

#1509 Preparing for the next proxy-war (China and Taiwan)

Intro 8-26-22

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award winning Best of the Left Podcast, in which we shall take a look at the tensions between China and Taiwan, the tensions between China and the U.S. vis-a-vis Taiwan, the tensions between Russia, Europe, and the U.S. vis-a-vis China and Taiwan, and the tensions between these small minded struggles for global power and the dangers posed to the human race by nuclear weapons. Clips today are from Al Jazeera, Today, Explained, Democracy Now!, The Bradcast, and The Majority Report, with additional members-only clips from On the Media and Democracy Now!

Why China and the US are at odds over Taiwan: Start Here - Al Jazeera - Air Date 11-8-21

[00:00:39] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** Taiwan is an island stuck in a kind of political limbo. It's a democratic, self-governing territory. Just over the water is China, which claims Taiwan is its own, but many Taiwanese take issue with that. Then you add in the U.S., which has taken on the role of neighborhood cop, and you end up with Taiwan as the focus for many big competing interests. But to understand how we got here, you have to know the backstory. Taiwan was ruled by Imperial China for 200 years. Then Japan had it for 50 years after winning war against China. But when Japan lost in World War II, China, one of the victors, got Taiwan back again. Then you had the Chinese Civil War. Mao Zedong's communist forces took over the mainland, while the other side, the nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek, escaped to Taiwan. So in 1949, China sort of split in two, and you had two rival governments, one in Taiwan, one in Beijing, both claiming they were the true government of China. The side in Taiwan was known as the Republic of China, the ROC, and that's still the island's official name today. And on the mainland, the Communist Party declared a brand new Chinese state: the People's Republic of China, PRC for short. Now, remember the U.S. wasn't exactly a fan of communism. And so it was the ROC in Taiwan that mostly got the international recognition, including a seat at the UN. But by the 1970s, that seat didn't really make sense anymore. The UN passed a resolution confirming the

representatives from the PRC as the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations. And so the ROC was out.

[00:02:27] **CHIANG KAI-SHEK:** We are being deserted. We are being forsaken.

[00:02:30] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** So what does all this mean for Taiwan's political status today? Well, it leaves it in that limbo we talked about at the beginning. Now from Beijing's perspective, it's pretty clear: China is one country and Taiwan is part of it. Right now the island governs itself, but Beijing's position is that eventually it'll be reunited with the mainland. And lately Chinese president Xi Jinping has been emphasizing that a lot and linking it to his big policy known as "national rejuvenation".

[00:02:59] **CHINESE PRESIDENT XI JINPING:** [translated from Chinese] The separation of Taiwan is the biggest obstacle to the reunification of the motherland and a serious hidden danger to national rejuvenation.

[00:03:09] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** So what about Taiwan's status according to Taiwan? Well, the President, Tsai Ing-wen, and her party have never fully accepted the idea that Taiwan is a part of China. But at the same time, they're not explicitly pushing for Taiwan to be recognized as independent. It is a bit of a fudge, really. They say that Taiwan is effectively independent, so they just want things to stay the way they are.

[00:03:32] **TAIWANESE PRESIDENT TSAI ING-WEN:** [translated from Chinese] We will do our utmost to prevent the status quo from being unilaterally altered.

[00:03:37] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** Okay, so what about the U.S.? Well, their position is also a bit of a fudge. It even has an official name: "strategic ambiguity". On the one hand, they do acknowledge that Taiwan is a part of China and not an independent country - there's no official U.S. embassy in Taipei, for example - but on the other hand, they sort of want China to leave Taiwan alone, and the U.S. has suggested they would defend Taiwan militarily in certain circumstances.

[00:04:04] **PROF. CHARLES GLASER:** There are reports that the United States has made clear to China that it would defend Taiwan if a Chinese attack is unprovoked, and on the flipside, it's made clear to Taiwan that it will not come to Taiwan's aid if the Chinese attack is provoked.

[00:04:20] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** So that's the big picture. If things spin out of control, we could potentially be talking about a war between the U.S. and China. It means that when things are tense around Taiwan, it's a big deal. And things have been getting tense. Under President Donald Trump, the U.S. got a lot cozier with Taiwan than previous presidents. And Biden's administration has effectively continued in the same direction. Over in Taiwan, the political climate shifted in 2016 when President Tsai Ing-wen took over from a pro-Beijing president. She's been pretty outspoken against Beijing and the question of Taiwan's status has taken on new significance after people in Taiwan saw what China did in Hong Kong.

[00:05:06] **KUANTING CHEN - CEO, TAIWAN NEXTGEN FOUNDATION:** The people of Taiwan saw how they treated Hong Kong, we just realized that their promises, it's not something we can trust.

[00:05:14] **BONNIE GLASER, DIRECTOR, ASIA PROGRAMME GERMAN MARSHALL FUND:** Hong Kong has been completely absorbed into China. The last remaining piece that is missing is Taiwan.

[00:05:21] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** Then you add the fact that both Taiwan and China are expanding their military. So when we see headlines about China flying 150 war planes near Taiwan and the U.S., according to this Wall Street Journal report, secretly deploying troops there, well, it's no small thing.

[00:05:38] **BONNIE GLASER, DIRECTOR, ASIA PROGRAMME GERMAN MARSHALL FUND:** The potential for war does exist. I do not think it is very high, but I do believe it is growing.

[00:05:45] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** And there are a few other factors that raise the stakes even higher when we're talking about Taiwan. First up, its location. It sits in what's called the first island chain in the Western Pacific that extends to Japan in the north all the way down to Indonesia in the south, going through the Philippines.

[00:06:02] **BONNIE GLASER, DIRECTOR, ASIA PROGRAMME GERMAN MARSHALL FUND:** And so if China were to take over Taiwan and deploy PLA forces on Taiwan, that would truly pose an existential threat to Japan. And Japan, of course, is a very important ally of the United States.

[00:06:18] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** Then there are those microchips we mentioned earlier. Taiwan is a world leader. When it

comes to semiconductor technology, the tiny chips that the world has come to rely on. They're in everything from smartphones to aircraft. As far as the smallest, most advanced chips go, around 90% of them are made in Taiwan.

[00:06:38] **PROF. CHARLES GLASER:** This actually is a capability that China's aspiring too. And so then there was this very important question of what would happen if China controlled that production.

[00:06:46] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** The other big thing about Taiwan is that it acts as a kind of lightning rod for the big political rivalry between the U.S. and China and how they see themselves and each other.

[00:06:56] **EINAR TANGEN, CURRENT AFFAIRS COMMENTATOR:** From the Chinese perspective, it just seems like king of the mountain. The U.S. is the most powerful economic, military, and political country in the world and they wanna stay that way.

[00:07:06] **PROF. CHARLES GLASER:** Taiwan is now a mature and vibrant democracy and the United States has a longstanding commitment to protecting and advancing democracy.

[00:07:14] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** Let's not forget about the 24 million people who live there. A recent poll suggests around 10% of Taiwanese say they want unification with China at some point. 34% say they want independence at some point. But a majority, 51%, say they simply want to keep things the way they are forever.

[00:07:37] **BONNIE GLASER, DIRECTOR, ASIA PROGRAMME GERMAN MARSHALL FUND:** Most people believe that the best scenario for Taiwan, for the short run at least, is just kicking the can down the road. Helping Taiwan to preserve its freedoms, continue to have economic prosperity, having a limited voice in the international community, but being able to essentially be an autonomous entity.

[00:08:02] **SANDRA GATHMANN - HOST, AL JAZEERA:** Things with Taiwan might be ambiguous, but maybe it's better that way. Maybe Taiwan is an example where doing nothing is actually the best.

