

A Blueprint for Deterring War Over Taiwan

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Published: March 23, 2026

Two parties have watched Operation Epic Fury (OEF) from a distance. China has been taking notes. The United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) has tracked munitions consumption rates of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). Both the PRC and INDOPACOM know that what is happening above, in, and around Tehran will impact Beijing's plans to take Taiwan. And they know Washington plans to prevent that.

Opposing Forces

The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) strongman Xi Jinping [declared](#) Taiwan “must and will be” absorbed. He has even set a [deadline](#) of 2027 for his military to be ready to seize Taiwan. The Pentagon [reports](#) that Beijing “continues to refine multiple military options” to take Taiwan “by brute force.” Xi is assembling the [capabilities](#) to execute those options. This includes 420,000 troops, 750 fighter-jets, 300 bombers, 158 warships (including 50 landing ships) and hundreds of missile systems, all in the Taiwan Strait region.

In response, Taiwan has increased defense spending from 2% of GDP in 2019 to 3.3% of GDP in 2026, with plans to invest 5% of GDP on defense by 2030. Taiwan is using those resources to produce [homegrown](#) antiship, air-defense, land-attack and air-to-air [missiles](#); expand production of [attack-drones](#); and build a fleet of [submarines](#). Taiwan recently [received](#) ATACMS missiles and HIMARS systems. Taipei is still awaiting delivery of dozens of F-16V fighters and TOW antitank systems, which is part of a \$21 billion [backlog](#) of U.S. arms. Taipei also [wants](#) F-35s and additional Patriot systems. In short, Taiwan is racing to construct “a porcupine defense”—one that would make an invasion so painful as to dissuade Xi from even attempting it.

The United States Response

While Xi has been clear about his plans for Taiwan, Washington has been vague. Under the Taiwan Relations Act, neither side of the Taiwan Strait knows exactly what Washington would do in the event of war.

The INDOPACOM commander, Adm. Samuel Paparo, is doing his part to send a clear message. If Beijing attacks Taiwan, he [plans](#) to “turn the Taiwan Strait into an unmanned hellscape.” The drones and missilery of “hellscape” would come from multiple directions. Further supporting this clear message is that in 2024, the U.S. Army [moved](#) Typhon missile systems to the Philippines, and in 2025 the Pentagon created Task Force-Philippines and deployed a Marine unit armed with anti-ship systems to the Philippines. Lastly, in 2026, the Pentagon unveiled [Army Rotational Force-Philippines](#), which will deploy [missile and drone assets](#).

Currently the Pentagon is [revitalizing](#) airfields in the Philippines, [Tinian](#) and [Wake Island](#); basing top-of-the-line fighters on [Okinawa](#); and rotating B-52s through Australia. Army units on [Palau](#)

have tested land-based missiles against seagoing targets. And F-35s are now carrying [long-range antiship missiles](#) tailor-made for targeting a PRC invasion fleet.

Near the end of his tenure, however, commanding U.S. Army-Pacific, Gen. Robert Brown [reported](#) that his PRC counterparts “don’t fear us anymore.” This is regrettable, but understandable. America’s Navy deploys fewer than 300 ships which, like America’s commitments, are spread around the world. Those commitments expend finite assets: OEF has exposed the [limitations](#) of U.S. weapons stockpiles and production capacity, and it has forced the Pentagon to [shuffle](#) assets from the Indo-Pacific to the Middle East.

Allied Response

America’s not-so-secret weapon is its interconnected system of alliances. America’s alliances serve as force-multipliers, layers of strategic depth, and outer rings of America’s own security, which enable power projection through prepositioning, basing, overflight, and resupply. Even though U.S. allies are critical, China has no real allies.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi [describes](#) an attack on Taiwan as a “threat to Japan’s survival,” indicating Japan would [assist](#) the U.S. in defending the island. In hopes of preventing such a scenario, Japan has bolstered defenses across its southwestern [territories](#), placing F-35Bs on Kyushu, anti-ship systems, air-defenses, and electronic-warfare units on islands south of Kyushu; and air-defense and missile-defense units on [Yonaguni Island](#) (70 miles east of Taiwan). In addition, Japan is fielding 22 attack submarines, acquiring 500 TLAMs, [producing](#) missiles domestically, and upconverting ships into aircraft carriers armed with F-35Bs.

Australia is partnering with the U.S. and Britain to deploy a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, and Australia has opened its territory to U.S. Marines, [submarines](#) and B-52s.

[Britain and France](#) have stepped up in production of a key element needed for TLAM production due to China shutting off the supply. Norway is supplying the U.S. with antiship [missiles](#) and [joint strike missiles](#). A U.S.-Israeli partnership is manufacturing [loitering munitions](#), which are likely part of Paparo’s “hellscape.” Japan, Australia, Britain, Canada, France, and Germany have conducted freedom-of-navigation operations through the Taiwan Strait further supported by Britain, Italy, and France [coordinating deployments](#) of their aircraft carriers in the Pacific.

Enhancing A Deterrent Posture

China’s commitments and assets, conversely, are focused on its neighborhood. If Xi moves against Taiwan, his arsenal will be better positioned than the U.S. and is more sophisticated than Iran’s.

Deterring Xi from making that move will require more capability and more defense spending. Sen. Roger Wicker has unveiled a [plan](#) to increase defense spending to 5% of GDP. Similarly, the Commission on National Defense Strategy [recommends](#) lifting defense spending to levels “commensurate with the U.S. national effort seen during the Cold War.”

Although the president recently [called](#) for more military spending, the administration’s FY2026 defense budget was just 3.2% of GDP. The Cold War average was more than twice that.

The Way Forward

It is time to maintain a policy of “strategic ambiguity” to one of strategic clarity because of the great danger it presents. The secret alliances that led to World War I remind us that there is a greater risk in leaving defense guarantees opaque. The open defense treaties that followed World War II, and prevented World War III remind us that the prudent course is clarity of commitment.

There is a blueprint for deterring war over Taiwan: Washington needs to be clear about the nature of its commitment to Taiwan. Washington needs to view alliances not as liabilities to cut, but as resources to nurture. “We cannot afford,” as Churchill once counseled, “to work on narrow margins, offering temptations to a trial of strength.”

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