



## **Why is Biden Risking Nuclear War With China? - Chomsky and Ellsberg**

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**Paul Jay (PJ):** Hi. Welcome to theAnalysis.news, I'm Paul Jay. In a few seconds, I'll be back with Noam Chomsky and Daniel Ellsberg. Please don't forget there's a donate button, Subscribe button, The email list, All the buttons. Noam Chomsky and Daniel Ellsberg join me again today to discuss President Biden's again claiming the US will defend Taiwan with US troops if China uses military force to reunify the country. Here's what Biden said on 60 Minutes.

**Scott Pelley (SP) from 60 Minutes:** What should Chinese President Xi know about your commitment to Taiwan?

**Joe Biden:** We agree with what we signed on to a long time ago. There's a One China policy and Taiwan makes their own judgements about their independence. We are not moving. We're not encouraging them being independent. We're not. That's their decision.

**SP from 60 Minutes:** But would US forces defend the island?

**Joe Biden:** Yes. If in fact, there was an unprecedented attack.

**SP from 60 Minutes:** To be clear, sir, US forces, US men and women, would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion?

**Joe Biden:** Yes.

**PJ:** Analysts in the US and elsewhere, including Chinese, are saying this sounds like the end of a strategic ambiguity over Taiwan. And it also seems that, once again, the White House has tried to walk it back a little bit, claiming the OneChina policy is still in effect. But how

there's a One China policy and a commitment to use American soldiers to defend Taiwan that seems to at least escape me. Now, joining me again is Noam Chomsky and Daniel Ellsberg. Thanks very much for joining me. So, Noam, why don't you start with this? What is going on with Biden doing this? And are they really serious about dropping strategic ambiguity? And maybe you can just explain a little bit what that is for people that don't know.

**Noam Chomsky (NC):** What's held for about 50 years, keeping peace in a very volatile area, we should recognise that under international law, Taiwan is part of China. It's not ambiguous. It's like Hawaii being part of the United States. That's so. And the United States has accepted about 50 years ago the one-China policy that says Taiwan is part of China, but we'll keep ambiguous about what's going to happen in the interaction between Taiwan, China and the United States. So both sides won't do anything to disrupt it. We just won't talk about it. We won't be provocative. We won't try to disrupt it. And let's just keep the peace in a very volatile area. That worked for 50 years. That's pretty good. Now, the United States has tried to provoke it and undermine it. The Biden speech is just one example. In some ways, I think even more important is what just happened in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where they just came out with a bill, proposed legislation which pretty much says that Taiwan should be kind of a NATO partner. Put down all the bars, regular diplomatic relations, and interoperability of weapons. In fact, it's almost a copy of the inflammatory rhetoric that led up to the Russian invasion last fall. With increasing establishing an enhanced programme, which was the word used for Ukraine to enter into NATO, increasing weapons supply and the military operations. I mean, it's not a justification for the invasion, but they were plainly, were being very provocative. The fact that, you know, the State Department even said we're not going to take Russian security interests into account. Well, now they seem to be doing the same thing with China. You should read that policy, the Taiwan Policy Act. It's basically telling China that we want to not only break down strategic ambiguity, but we want to be highly provocative about it. Now, Biden, to his credit, seems to oppose that legislation. I haven't seen anything definite, but he's indicated he is not approving it. But it passed overwhelmingly bipartisan rooted support. It's going to go to Congress, we see what happens. But it's kind of the after [inaudible]. I mean the Pelosi visit was crazy enough. But this goes beyond. It's almost as if you're watching this from the outside. It almost looks as if Congress is just dying to have two wars on its hand.

**Daniel Ellsberg (DE):** Could I ask a question?

**PJ:** Yeah, go ahead.

**DE:** I think I read; I'll have to look it up, that Congress had proposed, I don't know if it's been passed, for aid for Taiwan. The billions of dollars that would be used to buy weapons in the US and elsewhere. Is that part of that same bill you're talking about now or is it something separate or am I mistaken?