Pelosi in Taiwan - Today, Explained - Air Date 8-2-22

[00:08:12] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** What is China's policy toward Taiwan, and I mean both its official policy and also the way it behaves toward Taiwan?

[00:08:20] **ALEX WARD:** The official policy is that there is, you know, one China. And by the way, I should say that the U.S. believes in that, too, that is the "one China policy". Taiwan is a separate entity. Beijing believes that Taipei is not its own capitol, that it belongs to China. And so the sort of official policy is that eventually there will be the reunification of the island. And so it's been decades in which, you know, sort of a democratic Taiwan has built up basically off the shores of a very communist China.

And so the goal is, you know, perhaps economic integration, perhaps with change in Taiwan's own politics, or just given enough time, there will be a reunification. The thing that worries a lot of people and a lot of people here in the U.S., especially, is that China may grow impatient. And especially with the authoritarian leader in Xi Jinping and especially with other, you know, internal politics. Dictators have politics, too. We always seem to forget that. You know, there are people that might consider Xi weak for allowing the U.S. to still defend Taiwan. So this is sort of leading to some concerns that China's gearing up for an invasion of Taiwan, not imminently, not anytime soon, but soon enough. The Chinese timeline, let's say, and I'm making this up, is like 20 years from now, well, the American timeline, and of course the Taiwanese timeline is never. Never do that.

[00:09:36] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** Okay. So Nancy Pelosi's visit is making a lot of people tense. Did she get approval for this trip from President Biden?

[00:09:44] **ALEX WARD:** No. The opposite. She, um, well actually not even the opposite. Biden, didn't call her as far as we know and say, Please, don't go. What Pelosi heard was a lot of anger through the media about what U.S. officials were thinking. White house officials: Oh, why would we start another fight when we've got the Russia-Ukraine thing going on? And we don't want China to actually start helping Russia in that fight. But what's been interesting, the administration's stance has changed. And changed in the sense that they're like, Look, you know, if she's gonna go, we're gonna do what we can to defend her. It's her right to go. You know, we're never going to kowtow to what a

Chinese leader is saying. You know, if she wants to go, we will not be intimidated. And this was said from the White House podium.

[00:10:25] **JOHN KIRBY, WHITE HOUSE SPOKESPERSON:** Put simply, there is no reason for Beijing to turn a potential visit consistent with longstanding U.S. policy into some sort of crisis or conflict, or use it as a pretext to increase aggressive military activity in or around the Taiwan straight

[00:10:42] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** President Biden didn't want her to go. What about her Republican colleagues, many of whom share her hawkishness on China? What do they think about this?

[00:10:50] **ALEX WARD:** They're delighted. It's a, you know, big deal. And then look, let's not, you know, sugarcoat this. Like, it is a massive deal that she's going, because what it shows is that it's, you know, the highest ranking Democrat in decades to show up in Taiwan. And it's the highest ranking American to show up in, you know, since 1997 in Taiwan and Republicans like it, because there has been sort of a shift in Republican thinking on Taiwan, and I should say among some Democrats as well, but mostly Republicans. They don't like that the U.S. has what's called a strategic ambiguity stance for Taiwan, which basically means that if China were to invade Taiwan, the U.S. is not going to signal what it's going to do, whether it's going to defend Taiwan or whether it's not. Republicans have told me, they've been, oh, very open about this, you know, We should get rid of this, get it done. We will defend Taiwan, is what they want. Like, why make it ambiguous? And that's not what Pelosi's going to Taiwan to say, as far as we know, but it does sort of show a level of closeness and integration that could lead eventually down the line to like, Well, why wouldn't we defend Taiwan?

[00:11:53] **REPORTER:** Are you willing to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan, if it comes to that?

[00:11:57] **PRES. JOE BIDEN:** Yes

[00:11:59] **REPORTER:** You are?

[00:12:01] **PRES. JOE BIDEN:** That's the commitment we made.

[00:12:02] **ALEX WARD:** And I should note, President Joe Biden has three times said the U.S. would defend Taiwan in case of an invasion. Although his team has always walked it back.

[00:12:10] **NORAH O'DONNELL - CBS REPORTER:** Today, they insisted our policy has not changed. And that the president is simply committed to provide Taiwan with the military means to defend itself, as he has in Ukraine.

[00:12:22] **ALEX WARD:** You know, it's sort of this fascinating moment where, you know, especially former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was, like, Hey...

[00:12:27] **MIKE POMPEO:** She should absolutely go.

[00:12:29] **ALEX WARD:** And then you've had the former Defense Secretary Mark Esper, also for Trump, who was just there, basically saying, you know, the one China policy has outlived its usefulness.

[00:12:37] **MARK ESPER:** I think if the Speaker wants to go, she should go.

[00:12:40] **ALEX WARD:** So she's, again, not going there to back a Republican stance, but it's interesting the Republicans are backing her trip and Democrats are the ones who are mostly worried about it. But I also want to reiterate, Pelosi has bucked the Democratic Party for years on China and mostly she's been a fierce advocate for "small d" democratic norms in that country, for human rights, and that, you know, those issues have become increasingly problematic as Xi Jinping's leadership continues the crackdown on Hong Kong, the detention, the forcible detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and his consolidation of power to the point that he could be leader for life.

So, you know, her going to Taiwan in a moment when there's fear that eventually there could be an invasion, you know, it's unsurprising that she feels that way and is doing this and that Republicans are backing her because she has been on her hawkish stance for China more, I would say, on where Republicans have longer been than where Democrats are.

[00:13:36] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** Alex, do you think Taiwanese leaders feel that they're running a risk with this visit or are they happy to have Nancy Pelosi there, even though it's drawn a lot of attention from China?

[00:13:45] **ALEX WARD:** I mean a bit of both. I mean, I've talked to some Taiwanese officials and they are saying, Look, you know, we're worried about what this means. There's no illusions that China is just gonna, you know, sit this one out, right? They're expecting maybe missiles to be shot in the Taiwan straight, you know, near Taiwan itself. More planes, more shifts near the island,

you know, perhaps some cyber-attack or something, you know, there's tons of possibilities. So they're a bit fearful. It's not like this will be, this will just move on by. And of course, it's not like war's going to break out because of this visit, but the chance of miscalculation rises and that doesn't make anyone feel good. But the other part of it is like, Yeah, hell yeah. You know, we're happy to have Nancy Pelosi here because it shows how close America and Taiwan are now, you know how much the U.S. really does seem to care about the plight of Taiwan and all those other things. And it's sort of interesting because, you know, at the inauguration, Taiwan's lead representative, not ambassador, but lead representative to the U.S. showed up there, which was the first time in a while, and then in early 2021 the U.S. ambassador to Pulau went to Taiwan, being the first U.S. envoy to be there since the U.S. changed its policy in 1979. So there's been sort of a closer relationship now, and Pelosi going there is just basically the icing on the cake

[00:15:13] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** As Speaker Pelosi's plane landed in Taiwan, the Washington Post published an op-ed she'd written called "Why I'm Leading a Congressional Delegation to Taiwan": "In the face of the Chinese Communist Party's accelerating aggression, our congressional delegation's visit should be seen as an unequivocal statement that America stands with Taiwan, our democratic partner, as it defends itself and its freedom.

U.S.-China Tensions Rise as Pelosi Vows Ironclad Support for Taiwan During Controversial Trip - Democracy Now! - Air Date 8-3-22

[00:15:42] **AMY GOODMAN:** U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has left Taiwan after a series of high-profile meetings that increased tensions with China, making her the most senior U.S. official to visit Taiwan in 25 years. Pelosi met with Taiwan's president and Taiwanese lawmakers. Their encounter was partly broadcast online.

