

# [***New Quills Needed for Taiwan's 'Porcupine' Strategy Against China | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BYY-SC61-JBR6-90M2-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Reclaiming control over the island of Taiwan has risen to the top of Chinese President Xi Jinping's priority list.

**Body**

Avril Hines, director of national intelligence, disclosed Thursday in Congressional testimony that Russia and China are training together for a future invasion of Taiwan. The "unlimited friendship" [*proclaimed by presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin in Beijing in February 2022*](https://multimedia.scmp.com/infographics/news/china/article/3214426/china-russia/index.html), just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, moved closer to a potential two-front deadly conflict between the West and the Moscow-Beijing Axis.

The revelation came days after the House of Representatives finally passed the [*much-anticipated foreign aid package*](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/biden-signs-foreign-aid-bill-providing-crucial-military-assistance-to-ukraine/ar-AA1nALkA), which allocated $95 billion to foreign partners. Taiwan and the surrounding region will receive less than $4 billion [*from Washington*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/26/us-foreign-aid-bill-package-details). President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) signed the bill while Secretary of State [*Antony Blinken*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/antony-blinken?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) was in Beijing, [*warning China about aiding Russia*](https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/markets/blinken-tells-beijing-stop-boosting-russia-or-face-punishments/ar-AA1nIdX7) in Ukraine. China [*lambasted*](https://apnews.com/article/china-taiwan-military-assistance-e505267d2fc595be2d45b2e70d6d1ead) U.S. aid to Taipei, which has become the latest flashpoint in Sino-American rivalry.

Immediately after Blinken's departure, China responded by [*probing Taiwan's air defenses*](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/taiwan-reports-chinese-military-activity-after-blinken-leaves-beijing/ar-AA1nKIii). Aside from its strategic importance in the [*first island chain*](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/geostrategic-competition-and-overseas-basing-in-east-asia-and-the-first-island-chain/) (an expanse that stretches from the Philippines via Taiwan and Ryukyu Islands to Japan and the Aleutians) and being a computer chip and semiconductor superpower, it is symbolically vital as a free and prosperous culturally Chinese state. Taiwan is officially named "The Republic of China," and its thriving democracy is a solid rebuttal to Beijing's hollow arguments on the incompatibility of Chinese culture and democracy.

Reclaiming control over the island has risen to the top of Xi's priority list. At last year's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), he restated [*that Beijing would be willing to use force against Taiwan*](https://english.news.cn/20221016/29113f9cbf3247978534dd1f4aee299e/c.html) if the two could not agree on a peaceful solution. When Xi made the same claim two years earlier at the National People's Congress, he was greeted with [*thunderous applause*](https://www.newsweek.com/xi-jinping-speech-suggests-china-invade-taiwan-promise-force-1752215?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

China continues to step up its "grey zone" tactics. Incursions into Taiwan's [*Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-taiwan-air-defense-zone-warplane-sorties-1881651?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) are now routine, and China has also stepped up its [*military exercises in the Taiwan Strait*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/19/taiwan-reports-increased-chinese-military-drills-nearby). The election of Lai Ching-te as president of Taiwan will only exacerbate these trends. In January, Xi even called his election a [*"choice between peace and war."*](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-vote-what-china-calls-peace-war-election-2024-01-10/)

Washington and Taipei must adopt a more active approach to deterring China as tensions rise. Taiwan, with [*only 2.6 percent of its GDP*](https://www.cfr.org/blog/taiwan-announced-record-defense-budget-it-enough-deter-china) spent on defense, is still unprepared to resist a Chinese invasion. Admittedly, Taiwan's former President Tsai Ing-Wen made strides in addressing military shortcomings. She oversaw a robust [*drone program*](https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL4N39714X/), introduced longer [*compulsory service requirements,*](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-begins-extended-one-year-conscription-response-china-threat-2024-01-25/) and announced a [*historic increase*](https://www.cfr.org/blog/taiwan-announced-record-defense-budget-it-enough-deter-china#:~:text=Last%20week%2C%20Taiwan%20announced%20plans,to%202.6%20percent%20of%20GDP.) in national defense spending. Unfortunately, these measures were insufficient.