**NC:** No, this is separate. This is new. It's not legislation yet. It came out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

**DE:** Anyway, one of the ... [crosstalking]

**PJ:** Go ahead.

**DE:** Okay. One of the very few reasons I can think of for this very provocative behaviour undermining our supposed commitment to a One China policy, which Biden and everybody else have always announced and are still announced. But in other words, that Taiwan is a province of China, which the Chinese certainly regard it as being, not just Xi and all of his previous leaders. In fact, their nationalist feelings have focussed for a long time, I understand, on eventually being strong enough and taken seriously enough to regain control of Taiwan. In other words, that's a red line that we are rushing right toward to cross. Not only by Biden and not only by these congressional bills, but the visits by Congress leaders treating Taiwan as a sovereign state, in effect, which is totally contradictory to the One China policy. Now, why would China particularly be concerned about that, aside from the fact that it's a nationalistic mantra that Taiwan is not an independent state of China, something that Taiwan agreed with almost unanimously until this century, till the last 20 years. Now, the best reason I can think, of one of the few effective reasons, is to sell more arms to Taiwan, and we have yet done. The 1979 agreement with China, recognising mainland China as the sole ruler of all China, including Taiwan, did, by simultaneous congressional action, allow for us to sell defensive weapons to Taiwan under a certain ceiling. And we pretty much observed that. I think we can be sure that Raytheon and Lockheed and Northrop Grumman, and the others would like to break through that, just as they are doing marvellously in Europe now and Ukraine directly. They would like to be able to sell weapons the same way they do to other NATO countries. But beyond that, before 1979, Taiwan was in effect, a US military protectorate since 1949, when the communists took power on the mainland. The Seventh Fleet was used to prevent any continuation of the Civil War, which at that point had led to the victory of the Chinese Communist leadership. And the Seventh fleet was there to protect them with threat of nuclear weapons, as I revealed last year with some top secret documents that are still being kept up secret, on the fact that we were threatening and prepared to use nuclear weapons to defend Taiwan and possibly even the offshore islands which are within sight, a few miles off the Chinese mainland. So that ended in 79 up till that time we had bases in Taiwan, which you can be sure the Navy and Air Force were very happy to have and I'm sure would be glad to get back. We had, I'm virtually sure, I believe, nuclear weapons there. I visited there in 1960 from the Defence Department and there were nuclear weapons there at that time. They would like to get those back. Well, it's very obvious China has in this case, not just nationalistic, but significant security reasons for not wanting that to happen. And strictly speaking, they don't even have to be in NATO to do that. Nor would Ukraine have had to be in NATO for US bases to be there, or other European powers. It could be bilateral arrangements, then and now, which would allow for that. And obviously, Russia was very reasonably concerned not to let

that happen. And actually, I believe there was word that Biden was definitely prepared to negotiate on that point: on basing and weapons. In any case, in Taiwan, the Chinese- I think it's a recipe. As Noam has said, it's hard to understand that as other than a desire to bring about a war between China and the US, given the Chinese repeated vociferous position for the last 70 years that they will not realow, they will not allow again foreign bases, US bases, threatening them from Taiwan and or and preventing them from peaceful reunification in Taiwan. What do they actually want, which is hard to believe, an actual war. They are certainly risking it. For whatever reasons they are gambling here on such a war. And one thing that Biden is not, and I'm afraid not going to remove in terms of ambiguity, is whether he will use nuclear weapons, if necessary, to defend Taiwan. Is he going to remove that ambiguity and to say 'no first use'? We will not initiate the stages of blowing up the world to defend Taiwan or anywhere else or the Ukraine. By the way, he could easily afford to say that in Ukraine, 'no first use' by the US and to try to shame Russia from the threats that Putin is actually making now in imitation of the threats we made for so many years. But what's changed in Europe is that the Warsaw Pact countries, aside from Russia, moved over to NATO. And so the conventional balance is totally changed there. And there's no pretence of a need for us to threaten nuclear war in Ukraine. Putin is doing it for the other reason. And with no more justification than the US had for doing it for the previous half century. To come back to Taiwan, there the situation is different. The Chinese for 20 years, more than 20 years, since Clinton sent two carriers into the Taiwan Straits to intimidate them in 1996, they have been building up that area so the US can't make threats like that and can't act with impunity in that area anymore. And in this case, I think Biden will be willing to give up a kind of threat that Putin was making if he were on the losing side in Ukraine, he won't give it up and he should. It's outrageous for either party here, either superpower, to be using the threat of initiating nuclear war for any reason whatsoever. And it should not be. Whatever Taiwan's reasonable, realistic concerns are, it should not be the case in this century that we are defending or protecting any other place by the threat to blow the world up.