[00:16:04] **SPEAKER NANCY PELOSI:** It's really clear that while China has stood in the way of Taiwan participating and going to certain meetings, that they understand that they will not stand in the way of people coming to Taiwan. It's a show of friendship, of support, but also a source of learning about how we can work together better in collaboration.

[00:16:28] **AMY GOODMAN:** Pelosi discussed economic plans, including a possible trade deal between Taiwan and the United States, and met with key pro-democracy activists. Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen said she welcomed Pelosi's visit.

[00:16:42] **PRESIDENT TSAI ING-WEN:** The speaker's presence here in Taiwan serves to boost public confidence in the strength of our democracy as a foundation to our partnership with the United States.

[00:16:55] **AMY GOODMAN:** Meanwhile, China responded to Speaker Pelosi's trip to Taiwan in part by announcing plans to carry out new air and naval drills and long-range live-fire exercises in six areas around Taiwan beginning Thursday. Taiwan said the military exercises are, quote, "tantamount to an air and sea blockade of Taiwan." This is a spokeswoman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

[00:17:19] **HUA CHUNYING:** [translated] The relevant actions of the Chinese military are a deterrent to the separatist forces in Taiwan and are justified. You mentioned the issue of the navigation in the waters. We have never seen any problems with the freedom of navigation in the waters. I think you should pay more attention to how U.S. warships and military aircraft have come so far right up to China's doorstep to show off their force.

[00:17:43] **AMY GOODMAN:** This comes as the U.S. is holding a massive military training exercise in the region with Indonesia, Australia, Japan and Singapore for the first half of August, with 5,000 soldiers on the island of Sumatra. This is the commanding general of the U.S. Army Pacific, Charles Flynn.

[00:18:01] **GEN. CHARLES FLYNN:** With all of the technical and procedural aspects of this, it's just a really important expression of our teamwork and our interoperability and our — our unity, really, as a group of nations that are — seek to continue to have a free and open Indo-Pacific.

[00:18:23] **AMY GOODMAN:** For more, we're joined by two guests. In Taipei, Taiwan, Brian Qiu Qixin Hioe is with us, Taiwanese American journalist, founding editor of New Bloom magazine. And in Washington, D.C., Michael Swaine is director of the Quincy Institute's East Asia Program, longtime U.S.-China relations analyst. His books and briefings include *America's Challenge: Engaging a Rising China in the Twenty-First Century*.

We welcome you both back to *Democracy Now!* Brian Hioe, let's begin with you. You're right there in Taipei, where Nancy Pelosi, the House speaker, has just left along with her congressional delegation. Can you talk about the significance of this trip?

[00:19:06] **BRIAN HIOE:** That's right. And so, as mentioned, this is historic in the sense of this has not taken place in 25 years. But what is also interesting is that there has been such a large response. Under the Biden administration, there has more been the pattern of announcing these kind of visits after they take place. This gives China less of a window to react. But news of this broke much earlier, once there was a scoop by the Financial Times. And so, then, there have been weeks of discussion.

But I think that what is interesting to note, or what is significant to note, is that while Taiwan would directly be in the line of fire from China, there is actually not panic the way there was in the international world, and much discussion of it. I think there's not a lot of attention paid to that, Taiwanese and their own threat assessment of what this will lead to. And so, we'll see about the exercises, because China claims it will only last for three days, and it does want to play them up as blockade now, but that is to be questioned.

[00:19:54] **JUAN GONZALEZ:** And, Brian, what's your sense of the reaction within Taiwan among the Taiwanese people to — and the government, as well - - to Nancy Pelosi's efforts? There have been some reports that even within the Taiwan government, there were concerns about her visit.

[00:20:12] **BRIAN HIOE:** Well, I think the general public was not actually aware that this was really taking place until very recently. There is even a joke on the internet nowadays that people thought Pelosi was the name of a typhoon, that something was coming, it could cause chaos, but it was a typhoon. And so, now this visit's happened.

But there's also a question under what circumstances it took place. There was a report from a very pro-China media outlet, which has been reporting on — is taking funding and editorial direction from the Chinese government directly. The report claims that Taiwan tried to turn down Pelosi, to disinvite her, fearing the dangers, but that Pelosi was still insistent on going. That's hard to say. It's hard to know the veracity of this report. But the Taiwanese government is not in a position to say no to the U.S., even when it comes to issues that might put it in the line of fire.

[00:20:57] **JUAN GONZALEZ:** And I'd like to ask Michael Swaine — here we are less than a year since the disastrous end of the 20-year U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, just six months since Washington's efforts to expand NATO triggered the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a conflict that's destabilized the entire world, pushed us closer to nuclear war. Why would our political leaders risk at the same time a new confrontation with China, our planet's rising economic power and its most populous nation?

[00:21:34] **MICHAEL SWAINE:** Well, that's an excellent question. I'm not sure I know the answer to it, why they would want to do this at this time. I think the administration was not, in truth, terribly happy about Nancy Pelosi's decision to take a congressional delegation to Taiwan at this time, but they certainly knew about it well in advance, and they could have done a lot more to try to discourage it, but they did not. And I guess, from what they've been saying since her visit there, that this is really no big deal, there's no difference here between what she's doing today and what's happened in the past, that they think the Chinese will sort of shrug and say, "OK, well, I guess, no big deal."

But, of course, that is not exactly what's happening. You've got, if anything, the reverse. The Chinese have embarked on, as you said in your setup, a series of military actions here that rival or exceed the military actions that they took back in 1995, '96. And it's very hard to see how the Pelosi visit has helped or advanced Taiwan's security in light of this kind of Chinese reaction.

Pelosi in Taiwan Part 2 - Today, Explained - Air Date 8-2-22

[00:22:37] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** Alex, what is China saying about Pelosi's visit to the U.S.? What is Xi Jinping saying to his own people? What is he DMing to Taiwan's leaders? What do we know for certain about how China feels here?

[00:22:50] **ALEX WARD:** So, they're unhappy, right? So what they're planning again is some sort of increased aggression in the sense of missile strikes into the water, airplane incursions, ships, et cetera. But what they've been saying is like, Look...

[00:23:05] **REPORTER:** In a call that we're told lasted more than two hours, Xi warned President Biden, "Those who play with fire will perish by it. It is hoped that the U.S. will be clear-eyed about this".

[00:23:18] **ALEX WARD:** And he says that a lot. It's a pretty evocative phrase, but Chinese state-run media commentators have basically been threatening and they take their cues from the leader and from the government. Like, they would consider shooting down. Pelosi's plane. But there's no real risk of that. Sorry. I shouldn't say no real risk. It's like, you know, 0.0001%. That would be a calamitous moment. But there is fear in the White House and elsewhere, from what the Chinese are saying that like, this is going to lead to short term, perhaps medium term, escalation. And that's something, you know, no one can really afford at the moment. And especially with the Russia-Ukraine thing going on. So, you know what China is basically saying is like, You should have stopped her from going, Joe Biden. The fact that you didn't is a signal to us that you really are trying to escalate this moment. Because look, it's a Democratic Speaker of the House under a Democratic President. And you know, whether or not we know that it's kind of hard for Biden to tell Pelosi what to do, that doesn't translate well elsewhere in the world. They go, Okay, well, obviously this is a signal, even a wink-wink signal. So a very unhappy China about this event.

[00:24:26] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** What do China's threats about Taiwan actually mean? What has happened in the recent past that we might worry about?