China's increasing threats are forcing Taiwan to reevaluate its strategic partnerships, and its deterrence capacity. Being a "[*porcupine*](https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/05/10/what-is-taiwans-porcupine-defence-strategy),"—a static but strategically difficult, and dangerous obstacle that forces China to reevaluate the utility of attacking the island, is a good start. Taiwan must embrace a more dynamic defensive strategy that can independently deter, or at least stall, Beijing.

First, the prestigious big-ticket weapons systems embraced by Taiwan, such as its many armored vehicles and conventional fighters, are large and easily tracked, making them prime targets for [*China's advanced missiles and satellite-guided munitions*](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-03/240306_Jones_Rebuilding_Democracy_0.pdf?VersionId=sCRmR1UN.8dKYYu4hyh8PMB.U32ww58D)—a challenge for Taiwan due to the sheer number of such weapons in China's arsenal. Taiwan must embrace interdiction and interception by focusing on a decentralized and quantitative acquisition plan. For Taiwan, many drones would better serve it than a handful of jets. If it doesn't, it may have to re-learn the same harsh lessons that [*Armenia learned in 2020*](https://www.csis.org/analysis/air-and-missile-war-nagorno-karabakh-lessons-future-strike-and-defense) in the war with Azerbaijan or [*Russia learned in 2022-2023*](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/russians-are-getting-better-learning) in Ukraine.

Second, Taiwan cannot win a protracted contest of military might. If China establishes a beachhead on Taiwan that can be reliably resupplied, defeat is a matter of time. Instead, Taiwan needs to invest in front-ended weapons and tactics designed to deny this beachhead as long as possible. Land-based anti-ship weapons, mortars, light artillery, rapid mine-deploying vehicles, and more mobile surface-to-air missile systems are needed.

Third, Taiwan needs to build up vast quantities of ammunition. The wars in Ukraine, Yemen, and Gaza demonstrate that modern warfare consumes copious amounts of bombs and shells. Taiwan must become a massive "weapons depot," self-sustaining until American help can arrive. The West's lagging defense industrial base, incapable of even supplying Ukraine at sufficient levels, needs re-investment, and Taiwan independently must acquire and produce as much ammunition as possible.

Fourth, Taiwan needs to redirect the economic burden *of warfare* to China. Investing in defensive weapons like anti-satellite (ASAT) and anti-radiation missiles (ARMs) will go a long way. The rationale must always be that crucial and expensive Chinese assets should be threatened by cheaper, defensive assets.

To maximize the impact of this proposed strategy, Taipei must also make better use of its geography. Much of the island's coast is covered in cliffs and mudflats, meaning only [*10 percent is suitable for landing.*](https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/ISEC_a_00294-Beckley_proof3.pdf) This makes it easier for Taiwan to concentrate its defense. The island's rugged terrain also significantly protects critical weapon systems if Taiwan leverages it strategically. Taipei is already aware of this reality, as shown by its construction of [*aircraft hangars inside mountains.*](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3229321/taiwanese-militarys-plan-use-mountain-barrier-natural-shield-called-question-pla-expands-presence) Doubling down on these efforts will be essential in a high-intensity conflict.

The "porcupine" strategy may save the island money and resources, but it won't stand up to Beijing's efforts if its quills aren't sharp. China plans to increase military spending by [*7.2 percent*](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-03/240306_Jones_Rebuilding_Democracy_0.pdf?VersionId=sCRmR1UN.8dKYYu4hyh8PMB.U32ww58D) in 2024; meanwhile, after years of neglect, Washington still struggles to revive its [*sluggish defense industrial base*](https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2024/03/16/to-defend-democracy-time-to-revamp-americas-military-industrial-base/?sh=68285fdd78b6). Taiwan's Pacific partners, including Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea, must contribute financially to ensure that Taiwan can defend itself.

Taipei and Washington must act fast. Large-scale shifts in military strategy take years to implement, and this prescribed approach will be no different. Often, wars are won years in advance through the right procurement strategy. America's spectacular victories in World War II, which were based on massive naval and air fleets, are the best testimony to this. Russia and China are explicit about their intentions. The clock is ticking.

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*The views expressed in this article are the writers' own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2389383/preparing-new-president-taiwan.jpg)

**Graphic**

Preparing for the New President of Taiwan

SAM YEH/AFP via Getty Images

A US-made CH-47SD Chinook helicopter (R) flies Taiwan's flag in Taoyuan on May 7, during a rehearsal ahead of the May 20 inauguration ceremony for Taiwan's President-elect Lai Ching-te.

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