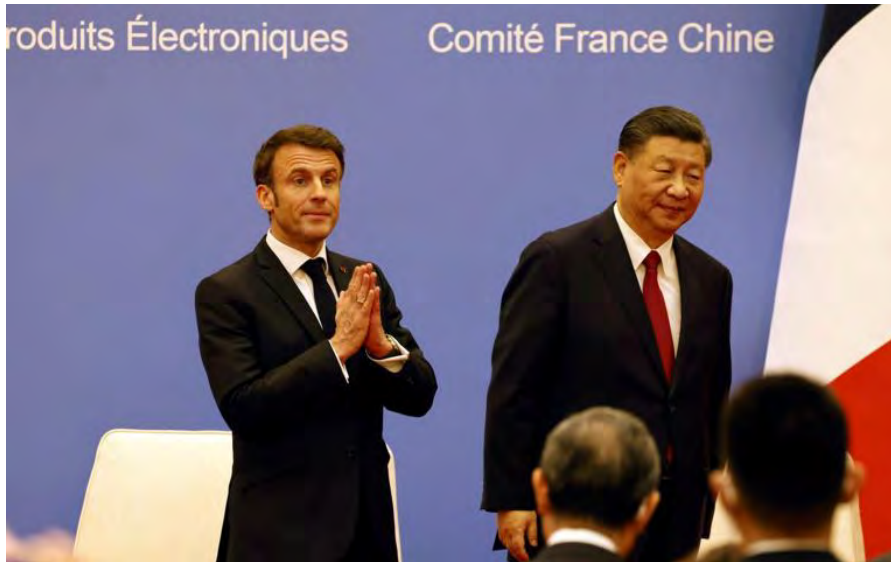


Get ready for China's invasion of Taiwan – and the end of Macron's delusions
Jeremy Warner - The Telegraph

Blame it all on Richard Nixon if you like. Nixon was the US president who began the process of post-war economic integration with China, and in so doing severely compromised Taiwan's [right to an independent sovereign future](#).



*French President Emmanuel Macron, left, and Chinese President Xi Jinping -
Ludovic Marin/Pool via AP© Ludovic Marin/Pool via AP*

By recognizing Beijing as China's legitimate authority, and therefore its claims over Taiwan, Nixon opened Pandora's box, and if the more alarmist predictions are to be believed, very possibly sowed the seeds of World War Three.

Part of history's enduring fascination is the way it keeps rewriting itself; up until relatively recently, Nixon's "opening to China" in 1972 was regarded as a masterpiece of diplomacy that thwarted the Soviet Union and gave birth to an unparalleled period of globalization, economic integration, and advancement.

If there was ever redemption to be had for the shame of Watergate, this was it, Nixon's lasting contribution to a better and more harmonious world. Yet in so doing, Nixon incubated a monstrous rival which now challenges US economic and geopolitical hegemony on multiple fronts.

Poor little Taiwan, [sandwiched between vying Chinese and US interests](#), is the most visible proxy for this ever more dangerous standoff. As a result of Nixon's maneuverings, Taiwan has no standing as a recognized sovereign state, let alone one that presumptuously still claims jurisdiction over all China.

Taiwan was cynically sacrificed in Nixon's attempt to build bridges with Beijing. Notwithstanding repeated pledges by President Joe Biden, if Beijing invaded Taiwan tomorrow it is not clear that the US could legally come to its aid.

In international law, Taipei's position would be more akin to that of Chechnya – almost indisputably part of Russia – than that of Ukraine.

So there we have it, a flashpoint as potentially deadly today as the Balkans were in the run-up to the First World War, a period that was likewise characterized by unprecedented levels of economic integration which many people believed had made conflict between the great powers impossible because of the damage it would do to prosperity.

We've seen a repeat of naive thinking like this in [Emmanuel Macron's recent positioning on China](#). “The great risk” Europe faces, the French President said on a flight back from a state visit to Beijing, is that it “gets caught up in crises that are not ours, which prevents it from building its strategic autonomy”.