[00:24:34] **ALEX WARD:** Well, I think we should first know that even though they might be sending signals to the U.S., it's mostly for a domestic audience, right? We gotta remember where Xi Jinping is here. And I try to always emphasize dictators have politics, too. So Xi Jinping has a Party Congress this fall, the 20th Communist Party Congress, in which he is both trying to finalize his forever rule and trying to get passed some of his own policy preferences. There are parts of that Communist Party that do not want him to lead for life and do also consider him weak. And how weak does this make Xi Jinping look, if Nancy Pelosi lands in Taiwan, you know, weeks, months before that Party Congress. It is unsurprising then that Xi and his, you know, apparatus is putting out tons of messages signaling strength, signaling they would shoot down the plane, you know, showing that they would do more military stuff.

[00:25:27] **REPORTER:** "If speaker Pelosi visits Taiwan, said the Chinese foreign affairs spokesman, it would grossly interfere in China's internal affairs."

[00:25:35] **ALEX WARD:** Um, being quite, you know, boisterous about this visit...

[00:25:40] **REPORTER:** ...he warned the Chinese military would never sit idly by.

[00:25:44] **ALEX WARD:** And again, part of this is just, sort of, what happens in China, right? That you, when something goes wrong, you show your strength, you roar a bit. But of course, the problem, everyone knows that China doesn't want, at the moment, a war with Taiwan cause it doesn't feel like it's ready and it would basically shift the entire narrative of what China's trying to do, which is a "peaceful rise" and could jeopardize its perhaps ultimate goal of being the world's top power, right? If it effectively launches World War III. So it is for the U.S., you know, in hopes of like, why not try to stop Pelosi from going, especially if you do, you could make the Biden administration look weak. So that's a win-win. But it is also mostly for the domestic audience of like, Xi is unhappy and he will respond strongly if this happens. So it's a bit of a dual game here.

[00:26:27] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** Alex, would the U.S. get involved if China and Taiwan went to war? What do we know about this?

[00:26:32] **ALEX WARD:** The U.S. has, what's a policy of strategic ambiguity. So we do not say whether or not we will defend Taiwan, even though we've, you know, given billions of dollars to, for Taiwan to defend itself, like that's basically our policy: You, Taiwan, defend yourself. We'll help you do so, but whether or not we will come to your defense, we'll leave strategically ambiguous. Now President Joe Biden three times has said the U.S. will come and defend Taiwan. And each time his staff has walked back his comment saying the policy hasn't changed, he himself has said that. But you know, when you on three occasions, and you're the President, kind of go, Yes, it is our policy to defend Taiwan, that ups the ante. That's almost, you know, defacto changes the policy. You know, whether a future President sort of continues that or follows strategic ambiguity, since 1979, we don't know. It does feel like if it was 50/50 before it's like 55/45 now that the U.S. would do so. In which case we're talking about really a massive conflict here, which would also bring in, you know, Japan, probably South Korea, um, other U.S. allies and who knows what else? It would be as close to World War III, if not World War III, than you'd ever seen.

[00:27:41] **NOEL KING - HOST, TODAY, EXPLAINED:** What, Alex, is a war between China and Taiwan, most likely to start over?

[00:27:48] **ALEX WARD:** Well, anything that could spark a miscalculation and lead to a mistrust between, you know, the U.S., Taiwan, and China. And Pelosi's visit isn't like the perfect thing for that, but it's darn close because it feels like... if you're from, if you're in Beijing right now, you're going, again, the second in line to the presidency, you know, after the President and the Vice President themselves, it's the Speaker of the House of the same party as the President going to Taiwan to basically go democracy "small d", you know, is good. Human rights is good. We stand by Taiwan. Then you have Chinese military exercises in response to that because of Xi Jinping's own political needs. You know, he's gotta act tough, which will then lead to some sort of perhaps stronger response from Taiwan and the U.S. Then, who knows? This could spiral out of control. That's sort of been the big issue here, is that something small-ish causes a series of miscalculations and escalations that eventually leads to someone doing something very stupid and starts a war. Again, I wouldn't say Pelosi's visit is it. We have precedent, right? Former Speaker Newt Gingrich was there in 1997. Tons of American lawmakers have gone to Taiwan. This isn't new, but the fact that China's responding so, you know, angrily to this could lead them to do something dumb, which leads Taiwan or the U.S. to do something dumb. And then everyone just sort of dumbs upwards into a war.

There has always been an inescapable tension at the heart of U.S. policy towards Taiwan. We recognize one China. China is the, with which we have relations, but we're still helping to defend this island, that China wants to reintegrate, to defend itself. It was always going to be a bandaid over an irreconcilable problem. And so the reason it becomes such an issue is because, you know, it's a tinderbox, right? It's so fraught with danger. There's so many potential pathways to miscalculation that the last thing you wanna do is just sort of light the match. Pelosi going there isn't necessarily the match. But it is, like, her basically lifting, you know, taking the matchbook out of her pocket and going, Hmmm? Um, so there's a reason everyone's sort of angry about this and especially with the time that we're in, like, do you really wanna even risk a second bigger fight? Not that it's likely, but do you even wanna risk it? And the problem with Pelosi's visit is that it does risk that unnecessarily.

George Beebe of the Quincy Institute on the Russia-Ukraine war - The BradCast - Air Date 8-2-22

[00:30:26] **BRAD FRIEDMAN - HOST, THE BRADCAST:** Nancy Pelosi landed in Taiwan late on Tuesday after reportedly being dissuaded from that trip

by President Biden and the Pentagon for fears of exacerbating tensions between China and the US, as it's the highest level visit to Taiwan since then-Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich visited back in 1997, I believe. I have noticed Russian media has been absolutely obsessed with the -- well, with the possibility of this visit now for several days. And they frequently argue that the US is meddling in China's sovereign affairs in what seems to me to be a way to distract from or counter what Russia themselves are doing in Ukraine. As a Russian expert and as director of grand strategy at Quincy Institute, how does the Pelosi visit to Taiwan affect Russia? And is it an ill-considered move amid these increasingly tense relations between China and the US?

[00:31:32] **GEORGE BEEBE:** Well, from the Russian point of view, their relationship with the west is over. They no longer have any realistic possibility of good relations with Europe and the United States anytime soon. So this war in Ukraine has made them almost completely dependent on China.

And you know, from Russia's point of view, the Pelosi visit is a godsend. Because up to this point, the United States has been attempting to, through persuasion and coercion, to prevent the Chinese from really providing serious backing to Russia in the war in Ukraine. And the Chinese have been quite ambivalent about this, I think. They have been hesitant to side openly with the Russians in this. And what the Pelosi visit essentially is doing is exacerbating tensions between the United States and China in a way that will only encourage the Chinese to side more overtly with the Russians.

And the ultimate problem from our point of view would be if the Chinese provide the Russians with real military assistance in all of this. That could have a quite decisive effect on prospects on the battlefield. So the Russians are essentially thanking Nancy Pelosi for exacerbating the US-Chinese relationship in a way that could help Russia form a much closer, more cooperative partnership with China.

Fallout From Nancy Pelosis Taiwan Visit - The Majority Report - Air Date 8-4-22

[00:33:10] **EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** It's notable to say that there's a power and balance here, right? Because the Taiwanese government officials are not necessarily in a position to turn down a US politician of her stature, given the United States' commitment to defending Taiwan militarily, if China does choose to escalate. But the US has not really contested China's sovereignty publicly over Taiwan since the 1970s, so it's a

very delicate balance here. And that is independent of our views on Taiwan's self-determination because I, of course, I think Taiwan should be able to be independent if it so chooses. But that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about the United States as a third party and it's posture potentially escalating conflict between China and the United States.

And this also comes after the bill just passed the Senate, the CHIPS bill, which is explicitly written in a way that escalates, rhetorically at the very least, and also economically, a rivalry between the United States and China. And I just think history should tell us that we should be wary of these kinds of escalations, based on the cold war and the fallout from that. And it's a complex dance. But Nancy Pelosi threw a wrench in that, presumably against the wishes of the Biden administration, against what most diplomats and people in international relations in government and people who analyze this from the outside -- against all of those recommendations.

