

The M-1 Abrams Main Battle Tank: A Symbol of Dominance and Deterrence

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An M-1A1 Abrams tank guards a position during the Advance Warfighting Experiment at the Fort Irwin Army National Training Center in Fort Irwin, Ca., in this undated photo. Mike Nelson/AFP via Getty Images



By John Mills

1/6/2025 Updated: 1/6/2025

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Commentary

The M-1 Abrams main battle tank was championed by then-Army Chief of Staff Creighton Abrams in the early 1970s. Abrams had vowed never again that American tanks would be anything but dominant after his experience [driving his regiment of Sherman tanks](#) to relieve the surrounded American force in Bastogne in December 1944.

The German tanks were far better armed and armored. The Abrams tank delivered dominance and overmatch by annihilating the most advanced Soviet tanks used by the Iraqis in [1991's Battle of 73 Easting](#). The Chinese (and Russians) continue to study Desert Storm as their model of perfect warfare, and they know the decisive role of the M-1 tank well.

Taiwan has sought M-1 tanks from the United States for years, and they were [finally approved in 2019](#). As the cyber liaison from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) for several years, M-1 tanks were routinely brought up as the first point of order in our regular bilateral cyber meetings. It was a bit of a stretch to connect M-1 tanks to cyber—but there is a nexus.

M-1 tanks not only have the dominant firepower, mobility, and protection of any tank in existence but are also heavily connected to the cyber world. They are perhaps the most ferocious land domain and internet protocol endpoints ever created. It took years, but finally, the deal was consummated, and now the first 38 tanks have arrived in Taiwan. The Taiwanese army now has its hands on the best tank ever created with a proven combat record.

Abrams Tanks Send Message of Deterrence, US Support

The [first M-1s were delivered](#) to the Hsinchu, Taiwan-based Armor Training Command. Some will become training tanks; some will be the nucleus of the first M-1 armored battalion of the Taiwanese army. Delivering the M-1 tank was a strong signal of U.S. resolve.

However, there has been hesitancy on the U.S. side over the M-1s. The issue was the “prickly” versus “prestige” debate. This was a basic math issue on defense spending with some American policy experts. “Prestige” weapons such as tanks, submarines, and ships consumed a higher percentage of the Taiwanese defense budget. This was a realistic concern during earlier days of lesser Taiwanese defense spending.

One way to address both the “prickly” and “prestige” weapons was to increase Taiwanese defense spending. Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party has implemented seven straight years of defense spending increases, reaching over \$20 billion in 2025.

Both “prickly” weapons (drones and missiles) and “prestige” weapons have a role. Ukraine had few weapons, prickly or prestige, and made Ukraine look like an easy, 72-hour Desert Storm to Russia. Without any visible deterrence, Russia, a [vassal of China](#), was seeing a green light to invade Ukraine. Having a disciplined and ready force of prestige weapons like the M-1 tank is a visible, demonstrative signal of deterrence that totalitarian countries like China see, respect, and incorporate into their invasion calculus.

By late 2023, “prickly” weapons were bogging down the war, as both Russia and Ukraine faced small drones on the battlefield. But Ukraine was able to break out of this drone stalemate by using tank maneuver warfare (including M-1s) to counterattack and occupy a significant swath of Russia’s Kursk Oblast.

The Taiwanese M-1 tanks are a strategic psychological operations message of deterrence and a powerful maneuver force to strike and destroy any possible Chinese beachheads on Taiwan’s west coast if an invasion occurs.

Taiwan Waits for Delivery of Defense Equipment

One question regarding the M-1 tank delivery to Taiwan is: Why did it take so long?

There is a significant backlog of “prickly” and “prestige” weapons orders for Taiwan, and it’s a U.S. industrial base issue, not a Taiwanese issue. For M-1 tanks, the sole plant for [new construction and refurbishment is in Lima, Ohio](#). With the war in Ukraine, interest in the M-1 has outpaced the plant’s capacity, which has languished and has been underutilized for almost 20 years.

[Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Australia, Egypt, Bahrain](#), and the [U.S. Army](#) are all jostling for slots in the production and refurbishment schedule, which squeezes Taiwan’s deliveries. U.S. missiles are also in high demand, straining the American defense industrial base.

The good news is that Taiwan has started receiving some missile shipments. The first 100 Harpoon coastal defense missile launchers and 400 Harpoon Block II missiles [arrived in September 2024](#), based on a [2020 order](#) placed during Donald Trump’s first presidential term.

HIMARS long-range rocket artillery, which has proven so effective in Ukraine, has partially arrived in Taiwan. This was also ordered in 2020, meaning about a four-year lead time. Beyond these missiles, there is still a [long list of items](#) that are already paid for by Taiwan and waiting for production and delivery.

Chinese Penetration of LOGINK Shipping Software

China has been conducting an expanding set of Joint Sword exercises demonstrating a possible blockade or quarantine of Taiwan.

During a meeting in September 2024 in Taiwan, Tzu-Yun Su, a research fellow and director of the Taiwan-based Institute for National Defense and Security Research, expressed concern that the Chinese regime might quarantine Taiwan within six months.

LOGINK is an integrated platform of logistics data broadly used in the transportation community. This system is potentially being used, like port “spy” cranes, for monitoring U.S. war material shipments to Taiwan. [A spokesman for the U.S. Transportation Command](#) stated, “China is seeking to enhance its visibility into the global supply chain, including U.S. military logistics.”

With communist China leveraging LOGINK, future shipments of the \$22 billion-plus of the backlog of war material from the United States to Taiwan may be selectively targeted in the coming years.

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