to stability and security in Europe. As such, European nations are reasonably willing to make economic sacrifices to enhance their security. War in Asia would undoubtedly have consequences for Europe, but would also be more distant, both geographically and emotionally. Taipei should continue investing in its European relationships, but it should also recognize that the global response to Putin's renewed invasion may not be an applicable template in the event of war in the Taiwan Strait.

### ***Will China Be Alone?***

Policymakers and analysts have long identified China's lack of consequential allies as a key comparative disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the United States. In the event Beijing ever opted for force, it would probably be largely alone, while the United States would at least have a shot at mobilizing a group of wealthy nations with modern militaries to come to Taiwan's defense. But maybe Beijing will not be quite so alone as many had assumed.

There have always been questions about how Russia would respond in a Taiwan Strait crisis, but the safe assumption now is that Moscow would not sit on the sidelines. On the day before the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, with war in Ukraine in the offing, China and Russia released a remarkable [joint statement](#). In that statement, Russia "reaffirms its support for the One-China principle, confirms that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and opposes any forms of independence of Taiwan." This was not a new position, but its inclusion here is notable. It should, moreover, be viewed in the context of the bilateral relationship the statement outlined:

*"They reaffirm that the new inter-State relations between Russia and China are superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era. Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation, strengthening of bilateral strategic cooperation is neither aimed against third countries nor affected by the changing international environment and circumstantial changes in third countries."*

Given this, it should come as little surprise that Chinese officials reportedly [conferred](#) with Russian counterparts after the United States presented China with evidence of Russia's preparations for war; that China apparently had foreknowledge of the renewed invasion and [requested](#) its delay until after the Olympics; that "Beijing is [framing](#) the conflict on Putin's terms, promoting pro-Kremlin narratives, and embracing Russian disinformation campaigns"; that Russia has [requested](#) China supply materiel as the war drags on; and that China has reportedly [responded](#) positively to that request.

Going forward, Taipei, Washington, and other concerned parties should be prepared for a similar dynamic to play out in the event that China opts for war against Taiwan. Moreover, thanks to Russia's geography, it has options to aid China more directly than China can in Ukraine. Armed intervention in the Taiwan Strait would seem unlikely, but Russia could use its military in a threatening manner in the Sea of Japan and North Pacific in an effort to attract Japanese and American attention needed elsewhere. Moscow might also employ intelligence assets located in eastern Russia to support Chinese operations.

Recent events suggest that, in a cross-Strait conflict, China might not be alone after all. And that could make a difference.

### ***Ukraine and Taiwan Parallels***

A common line of argumentation in recent weeks has been that the United States is more likely to intervene directly in a Taiwan Strait conflict than in Ukraine because Washington has more pressing interests at stake in Asia, and because Washington has made a stronger—albeit ambig-

uous—commitment to Taiwan’s defense. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan put it [thusly](#):

*“I think the US position when it comes to Taiwan actually is clear because it’s a position that we have sustained to maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait for decades. It is rooted in the “One China” policy, the Taiwan Relations Act, the three communiques. And the Taiwan Relations Act is a unique instrument—we don’t have it with other countries; we don’t have it with Ukraine—that does talk about American commitments to support Taiwan in various ways.”*

In other words: don’t draw parallels between how the United States is responding to the war on Ukraine and how it would respond to a war on Taiwan.

Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has presented a similarly reassuring message to the Taiwanese people. This, for example, is from a [news release](#) her office issued on February 25:

*“President Tsai emphasized that the situation in Ukraine is fundamentally different from the one in the Taiwan Strait. The president noted that the Taiwan Strait provides a natural barrier and that Taiwan has a unique geostrategic importance, while our military is committed to defending our homeland and continues to improve its ability to do so, and our global partners are contributing to the security of our region, giving us strong confidence in Taiwan’s security.”*

Sullivan and Tsai are both correct that US interests in Taiwan are deep and enduring and there is a clear commitment to maintain peace in the Taiwan Strait, even if a commitment to defend Taiwan is less clear-cut. But as Tsai watches her American counterpart respond to Russia’s assault on Ukraine, she may find reason for concern that the United States would not intervene directly.

