

How the United States Can Support Ukraine Without Compromising Deterrence in the Indo–Pacific

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Assistance provided thus far to Ukraine has not materially detracted from efforts to build a strong deterrence posture toward China.

The anticipated military equipment needs of Ukraine and Taiwan are not independent—there is overlap.

The nation's strategic focus should be on its greatest threat—China—even as it defends key American interests by aiding Ukraine.

Supporting the self-defense of Ukraine and the defense of Taiwan are both in the interest of the United States. Any form of forced unification of Taiwan by China would entail unprecedented and direct harm to U.S. national security and economic interests and likely prompt an unraveling of alliances and the regional order in the Indo–Pacific, with global consequences. A Russia that emerges from the Ukraine war capable of further territorial aggression could threaten NATO (triggering U.S. Article V commitments), non-NATO countries, and international trade routes.

To date, insufficient attention has been given to ensuring that assistance provided to Ukraine does not materially detract from efforts to build a strong deterrence posture toward China. There are options to deal with this tension, but the Administration and

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Congress should first acknowledge it and then actively manage U.S. efforts to accomplish both. The United States should protect its interests in both theaters.

Not Either/Or

Some commentators believe the United States would be better served reducing or stopping aid to Ukraine in favor of prioritizing efforts toward deterring a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan.¹ In support of that viewpoint, they point to perceived Ukrainian-driven trade-offs being made in financial and materiel assistance, which could detract from U.S. efforts to build effective deterrence against Chinese aggression.

There is good reason to be concerned about the potential for strategic distraction. Indeed, previous efforts by the Obama Administration to “pivot” or “rebalance” to Asia were derailed by an overshadowing U.S. focus in the Middle East, even as China went about turning coral atolls in the South China Sea into fortified military bases² and built a navy larger than that of the United States.³ Further, despite the stated priorities in the 2022 National Defense Strategy, actions to date by the Biden Administration do not indicate that building deterrence against China is indeed the top national security priority. The recently submitted U.S. Navy 30-year shipbuilding program fails to build a sufficient naval fleet in the necessary time frame,⁴ current U.S. military aircraft fleet readiness rates are appallingly low,⁵ and flying-hour programs in the Air Force are not meeting minimum standards to maintain proficiency against a near-peer competitor.⁶

Nor, as some contend, are the anticipated military equipment needs of Ukraine and Taiwan independent: There is overlap.⁷

The nature and magnitude of the Chinese threat is such that the United States cannot afford for its attention to be disproportionately diverted elsewhere.

Indeed, there is near unanimity in Washington that General Secretary Xi Jinping’s regime presents the greatest long-term threat to U.S. interests. Forced unification of Taiwan by China would create direct harm to U.S. national security and economic interests and likely prompt an unraveling of alliances and the regional order in the Indo-Pacific—with global consequences. China is the only country with the means and demonstrated intent to make this happen.⁸ Thus, as the last two Administrations have recognized, China should be the priority for U.S. national security efforts for the foreseeable future.

But neither can the United States afford to ignore the fact that there is a major land war underway on NATO's border, the first in 78 years, initiated by a ruthless leader backed by a powerful army bent on subordinating Ukraine—and perhaps more of Europe. The extent to which Russia can achieve the objectives of its war of choice, and the effectiveness of allied efforts to support Ukraine, would likely also inform Xi Jinping's designs on Taiwan. It is thus in the U.S. interest, in concert with NATO countries and other like-minded partners, to support the self-defense of Ukraine. Effectively doing so will not only weaken the Kremlin's foreign policy, generally; it will also constrain the resources Moscow has to cement its relationship with China.

Support provided to Ukraine should be fiscally responsible, fully accountable, focused on military aid, and tied to a responsible long-term plan to safeguard U.S. interests.⁹ It should also be carefully balanced by the overarching need to prioritize U.S. deterrence efforts against China.

To best address these issues, policymakers should understand the specifics of financial support to Ukraine and Taiwan, the types and amounts of materiel support the United States is providing each country, and the intersection between the two. Policymakers should also understand the tension between the two countries' foreign military sales (FMS) purchases while working to fix the administrative and capacity problems causing a backlog in FMS deliveries. Importantly, lawmakers in Congress should focus the nation's strategic attention on its greatest threat—China—even as they continue to defend key American interests in Europe by aiding Ukraine.