**PJ:** And Noam, the American corporate elite seem very split at the level of their commercial interests. Apple is expanding its investments in China. BlackRock, the largest asset management company in the US, is expanding a whole new Chinese investment fund. And the schizophrenia, you can see in one company, in a very interesting way, Boeing, for which Taiwan is a significant market, maybe not in their top ten, but significant. But the largest purchaser of Boeing commercial aircraft in 2020 was China. So, you know, one arm of Boeing wants to sell arms and inflame the situation. Another arm wants to continue commercial sales to China. I mean, it's really nutty. But at the level of the commercial interest, at the very least, it's divided. Certainly, the military industrial complex knows what they want, but at the political level, you don't see that division. Both parties are as hawkish on China. I mean, is domestic politics driving this that, oh, they don't want to be weak on China with elections coming?

**DE:** I'd like to hear from both of you the answers to that question, why that is the case. Why are the Democrats vying with the Republicans in support of abandoning the One China policy and moving toward war? I can't understand it. And from what you just said, Paul, it occurs to me, is it not conceivable or is it that Apple and even the Boeing commercial division could come out and would find some political reasons and come out against the move toward war of the military industrial part of the company, or against Lockheed or against the others? Why don't the ones who are trading with China come out openly and say, this is crazy as it is?

**PJ:** Noam.

**NC:** Well, if you could get into a corporate boardroom, Apple or Tesla, any of them, I'm sure they'll be very eager to maintain their commercial relations with China. For the corporate sector, it's just been a bonanza, cheap controlled labour, much lower skilled, you know, and they make enormous profits. It's not just the military, but the whole corporate sector. For them the opening of China has been a huge bonanza.

**DE:** So why are they not confronting this approach and opposing it effectively? What's happening?

**NC:** That's what I would be interested in seeing. What's going on in the corporate boardrooms is beyond that, in fact, Taiwan is the major producer of chips, advanced chips. The only ones to compete are South Korean. I think the corporations are concerned about the threat to supply lines, which was brought up by COVID. COVID, the pandemic showed that the business model of the past generation has been very hazardous. It's a kind of, you know, the business model, it's kind of like running an assembly line. So to the last second nothing can go wrong; when anything goes wrong and collapses. That's been the business model on supply chains. As soon as anything goes wrong, it all collapses. Very fragile system. Now, the corporate world must be realising this. This had nothing to do with Taiwan, it was just the pandemic that did it. And so they must be trying to rationalise supply chains, which might mean trying to move things to other, less dangerous areas.

**DE:** Isn't that threatened by a congressional delegation?

**PJ:** Yeah, let me add to Dan's question. Probably the most important thing for American capital in terms of globalisation was the leverage cheap discipline Chinese labour gave them against American workers and now they're losing that. The more tense it gets with China, the more jeopardised those global supply chains get and the more leverage American workers get. I mean, a sense that's a little bit of an upside from all this. But again, why the hell isn't that part of corporate America screaming against this policy? I mean, they're not saying a word.

