

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Biden takes the ‘ambiguity’ out of defending Taiwan

On the first day of President Biden’s five-day Asia trip, Taiwan was forced to scramble its fighter jets in response to 14 Chinese aircraft entering its air defense identification zone.

On day four of his trip, Biden signaled in the strongest terms yet that the United States was firmly committed to the defense of Taiwan should it be attacked by China — that the last thing the world needed was another Ukraine, another self-governing democratic nation invaded by the forces of an autocrat laying claim to a purportedly rebellious province.

Ever since Russia’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February, the international community has been eyeing China’s increasingly aggressive behavior toward the island nation that the People’s Republic still considers part of its territory. In fact on the day of the Russian invasion, nine Chinese mili-

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tary aircraft entered Taiwan’s air defense identification zone, according to Taiwan’s Ministry of Defense.

So Monday in Tokyo, when asked by a reporter, “Are you willing to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan if it comes to that?” Biden gave an unequivocal “yes,” adding, “That’s the commitment we made.”

Biden was also quick to add, “We agree with the ‘One China’ policy . . . but the idea that it [Taiwan] can be taken by force, just taken by force, is just not appropriate. It would dislocate the entire region and be another action similar to what happened in Ukraine. And so it’s a burden that’s even stronger.”

The “commitment” Biden referred to was the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act signed at the same time the US recognized the government of mainland China as *the* government of China. Taiwan, for example, has no embassy in the United States (although the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office acts as a de facto embassy), and it has no representation at the United Nations. But the 1979 act did provide that “the United States will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain sufficient self-defense capabilities.” What “defense services” might mean has never been fully explained.

The resulting policy toward Taiwan has become known as “strategic ambiguity” — a phrase only diplomats could love. And Monday Biden removed some of that ambiguity.

It wasn’t, of course, the first time Biden had issued a similar warning to Beijing to keep its hands off Taiwan. Last August, fresh from the disaster that was the US evacuation from Afghanistan, Biden told ABC News that the United States had a “sacred commitment” that “if in fact anyone were to invade or take action against our NATO allies, we would respond. Same with Japan, same with South Korea, same with Taiwan.”

Last October, at a forum hosted by CNN, he was asked, “Are you saying that the United States would come to Taiwan’s defense if China attacked?”

“Yes. We have a commitment,” Biden replied.

Now, for the third time, the president has made it as clear as humanly possible that Taiwan will not be sacrificed on the altar of strategic ambiguity. This was no slip of the tongue.

Just as it is certainly not simply a happy coincidence that Japan has taken unprecedented steps to give military aid to Ukraine, to accept more than 1,000 Ukrainian refugees, and to increase its own defense budget. Russia may be the current *bête noire* of the global community, but China’s aggressive stance toward Taiwan makes it a close second.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, speaking at the joint news conference with Biden, also addressed the possibility of a Ukraine-style invasion of Taiwan by China, noting, any “unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force like Russia’s aggression against Ukraine this time should never be tolerated in the Indo-Pacific.”

Among the many lessons learned from the world’s naive insistence that somehow President Vladimir Putin of Russia could be cajoled into giving up his designs on Ukraine is that tyrants aren’t easily dissuaded if they see an opportunity for conquest. China must never be allowed to view Taiwan as an easy target. Taiwan’s own military and defensive capability — much of it US-made — is one way to prevent that.

Biden’s addition of some presidential clarity to the usual diplo-speak ambiguity is even better.



DARIO LOPEZ-MILLS/AP

Emergency personnel gather near Robb Elementary School following a shooting on Tuesday in Uvalde, Texas.

When it comes to gun control, our children are Generation Abandoned

By David Hogg and John Rosenthal

Consider the fact that children today have never spent a day in school without the fear of being shot.