And here she is in Taiwan, responding to the outcry about her visit, which I think should have been a bit more specific, frankly.

[00:35:07] **NANCY PELOSI:** But I think it's important to note that members of Congress, several of them had made trips just earlier this year, five senators, bipartisan, came again, including the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, Mr. Menendez came, not too much of a fuss was made. Individual senators have made trips or planned to make trips.

And I just hope that it's really clear that while China has stood in the way of Taiwan participating and going to certain meetings, that they understand that they will not stand in the way of people coming to Taiwan. It's a show of friendship, of support, but also a source of learning about how we can work together better in collaboration.

So I think that they made a big fuss because I'm Speaker, I guess, I don't know if that was a reason or an excuse, because they didn't say anything when the men came.

[00:36:07] **EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** More female conflict escalators, right? I mean, I cannot believe that she took that tack. But naturally I guess that's something she falls back on. Can we pull up this thread from this Harvard professor who's done actual work in this space? He spoke about why her visit to Taiwan was such a terrible idea. Do we have this?

There's William H. Overholt: "Thread: Pelosi accomplished much in Taiwan. She stimulated cyber attacks. Got thousands of businesses banned from exporting to China. Shut down the important cross-Straits communications tool Weibo, elicited mainland military exercises and stimulated an imminent temporary blockade."

Good, scroll down. "Long run consequences are more important. She raised tensions at the time when tension is already excessive. She damaged Xi Jinping when he's ensuring his third term & is under attack for being weak on Taiwan. This forces him to take especially strong ongoing measures.

"She irritated allies who want support against China, but fear U.S. provocation of China. From Australia to Japan, they resented not being consulted." And by the way, this is at the same time that the US is doing its annual military exercise off the coast of China with other Asian countries. "She made the U.S. look weak and divided by ignoring the advice of the most informed parts of the executive branch. Biden made that worse by insisting he couldn't influence her and Blinken made it worse by appearing supportive after the fait accompli. She raised the baseline for future military signaling, which to show seriousness will now have to start with exercises completely surrounding Taiwan and likely blockading it. The added tensions will imperil vital efforts to get China to agree to guardrails that would limit the risks of accidents, misunderstanding and unwanted escalation. What she didn't do was strengthen Taiwan or U.S. support for Taiwan in any way. Trump, Pompeo, and Biden already pushed that support to a point that jeopardized the 1979 understanding, which is the foundation of Taiwan's enjoyment of peace, prosperity and democracy. Her visit was not just a rerun of Newt Gingrich's visit the generation earlier, which occurred during an entirely different relationship between the two countries. It was a political stunt that took a dangerous situation and made it more dangerous."

I thought that that was very well put, frankly. The reality of the situation is that, as I said, kind of at the start of the show, the stakes for Nancy Pelosi are very different from the stakes of the people in Taiwan.

As I mentioned there, I, I think her visit was concealed up until the very last moment, partly because they want to take China by surprise to a degree. But it also, there were memes reportedly circulating about her visit that no one even knew who she was. And yet she's going there as a political stunt, in order to kind of put a capstone on her decades of anti-China hawkery in the House as her career comes to a close, soon, hopefully. That seems to be the consensus about her motivation.

But we don't face the risk of military threat or violence based on this kind of visit and provocation. Taiwan does. And so for her to conflate and say that just because past government officials have done this, she's third in line to the White House. She's Speaker of the House. There's understand --

[00:39:47] **MATT LECH - PRODUCER, THE MAJORITY REPORT:**

Yeah, I have to say on that. Like, this is not to downplay the significance of it is to basically plant people's ignorance of how it's being greeted in Taiwan, which is a major, like you said, third in line coming to visit them, which doesn't happen.

[00:39:59] **EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:**

Yeah, of course. And so --

[00:40:01] **MATT LECH - PRODUCER, THE MAJORITY REPORT:**

Because of the historical reason, like both Taiwan and China think they're China, like for historical reasons, right? Like this isn't some sort of like -- this is a very complicated historical and political problem.

And yeah, I think Pelosi -- and I also just wanted to note, some people are saying that we can't really know for sure if this was against the wishes of Biden and Blinken, we'll not that just take their word for it until they classify like communications and stuff like that. But it really, it it's what it seems to be is like sending a message to the world post-Ukraine, that we're the tough guys still. And that's not a message that I want Pelosi sending.

[00:40:36] **EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:**

And for people downplaying military exercises because of this, and the show of force by China as they were shooting live ammunition and missiles in the waters outside of Taiwan.

Think of how you would feel if you were in Taiwan. I think there's really an arrogance surrounding this discussion, frankly. We don't know how that feels. No one seemed to think this visit by Pelosi was a good idea. And I really wish that the coverage about it treated the decision with the respective disgust that it deserves, frankly.

U.S.-China Tensions Rise as Pelosi Vows _Ironclad_ Support for Taiwan During

Controversial Trip Part 2 - Democracy Now! - Air Date 8-3-22

[00:41:15] **MICHAEL SWAINE:** I think the important point here is to understand what the larger context is of the relationship and the understanding reached between the United States and China regarding Taiwan at the time of normalization back in the 1970s and recognition in 1979. At that time, China and the United States basically reached an understanding over Taiwan, which was a very contentious issue at the time, and in order to try to neutralize that issue, the Chinese basically made a statement that they would pursue peaceful unification as a top priority. They wouldn't give up the possibility of use of force, because they regard Taiwan as sovereign Chinese territory, and a sovereign state can exercise military force over its own territory. However, they said, "We will no longer seek to liberate Taiwan by force as our policy. We're going to try a peaceful unification for years and work on that." By the same token, China said, "OK, we recognize that China is the legitimate government — the PRC is the legitimate government of China, and we do not challenge the claim by China that Taiwan is a part of China." Now, they didn't say they officially recognized, in a legal sense, Taiwan as part of China, but they said they don't challenge it. So, what you had here was the One China policy, peaceful unification.

Now, what's happened since that time is there's been a steady erosion on both sides in the level of their apparent commitment to those original pledges. And Nancy Pelosi's trip, this latest trip, represents yet another movement away from the different understandings and stipulations and procedures that were basic to the One China policy that the United States had been pursuing for years. She flew over to Taiwan on an official U.S. military jet, that looked like Air Force One. She described her visit in Taiwan as an official visit. She publicized it in a very major way, unlike Newt Gingrich, who went as Speaker of the House 25 years ago to Taiwan. Newt Gingrich went to Beijing first. He stopped in Taiwan very briefly and then moved on. The Chinese didn't like it then. But now what Pelosi has done is much larger scale than this, much higher publicity, much more the trappings of an official visit. And that is really a basic violation of the understanding that the United States and China reached at the time of normalization, as I say. And there have been a lot of other developments over the years —

[00:43:40] **BRIAN HIOE:** I'd like to cut in here, actually. So, can I ask —

[00:43:41] **MICHAEL SWAINE:** — that have moved Taiwan closer and closer to the U.S.

[00:43:42] **BRIAN HIOE:** Can I ask, actually, why we are talking about a 50-year-old agreement without talking about the wishes of the Taiwanese people in the slightest, justifying that the present actions China takes are somehow justified towards Taiwan because of these two imperial powers — the U.S. and China — deciding on the fate of Taiwan? I think there's often a misperception that Taiwanese people are irrational, pursuing independence at all costs, even if this means regional conflict. But I think that if you look at the way Taiwanese people vote, it's pragmatic, the path that they think will avoid conflict, will allow to retain their democracies. And so, I don't know, then, why we're talking about 50-year-old treaties by imperial powers, as though this were the left-wing or progressive position here.