**NC:** First of all, they're continuing the investments, as you pointed out before. They're moving some investments to Vietnam and Malaysia and a little more in Mexico. But there's been no basic move to try to pull out of China, it's a little more difficult because it's not just Congress, notice. There's a background to raising the threats to Taiwan, today. The Biden administration sharply expanded the Trump programmes of what they call encircling China with a ring of satellite states, so a ring of US satellites, South Korea, Japan, Australia. Australia, I should say if you read the Australian press is very nervous about this, they don't like what's happening for good reasons. They try to encircle China with this ring. The satellite states are heavily armed with advanced missiles pointed to China. And this is only a part of it. Remember at home, the United States is working to undermine China's technological development. It's not hidden. In the United States it's become so crazy that if Congress finally agrees to pass a badly needed infrastructure bill, it has to be called the China competition bill. You can't spend money if bridges are falling down, you have to do it because we have to beat China. It's kind of collective insanity. Incidentally, with China, this is an old business. The Yellow Peril fear is very deep in American history. You go back a century, you find a progressive author like Jack London writing a novel about how we have to carry out bacteriological warfare to kill all the Chinese. Before they come over here and destroy us. The 1950s, those of us who are old enough to remember, the huge Yellow Peril fear, the Chinese are going to come. Lyndon Johnson warned that, as he put it, without superior air power, we're going to be prey to any yellow dwarf with a knife. That's the mood with China. The first and racist immigration bill was Chinese back in 1882; Oriental exclusion named the Chinese. So it's deep in the background and it comes out any time there's a problem: the Chinese are going to conquer us and other stuff. And you know there's a lot of talk about China's going to surpass us in gross domestic product. They're going to be the main economic power in the world. Most of that, I think, is nonsense. But Sean Starrs, a young political economist, has been studying something else for some time. There is a good book coming out about him. He's pointing out that in a globalised world, a significant measure of national economic power is the amount of wealth held by multinational corporations based in a particular country. That's an important measure. And if you look at that measure, US corporations, US based corporations own about half of total global wealth, their first or second in just about every area. China is way behind. And in fact, if you take a look at the profit that's made from selling iPhones, very little of it goes to China. Most of it goes, well it goes to Taiwan, which is Foxconn or other managers, but most of that goes to Apple. It is what economists call rent design and, you know, royalties and so on. So China is undoubtedly growing, but the US economic power remains enormous. And this whole corporate world, as you say, wants to maintain the kind of China connection. They surely don't like the raising of tensions that's coming mostly out of Congress, but also out of the White House.

**PJ:** Maybe one of the reasons why the section of corporate America isn't saying more is because the Chinese are making it clear that they're not irrational about all this. There's a very interesting thing in Global Times, this English sort of edition of People's Daily, which is essentially an English platform for the Chinese Communist Party. And they praised the

appointment of the new American consul general to Hong Kong, saying that he actually knows something about China. And they see him as a message from Washington to try to calm things down that they finally, you know, they appointed someone that actually can be a good bridge for communication. And it was kind of positive; it wasn't filled with anti-American rhetoric. I mean, maybe what's happening is the Chinese are saying to corporate America, look, we have no imminent plans to use military force on Taiwan. That rhetoric is coming more from Washington than from us. So you don't actually have to worry so much. Keep your investments going.

**NC:** It would be crazy to invade Taiwan. Their own project is working very well. With all this war talk, the Chinese are systematically developing a huge investment development project, Belt and Road Initiative within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, spreading all over Asia and Central Asia, extending into Africa, it is even extending into Latin America. It's going into the Middle East through what they call the Maritime Silk Route, the UAE, major Middle Eastern powers tied up in the China system. Even Israel, I mean, China owns half the Haifa port. They're just spreading, developing, quietly building this huge economic empire based in China. They don't want any war to disrupt it. They're doing fine. I mean, I haven't seen it confirmed, but it was just announced that they're building the world's biggest battery manufacturing enterprise in Hungary, spreading into Europe. And it's very tempting for Europe. If you take a look at polls, Europeans don't want this war to go on. In Germany three quarters of the population wants to move to negotiations right now. Certainly they want to be part of this growing imperial system. China is a huge market for them. Japan, at the other end, has not cancelled and in fact it is increasing its investments in the Sakhalin Russian oil development areas. They just don't want to be part of it. The same is true of India and Indonesia. Which I should mention in India there's a good deal of deception going on. Like a lot has been made of the claim that India is rebuking Russia because of its aggression and the break between India and Russia. Take a look. It's based on six words in a SCO Summit meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Putin, in which Modi said: "Neither of us want war". That's the part that's quoted- and then he goes on to say, Let's move on together to a peaceful settlement. Our relations with Russia have been very close, very warm. They're continuing. We want them to improve. They are improving. I mean, it's like an ode to Putin and to Russia. It is interpreted here as a break between India and Russia. You know, to be really careful to watch what's going on. In any war, there's going to be plenty of propaganda, but the stops are totally out in this case.

