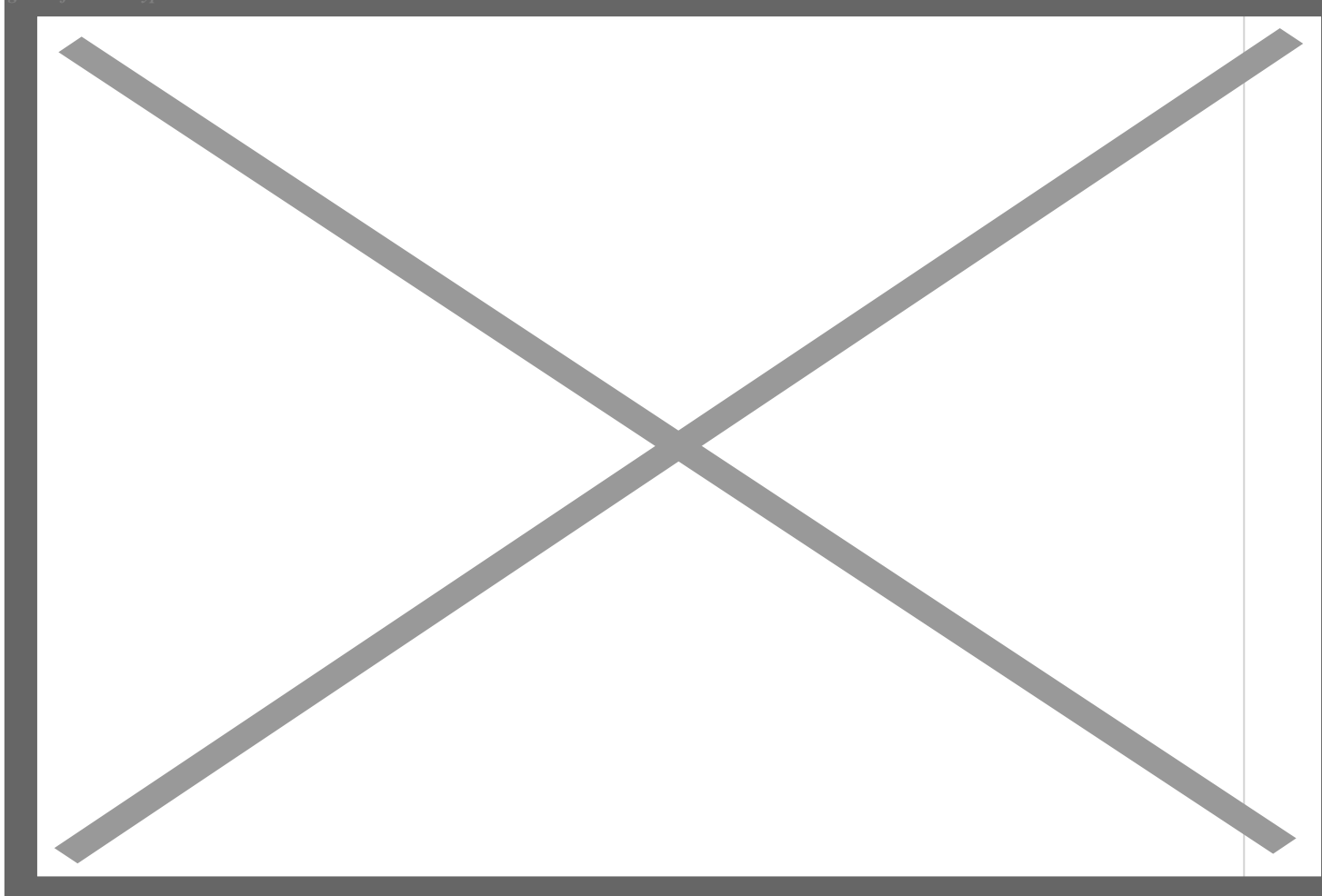


U.S. president says he'll send in the Marines to defend Taiwan against China

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Speaking at a news conference in Tokyo, Joe Biden has said the U.S. would defend Taiwan if it was attacked by China [File: Al Drago/Bloomberg]?

Tokyo, May 23 (RHC)-- U.S. President Joe Biden said on Monday he would be willing to use force to defend Taiwan, capping a series of critical comments about China while in Asia that an aide said

represented no change in U.S. policy toward the self-ruled island.

Biden's remarks, made during his first visit to Japan since taking office, and as Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida looked on, appeared to be a departure from existing U.S. policy of so-called strategic ambiguity on Taiwan.

China considers the island its territory, under its "One China" policy, and says it is the most sensitive and important issue in its relationship with Washington.

When a reporter asked Biden during a joint news conference with the Japanese leader if the United States would defend Taiwan if it were attacked, the president answered: "Yes." And Biden added: "That's the commitment we made."

"We agree with a One-China policy. We've signed on to it and all the intended agreements made from there. But the idea that, that it can be taken by force, just taken by force, is just not, is just not appropriate."

A White House official later said there was no change in policy towards Taiwan. China's foreign ministry said the United States should not defend Taiwan's independence.

The president's national security aides shifted in their seats and appeared to be studying Biden closely as he responded to the question on Taiwan. Several looked down as he made what appeared to be an unambiguous commitment to Taiwan's defence.

Biden made a similar comment about defending Taiwan in October. At that time, a White House spokesperson said Biden was not announcing any change in U.S. policy and one analyst referred to the comment as a "gaffe."

Despite the White House insistence that Monday's comments did not represent a change of U.S. policy, Grant Newsham, a retired U.S. Marine Corps colonel and now a research fellow at the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies, said the meaning was clear.

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