



The Impact of the Ukraine Crisis on the Taiwan Issue

By QI Dongtao

The impact of the Ukraine crisis on the Taiwan issue is multifaceted, and could be in some respects significant and far-reaching. To the West, and especially the United States, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has elevated the Taiwan issue to another level of urgent concern. The slogan "Today, Ukraine, tomorrow, Taiwan!" has gripped both Taiwanese and Chinese media. Possibly to calm jitters in Taiwan, the emphasis of subsequent discussions in Western academic and policy circles was on the difference between Taiwan and Ukraine. This line of reasoning argues that Taiwan's strategic value to the United States is more important than that of Ukraine, and that US commitment to Taiwan is legally guaranteed. The Taiwan Relations Act requires the United States to support Taiwan, possibly even send troops, while the United States offers only indirect support in the case of Ukraine.

The US strategic and military communities, as indicated by 2017 National Security Strategy, 2018 National Defence Strategy, 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance and so on, have tended to view China and Russia as the same group of adversary for their rising challenge to the international order; however, China has become the primary adversary due to its economic might. From US and Western viewpoints, China has reaffirmed its "anti-US and pro-Russian" position in the Ukraine crisis. This assessment has pushed the United States closer to its allies and partners in not just Europe, but also Asia. Russia's invasion of Ukraine will likely lead the United States and its allies to make more comprehensive preparations and plans for the Taiwan issue. On the same issue, China will face greater pressure from the United States and the West. The United States will possibly double up on its traditional means of intervention such as arms sales, visits, pro-Taiwan legislation and in shaping international public opinion. It will likely also further internationalise the Taiwan issue to increase the political, economic, military and reputational costs for China should the latter decides to militarily resolve the Taiwan issue in the future.

For Taiwan, the refusal of the United States and NATO to send troops to protect Ukraine has dampened hopes of the United States sending troops to protect Taiwan in the event of a similar

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conflict across the strait. The Ukraine crisis has served as a wake-up call for Taiwan to stand on their own feet and defend themselves rather than to rely on external aid. The strong Ukrainian resistance to Russia's invasion and the well-coordinated strong sanctions imposed on Russia to deter the Russians have further boosted Taiwanese determination to stand up in self-defence. This determination even transcends the Blue (Kuomintang)-Green (Democratic Progressive Party) partisan divide to some extent, serving as a green light for Taiwan to invest more in its military capabilities in the future, including increased military exchanges and cooperation with the United States and its Asia-Pacific allies. It is also a response to the criticism of the United States over Taiwan's lack of determination in self-defence. Taiwan will also welcome the internationalisation of the Taiwan issue to gain more international support and protection.

For China, the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Russia was a bellwether of similar, or even larger, sanctions if it were to take over Taiwan by force. Adjusting the structure of production, trade, finance and inbound and outbound investment to minimise its own losses and increase the cost to the sanctioning party will become a significant strategic issue for Beijing. This necessary adjustment is likely to increase China's strategic patience to resolve the Taiwan issue at a later time and to continue with its focus on developing its various strengths. As a result, China could make greater efforts to improve its relations with the world, even with the United States and the West, to improve the external environment to smooth its development efforts. On the other hand, China will continue to fight resolutely against enhanced US-Taiwan collaboration, including through military pressure and sanctions, while avoiding a spillover of the Taiwan-related conflict to other arenas.

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