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## Trump Is Showing China How to Seize Taiwan

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*Great powers study each other closely, observing the strategies used, the resistance met, and the outcomes realized. Donald Trump's strangulation of Cuba thus could become a template for others, beginning with Xi Jinping, who remains committed to achieving "reunification" with Taiwan.*

TOKYO – Since returning to office last year, US President Donald Trump has ordered military strikes from the Caribbean and eastern Pacific to Africa and the Middle East, targeting alleged drug-smuggling boats and suspected terrorist groups. He has attacked Venezuela and kidnapped its leader, Nicolás Maduro. And he has joined Israel in a [large-scale assault](#) on Iran that amounts to a major escalation from last year's strikes, which supposedly "obliterated" the country's nuclear facilities. Meanwhile, he is tightening a noose around Cuba, in the hopes that the resulting [humanitarian crisis](#) will [open the way](#) for a "friendly takeover" of the island by the United States.

As Trump acts with [open contempt](#) for international law, China is taking notes. The Cuba model, in particular, offers a useful blueprint for Chinese President Xi Jinping to apply in pursuing his "[historic mission](#)" of "reunification" with Taiwan. This is a live demonstration of how a superpower can strangle a country into submission.

Modern societies depend on a handful of critical systems such as food, water, transportation, and communications. But one system rules them all: energy. Electricity [powers](#) water pumps, refrigeration, health care, digital networks, and industrial and agricultural production. Once the grid begins to fail, so do all other critical systems – and social stability. This makes countries that [depend heavily](#) on imported fuel to generate electricity fundamentally vulnerable.

For Cuba, which has long depended primarily on oil purchased from Venezuela and Mexico, Trump has exploited that vulnerability by imposing a [complete blockade](#) on fuel deliveries. Millions of people have [lost access to electricity](#). Water-pumping stations have shut down. Tractors and delivery trucks sit idle, leading to food-price spikes, food shortages, and rising hunger. Hospitals [struggle to function](#) amid intermittent blackouts.

The suffering is the point: it is the lever Trump is using to apply pressure to the regime, whose fall, Trump [glibly maintains](#), is imminent.

For Xi, such a coercive siege of Taiwan might be more appealing than a full-scale amphibious invasion across the Taiwan Strait, which would be fraught with [logistical challenges](#) and likely draw in the US and Japan. Instead of firing missiles at Taipei or storming Taiwan's beaches, China could declare a maritime quarantine or customs-inspection regime around the island, with Chinese coast-guard vessels stopping energy tankers bound for Taiwanese ports for "safety checks" or "anti-smuggling operations." Even modest disruptions could quickly create supply bottlenecks. Given that Taiwan imports [nearly all of its fuel](#) (mostly liquefied natural gas), and maintains barely [two weeks' worth of reserves](#), a line of LNG tankers waiting offshore could trigger cascading shortages within weeks. Like Cuba, Taiwan would face blackouts, which would disrupt its water and health-care systems. Industrial production, including the [semiconductor plants](#) that power the global digital economy, would grind to a halt. The goal would not be immediate surrender, but rather gradual exhaustion.

This [gradualism](#) is essential. A single dramatic act would jolt the international system, forcing others to respond. But a steady rise in "routine" ship inspections, producing increasingly long delays and escalating economic and social pain, offers no such shocking moment. Each step appears insufficient to justify a major military response. This is no Trumpian innovation: Xi is a [master](#) of such tactics, which have enabled him to make major strategic gains, such as in the South China Sea and the Himalayas, without firing a single shot.

In Taiwan's case, China could simply wait until the economic and humanitarian crisis that it created became severe enough to justify moving in to "stabilize the island" and "rescue its people." As with Trump's "friendly takeover," which makes geopolitical

coercion sound like corporate restructuring, the logic is that of a protection racket: create the problem, then step in to “solve” it.

All this could unfold under a shroud of legal ambiguity. While a formal naval blockade would be regarded as an act of war under international law, a quarantine or inspection regime could be presented as law enforcement, rather than military action. China’s government – which insists that Taiwan is a Chinese province, not a sovereign state – would likely portray maritime inspections as an internal matter of administrative enforcement.

Would Japan and the US risk war with a major nuclear power and the world’s second-largest military spender over actions portrayed as customs enforcement? Would they want to take responsibility for a crisis-stricken Taiwan? The answer may well be no, especially at a time when the US is hemorrhaging blood and treasure, owing to Trump’s multiplying military adventures abroad.

Other countries would be even less likely to jump to Taiwan’s defense. Just as the US is using [tariff threats](#) to prevent third countries, such as Mexico, from providing oil to Cuba, China could leverage its [central role in global trade](#) and its chokehold on rare-earth supplies to deter opposition to a siege of Taiwan.

Great powers [study each other](#) closely. What works for one becomes a template for others, now and in the future. In this sense, what is happening to Cuba is not a one-off tragedy; it is a rehearsal and a test. If the world sits silently by as Trump strangles Cuba, with its 11 million people, Xi will see little reason not to apply the same strategy against 23 million Taiwanese.