

John Quincy Adams Society

ESSAY SERIES



1. What national interests does the United States have in Taiwan? How much impact do these interests have on the well-being of people in the United States? In light of this, should the United States be willing to go to war with China over Taiwan?

By David Winter

There is an ongoing debate regarding whether the United States should intervene in a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The core issue of this discourse is that insufficient attention is given toward the strategic interests Taiwan offers the United States. Instead, there is the tendency to proclaim that the liberal democratic values of [Taiwan must be protected in the face of a Communist aggression](#). Although this is certainly important, it is hardly a major factor in the national interest of the United States. Rather, the conversation should be framed on what vulnerabilities are precipitated by a Chinese takeover of Taiwan. Although the United States does not wish to lose a democratic ally in Asia, there are more pressing issues posed by the threat of Chinese invasion. Some of these issues, which I will cover include loss of strategic ports and defense positions offered by Taiwan, China's control of the valuable maritime commons around Taiwan, and the potential loss of vital microchip technologies. These are a few examples of issues that threaten the national interest of the United States. Furthermore, the impact of such issues can trickle down to the domestic layer and affect the lives of the American people. For these reasons, it is necessary for the United States to be prepared to intervene in the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

The island of Taiwan is as threatening to China as it is valuable. A major impediment to the projection of Chinese power in the South China Sea is the presence of a hostile air force, air defense system, and a series of deep-sea ports. With the help of American arms sales, the Taiwanese Air Force is equipped with the [most advanced F-16 fighter jet](#). Taiwan possesses 400 fighter jets in contrast to [China's 1,600 fighter jets](#). Clearly, the Taiwanese cannot take on the full force of the People's Liberation Army's Air Force, but with the help of Western allies it could keep the Chinese at bay. In addition to a decent air force, the Taiwanese military is armed with various [missile defense systems that can target aircraft and ships](#). This defense combination proves to be a formidable threat to the Chinese, whether they wish to invade Taiwan or instigate conflict in the region. Lastly, the deep-sea ports available around Taiwan are important for detecting Chinese submarines via acoustic sensors. Loss of this strategic capability will allow the Chinese Navy to advance further into the South China Sea unchallenged. The loss of Taiwan will allow China to advance eastward and interrupt the flow of trade between neighboring nations, thus affecting global economies.

Were the Chinese to successfully takeover Taiwan and absorb it into its territory, they would have complete control of the surrounding sea lanes. Considering there is about [\\$4 trillion USD worth of annual commerce](#) in the South China Sea, this would undoubtedly affect the United States. As for the neighboring nations who align with the United States, Japan and South Korea, there are additional concerns with China taking over Taiwan. China could exercise a great degree of control over both of these economies through denial of trade or access to vital resources, like oil. In the event that the United States does not intervene, it will be perceived by our allies as our abandonment of our commitments. This would be reminiscent of the recent American withdrawal from Afghanistan. By severing our ties with our close allies, we will give up security agreements and economic arrangements that support and secure each other's nation. As a result, the American people will begin to see a degradation of their standard of living as China usurps our power abroad. After all, American power rests on economic strength and maintenance, which is [already in decline](#). But all of these issues are exacerbated by the loss of microchip technology that supports the growth and development of Western economies, especially the United States.

Perhaps the microchip aspect of the Taiwan debate is severely overlooked as it should constitute a singular reason for protecting against a Chinese invasion. Currently, more than 60% of microchips used around the world are manufactured in Taiwan. Taiwan's major manufacturer, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., provides chips for some of the world's major companies including [Apple, Qualcomm, and NVIDIA](#). What the American general public, and possibly policy makers, seem to overlook is that these microchips are necessary for making our phones, cars, computers, and other everyday goods we depend on. Loss of this technology would not only result in losing these goods, but more importantly, losing domestic manufacturing capability. Furthermore, loss of these microchips would result in playing into China's economic statecraft in which Western states would be reliant on an authoritarian government for a vital technology. China gaining this technology would help it advance in this area of research and manufacturing as it is [years behind Taiwan's manufacturing process](#). Similar to the previous two examples, our loss is China's gain. China's gain is a loss to the American people, who have become accustomed to the standard of living afforded by American hegemony. China taking over Taiwan would be a threshold for ending the United States' unipolar moment.

As demonstrated by these more pressing issues, the impact of a successful Chinese invasion of Taiwan would challenge American supremacy. The shift in the balance of power would be in favor of China due to the decreased threat posed by a Western-backed Taiwan. The result of which would be greater economic and military strength afforded to China. The rise of a Chinese regional hegemon in the East would undoubtedly challenge American power in other regions. As discussed, the affect of these shifts in the international system would trickle down to the domestic level, thus altering the standard of living for all Americans. Though protecting democracy is an honorable goal, the United States should be motivated to protect its place on the world stage from authoritarianism that seeks to replace its liberal democratic world order. In order to achieve this, the United States must be prepared to continue supporting the military deterrence and technological hindrance Taiwan poses to China. This commitment must extend to intervention in the event of an aggressive Chinese maneuver.