**PJ:** Go ahead, Dan.

**DE:** Yes. I'm a little bit concerned about this conversation. First reason, Noam of course all the points you've made to the reality as I understand it that there would be essentially no threat to Taiwan, military threat to Taiwan from China, from the Chinese regime, were it not if the status quo of ambiguity, as you say, of the last 40 years, were to continue. And there would be no threat, as things goes on, if it weren't for what Congress and both parties and

Biden are saying. And what Trump began actually, with recognising- one of his first calls with Taiwan when he became president, treating it as an independent nation. Now Xi has given, neither Xi nor the Chinese in general or his predecessors gave any indication they were going, since the Taiwan Straits crisis of 58 or the latest, 98, 96, one generation ago, that they were intended in the near future to invade Taiwan or ever would, unless it became thoroughly infeasible to consider a peaceful reunification, or if Taiwan independence were to be recognised by other states larger than Saint Dominica, I think, and a few other islands, basically. But if the US were to recognise Taiwan and act toward it as a sovereign nation, they've said all along, they haven't made the preparations for an invasion now, but they will. In other words, to say that now, given what the US is doing in the way of moving toward Taiwan to be a sovereign nation, that could call in the US bases and in any amount. If they're a sovereign nation, they can ask for any amount of offensive weapons they want, ICBMs [Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles] for example if they wanted. That's the implication of being a sovereign nation. And if it weren't that the US is fanning those flames within Taiwan, and implying we're moving toward recognition of Taiwan, there wouldn't be any danger, as you say. But that is happening. So there is a danger. And here is the paradox, ruling circles, corporate circles in the US, except for a relatively minor amount of arms sales compared to the other sales, as Paul points out, of Boeing and Lockheed and the others, except for that, in corporate America, we can see them as setting the policy. Which is moving toward war. I repeat again, the war is not imminent unless we keep going the way it is, and then it will become imminent by every standard. So how can we stop that? And there is this paradox, this mystery that I have to call it, why is this happening? Why are the commercial interests going absolutely against the interests of world stability and the US profit?

**PJ:** In one of the other articles I read in Global Times, which is one of my new favourite things to read, because I get to actually see what the Chinese are saying themselves, they accused the United States on the issue of Taiwan of trying to create a kind of encirclement of China on the issue of semiconductors. That they're trying to control the semiconductor market. And the semiconductor thing, If I understand it correctly, Taiwan is not just one of the largest, but in terms of the thinnest wafer semiconductors that are really necessary for real high tech, including military, but all the big high commercial tech, Taiwan is really the dominant player in the world by like 70-75%. But the thing that's interesting is that the machines that make those semiconductors, the machines that make the machines are made in the Netherlands. And the Netherlands is the only place on earth that makes the machines that make the machines. And they're backordered for about five years. Because that's why all these other countries can't just- like why can't China just make its own high level semiconductor? They don't have the technology yet. In fact, even the United States doesn't have it, only the Netherlands. I actually had this explained to me by the guy that invented the use of silicon in chips. So the issue of the control of the semiconductor market is one of the things at the heart of this. Am I reading this right, Noam?

**DE:** Can I go ahead?



**PJ:** Go ahead Dan.

**DE:** Because what got me concerned about Taiwan specifically over a year ago was an article by that smart fool of The New York Times, Tom Friedman, who pointed out that the semiconductor market was so dependent on Taiwan. And that's why we had to have this strategic ambiguity. In fact, he didn't come right out and say that, but he implied that's why China wants Taiwan and that's why we have to defend Taiwan, in effect. So they got an interest in saying, We're blowing up the world over these semiconductors and we can't move them somewhere else?! Well, the point I was making right now is, there would be no threat of a military occupation event if we weren't creating it. It seems almost entirely, I mean, if I can go on to things that Noam said earlier, and you also mentioned. I've just said the semiconductor part, but the chain of satellite bases that we're trying to have around a new Asian NATO in effect, containing China, had originally Taiwan as its anchoring point. And China must believe, it will be very natural to believe and pretty realistic, believe that the Pentagon and the imperialists and the administrations in both parties, would like to have Taiwan as part of that satellite group again and to have bases there or have our submarines base there, have missiles and so forth. Pinning that down. So they have every reason to believe, given what we're doing and saying, that's what we want to produce again. All this talk about an Asian NATO with Taiwan in it and with Japan lending itself to that for some reason and offering to take part in this, and the concern about who controls the Solomon Islands, for example, and whether China is getting it now, in preference. So let me say, the reason I was laughing when you mentioned semiconductors is I remember Friedman saying, this is why we have to be prepared to go to war. It didn't seem to me like a terribly plausible basis somehow. And the assumption that I thought if it was really that dangerous, if the Chinese were threatening to take it over right away, am I wrong that you can't move that whole thing?