[00:44:21] **MICHAEL SWAINE:** Well, the point here is not so much what the Taiwanese themselves are saying in this regard. What I was just saying was about the United States —

[00:44:29] **BRIAN HIOE:** So, then, it doesn't matter, huh?

[00:44:29] **MICHAEL SWAINE:** — and U.S. policy. The issue here — my point is the One China policy and the peaceful reunification agreement and understanding provided Taiwan with decades of stability and development. And that sort of relationship —

[00:44:44] **BRIAN HIOE:** Under authoritarian rule, though, backed by the U.S.

[00:44:46] **MICHAEL SWAINE:** — should continue. It should continue. And right now shifting on both sides, by both the Chinese and by the United States, away from this original understanding, is actually weakening security for Taiwan. It's undermining Taiwan's own security. The Taiwanese don't want changes in the status quo. They want a continuation of the status quo, and that's not what they're getting. They're not getting that with Nancy Pelosi.

[00:45:10] **BRIAN HIOE:** So, will that occur? I mean, you look at the fate of Hong Kong. You look at increasing Chinese threats directed at Taiwan. Even if Taiwan — you just claim as though if it do nothing, and then things would be all right. That's not the case. China actively tries to undermine Taiwan. For example, there are Taiwanese that are kidnapped by China. For example, Lee Ming-che was one of the people that Pelosi met with today. Obviously this is political stunt, but there's that. You look at the police crackdown in Hong Kong,

the detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. And these do not offer alternatives that Taiwanese people think of as peace. China is a power that is expanding. It wishes to expand. It wishes to challenge the U.S. It is modeling itself after the U.S., even using anti-terror discourse drawn from the U.S. war on terror. And so, then, why do you think that China would simply allow Taiwan to let live? That's not how imperial powers work.

[00:45:54] **MICHAEL SWAINE:** I don't generalize to imperial powers, across the board, they all behave as such. I don't want to get into that kind of argument, because you get into all kinds of exceptions when you talk about that. But in this particular case, I think the issue is what best serves Taiwan's security interests over time. If you assume that the Chinese have absolutely —

[00:46:14] **BRIAN HIOE:** And so, have you talked to Taiwanese people about what they think is best in their interests?

[00:46:16] **MICHAEL SWAINE:** If you assume that the Chinese have absolutely no interest whatsoever in maintaining — in avoiding a conflict over Taiwan, that they're just basically preparing to attack Taiwan, seize it and hold it, then we are in a different kind of situation from what we have been in for the last many decades. And I would not assume that the Chinese are developing or focused primarily on a policy of invading, seizing and holding Taiwan. They're not stupid. They understand that that would be a huge roll of the dice. What they would prefer to do is to establish a relationship with Taiwan that was one in which Taiwan became increasingly inclined towards dealing with the mainland in some political way and could resolve the situation peacefully. That's what they'd like.

Now, the Chinese have not been doing things that make that more likely. I'm not letting the Chinese off the hook here. I'm saying that the Chinese themselves have also been doing things that have been changing the status quo. Yes, they have been raising concerns in Taiwan and in the United States. And the United States has, in turn, responded to this by doubling down on deterrence. So what you have on both sides now is a heavy emphasis on military deterrence, heavy emphasis on worst-case outcomes, very little real communication about Taiwan and where Taiwan's status lies and how you can stabilize the country. You've got this posturing going on and this positioning going on between both sides that is not serving the interests of Taiwan at all.

[00:47:39] **JUAN GONZALEZ:** If I can, if I can ask Brian, following up on this issue of the rest of the world not taking into account the aspirations of the Taiwanese people: If the Taiwanese people do wish, the majority of them, for

independence from China, is it the responsibility of the United States to defend Taiwan's viewpoints? Why should the United States be the country that is constantly the policeman of where democracy is expressed in the world?

[00:48:09] **BRIAN HIOE:** Well, has it been? I mean, the U.S. backed authoritarian dictatorship in Taiwan for decades under Chiang Kai-shek and his son, Chiang Ching-kuo. And now, in the present, Taiwan is a geopolitical chess piece for the U.S., to be traded off perhaps, or it raises stakes for negotiations. That was very visible under Donald Trump. You know, some idealized him in Taiwan. And then, now, the present, the view from Americans is that, "Well, we should just fork over Taiwan to China," that this is the way to keep peace. It seems very convenient logic for people from an imperial power in order to always maintain this.

So, what is the outcome that we hope for? It is not conflict on either side. There will be enormous losses, Taiwanese or Chinese — more Chinese perhaps, in fact, based on some of the estimates — of an invasion. So, how do we avoid this outcome? But we cannot assume that China will be an active rational actor here, when it's increasingly authoritarian. Xi Jinping's interests are not those of the Chinese people. For example, provoking a crisis, losing an enormous amount of — tens of thousands of young people, that might be the way for Xi to maintain power. It might be the way to expand power for him. It cannot be, then, just assuming that the CCP will act rationally, always just hoping for Taiwan to become willing to join with China, because what we see is that it takes a velvet glove approach sometimes, offering economic incentives; at the same time, it tries to set examples, which we see in Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang, authoritarian repression, drilling in the South China Seas, territorial claims disputed with other Southeast Asian countries in the area. And so, there is that. This world is not just that of between the U.S. and China. And we cannot act, as progressives or leftists, seeing things in a bipolar world, seeing no other agency from any other force. We need to think of ways out of this binary. And I don't see that happening.

Hong Kong's Rewritten Histories - On the Media - Air Date 7-6-22

[00:49:40] **ANNALEE NEWITZ - HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** I recently read a great book about Hong Kong that hit some sweet spots for me. History, myth, activism, and what it means to call a place home. It's by reporter Louisa Lim who grew up in Hong Kong and has covered China for NPR and the BBC. The book is called *Indelible City: Dispossession and Defiance in Hong Kong*. Lim's

work feels particularly relevant now, because this fall students in Hong Kong will learn a new version of history, one that erases the fact that Hong Kong was ever a British colony.

According to four history books now under development in China, Hong Kong has always been a part of China, despite 156 years of British dominion. China has promoted this narrative ever since 1997, when the British left the hundreds of islands and one peninsula that make up the territory of Hong Kong. However, many Hong Kongers cannot forget their colonial history. One such Hong Konger was the so-called King of Kowloon. Lim describes him as a graffiti artist who went from being a quote toothless often shirtless disabled trash collector to a symbol of Hong Kong's defiance by the time he died in 2007. He believed that the peninsula of Kowloon rightfully belonged to his family and that the British had stolen it in the 1860s.

In 1956, he took to the streets, painting calligraphy on the walls of Hong Kong in his shaky, stilted handwriting. He raged against the British empire, scribbling down his entire family tree and the names of places he believed his family had lost.

[00:51:22] **LOUISA LIM:** And he'd write on the walls, electricity boxes, the lampposts, the flyovers, all these kind of bits of street furniture that you don't normally notice. And the government cleaners would clean away his work, and he'd often come back the next day and write at the same place.

[00:51:39] **ANNALEE NEWITZ - HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** In her book, Lim explains that the history of her city has always been shrouded in many contradictory myths. In defiance of these narratives, the King of Kowloon created his own personal history of the place, capturing the imagination of Louisa Lim and her fellow Hong Kongers.

[00:51:57] **LOUISA LIM:** His calligraphy became a real collective memory for Hong Kongers when the future was really uncertain. No one knew what going back to China would mean. But day after day, there was King of Kowloon, and over time he became an iconic figure. There were songs sung about him, rap songs and jazz ballads and poets wrote poems to him, and he appeared in local films, in adverts. He went on to represent Hong Kong in the Venice Biennale.

