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## Washington Wants a New Cold War—But That’s a Bad Idea

As China unleashed [live-fire military exercises](#) off the coast of Taiwan, simulating a real “[reunification by force](#)” operation in the wake of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s ceremonial visit to the island last week, the bipartisan fervor for a new Cold War with China and Russia took greater hold in Washington.

“Leaders in both parties,” Post columnist [Josh Rogin reports](#), “understand that the United States has a duty and an interest in ... pushing back against America’s adversaries in both Europe and Asia.” The United States showed that it could take on both China and Russia at the same time, he adds. The Senate [voted 95-1](#) to add Sweden and Finland to NATO. The [Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act](#) enjoys bipartisan support. And politicians in both parties scrambled to give the Pentagon [even more money](#) than it asked for.

Cold War is America’s comfort zone. We won the last one. We wear the white hats. It’s democracy against authoritarianism. And we’ve got the biggest and best military. Who could object?

But haunting questions remain. Does a new Cold War—taking on Russia and China at once—serve the real security of Americans? Does it further President Biden’s promised “[foreign policy for the middle class?](#)” Might most Americans prefer that this country curb our enthusiasm for foreign adventure while focusing on getting our own house in order?

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The existential threat to our security now is the extreme weather caused by climate change, which is already costing lives and billions of dollars in destruction from wildfires, floods, plagues and drought. Monkeypox reminds us that the deadliest attacks have come from global pandemics. Throwing money at the Pentagon doesn't help. Wouldn't it be better if Special Presidential Envoy John F. Kerry's journeys got as much attention as Pelosi's Taiwan performance? Addressing climate change and pandemics can't be done without Chinese and Russian cooperation, yet the Chinese officially terminated talks on these issues in the wake of Pelosi's visit.

Biden's foreign policy team has focused on lining up bases and allies to surround and contain Russia and China. But the Ukraine war has revealed Russia's [military weakness](#). Meanwhile, [sanctions](#) have cut off access to Russian food, fertilizers and minerals vital to countries worldwide and might contribute to a global recession.

China is a true "peer competitor," as the Pentagon calls it. But its strength is its economy, not its military. It's the [leading trading partner](#) for countries across the globe, from [Latin America](#) to Africa to Asia. When Pelosi stopped [in South Korea](#) after her visit to Taiwan, South Korea's president did not receive her. President Yoon Suk-yeol, we learned, was on a "staycation," attending a play. The snub by a loyal ally, home to nearly 30,000 U.S. troops, is surely a reflection of the fact that China is South Korea's leading trading partner. The United States would be well advised to focus—as China does—on developing the new technologies that will define the markets of the future, rather than spending more than \$1 trillion on items such as a new generation of nuclear weapons that can never be used.

The revived Cold Warriors assert that the U.S. deployment of forces around China and Russia is defensive. But as Stephen Walt notes in Foreign Policy, this ignores the ["security dilemma"](#): What one country considers innocent measures to increase its security, another might see as threatening. U.S. administrations kept asserting Ukraine's "right" to join NATO as security against the threat posed by Russia. Russia saw the possible basing of NATO forces and U.S. missiles in Ukraine as a threat. Biden's comment that Putin "cannot remain in power," echoed by U.S. politicians, and the history of U.S. support for regime change around the world, weren't exactly reassuring.

Though Washington formally accepts that Taiwan is a province of China, it [arms the island](#) and deploys more forces to the Pacific. Pelosi [described her visit](#) as an “unequivocal statement that America stands with Taiwan, our democratic partner, as it defends itself and its freedom.” Beijing views this as an attack on its national sovereignty, a violation of our official position, and as a provocation designed to spur independence movements in Taiwan.

The Cold Warriors assume that most of the world stands with us. True, our NATO allies rallied against Russia after its invasion of Ukraine, but two-thirds of the world’s population, according to [the Economist](#), lives in countries that refuse to sanction Russia. Much of the developing world is skeptical or worse about U.S. claims regarding democracy or the rules-based order. This makes sanctions less effective—[China’s purchases](#) of Russian oil and gas, for example, have increased by 72 percent since the Ukraine invasion. It also reflects the growing strength of Chinese “soft power” and the declining currency of the U.S. military force.

Great powers decline largely because of internal weakness and the failure to adjust to new realities. In an era of dangerous partisan enmity, the reflexive bipartisan embrace of a new Cold War is a striking contrast. But the old habits don’t address the new challenges. This is hardly the way to build a vibrant American democracy.

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