**PJ:** Yeah, my understanding is it is not easy to move the whole thing or they would have done it already. It's not so easy. Well, I understand there's about a five year window, what I've been told, to actually kind of repatriate. They're spending billions of dollars now trying to do this in the US and India, but it's not something you can do quickly. Noam, go ahead.

**DE:** ... and everybody gets their semiconductors. The only thing that's threatening Chinese can- actually the destruction of those. Would semiconductors survive a war between the US and China and Taiwan, I really raise that question.

**PJ:** That's a good point.

**DE:** In fact that of the global supply chains I think would be quite spectacular. So it is this paradoxical business. We are creating a threat in the sense that we are going against the Chinese attitude toward Taiwan, which is not distinguishable from Lincoln's attitude toward

the Confederacy, which is , you can't succeed. We will not allow that. And we got into a civil war over it.

**PJ:** Nobody accused global capitalism of being rational. Go ahead, Noam.

**NC:** I was going to say that your point about the Netherlands is quite significant. There is a global production [inaudible] so integrated within the whole coordinated state capitalist framework. The Netherlands is part of the German system. Germany has constructed in Europe a quite elaborate complex production system production, distribution. Now it extends from the Netherlands to Slovakia. All of this is being threatened and they surely don't like it. I am sure that's the reason we are seeing 75% of Germans want to get the war over. They don't want this system broken up and they want it connected with Asia. Asia is a huge market, not just the whole BR, the Belt and Road Initiative thing, but Japan, Indonesia, India. They don't want to be cut off from all of that. And the China Taiwan connection is an example. But these things don't get developed in a day. You can't just move them. They're integrated internationally and well-established. What we're actually driving China to do is develop its own high tech chip technology. You may have seen in the science journals, they recently produced a very thin, super thin wafer, maybe they can make it commercially viable. But we're driving them to raise their technological level. We're doing the same thing by excluding Chinese students from US universities. These are some of the top students in the universities. Okay. So they'll go back to China and work there, meanwhile we will encircle China with satellite states aimed at them, trying to create to turn Taiwan into a semi-United States. I mean, from a rational national interest perspective it has no logic. You can understand why hawks want to outdo each other. Of course, as somebody said before, the military industry loves it. You know, they can sell more arms and so on. But it's part of a longstanding affair. I mean, 50 years ago, Seymour Melman was pointing out in his work on the military, Pentagon system, the war, in those days it was Japan. Well, Japan and Germany are developing advanced technology and superior means of production. The United States is putting its research development and production into creating more ways of destroying things. Well, of course that hit the United States in the 1980s, when the United States was falling far behind in production capacity, and the Reagan administration had instituted government programmes to train managers in Japanese and German style production.

**PJ:** One of the forces driving this anti-China fervour in the United States is Christian nationalism. A few years ago, Steve Bannon spoke to a meeting of multi-millionaires at the Vatican being held under the auspices of Cardinal Burke. This far right wing opus dei cardinal who has been trying to overthrow Pope Francis. And in that meeting, Bannon said to these millionaires, he says, You're rich because God made you rich and you have a responsibility to God for your riches. And that responsibility is fighting in this coming war against radical Islam and China. And, of course, now it's become more about China than it is about radical Islam. But one of the core beliefs of the Bannon-esque Christian nationalists is this mythic, apocalyptic even war against China. And that's helping, I think, create the kind of

fervour in Congress, because nobody wants to look weak on China, certainly not the only factor at play. But given what's coming in the coming elections, where it's not out of the question that the Christian nationalist Republican Party might control Congress, they more or less control the Supreme Court and who knows if they don't have the presidency in 24. So in the next segment with Noam and Dan, we're going to talk about the coming elections and rising fascism in the United States. So thank you, Noam and Dan, and thank you for joining us, and join us for part two.

**END**