[00:52:26] **ANNALEE NEWITZ - HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** Here's a clip from your podcast called the King of Kowloon.

[00:52:31] **CLIP FROM KING OF KOWLOON PODCAST:** I was looking at him as a spectacle rather than profit.

He was completely mad, completely bonkers. He was incoherent. He was certifiable.

Only when you go crazy, you can see the truth

[00:52:48] **LOUISA LIM:** Decades after his death, in 2007, the themes that he was writing about, dispossession and sovereignty, territory, and loss, these are themes that are right at the very heart of Hong Kong's political crisis.

[00:53:05] **ANNALEE NEWITZ - HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** And as you were investigating his life, you encountered a lot of conflicting and overlapping stories about Hong Kong and its history. And the King of Kowloon's story kind of challenges the history of Hong Kong that you were taught as a child attending school there under British sovereignty. And that version of history was dreamed up in 1841 by Lord Palmerston, Britain's former Prime Minister at the height of British Imperial power, and obviously it served the British interests. So what does this version of the story deliberately leave out?

[00:53:39] **LOUISA LIM:** So the British version says that Hong Kong was a barren rock before the British arrival. A barren rock with nary a house on it as Lord Palm famously wrote. It makes it sound like there was nothing there, and that solely through British intervention Hong Kong became this international center of commerce. Britain was a civilizing force. That wasn't true, Hong Kong has an extremely long pre-British history going all the way back to the middle neolithic era. The British census on arrival said that Hong Kong had thousands of inhabitants. So it simply wasn't true, but that didn't mean that that's not the version that was so popular, and I think still is in people's imaginations.

[00:54:29] **ANNALEE NEWITZ - HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** In 1997, the British handover sovereignty of Hong Kong to China, and there's this elaborate ceremony where the British flag was lowered, followed by a few seconds of silence, and then the Chinese flag was raised.

[00:54:42] **JOURNALIST:** Speaking for the British monarchy, which had ruled 800 million people only 50 years, the Prince of Wales.

[00:54:49] **PRINCE OF WALES:** The eyes of the world are on Hong Kong today. I wish you all a successful transition and a prosperous and peaceful future.

[00:55:01] **ANNALEE NEWITZ - HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** And in those early years after the British evacuated the island, we see a new historical narrative emerging from Beijing. And that's one that explicitly rejects this barren rock idea.

[00:55:13] **LOUISA LIM:** So the Chinese version of Hong Kong history claims that Hong Kong has been a part of Chinese soil since time immemorial. That Hong Kong's culture is the same as Chinese culture. Basically this agrarian, grain growing, rice eating kind of culture. The interesting thing is that version of history is in flux. Just over the last couple of weeks, it's emerged that China's rewritten Hong Kong's textbooks yet again.

Now they're claiming that Hong Kong never was a British colony. They're saying that when the British took over Hong Kong, there were these series of treaties, which the Chinese call unequal treaties. They say they were forced upon them by gunboat diplomacy, by violence, and they never actually agreed to any of these treaties. So sovereignty was never ceded. It's a crazy argument when you think of all those governors and the British administration of Hong Kong to claim that it was never a colony, but it also shows you the sort of mutability of history.

[00:56:26] **ANNALEE NEWITZ - HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** And then of course, there's this other story about Hong Kong that originates with Hong Kongers themselves. It's deliberately mythical and involves a race of fish headed mermen called Lo Ting. You quote Roland, Bart, the French philosopher, saying the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in turn and produce an artificial myth.

[00:56:50] **LOUISA LIM:** So the Lo Ting myth is the idea that Hong Kongers are descended from this race of fish headed Merman. In Chinese texts there are some references to the Lo Ting. They were this race of fishermen who live in caves, and the kind of myth that emerges were these were the ancestors of a general in 512 AD, who fought the emperor and was defeated and withdrew with his army of a hundred thousand men to caves in Lantau, where they ate so many fish that they became fishermen. It was a myth that many people liked because it felt as real as any other version of Hong Kong's history, or perhaps even more real to them.

[00:57:48] **ANNALEE NEWITZ - HOST, ON THE MEDIA:** The other thing that was so interesting about this myth is that it suggests that there's a long history of insurrection and resistance in Hong Kong.

[00:57:59] **LOUISA LIM:** There's been this idea, I think, that's really just been imposed on Hong Kongers that Hong Kongers are economic actors, not that interested in politics, only interested in making money. It was an idea that the British used to propagate all the time, and it continued under the Chinese. The Lo Ting really challenges that idea, because these fishmen were mythically descended from a rebel.

There's actually a long history of rebellion in Hong Kong. In the 12th century, there were uprisings against China's salt monopoly in Lantau, the same island. They were by villagers who were illegally harvesting salt, who didn't wanna pay taxes on it. Then over the years, there've been a series of protests, strikes, and boycotts, and all kinds of political action. Even a six day war against British colonial takeover of the new territories in 1898. So actually, hong Kongers have always been a. People, and I think the myth of the Lo Ting, maybe one of the reasons it speaks to them is it recognizes the actual nature of Hong Kongers.

Warnings Grow over Nuclear Annihilation as Tensions Escalate Between U.S., Russia & China - Democracy Now! - Air Date 8-4-22

[00:59:17] **AMY GOODMAN:** The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned this week humanity is, “one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation.” He made the comments at the opening of a major U.N. gathering here in New York to review the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The meeting comes at a time when tensions are escalating between the United States and two other nuclear powers, Russia and China. This is part of António Guterres’s remarks.

[00:59:41] **SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES:** The clouds that parted following the end of the Cold War are gathering once more. We have been extraordinarily lucky so far, but luck is not a strategy, nor is it a shield from geopolitical tensions boiling over into nuclear conflict. Today humanity is just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation. We need a treaty of nonproliferation of nuclear weapons as much as ever, and that is why this review conference is so important. It’s an opportunity to hammer out the measures that will help avoid certain disaster and to put humanity on a new path towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

[01:00:27] **AMY GOODMAN:** And, Zia Mian, during the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, France, the UK and the US issued a statement saying, “Nuclear weapons, for as long as they exist, should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war. We condemn those who would use or threaten to use nuclear weapons for military coercion, intimidation, and blackmail.” Your response?

[01:00:56] **ZIA MIAN:** This is basically the US, France, and the UK saying, “Our nuclear weapons are good. Your nuclear weapons are bad,” even though, as we all know, the US and the UK and France make nuclear threats—it’s called nuclear deterrence. The very practice of nuclear deterrence is military coercion, intimidation, and blackmail. It’s just that when we do it, we call it deterrence; when they do it, you call it for what it is, which is coercion, intimidation, and blackmail.

And Daniel Ellsberg — bless him — pointed this out back in 1950s in a famous lecture on coercion and blackmail in the nuclear age, saying that nuclear weapons, fundamentally, except during times of active war, when they are exploded, are instruments for the threat of nuclear war. They are intended to be instruments of coercion, intimidation, and blackmail. So, all I think we need to do is to accept the fact that for the first time these three weapon states have recognized at least the fact that nuclear weapons are about coercion, intimidation, and blackmail. It’s just the rest of us understand this applies to everybody’s nuclear weapons.

[01:02:09] **NERMEEN SHAIKH:** And, Zia, finally, earlier this year, you attended the Vienna Conference of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Talk about the significance of that treaty, why it was formed to begin with, and what the substance of the discussions were.

[01:02:28] **ZIA MIAN:** So, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is the first international treaty that bans nuclear weapons absolutely and unconditionally. And it also is the first and only treaty that bans the use, and even the threat of use, of nuclear weapons. If we had actually had the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in force with the US and Russia and so on involved, there would have been no question of the threat of use of nuclear weapons by anybody.