Financial Support

The U.S. government uses security assistance programs to provide defense articles, training, and services to eligible foreign governments.¹⁰ Since February 24, 2022, the United States has provided \$36.9 billion in security assistance to Ukraine.¹¹ (When adding indirect or non-military assistance to Ukraine, the total figure exceeds \$110 billion, although not all of these funds have been spent.)

The Department of Defense (DOD) budget for fiscal year (FY) 2023 was \$797.6 billion.¹²

The United States has provided \$21 billion in transferred weapons, munitions, and equipment (out of \$23 billion authorized), most of which has arrived. The United States has used roughly \$14 billion in Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative funding to sign contracts with weapons manufacturers in the United States, but many of those weapons are still in production and

will not arrive until late in 2023 or later. The situation is similar for the \$4.7 billion in foreign military financing for Ukraine and other NATO partners. The United States has also provided another roughly \$11.4 billion in military support, which runs the gamut from cyber and intel (targeting) support to the increased presence in Eastern Europe for deterrence/assurance purposes.

However, the weakening of Russian armed forces in Ukraine also carries tangible strategic value for U.S. national security interests. Russia, which is still considered a “profoundly dangerous” threat to U.S. national security, is being materially diminished.¹³ According to leaked U.S. intelligence reports, Russia is estimated to have suffered 189,500–223,000 total casualties, including 35,500–43,000 killed.¹⁴ Russia has also lost copious amounts of equipment, with losses in tanks alone estimated to be between 1,845 and 3,511.¹⁵ The extent to which U.S. support to Ukraine reduces either the future likelihood or the severity of war with Russia should be factored into assessments of its value for U.S. interests.

Although Vladimir Putin, given the opportunity, will certainly seek to rebuild his military, the Russian threat is likely to be substantially diminished in the near term and perhaps much longer if an effective sanctions regime is maintained.¹⁶

Thus far, there is no evidence that U.S. fiscal support for Ukraine has had a decisive impact on efforts to deter China, but with continued deficit spending, this concern is growing. This tension reinforces the urgency to find cuts and savings in other areas of the federal budget to create fiscal space in the federal budget to support America’s national security interests and goals.

Materiel Support

Materiel Support to Ukraine. Thus far, equipment deliveries to Ukraine are not having a significant impact on U.S. efforts to increase deterrence against China, but at current levels of arms transfers, that day is likely coming.

The United States has delivered large quantities of materiel and munitions to Ukraine. Among the highlights are 10,000 Javelin anti-tank systems, 1,600 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, 160 155 millimeter (mm) artillery howitzers, 1,500,000 155 mm howitzer artillery rounds, 38 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems and ammunition, one Patriot Air Defense battery, 90 Stryker infantry vehicles, 109 Bradley fighting vehicles, and (in the near future) 31 Abrams tanks.¹⁷ In terms of the munitions provided, such as

Stinger missiles, congressional staff informally report that the quantities transferred thus far do not exceed war reserve requirements for a conflict with Russia (although we cannot independently verify that), suggesting that the overall risk providing them to Ukraine is tolerable given that they are being used against that same adversary.¹⁸

Nearly all the equipment already provided to Ukraine has been through Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), where the President authorizes the transfer of DOD defense articles in response to an “unforeseen emergency.”¹⁹ Drawdowns are a form of security assistance. Congress has provided PDA to Ukraine exceeding the normal limit of \$100 million.²⁰ As of May 16, 2023, the total of equipment provided via PDA to Ukraine has been \$21.1 billion.²¹ Congress has also appropriated money to replenish DOD stocks sent to Ukraine.

For context, in FY 2023 the money the U.S. Army received to replenish stocks of equipment and munitions sent to Ukraine via PDA equaled about one-third of its total procurement budget.²² Delivery back to the DOD will, however, take years to accomplish. Congress also appropriated nearly \$4.7 billion (of which \$3 billion has been obligated) for foreign military financing (FMF) for Ukraine and other European countries, which is being used to place new orders with companies for Ukraine or for “allies and partners who have provided security assistance to Ukraine to backfill their capabilities,” although most of those deliveries will not take place for months or years.²³ The United States has also appropriated over \$18 billion to Ukraine under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative for direct commercial contracting with U.S. defense firms, which compete for the same production lines with FMS and FMF cases.