Macron seemed to be giving the green light to whatever China wants to do in the East. His remarks have been widely interpreted as an attempt to sweet talk China into [brokering a peace deal in Ukraine](#).

Possibly he's right in believing that Chinese involvement is ultimately the only way of delivering the desired peace settlement. Morally and geopolitical-ly, surrendering Taiwan as a quid pro quo nevertheless seems a very high price to pay. But there may also be an ulterior motive.

This week, Bernard Arnault's sprawling luxury goods empire, LVMH, [became the first European company to achieve a half a trillion dollar valuation](#) and thereby enter the hallowed ranks of the top ten companies worldwide by market capitalization.



Bernard Arnault - Nathan Laine/Bloomberg© Provided by The Telegraph

The latest surge in the share price has been driven largely by success in Chinese markets, where demand for luxury goods has surged since China abandoned its zero-Covid policies.

If you want to know why Macron is schmoozing Xi Jinping, there could be your answer: the economic interest has trumped the security concern.

Olaf Scholz, the German Chancellor, may pretend otherwise, but privately he will not have been displeased by Macron's intervention.

Europe's economic interest in China ensures an ambivalence to Chinese ambition and causes it to shrink from outright confrontation.

Unfortunately, Beijing doesn't appear minded to return the favour. Its ambassador to Paris, Lu Shaye, this week outrageously took it on himself to question the sovereign status of the former Soviet Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, prompting even the Élysée to recoil in horror.

It is as if Macron's green light on Taiwan has also legitimized renewed Russian interest in taking back Eastern Europe. Give autocracy an inch, it would seem, and it will take a mile.

To see the dangers, just answer this question; what would Europe do [if China actually went ahead with its threat](#) to take Taiwan by force?

Is it really credible that everyone would then just stand back and say none of our concern – fine by us as long as Louis Vuitton handbags continue to fly off the shelves in Shanghai?

Whatever Macron says, this seems deeply unlikely. Instead, even Europe would be on the slippery slope to outright conflict with China.

Any such outcome would be an extraordinarily dangerous and pivotal moment in world affairs, making Putin's invasion of Ukraine look like a mere skirmish by comparison.

At almost any cost, it must be avoided. Encouraging China to think it might get away with subverting Taiwan undermines any such endeavour.

But it is not just Macron who struggles with the dilemma of balancing economic objectives with security concerns.

In a speech this week, James Cleverly, the UK foreign secretary, seemed to side much more overtly with the European view than that of Washington.

“It would be clear and easy, perhaps even satisfying, for me to declare a new cold war and say that our goal is to isolate China”, he said in an address at the City of London's Mansion House.

“Clear, easy, satisfying and wrong. Because it would be a betrayal of our national interest and a willful misunderstanding of the modern world”.

For the US, Taiwan has become totemic; to surrender Taiwan would be not just to imperil crucial supplies of advanced chips; it would also mean giving up on key shipping lanes and on large parts of the Pacific in general.

America's sphere of influence would be permanently impaired, with both Japan and Australia left isolated.

Total disengagement from China in preparation for such a moment is not really an option. After decades of economic integration, we are bound at the hip. Separation would be extraordinarily destructive.

Comparisons with the Cold War of the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies are therefore not particularly instructive.

There was little or no economic interaction between West and East in those days.

This is not a remotely similar situation. Instead, we have increasingly hostile powers which in economic terms are also highly integrated and dependent on each other.

This is a potentially calamitous mix.

That very dependence has thus far helped to prevent an outright conflict, and somewhat tempered Chinese ambitions.

But the chances of mishaps are growing by the day. Countries – and companies – that don't prepare for them will be hit doubly hard if and when a permanent parting of the ways occurs.

Congratulations to Bernard Arnault for overtaking Tesla's Elon Musk to become the world's richest man, but fortunes built on the shifting sands of Xi Jinping's say-so are bound to be insecure, and cannot in any case be allowed to dictate the West's approach to Chinese expansionism.