The origins of this treaty go back to the beginning of the nuclear age. This was the first decision ever made by the United Nations in 1946. Before anything else, they said we need a plan for the elimination of nuclear weapons. What this treaty does, which entered into force in 2021, was to basically fulfill that first

goal of the United Nations system. We now have an international legal instrument that bans nuclear weapons and bans the use and the threat of use of nuclear weapons.

And in Vienna, the countries that came together as members of this treaty actually made a statement specifically talking about the threat and use of nuclear weapons as we see it today. And they said that this threat and use of nuclear weapons, including by Russia and by anyone under any circumstances, is a violation of international law, is a violation of the U.N. Charter, and should be condemned explicitly and implicitly and irrespective of the circumstances. You couldn't ask for a clearer statement against the threat of nuclear weapons — unlike the kind of statement that we saw that you asked about from France, the UK, and the US, which says, "Our nuclear threats are okay. Everybody else's threats are bad."

[01:04:17] **AMY GOODMAN:** And finally, Dr. Helfand, the U.N. secretary-general heads to Hiroshima for the 77th anniversary of the US dropping the first atomic bomb in the world on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, followed by the dropping of the second bomb on Nagasaki on August 9th, '45. If you could comment on his comment saying we are closer to nuclear annihilation than ever. He'll be meeting with hibakusha — that's Hiroshima bomb survivors — and young activists. And also, whether you think what's happening with the increased tensions with Ukraine, Russia and China are — and now bringing Finland and Sweden into NATO, are escalating tension?

[01:05:10] **DR. IRA HELFAND:** Well, I think the tensions clearly are escalating, and we are closer to nuclear war than we've ever been, and we need to recognize that. The song that you played earlier in the show, "You don't believe we're on the eve of destruction," that's the problem. We don't believe it, because it is such a horrible reality that we're confronting. But we better start believing it, because it's true.

Fortunately, we have to also understand this is not the future that needs to be. There's nothing that makes nuclear destruction inevitable. It's not as though we're dealing with some force of nature that we have no control over. We know how to take these weapons apart, and we need to do that.

Here in the United States, we've launched a national campaign called Back from the Brink to try to force the United States government to change its nuclear policy in a fundamental way, to recognize that nuclear weapons do not make the world secure, they are the greatest threat to security, and they need to be eliminated. To get the United States to play the role which it should,

initiating negotiations with the other nuclear-armed states for the specific verifiable, enforceable, time-bound agreement, so they will come to eliminate their weapons, so they will meet their obligations under Article 6 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and meet their obligations under the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

And at the current session at the NPT in New York, I think it's incredibly important that the non-nuclear weapon states hold the permanent members of the Security Council accountable, that they demand that NATO and Russia in fact issue a statement pledging they will not use nuclear weapons in the context of the war in Ukraine, and they go beyond that and demand that all five members of the Security Council's P5, the permanent members, begin now. During this meeting in New York, the negotiations to eliminate their nuclear weapons, as they have promised to do for 50 years, and that they bring in the other four nuclear-armed states into that process. And that can happen. This is not some fantasy. This is, practically, what needs to happen if we are going to survive.

And the leaders of the great powers — Biden, Xi, and Putin — need to sit down with themselves and recognize the fact that the policies they are pursuing are going to lead to the end of the world that we know. They're playing this game of chicken, this game of king of the mountain, to see who's going to come out on top of this struggle for power and wealth in the world, and they don't seem to understand that while there may be a winner, the mountain that that person ends up sitting on is going to be an ash heap, what's left of our civilization, because they're going to be destroying it. And they need a totally different approach. They need to understand that to deal with the nuclear threat, to do with the climate crisis, to deal with the future pandemics that we will experience, they need to cooperate. They need to work together, or else none of us are going to survive.

Final comments on thoughts too nuanced to share

[01:08:06] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with *Al Jazeera* explaining the two Chinas and the United States strategic ambiguity. *Today, Explained* looked at who was supporting Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan visit. *Democracy Now!* also discussed Pelosi's trip. *Today, Explained* explored the internal politics in China. *The Broadcast* looked at how the situation in China and Taiwan is going to impact Russia. *The Majority Report* highlighted that Taiwan, not the US is the most

likely to get caught in the crossfire of Imperial brinksmanship. And to *Democracy Now!* hosted a debate over whose interests should be centered by progressives.

That's what everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *On The Media* looking at the history of Hong Kong, another quasi independent region in China's orbit. And *Democracy Now!* looked at escalating international tensions through the lens of the threat of nuclear war. To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive... I know, I know. Sorry, if you wanna know how to avoid perishing in a nuclear war, that's for our premium members only. Have we finally reached peak late capitalism? But look, it's really just that that clip was slightly off topic, which usually means it's a good candidate to be a bonus clip, so I didn't plan for it to sound like the worst membership pitch in history. And yet, here we are. So, to hear that and support the show, sign up at bestoftheleft.com/support or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information. So at least there's that.

To wrap up today, I really don't have any more to add, except that that is for complicated reasons. I mentioned at the end of the neurodiversity episode I believe that I've been working on a new project and, you know, since I have ADHD, I often jump headlong into new projects that never end up going anywhere, much less being completed, so that may very well happen again with this one. But in the meantime, this project is taking up a lot of my time and attention and has me doing lots of research on interesting topics, but they are topics that I am not at all ready to talk about, so I can't just pick and choose a few interesting ideas that I've been reading up on and talk about them here at the end of the show.

There was an incident on Twitter recently that reminds me of my own situation. I think his name is Jason Stanley. He's a quasi famous professor and author, writes about anti-authoritarianism that sort of stuff, and he wrote on Twitter recently about something that requires a whole lot more context than he was able to give on Twitter, and he just sort of threw it out there, and I think went actually viral, like started trending because people were piling mostly hate, but also some support on him, and that sort of feels like what would happen to me. Not exactly, I mean, I'm not gonna start trending or anything if I talk about something on the show, but the point is everything I've been researching, reading, thinking about, requires so much context, and the thoughts that I'm trying to pull together are so nuanced, I mean, I'm trying to have nuanced thoughts about things that people generally think too deeply about. And so to try

to pull any of those ideas and chat about them for half a dozen minutes is, well, it's a danger zone.

So, I'm not gonna do that, but then on the other hand, it's been taking up so much of my attention that I don't have any brain space left to have any thoughts about anything else. I think members even heard on a recent bonus episode that we had to... at least on a bonus show, we could take more time and space for it, but one of the topics that we discussed had to be from my research, because I didn't have enough brain space to have another topic to talk about. So, that's how things are going right now, and it's very odd because I'm getting a lot of enjoyment out of this project I'm working on. I sank my teeth into it and now I'm a dog with a bone. But, like a dog with a bone, it's very hard to pull me away from that project to get me to focus on something else, like what I might want to say at the end of a podcast episode, in the final comments. And so here we are, without me having much to add.

But if you would like to help your, particularly voicemails, but also emails are a great source of inspiration, so if you'd like to start a conversation, get me to think about something else for a few minutes so that I have things to talk about here at the end of the show, keep your comments coming in, as always, at (202) 999-3991 or by emailing me directly to jay@bestoftheleft.com.

That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Brian for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show cohosting. And thanks to all those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support, through our Patreon, or from right inside the Apple Podcast app. Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly good bonus episodes in addition to there being extra content and no ads in all of our regular episodes, all through your regular podcast player. And if you wanna continue the discussion, join our Best of the Left Discord community to discuss the show or the news or other shows or articles you've read, videos you've seen, anything like that, or practically anything at all. Links to join the community are in the show notes.

So, coming to from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left Podcast* coming to you

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