Joe Biden has been clearly, and rightly, concerned about managing escalation in Europe. Along with American allies, he has taken the bold steps of openly transferring arms to Ukraine and bringing the economic hammer down on Putin. But the American president also seems to believe that

direct engagement of US and Russian conventional forces will lead to uncontrollable escalation. This, in part, explains the president’s reluctance to institute a no-fly zone over Ukraine and to facilitate the transfer of Polish fighter jets to Kyiv. As he [told](#) a gathering of House Democrats on March 11: “The idea that we’re going to send in offensive equipment and have planes and tanks and trains going in with American pilots and American crews—just understand, don’t kid yourself, no matter what y’all say, that’s called World War III.”

Biden has raised the same concern about World War III even when stating a seemingly unambiguous [commitment](#) to “defend every inch of NATO territory with the full might of a united and galvanized NATO.” That juxtaposition raises a crucial question: will President Biden truly be willing to go to NATO Europe’s defense if he believes doing so would entail the outbreak of World War III? Maybe. But then again, maybe not. And if there are reasonable concerns he would not do so in Europe, those concerns are more pointed with respect to the Taiwan Strait, where the United States likewise faces a nuclear-armed power, but where it is not bound by treaty to do so forcefully.

### **Conclusion**

Biden’s decisions thus far regarding a no-fly zone and sending fighter jets to Ukraine may be the right ones. Putin’s approach to the crisis he has instigated has included nuclear signaling, bringing to the forefront the nuclear dynamics that are often at play in the background. Caution is in order, just as it would be in a Taiwan Strait crisis. But for Taiwan, that caution may not be entirely reassuring. As Taipei grapples with the advent of a potentially formidable Sino-Russian axis, it will also have to question just how far Europe and the United States will go to aid Taiwan in its hour of need.

**The main point:** As Taipei grapples with the advent of a potentially formidable Sino-Russian axis, it will also have to question just how far Europe and the United States will go to aid Taiwan in the event of an attack by China.

## ***At the Water's Edge: Lessons for the Defense of Taiwan***

By: Charlemagne McHaffie

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As tensions between China and the West [worsen, increasing attention](#) is being paid to Taiwan. In particular, [robust debate](#) about how best to defend Taiwan from a Chinese invasion is occurring. A study of past defenses against amphibious invasions published by retired US Marine Theodore Gatchel suggests several lessons for the defense of Taiwan. [1] Among these is that not all the conventional capabilities [often maligned](#) by American analysts may be as ill-suited to Taiwan's military as is typically argued. Powerful mechanized forces, in particular, appear essential to repelling amphibious invasions.

The air and naval defenses necessary to protect these forces from interdiction, however, are vast and costly. Rather than financially support Taiwan in establishing them, the United States could attempt to persuade Taiwan to embrace [asymmetric defense](#) by adopting a policy of [strategic clarity](#), although it would need to weigh the political repercussions of doing so. If neither course is taken, the peril to Taiwan's safety will continue to rise.

### ***Amphibious Defense in Theory***

Gatchel identifies three components of a defense against an amphibious assault: naval defense, defense at the shoreline, and mobile defense. [2] Naval defense focuses on targeting enemy warships and transports. Shoreline defense relies on fortifications and troops stationed along the coast battling enemy forces as they conduct the landing. A mobile defense relies on troops held in reserve moving to the enemy beachhead after their landing and destroying it in a counterattack.

Each defensive approach has its strengths and weaknesses. Naval defense, for example, offers the prospect of preventing an enemy landing entirely, but is impotent against enemy forces who do manage to land. Shoreline defenses can be extremely tactically formidable, but they are also extremely rigid. They offer no recourse against enemy forces who penetrate the defensive line. The ideal amphibious defense would therefore integrate all three approaches into a comprehensive strategy. In such a strategy, each successive layer would act as a backstop against the failure of the preceding layer.

The historical cases suggest that strategies that include a strong mobile defense have the best chance of success. Mobile defense, in turn, requires strong mechanized forces (i.e., forces strong in tanks, mechanized infantry, and supporting arms such as artillery) that are capable of powerful tactical and operational offensives in service of a strategic defense. These forces offer commanders a great deal of flexibility in responding to an enemy landing, but they must be able to move to the landing site quickly. Furthermore, commanders must rapidly make decisions as to where to commit them. In Gatchel's words, mobile defenders are "conducting a race with the attacker to build up combat power at the site of the landing." [3]

### ***Past Attempts at Amphibious Defense***

The Allied landings at Salerno, Italy, during World War II were the closest a defender has come to repelling a major amphibious assault in modern times. [4] During that battle, the Germans employed a mobile defense strategy augmented with some shoreline and naval defenses. This strategy hinged on mechanized forces stationed throughout Italy converging on the landing site in time to launch a counterattack that would destroy the beachhead before the Allies could consolidate their presence, epitomizing Gatchel's "race to build up combat power."

