

## VICTORY IN UKRAINE = MESSAGE TO THE CRINKS (CHINA/RUSSIA/IRAN/NORTH KOREA)

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**C**RINKs (China, Russia, Iran and North Korea) is a partnership of convenience rather than an alliance of nations sharing a common goal. Its members know that the existing world order is not conducive to their respective ultimate ambitions.

Should Russia and Vladimir Putin be defeated in Ukraine, the liberal international order would be strengthened. In such a world, the CRINKs will be even more reliant on China, the most powerful member of the bloc. In the end, Putin's defeat will force China to reconsider its role as the leader within the CRINKs authoritarian sphere and its near-term ambitions over Taiwan.

The second biggest loser after Putin in a Russian defeat would be Xi Jinping. The Chinese premier does not accept the existing US-dominated liberal international order as appropriate or good for the world. He seeks a world that is Sino-centric or at least China-friendly and that fulfills his ambitions for conquest under the slogan "the common destiny of humankind."

In Xi's telling, the international order needs to be "democratized" - another slogan that has led China to enlist the support of the Global South. Many nations that feel estranged from the prevailing international order have been receptive to overtures from China and the rest of the CRINKs. A Russian defeat in Ukraine would certainly unsettle the CRINKs and possibly loosen their sway over the Global South but it would not force Xi to abandon his ambitions, particularly in Taiwan.

In order for Xi to fulfill his "China Dream of national rejuvenation" he must incorporate Taiwan into China. From Xi's perspective, such a move is both necessary and inevitable since Taiwan is

geo-strategically located in the middle of China's First Island Chain. To envision a Chinese attack on Taiwan is to imagine scenes of wanton destruction and loss of life. Such an attack would also upend a geopolitical balance that has held the region in an uneasy peace.

China can only take Taiwan if it dissuades the United States from interfering or repels an American intervention. Either way, Xi believes, China taking Taiwan will destroy American credibility among its allies in the region. The attack would push American power out of the Western Pacific and fundamentally alter the global strategic balance, in Xi's vision.

**"Ukraine is a fitting model for what we might see in Taiwan."**

A Russian defeat in Ukraine will force Beijing to re-think whatever plans it has made for taking Taiwan. The reality is that Taiwan - a medium power proud of its democracy and with superpower backing - will not surrender when facing an existential threat from a near-totalitarian neighbour. Ukraine is a fitting model for what we might see in Taiwan. If Ukraine beats autocratic Russia with the support of the democratic West, it will make Taiwan even more determined to stand firm.

A Russian defeat will also force the Chinese military and leadership to deliberate more carefully about the risks inherent in using force against Taiwan. If Ukraine repels Russia, it will do so thanks to sustained and staunch Western support. Since Taiwan is strategically much more important to the United States than Ukraine, Beijing will have to take note.

A Ukrainian victory would erase Xi's dream of conquering Taiwan. A Ukrainian victory would

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influence China's planning, preparation and timetable for an attack. A Russian defeat will give the United States and its allies greater scope to deter China over Taiwan. It may also make the leaders of Iran and North Korea think twice with their ambitions.

CRINK may not be an alliance but its members share a powerful common interest in seeing Western leadership of the existing world order go bankrupt. If the West can work together to ultimately help Ukraine defeat Russian aggression, the liberal international order will be strengthened.

*Tsang's new book, The Political Thought of Xi Jinping, will be published by Oxford University Press in January 2024.*

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