Materiel Support to Taiwan. Although the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act (TERA) included in the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (signed December 23, 2022²⁴) authorized \$1 billion per year in PDA for Taiwan, thus far (as of May 17, 2023) that authority has not been exercised. The NDAA also authorized FMF for Taiwan up to \$2 billion annually. However, Congress did not appropriate money to support either program. Instead, congressional appropriators included money for a loan program that Taiwan is not expected to use and did not require making significant offsets elsewhere in the spending bill.²⁵ The President’s FY 2024 budget request followed the same approach, ignoring the TERA’s meaningful authorities while superficially supporting a potentially defunct loan program.

FMS, a subset of security assistance, entails government-to-government sales of defense articles and services to foreign countries designed

to strengthen the security of the United States.²⁶ The FMS program is normally operated under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961²⁷ and the Arms Export Control Act of 1976,²⁸ with sales to Taiwan also informed by the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979.²⁹

Two months before Putin invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Taiwan had a \$14 billion FMS backlog of defense goods ordered but not delivered. By the end of 2022 that backlog had grown to \$19 billion—not because of U.S. support to Ukraine but rather because of lengthy existing delivery delays from the defense industry and the lengthy U.S. approval process for FMS.³⁰

Among the items ordered but not yet delivered to Taiwan are Javelin antitank missiles, F-16 fighters, Standoff Land Attack Missile Expanded Response cruise missiles, Coastal Defense Cruise Missiles, High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, Abrams tanks, MQ-9b Sky Guardian drones, Paladin howitzers, air reconnaissance pods, Patriot missile system components, Stinger missiles, and Harpoon surface-launched anti-ship missiles.³¹ Projected delivery dates for these items range from 2024 to 2029.

The TERA included some useful new provisions to address the delay in FMS deliveries for Taiwan. Section 5506 of the FY 2023 NDAA called for the DOD and the State Department to develop a multi-year plan to fulfill Taiwan's defense requirements. Section 5507 called for “fast tracking” of FMS requests from Taiwan, and Section 5508 requires an annual report on items ordered through FMS that have not yet been delivered, including alternative capabilities, authorities that Congress could use to accelerate deliveries, and a description of the countries ahead of Taiwan in the delivery queue.³²

Most of the delays with FMS deliveries to Taiwan can be linked to a bottleneck in the commercial defense industrial base. While the annual Section 5508 annual report requirement is helpful, it could detail what options, authorities, or investments—including those using Title III of the Defense Production Act (DPA)—targeted toward the defense industrial base could result in faster arms and munitions deliveries to Taiwan. The Section 5508 report should also be submitted more frequently than annually.

The Intersection of Materiel Support to Both Ukraine and Taiwan. To summarize, most of the military equipment delivered to Ukraine has been from existing U.S. defense stocks, using PDA, while the backlog of equipment deliveries to Taiwan is through FMS. Simply put, Ukraine has not yet cut in line in front of Taiwan for items that were already delayed. At the same time, ongoing U.S. efforts in Ukraine can constrain America's ability to address the Taiwan backlog.

Furthermore, there are additional friction points now that both Taiwan and Ukraine have been authorized to obtain items from U.S. stocks through

PDA. America's ability to provide either country equipment through PDA will eventually be limited to avoid creating direct risks to America's Armed Forces, with more of the burden shifting to FMS. Even though the U.S. defense industrial base is now beginning to increase production of some items—including over \$3.5 billion in FY 2023 alone in capital improvements—both countries for at least the next few years will be relying on deliveries from an already strained U.S. defense industrial base, which is dealing with orders not just from Taiwan and Ukraine but also from a surge in FMS to partners for Ukraine backfill, as well as existing orders from major U.S. arms customers such as Japan, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.³³

Ukraine primarily needs weapons and munitions for a land war: tanks, tank ammunition, personnel carriers, anti-tank missiles, short and mid-range air defense systems, howitzers and artillery ammunition, and guided multiple rocket launcher systems.

Conversely, the most important military systems and munitions necessary for Taiwan to prevent China from mounting a successful invasion are mid and long-range missile defense systems, air defense systems, fast-attack boats, naval mines, and anti-ship missiles such as the Harpoon.³⁴

While U.S., allied and Taiwanese armed forces would seek to deny the People's Liberation Army a foothold on Taiwan in the event of invasion, they cannot assume complete success, necessitating the Taiwan Army be able to conduct land combat. Hence, land combat systems—similar to those needed by Ukraine—are also needed by Taiwan's armed forces.