When that counterattack came at Salerno, it caused such havoc that the Allied commander ordered his staff to prepare for a possible evacuation of the beachhead. [5] It was fought to a standstill, however, as were follow-up attempts. [6] Ultimately, the Germans were forced to retreat and establish a defensive line further up the Italian peninsula.

The most fatal flaw in the German defense was inadequate concentration of mechanized forces. Early in the battle, the German high command refused to release two panzer divisions stationed in northern Italy for action at Salerno. [7] The added power of these two divisions may have lent the decisive counterattack the mass and vigor it needed to destroy the beachhead, as the Allied force ashore early in the battle was little more than four divisions strong. [8]

The German commander, Albert Kesselring, took this lesson to heart. When the Allies landed further north at Anzio, he was able to mass twenty thousand troops against the beachhead on the first day. [9] This was enough to force a stalemate, but not to defeat the landing. Allied forces advancing from the south eventually relieved the encircled beachhead. After the battles in Italy, the German high command concluded that a mobile defense by concentrated mechanized forces was the best way to defeat a landing.



*Image: US Army personnel move wire mesh ashore to make an improvised beach road during the Allied amphibious landing at Salerno, Italy in September 1943. A German counter-attack after the initial landings came close to defeating the operation. (Image source: [Naval History and Heritage Command](#))*

By 1944, the Japanese had reached similar conclusions to those of the German high command. At Tarawa, a tiny atoll in the Pacific Ocean, they constructed perhaps the densest network of coastal fortifications faced by any landing during the war. Even here, however, the defense failed for want of a counterattack on the critical first day. [10] Later, at Saipan, the Japanese planned for a hybrid defense of shoreline po-

sitions backed by limited armored reserves, like the Germans in Normandy. In part due to unfinished fortifications and inadequate reserves, however, the defenders failed to repulse the landings. [11] They were forced to fight a delaying battle in hope of intervention from the Japanese fleet, which never came due to a crushing naval defeat at the Battle of the Philippine Sea. [12]

After Saipan, the Japanese concluded that beach fortifications alone cannot stop a determined landing and that a mobile defense is therefore required. [13] Japanese anti-landing strategy continued to evolve, however. At Okinawa, the Japanese made extensive use of kamikazes—which can callously be regarded as primitive guided missiles—against the Allied fleet. [14] This attempt at a naval defense caused horrendous casualties, but also failed to repel the invasion. [15]

In all the above cases, the defenders used various naval defense techniques. [16] These efforts were not coordinated with the armies ashore, however, and had little impact on the fighting there. [17] Overall, Axis naval defense proved “more annoying than decisive.” [18] Gatchel speculates that “Had these elements of a naval defense been employed in a more coordinated manner, however, they might have delayed the landings enough to have made the armored counterattacks ashore more effective.” [19]

### ***Lessons for the Defense of Taiwan***

The case studies above offer many lessons for amphibious defense. They suggest the importance of unified command, coordination of different layers of the defense, and the necessity of creating a defensive doctrine specific to amphibious operations. [20] They offer lessons as to how each defensive approach must be executed in order to be successful, and show the capacity of air and naval power to cripple enemy forces ashore. An underappreciated lesson for the [current debate](#) about Taiwan’s defense, however, is that a mobile defense is an essential component of any strategy to repel a hostile landing.

This conclusion is supported by the historical record and the conclusions of the defenders themselves. Naval defenses have proven unable to prevent enemy forces from

making landfall when that enemy has naval superiority, as China does against Taiwan. They can delay the landing and weaken the enemy force, but relying exclusively on naval defenses to stop an invasion would make for a brittle strategy. Similarly, coastal defenses have proven extremely capable at slowing the enemy advance and inflicting casualties on attackers, but have proven just as incapable of defeating an invasion outright. For any defender that intends to repel a landing, a mobile defense by powerful mechanized forces appears to be an essential backstop to naval and shoreline defenses.

