

*The Russo-Ukraine War and the Perceived Global Power Shift: Factors Influencing U.S. Taiwan Policy Change**

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Abstract

This article examines U.S. Taiwan policy change since the escalation of the Russo-Ukraine conflict in late February 2022 from a neoclassical realist perspective. The Ukraine war has made a significant impact on the United States, exacerbating Americans' perceptions of an imminent China threat due to its potential use of force in the Taiwan Strait and providing fresh impetus for Washington to revise its Taiwan policy. This article argues, however, that within a three-level theoretical framework guided by neoclassical realism, the war has just accelerated the pace of U.S. Taiwan policy change initiated during the Trump presidency. President Trump brought a drastic transformation in U.S. China policy, mainly due to America's perceived shift in the power distribution between the U.S. and China, along with mounting concerns about China's national governance system and its approach to foreign policy. As the perceived shift in power distribution and escalating threat concerns persist, Washington is expected to play the "Taiwan card" more assertively and reinforce the trend of "Ukrainization" in its

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* This article has been sponsored by National Social Science Fund of China (21CGJ047).

Taiwan policy in the near future. The Ukraine war would continue to influence the evolution of Washington's policy trajectories on Taiwan. However, the repercussions of the war would still be limited in the light of the systemic pressures facing U.S. Taiwan policy.

On July 28, 2023, U.S. President Joe Biden delegated to Secretary of State Antony Blinken the authority to “direct the drawdown of up to US\$345 million in defense articles and services of the Department of Defense, and military education and training, to provide assistance to Taiwan.”¹ This marks the first time a U.S. President has utilized the Presidential Drawdown Authority, which enables the United States to withdraw weapons and other military supplies directly from Defense Department stockpiles, expediting the transfer of inventory to Taiwan through a channel similar to the one that Washington has used for arming Ukraine.² The Presidential Drawdown Authority, authorized by the public law *James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023* (NDAA 2023), serves as the U.S. government's “most responsive tool to rapidly transfer U.S. military and other equipment in an unanticipated emergency that cannot be addressed by other means.”³ The authority is granted to the President to address what the law defines as “regional contingency” in the Taiwan Strait.⁴

The United States has been ramping up its efforts to support Kiev after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a “special military operation” against Ukraine on February 24, 2022.⁵ Recognizing that closer military cooperation and increased security assistance to Ukraine help in its defense of Russia's assault, Washington has become more determined to strengthen military ties with Taipei. This is aimed at preventing and responding to an “unanticipated emergency” in the Taiwan Strait triggered by the People's Republic of China (PRC). Judging from the fact that only Ukraine and Taiwan are receiving large amount of aid from existing U.S. stockpiles, along with senior American officials' frequent comparisons of “contingencies” in Kiev and across the Strait, we can therefore conclude that the United States is not only closely watching the Ukrainian battlefield, but more significantly wielding its successful experience there to the Strait—what the authors term as the “Ukrainization” of U.S. Taiwan policy.

So, the key questions are why, how, and to what extent the Ukraine war changed U.S. policy towards Taiwan in less than two years? This