Foreign Military Sales

Managing Tension for FMS. There is growing recognition that the United States should become more strategic in using FMS in support of its national security goals. A defense industry association "tiger team" recently recommended that the DOD "must fully commit itself to using FMS as a primary foreign policy tool to support U.S. interests, warfighters, and partners and allies," further stating that the current system is "opaque" to industry, "challenging to navigate," and "ineffective" in dealing with disagreements regarding technology release.³⁵

Representative Mike Gallagher (R-WI) recently returned from Taiwan frustrated by arms delivery delays. He expressed concern that because some customers such as Saudi Arabia ordered systems such as the Harpoon missiles before Taiwan did, Taiwan may need to wait until 2027—after the Kingdom gets its missiles.³⁶ Thus far, the U.S. government has been reluctant to step in and re-prioritize arms deliveries to foreign

customers. That might be understandable if the strategic circumstances were different. In this environment, it is past time for Washington to become more involved.

Of course, the Biden Administration's ability to renegotiate FMS deliveries with some of its largest FMS customers—Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states—is constrained because of the current abysmal state of diplomatic relationships with these countries. Because of this diplomatic malpractice, any hopes for success should be tempered with a strong dose of reality.

In the case of Taiwan and Ukraine, the Administration should prioritize deliveries of weapons and munitions from U.S.-based arms manufacturers. The new authorities provided in the TERA should accelerate FMS deliveries to Taiwan. The Biden Administration should also use PDA to speed up delivery of backlogged defense articles to Taiwan where possible.

Additionally, the Administration should renegotiate delivery dates previously agreed to with countries other than Taiwan and Ukraine. This re-prioritization will require intense bilateral negotiations with partners and industry to avoid damaging important security and business relationships. In simple terms, today Taiwan and Ukraine should be “dragged to the front of the line.” In cases of direct conflict between both countries' requirements, the default should be to support Taiwan.

Congress should increase the visibility of these issues by requiring more detail in the Section 5508 report, as well as more frequent submission.

The longer-term solution to the overall issue, however, lies in fixing the slow FMS processes and speeding up production in the defense industrial base.

Delays in the FMS Process. A full discussion of the FMS process is beyond the scope of this paper, but the lengthy time required between when a friendly county initiates a Letter of Request to when the materiel is placed on contract contributes to delays in delivery. Just placing the items on contract alone takes an average of 18 months, and that is for relatively simple programs.³⁷ Contracting officers are encouraged to seek efficiency and best prices for goods, leading to prolonged periods of performance and delays putting necessary goods on contract.

Supporting Key U.S. National Interests. Even if FMS processes were improved and the administrative timeline for contracts grew shorter, materiel deliveries would still take years thanks to the nation's limited defense industrial capacity and dysfunctional incentives. While the 2022 and 2018 National Defense Strategies are based on a return to great-power competition, this shift in mindset has not yet trickled down to the industrial base and the defense contracting establishment.

Defense contractors are typically not incentivized to manufacture items quickly: They normally prefer longer periods of sustained performance versus surge contracts, which peak quickly and result in workforce turbulence. As a result, when the government negotiates with a prime contractor to produce a given item for itself and for FMS customers, the contractor will negotiate delivery dates based on its current manufacturing capacity rather than increase manufacturing capacity to deliver munitions to all customers as quickly as possible. Consistent and stable work stretched over multiple years makes better business sense for a contractor than building a new factory and hiring a new workforce just to close the factory and lay off the workforce when the contract has been filled.

Indeed, the industrial base is optimized for peacetime needs, with very little excess capacity available for a surge. Eric Fanning of the Aerospace Industries Association testified before Congress that the defense industrial base is “optimized for efficiency, both from an infrastructure and workforce standpoint.”³⁸ Prime contractors, their subcontractors, and firms in every tier of their supply chains do not have the capacity or the staff to rapidly increase production rates.

They *need* to surge production, however, to meet the many and increasing demands being placed on the defense industrial base. Congress is aware of this need for greater defense industrial base capacity. The FY 2023 NDAA authorized funding for improvements at government-owned industrial base facilities, most notably the Army ammunition plants that produce 155 mm shells.

Other policy levers already exist for the federal government to increase production capacity directly. The DPA, specifically Title III, gives the President authority to expand defense industrial production capacity using loans, loan guarantees, purchase commitments, and even the authority to procure and install equipment in private industrial facilities. For example, in 2020, the DOD announced multiple DPA Title III funding awards to domestic rare earth element producers to expand their mining and refining capacity, creating a more secure supply chain for defense applications of these materials. More recently, President Biden used DPA authorities to build up domestic hypersonic weapons manufacturing capacity. This authorization will allow the DOD to invest in companies’ manufacturing capacity at different levels of the supply chain, such as air-breathing engines, guidance systems, and constituent components. These same authorities could be used to expedite production capacity expansion for munitions and other key systems.