From Columbine in 1999 to Sandy Hook in 2012 to Parkland in 2018, and now Uvalde, Texas, more than 187,000 kids have experienced a school shooting. Children in these age groups should be thought of as “Generation Abandoned” because the adults of America, and their elected representatives, have done nothing to remedy this shocking human-made public safety crisis. No place is safe — schools, churches, parks, grocery stores — in the mass-shooting-a-day culture that is unique to this country.

Just in the past 10 days, more than two dozen Americans in Buffalo and Texas were killed while grocery shopping and attending elementary school. Two 18-year-olds, one armed with an AR-15 assault rifle, the other carrying multiple weapons, were identified as the shooters.

For decades, adults of all political persuasions have faulted the “broken mental health system” and raised other (mostly partisan) distractions and grievances, and then done nothing to fix any of them.

No consumer protection regulations for gun manufacturers.

No limits on military-style assault weapons.

No limits on oversize ammunition magazines.

No background checks required for private and online sales.

Over the past several years, a new generation of Americans has organized and mobilized a movement not unlike ones in the past that spurred dramatic changes to civil rights and America’s involvement in Vietnam.

On Valentine’s Day 2018, the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, most of them toddlers when Columbine occurred, joined the 187,000 youngsters who had already been through the nightmare of a school shooting. These Parkland teens discovered, to their disgust, that nothing had changed since Columbine.

The March For Our Lives movement — comprising those Gen Z kids — set out to succeed where previous generations had failed, and their successes have been remarkable. Student activists registered more than 50,000 people to vote in the 2018 midterms, and youth turnout set new records. Candidates supported by gun violence prevention organizations were able to win in 88 of 129 races in 2018. The movement helped 50 new gun laws get passed at the state level (including 14 by Republican governors) and secure funding (after a 26-year hiatus) for the federal government to study gun violence.

Despite these encouraging results, a huge roadblock remains. Common-sense gun safety legislation routinely dies in the US Senate because of the filibuster. Hiding behind the misrepresentation of the Sec-

ond Amendment — and being supported by gun lobby dollars — these politicians apparently consider more than 100 gun deaths every day and a mass shooting a day an acceptable loss, even when it is their own constituents who are the victims.

The Biden administration could get around the filibuster through executive orders, such as the recent one on ghost guns. President Biden could establish an Office of Gun Violence Prevention similar to the ones we have for climate, labor, and transportation safety. He could fund more violence intervention and mental health programs. To date, little has happened.

Roughly 84 percent of voters, including 77 percent of Republicans, and a majority of gun owners support universal background checks. Nobody is calling for abandoning Second Amendment rights. Even the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, a conservative constitutional “originalist,” determined that such rights are “not unlimited.” Federal and state courts have consistently held that reasonable restrictions on how guns are sold are not unconstitutional.

Sensible gun laws save lives without banning all guns. Massachusetts has proved it. Since 1994, when Massachusetts began to seriously address gun violence prevention legislation, including first in the nation consumer safety regulations for all guns sold in the Commonwealth and a ban on assault weapons, the state’s gun death rate is down 40 percent. It remains one of the lowest in the nation, and it was accomplished on a bipartisan basis. According to an in-depth study by the Globe, if the rest of the country followed our lead, we could save 27,000 lives a year.

Gun violence is preventable. The fact that it continues is a measure of bad public safety policy and special interest politics. In deep blue cities and deep red counties, our struggles are not identical, but they are common American struggles. Complacency and inaction have resulted in over 1 million dead since 1975 from largely preventable gun violence and have left children a far more dangerous world. The next Parkland or Sandy Hook is a matter of when, not if.

The national focus should be on the Senate enacting the same universal criminal background check legislation already overwhelmingly passed by the House; consumer protection regulations for the uniquely unregulated firearm industry, currently prohibited by Congress from federal oversight; and renewing the previous federal ban on military-style assault weapons and large-capacity ammunition magazines, the weapons of choice by the majority of mass shooters. These are policies that we can all agree on to move this issue forward and save countless lives.

What kind of a society are we if we lack the will to protect our own children?

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