



Washington Is Making the Same Blunder Regarding Taiwan That It Did in Ukraine

By Ted Carpenter

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Tensions between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are rising sharply over the Taiwan issue. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's stated intention to include a stop in Taipei to meet with Taiwanese officials during her forthcoming trip to East Asia is the latest source of trouble. Pelosi apparently escalated that provocation further by inviting [other prominent members](#) of Congress to join her in that stop. Her actions have caused even the staunchly pro-Taiwan Biden administration to [quietly press her](#) to [change her plans](#). Conversely, congressional hawks are urging Pelosi [not to back down](#).

The reason for the administration's caution are readily apparent. Beijing has reacted with unusually intense anger to the prospective visit, with President Xi Jinping warning the United States not to ["play with fire"](#) on the Taiwan issue. Pelosi's visit is the latest – and most serious – in a series of U.S. actions over the past several years that have infuriated PRC leaders. The Biden administration needs to exercise even greater wariness about Pelosi's venture than it already has. Indeed, Washington needs to back away from its overall hardline policy toward the PRC.

For 4 decades after Washington shifted diplomatic relations from Taipei to Beijing in 1979 and passed the [Taiwan Relations Act](#) to govern reduced, informal relations with Taiwan, US administrations were careful to limit visits to the island to low-level officials. That restraint diminished dramatically during Donald Trump's presidency, when Congress authorized and the administration approved meetings by [National Security Advisor John Bolton](#) and other [Cabinet-level officials](#) with their Taiwanese counterparts. Those trips were part of a new policy of [much stronger](#) US diplomatic and military support for Taiwan – a course of action that the Biden administration has continued, despite insisting that the United States [still adheres to a "one-China" policy](#).

Beijing's complaints about Washington's actions have steadily intensified, and they have now reached openly confrontational levels with respect to the Pelosi visit. The Biden administration needs to take the PRC's warnings more seriously. In many ways, Washington's determination to press ahead with greater support for Taiwan as part of an overall containment policy directed against China is reminiscent of the blunders US officials made with respect to NATO expansion, especially the campaign to incorporate Ukraine, and Washington's tone-deaf response to Moscow's escalating complaints.

Biden administration policymakers dismissed the Kremlin's repeated warnings that trying to make Ukraine a NATO military asset would cross [a red line](#) with respect to Russia's security interests. They discovered belatedly that Russian President Vladimir Putin was not about to cower and accept US diktats simply because the United States insisted that Ukraine had a "right" to join NATO. Nor did he accept Washington's accelerating campaign to make Ukraine a [de facto US military and intelligence ally](#) perched on Russia's border.

The outcome of Washington's approach has been horrifyingly bloody and tragic for the people of Ukraine. Even more worrisome, the administration's policies have led to an extremely dangerous confrontation between NATO and a nuclear-armed Russia, with the United States and NATO cynically using Ukraine [as a pawn in a proxy war](#) against Moscow.

Washington risks making a comparable blunder in its dealings with China. The administration must implement a quiet retreat regarding its growing political and military ties to Taipei and adopt a less confrontational approach to Beijing. Moreover, that change needs to go well beyond merely discouraging Pelosi's provocative visit to Taipei. It has become increasingly obvious to PRC leaders that the United States is pursuing a full-blown anti-China containment policy, with Taiwan as the point of the spear, in a desperate effort [to preserve Washington's fading strategic primacy](#) in East Asia. It is highly unlikely that Beijing will passively accept such an intrusive US presence in China's core security sphere over the long term. As the PRC's economic and military power continues to grow, Beijing's resistance to Washington's hegemonic efforts will escalate.

US arrogance and inflexibility helped lead to the current tragedy in Ukraine. Policymakers blew through red warning light after red warning light from the Kremlin. A similar approach seems to be taking place in Washington's relations with Beijing, and it threatens to produce a similar ugly outcome in East Asia over the Taiwan issue.

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