Ultimately, however, increasing capacity for key programs—whether long-range anti-ship missiles or Abrams tanks—will require the DOD to work with each prime contractor (and, to the degree that it can, with subcontractors)

to figure out exactly what is required to ramp up production. Though the answers will be different for each program, they will all require the DOD to express a long-term and consistent demand signal, and they will require more money to expand the workforce, acquire the components, and (in some cases) build the facilities required to increase production from a peacetime rate to meet the requirements of a “new Cold War.”³⁹

Strategic Attention

Strategic attention is also a finite resource. With the Obama Administration’s overwhelming focus on the Middle East—on al-Qaeda, brokering a nuclear deal with Iran, and the civil war in Syria—it consequently took its eye off Asia. China responded accordingly, seizing Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines, building new militarized artificial islands in the South China Sea, developing a new “maritime militia,” increasing harassment activities around Taiwan and Japan, sparking border tensions with India, and using economic coercion against several U.S. allies.

There is only so much time in the day for coordinating support to Ukraine, managing alliances, and responding to Congress and the media. When Ukraine is the top priority of the commander in chief, deterrence of China and support to Taiwan may take a back seat if sufficient care is not exercised.⁴⁰

There are already signs that the intensity of American involvement in Ukraine is negatively affecting dedication to the China threat. The most concerning example thus far is the Biden Administration’s continuing failure to submit the TERA’s required reports.

It will require extraordinary discipline for key DOD leaders to preserve deterring China as the number-one defense priority. Schedules should be managed and leaders’ time protected to ensure that Ukraine does not squeeze out Taiwan prioritization. Congress can assist by continually emphasizing in its engagements with the DOD the overarching need to build deterrence in the Indo-Pacific while simultaneously maintaining effective oversight over aid to Ukraine.

Recommendations

The President should:

- **Take to task those NATO and other countries not doing their “fair share” of supporting Ukraine in international forums and**

formal statements. Thus far, such discussions are largely taking place out of the public eye, and, consequently, some countries are escaping international scorn.

- **Take a more active role in prioritizing deliveries of military equipment and munitions to Taiwan and Ukraine,** using the new authorities in the TERA as well as the inherent authorities in the Arms Export Control Act and Foreign Assistance Act that allow for cancellation or modification of agreements when necessary for the national security of the United States.
- **Require senior DOD leadership to work with prime contractors and subcontractors** to determine what will be required to increase production capacity for key munitions and systems.
- **Immediately prioritize compliance with TERA requirements and deadlines and begin exercising the PDA authority in the TERA** to mitigate Taiwan's worsening FMS backlog.
- **Request appropriations for TERA authorities.**

Congress should:

- **Implement federal spending reductions in the non-defense areas of the federal budget** to create the necessary "headroom" in the discretionary budget and avoid deficit spending, allowing the United States to continue to build deterrence against China while also supporting Ukraine.
- **Investigate all potential measures to accelerate FMS deliveries to Taiwan and Ukraine.**
- **Conduct continuous and vigorous oversight** to ensure that the building of deterrence against China remains the number-one national security priority of the United States.
- **Hold hearings with representatives of the defense industrial base,** at both the prime contractor and subcontractor levels, to obtain firsthand information on what will be required to increase production capacity for key systems.

- **Call for the supercharging of the training of security cooperation officers, seek specialization within the contracting officer corps, and look to remove dubious contracting requirements for FMS**, as the Armed Services Committees did for certain contracts in FY 2023 NDAA Section 1244(a).

Conclusion

The United States is currently balancing risk across multiple dimensions and theaters. Even though bullets and missiles are not currently flying, China poses the greatest long-term strategic risk to U.S. interests, and America should prioritize accordingly. Supporting Ukraine's self-defense is also in America's interest, but requirements for its military and financial aid should be carefully managed to ensure that the provision of that aid does not undermine U.S. efforts to deter China now and in the future.

Arguments that U.S. support to Ukraine contains no potential risk to efforts to deter China understate the problem. Similarly, proposals to stop aid to Ukraine to prioritize support to Taiwan ignore the danger from an unchecked Russia on the United States and the NATO alliance. Neither is correct.

Potential conflict between these two key security interests is looming, and the United States should act now to manage this tension or risk strategic failure.

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