

Has China Been Bluffing?

By [Kim Petersen](#)

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British professor Orlando Figes, who specializes in Russian history, wrote that the 2008 Russian intervention in Georgia on the side of the breakaway enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had exposed American timidity and scuppered NATO membership hopes for Georgia. (Figes, The Story of Russia, (Metropolitan Books, 2022): 285-286.) Was there a lesson learned by the West?

In 2021-2022, Ukraine joining NATO was identified as a red line by Russia. US, Ukraine, and NATO paid scant heed to Russian security concerns and the outcome is the current fighting in Ukraine.

Putin had issued a warning in April 2021: “But if someone mistakes our good intentions for indifference or weakness and intends to burn or even blow up these bridges, they must know that Russia’s response will be asymmetrical, swift and tough.”

□ Vladimir [#Putin](#): We really do not want to burn bridges.

But if someone mistakes our good intentions for indifference or weakness and intends to burn or even blow up these bridges, they must know that Russia's response will be asymmetrical, swift and tough. pic.twitter.com/6W8vvpGL0P

— MFA Russia □□ (@mfa_russia) [April 21, 2021](#)

Across the Eurasian continent, China finds itself being provoked by the US’s oleaginous adherence to the [One China policy](#) to which it is a signatory. Beijing has in recent days warned of severe consequences to be borne by the US and separatists in Taiwan (there are [vociferous protests in Taiwan](#) against Pelosi’s visit) if US House speaker Nancy Pelosi were to land in Taiwan.

Nonetheless, Pelosi is now in Taiwan, saying her visit “honors America’s unwavering commitment to supporting Taiwan’s vibrant democracy.” Even *NY Times* columnist Thomas

Friedman [said](#) that Pelosi was being “utterly reckless, dangerous and irresponsible.”

If the government in China ever still had any doubts (of course, they didn't) about malicious American intentions, they have all evaporated now.

Chinese media has described the trip to Taiwan as American hypocrisy at its best.

Despite the trip being “utterly reckless, dangerous and irresponsible,” one has to hand it to the US that it was gutsy. The US didn't back down. Pelosi did show up. But it required keeping her date, time, and place of arrival under wraps, and she was emboldened by the presence of accompanying US aircraft carriers.

Hung Hsiu-chu, former chairwoman of the Taiwanese political opposition Kuomintang, [sees some in the US tolerating](#) Pelosi's risky move to test Beijing's red lines.

Among the [speculated actions](#) that China might undertake are sending fighter planes into what Taiwan contends is its airspace and sending naval ships into waters that Taiwan lays claim to; and that “the PLA [People's Liberation Army] will strike Taiwan military targets ... and the mainland could also consider speeding up legislation for a national reunification law and even publish a timetable for reunification which will impose real pressure on the US and Taiwan authorities.”

As to when Beijing will respond, the *Global Times* [noted](#), “The Chinese mainland really knows the importance of ‘strategic patience.’”

Joint maritime and air exercises by the PLA [were announced](#) by senior colonel Shi Yi, a spokesperson at the PLA Eastern Theater Command, that will surround Taiwan in five directions.

It is well known that Putin does not bluff. Now the question is whether the administration of Xi Jinping bluffs. The world is about to find out what China means when it warns of “serious consequences.”

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