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**Nicole Gnesotto**  
Vice-President of the Jacques  
Delors Institute

**BLOG**  
**POST**  
**IN THE FACE OF WAR**

# Taiwan and European strategic autonomy



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Following Europe, it is now Asia that is hearing the sounds of army boots and aircrafts a little more each day: from 11 to 15 April, China conducted military manoeuvres on an unprecedented scale around the island, as if in rehearsal for a potential encirclement and attack. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, are we witnessing a new war between democracies and authoritarian regimes ? Should Taiwan be defended in the event of an attack from China ?

The answer is clearly yes. The entire West was outraged when the French President Emmanuel Macron dared to express doubt, during his trip to China: "the worst thing would be to think that we Europeans must become followers on this topic and adapt to the American rhythm or a Chinese overreaction." This statement in favour of Europe's strategic autonomy in relation to the United States is not a new standpoint for France. However, against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, the trip to China and Beijing's intimidation of Taiwan, the French head of State's words were almost sacrilegious for Atlanticists. Once the controversy has died down, what are the takeaways of this situation?

Firstly, it is perfectly clear that Taiwanese democracy must be defended. Yet it is just as essential that the conditions for the island's security and therefore peace in the region are not undermined. For decades now, **Taiwan's stability is based on a democratic**

**ambiguity that is respected by the three key players:** Taiwan, China and the United States. This compromise is hinged upon three prohibitions: that of Taiwan declaring its independence, that of the USA recognising the island's independence and that of China using military force to attack the island in a bid to reuniting it with the continent. This means a state of no independence and no invasion.

However, in recent years, **this fine balance has been disrupted by both China and the USA.** Beijing has increased its aggressive posturing towards Taiwan. In his inaugural address at the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Xi Jinping was clear that he will never give up on Taiwan's return to China and would never promise to renounce the use of force to achieve this goal. For its part, **the United States has played on the ambiguity of Taiwan's situation:** Nancy Pelosi, then Speaker of the House of Representatives, visited Taipei for the first time in August 2022, followed by a delegation of US senators. And Taiwan's President was received while "transiting" through the USA, admittedly not by Joe Biden himself – which would be a clear red line – but by the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Kevin McCarthy.

Back in 2016, during his election campaign, Donald Trump sparked dread when he publicly wondered why the USA "has to be bound by a 'one China' policy." Ahead of what seemed to be a turning point towards an official recognition of Taiwan, Beijing protested and the State Department immediately defused the situation by explaining that the US position on Taiwan has remained unchanged for forty years. Now these positions are changing on both sides and we find ourselves in a "chicken and egg" situation: **all Westerners believe that a hardening from the US is a response to China's growing hostility, and conversely the Chinese are taking a stand against "US provocation".**

It is most likely this spiral of escalation that underlies Emmanuel Macron's refusal to see Europe doomed to follow the USA. Why is the United States, under a Democrat President, Joe Biden, taking the risk of moving further away from this ambiguity, reaching the utmost limit of what would be a political recognition of Taiwan, and provoking a major crisis with China? Why not stick to the *status quo*, remembering the red line regarding non-aggression of Taiwan, leaving full responsibility for regional instability at China's door?

In other words, **when questioning the actual driving forces behind the US strategy, such puzzlement is appropriate. It is, however, unjustified when it comes to providing a nuanced response to our defence of democracy,** whether in Taiwan or elsewhere. There should be no confusion: when suggesting that France had reservations regarding democracy and felt goodwill towards China's position, the French President deserved to be criticised. Yet in reminding that Europe cannot follow US policies and decisions in all places and under all circumstances, he was absolutely right.

Democracy is the target of the authoritarian regimes in Russia and China. Yet it can also be an argument used by warmongers, as was the case for Iraq in 2003 and this may once more hold true in the future if we start yet again transforming legitimate strategic confrontations into an ideological endgame.

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**Institut Jacques Delors**

Penser l'Europe • Thinking Europe • Europa Denken  
18 rue de Londres 75009 Paris, France • [www.delorsinstitute.eu](http://www.delorsinstitute.eu)  
T +33 (0)1 44 58 97 97 • [info@delorsinstitute.eu](mailto:info@delorsinstitute.eu)



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