

On May 30, 2024, the international round table “**The Global Balance of Power: Assessing the Impact of US-China Rivalry on Ukraine and Taiwan**” was held at the Ukrainian platform for Contemporary China.

The organizers: A. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies NAS of Ukraine, the National Institute of Strategic Studies, the Ukrainian Association of Sinologists, Sinica podcast, and the Publishing House “Helvetica.”

The speakers: **Da Wei**, Director of Center for International Security and Strategy; Professor at School of Social Sciences, Tsinghua University; **Dmytro Burtsev**, Junior Fellow at A. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine; **Emilian Kavalski**, Professor at Centre for International Studies and Development, Jagiellonian University in Krakow; **Yuan I**, Research Fellow, Institute of International Relations, National Chengchi University, Taiwan.

The event was moderated by **Kaiser Kuo**, host and co-founder of the Sinica Podcast.

Kaiser Kuo started with the statement that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has not only had a profound impact on the security and stability of Europe but has also sparked discussions about the potential implications for other regions, particularly Taiwan, in the context of the growing rivalry between the United States and China. Kaiser introduced the participants and the key questions of the discussion – to explore the drivers of growing tension over Taiwan, the validity and utility of comparisons between Ukraine and Taiwan, and the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Taiwan's strategic thinking and global image.

Yuan I shared his findings that there is a parallel between the Russian invasion of Ukraine and China's potential military aggression against Taiwan, as both leaders assert claims on the territories, applying historical interpretations as justification for their real or hypothetical actions.

Dmytro Burtsev reminds us of the official Ukrainian position recognizing the one-China policy. While Taiwan has attracted the attention of some Ukrainian NGOs, it has not yet drawn significant interest from political elites. If any military actions occur in the Taiwan Strait, it is difficult to predict the official Ukrainian reaction. Dmytro shared his observation that there are many differing opinions on the meaningful parallels between the situations in Ukraine and the Taiwan Strait, both positive and negative. The biggest difference is that Ukraine is recognized by all countries, including Russia, as a sovereign state.

Da Wei said that Beijing doesn't see much relation between the two situations because Taiwan is considered part of China. In contrast, Russia and Ukraine recognize each other as sovereign countries. There is a different interpretation of the constitutions of mainland China and Taiwan: both believe that they belong to the same country. Da Wei draws a parallel, suggesting that China's relationship to Taiwan is similar to Ukraine's relationship to Crimea. The biggest takeaway from the situation in Ukraine for Chinese think tankers and academia is that war is not easy and comes with a significant cost. As China is strongly integrated with the international economy, imposing

sanctions on China would hurt the rest of the world, not just China. This situation is different from the one with sanctions on Russia.

Emilian Kavalski stated that for Eastern Europeans, the war was a shock but also predictable, as Russia had acted aggressively towards other countries in the region before. He emphasized that Europe's economic engagement with Russia, which created trade dependence, was a wrong strategy. Emilian stressed that there is a growing realization that the war in Ukraine and the tensions in the Indo-Pacific theater are well-connected, creating a confrontation between different blocs, such as Russia and China on one side and the West on the other. Speaking about the US-China rivalry, the scholar believes that despite the rhetoric, both countries have many mechanisms to prevent a hot war.

Yuan I mentioned that the US has a bipartisan consensus on protecting Taiwan in case of China's aggression, which is a profound difference from its position on Ukraine. In Taiwan, there is an understanding that the situations in Ukraine and Taiwan are different, including the size of the territory. However, both share a similarity in their aspirations toward democracy. The potential impact of a Trump presidency on Taiwan is unclear.

Dmytro Burtsev shared his opinion that the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 hasn't effectively assured security guarantees for Ukraine. In comparison, the US Congress Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 guarantees protection for Taiwan, making it a stronger document provided to a non-sovereign territory. Dmytro believes that if Trump comes into office, he would continue supporting Ukraine; otherwise, it would be a significant reputational loss for US foreign policy.

Da Wei expressed his low expectations that the US's hawkish position toward China would change, including its support of Taiwan's independence narratives. Da Wei said that there is no strategic triangle between Russia, China, and the US now because Russia is relatively weak. In China, a small group of scholars believes that the US may shift to closer relations with Russia in the near future instead of strengthening ties with China.

Emilian Kavalski, assessing the Ukraine situation, advised Taiwan to develop relations with its neighbors in the region, as they could play a bigger role in supporting Taiwan in a worst-case scenario. Emilian shared his opinion that a potential Trump presidency is a big concern for Europe, considering his statements on NATO.

Da Wei added that Xi Jinping, like all his predecessors, is very serious about the historical legacy. This might explain his cautious approach to the war. Da Wei described China's posture as a balancing act. He emphasized that the US-China rivalry impacts Taiwan's security as well as international politics. The war in Ukraine has oversimplified this worldview, including the rhetoric that Taiwan is the next Ukraine, which he believes is absolutely wrong and is pushing Taiwan in the wrong direction. The US arming Taiwan puts it in a more dangerous position. From Da Wei's perspective, Taiwan is one of the most prosperous places in the world, but the world is pushing it toward becoming another battlefield.

Yuan I stressed on Taiwan's strategic importance and its geographical proximity to the mainland. He argued that Taiwan needs a more balanced posture among all stakeholders and that dialogue can help find less confrontational solutions. Yuan I noted that this is the first cross-strait dialogue he has participated in since 2019, and he appreciates the moment.

Dmytro Burtsev said that for Ukraine, relations with both the US and China are crucial. The US is the first strategic partner, while China is a key trade partner. Although there is still a chance to improve Chinese relations with Ukraine, but it is diminishing. Dmytro summarized that both Ukraine and Taiwan are at the center of the Great Powers' competition, making it difficult for them to maintain balanced positions.

Emilian Kavalski noted that the chances of improving US-China relations to help find a consensus in Ukraine are very slim. However, he observed that the EU's approach toward China is more about de-risking than de-coupling, with an increase in market protection and securitization rhetoric becoming common in Europe. Emilian agreed with Da Wei's perception that all Chinese countermeasures would already be too late.