Analysts who argue that conventional capabilities are not suited to Taiwan generally say so because they believe that Taiwan cannot and should not attempt to repel a landing. [Some](#) suggest that Taiwan should not attempt a mobile defense because Chinese bombardment will make it impossible, as Allied airstrikes and naval gunfire did during World War II. To prevent such interdiction, Taiwan's military requires extremely robust air, naval, and other defenses, of the kind that American analysts often advocate for. An approach to coastal defense that eschews mobile forces and invests heavily in prepositioned troops and supplies, on the other hand, amounts to the kind of static shoreline defense that has proven incapable of repelling invasions in the past.

Other analysts suggest that if Chinese forces are able to establish a beachhead, Taiwan should wage a [guerrilla campaign](#) that would make conquering Taiwan as painful as possible for China. Such proponents of [asymmetric defense](#) point out that Taiwan's best hope for defeating a Chinese invasion would be to prolong the conflict and buy time for the United States to intervene on its behalf. The problem with such a strategy is that it is dependent on effective American intervention. Raymond Kuo [states that](#) "Asymmetric defense is ultimately predicated on the US military showing up," and Michael Hunzeker [admits that](#) "Even asymmetry's most ardent advocates accept that Taiwan's military will struggle to hold out indefinitely without outside help." Under America's policy of strategic ambiguity, Taiwan cannot count on such intervention.

Given that reality, Taiwan [cannot be expected](#) to fully embrace asymmetric defense. Instead, the Taiwanese defense

establishment will likely pursue a strategy that it perceives as giving them some chance of an independent victory, however slim. Given China's [overwhelming numerical and materiel advantages](#), it would eventually prevail in a conflict against Taiwan in which it establishes a secure beachhead. Since air and naval defenses cannot be guaranteed to prevent Chinese troops from making landfall on Taiwan, destroying Chinese beachheads will remain a Taiwanese imperative for as long as it faces the prospect of fighting a war alone. In light of the case studies above, this means Taiwan will likely attempt to maintain powerful mechanized forces as a backstop to its air, naval, and shoreline defenses.

This leaves the United States with two choices. First, it could abandon strategic ambiguity and attempt to persuade the Taiwanese to adopt asymmetric defense with the promise of American intervention. This would infuriate China, however, and have political repercussions that are beyond the scope of this article. Second, it could support Taiwan in establishing the defenses required to repel a Chinese landing, or else buy time for a potential American intervention. This would involve great financial cost and could aggrieve the Chinese as much as adopting a posture of strategic clarity. If neither option is taken, however, the United States could face the choice of [launching a costly counteroffensive](#) against a nuclear-armed rival to retake Taiwan—which is a much less credible policy option than providing for Taiwan's defense in the first place—or leaving Taiwan to its fate under a conquering China.

**The main point:** Among other lessons, the recent history of amphibious operations suggests that mobile mechanized forces are an indispensable element of amphibious defense. However, Taiwan will struggle to establish the robust air, naval, and missile defenses necessary to defend these forces from interdiction on its own. The United States therefore has two basic options for improving Taiwan's defense: it can either attempt to persuade Taiwan's defense establishment to embrace asymmetric defense by adopting a policy of strategic clarity, or it can substantially increase financial and material support to Taiwan.

[1] Theodore L. Gatchel, *At the Water's Edge: Defending Against the Modern Amphibious Assault* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996)

[2] Gatchel, "Anti-Landing Defense: The Other Face of Amphibious Warfare," in *At the Water's Edge*.

[3] Gatchel, *At the Water's Edge*, 47.

[4] Gatchel, "German Mobile Defense: Sicily and Salerno, 1943," in *At the Water's Edge*.

[5] Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2007), 226-227.

[6] *Ibid.*, 228-235.

[7] *Ibid.*, 214.

[8] *Ibid.*, 206.

[9] Gatchel, *At the Water's Edge*, 55.

[10] *Ibid.*, 128.

[11] *Ibid.*, 137-140.

[12] *Ibid.*, 140.

[13] *Ibid.*, 143.

[14] Gatchel, "The Ultimate Naval Defense: Okinawa and Japan, 1945," in *At the Water's Edge*.

[15] Gatchel, *At the Water's Edge*, 163.

[16] Atkinson, "Salerno," in *The Day of Battle*, and Gatchel, *At the Water's Edge*.

[17] Gatchel, *At the Water's Edge*, 215-216.

[18] *Ibid.*, 58.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*, 204-208.