

Before Zero Day

**Taiwan's Evolving Defense Strategy and the
Struggle for Peace**



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The Taiwan Strait Area (By Paul Huang)

Note on Terms

The following paper will not use the military term "D-Day" to refer to the notional day on which a PRC invasion operation was launched against Taiwan. Any practice of making allusions to Operation Overlord and the June 6, 1944, Normandy landings would almost certainly be detrimental to the person reading. Americans and other English-speaking peoples view D-Day as a glorious and magnificent moment in human history. The term D-Day, while sometimes used more broadly by military experts, is associated with strong positive emotions and would be inappropriate for discussing the subject at hand.

This paper will instead refer to the date of a future PRC invasion of Taiwan as "Zero Day" (or Z-Day). This term will designate the day of the invasion operation, since it has not yet been determined by PLA war planners, or is secret. Z-Day will be used in combination with numbers and plus and minus signs to indicate points of time before or after operations are initiated. For example, Z-Day minus five (Z-5) would mean five days before Zero Day, and Z-Day plus five (Z+5) would mean five days after Zero Day. This term, Z-Day, was used by Winston Churchill when discussing the date of a potential Nazi invasion of England, an operation Adolf Hitler planned to launch in 1940, but aborted after the Battle of Britain resulted in a decisive English victory.



CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, after months of troop movements and deception operations, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In the early hours of war, with Russian tanks rolling toward Kiev, many Ukrainians saw a series of messages appear on their social media feeds, claiming that China had just invaded Taiwan. Digital commentators asserted that America and its NATO allies were distracted by the disaster in Asia and in no position to fight a two-front war. Help for Ukraine would not be coming. The rumors, believed to have been spread by Russian agents, appear to have been designed to instill a sense of despair and hopelessness in Ukraine's defenders. If so, the disinformation campaign backfired. Ukrainians fighters later told interviewers that they went into battle worried about Taiwan's fate, but because they thought that a new world war had just broken out, it seemed especially imperative that they do their utmost to defend the cause of freedom.¹

A number of factors made the rumors appear more credible than they otherwise might have seemed. China had been making increasingly bellicose gestures toward Taiwan and signaling that it wanted to annex the island nation. As a result, the prospects of the two governments peacefully resolving their political differences had narrowed to the point where they appeared almost nonexistent. In the wake of China's violent crackdown on Hong Kong and its draconian response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing looked ever more willing to sacrifice economic growth for the sake of perceived security gains. But most importantly, the scene had now changed and one new fact stood out: interstate warfare for the purpose of conquest and territorial aggrandizement was no longer a theoretical abstraction or an anachronism of the last century.

¹ Authors' discussions with a Taiwanese subject matter expert, who reported extensively on the war in Ukraine, June 2023, in Arlington, Virginia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine came as a profound shock to an international community that had for decades upheld national self-determination and the peaceful resolution of disputes as sacrosanct. As Ukraine fought for its survival, everything seemed to hang in the balance and anything seemed possible. Long-held assumptions were cast aside, and people around the world started to fear that Taiwan would be the next democracy to be invaded. If a war like this could break out in 21st century Europe, the logic went, it could happen anywhere. And unless preparations were made to bolster deterrence against revanchist powers, the outcome could be catastrophic.

The sudden outpouring of concern and sympathy for Taiwan generated by the invasion of Ukraine raised urgent questions. What is the fundamental source of instability in the Taiwan Strait? How is Taiwan's defense strategy evolving in view of events? Does China plan to attack Taiwan in the foreseeable future? If so, what can the United States do to help prevent conflict and preserve peace?²

A Threat Like No Other

Taiwan, a country formally known as the Republic of China (ROC), has long faced an existential threat and uncertain future. In 1949, Mao Zedong's communist forces established the People's Republic of China (PRC). Since that time, the PRC has sought to marginalize Taiwan in the international community, disintegrate the ROC government, and assimilate the country's citizens into its Marxist-Leninist system. The PRC publicly describes this process as "peaceful reunification," but internal documents call it the "liberation of Taiwan" and assume the mission will require the application of overwhelming military force.³

² Michael Mazza, "Taiwan and China Keep Eyes on Ukraine," *The Bulwark*, March 3, 2022, at <https://www.thebulwark.com/taiwan-and-china-keep-eyes-on-ukraine/>.

³ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept: An Asymmetric Approach to Taiwan's Defense* [台灣的勝算：以小制大的不對稱戰略，全台灣人都應了解的整體防衛構想] (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Books, 2022), p. 39. See also Xu Lisheng and Wang Tiaoyong (eds.), *Research on Port Landing Operations* [港口登陸作戰研究] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2015), pp. 16-271; Cao Zhengrong, Sun Longhai, and Yang Yin (eds.), *Informatized Army Operations* [信息化陸軍作戰] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2014), pp. 109-215; and Cao Zhengrong, Wu Runbo, and Sun Jianjun (eds.), *Informatized Joint Operations* [信息化聯合作戰] (Beijing: Liberation Army Press, 2008), pp. 186-235.

The PRC is conducting a campaign of all-domain coercion and infiltration to set the conditions for its envisioned takeover of Taiwan. Many observers compare this approach to “boiling a frog in water.” Turn up the heat slowly and patiently, the thinking goes, and the prey will fall asleep forever instead of jumping out of the pot and making a mess.⁴ The armed standoff across the Taiwan Strait between the PRC and ROC governments has been relatively static since 1949. Occasional tremors and precursor events occur, but never yet an eruption. Many experts now believe time is running out. In their eyes, the strategic situation is fast reaching the point of fracture and a conflagration is likely in the near future.

It is difficult to accurately forecast the intentions of a totalitarian regime. Nonetheless, a considerable body of evidence suggests that the PRC's ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plans to use its preponderance of power to force the Taiwanese to the negotiating table under duress. When that fails, the CCP will launch a war of aggression to annihilate Taiwan's government and occupy the island. In 2021, Admiral Phil Davidson, then commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the PRC could be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027.⁵ Other American admirals and generals have made similar estimates. “The big one is coming. And it isn't going to be very long before we're going to get tested in ways that we haven't been tested a long time,” said Admiral Charles Richard, the commander of U.S. Strategic Command, during a speech in November 2022. “As I assess our level of deterrence against China, the ship is slowly sinking. It is sinking slowly. But it is sinking.”⁶

Admiral Richard is one of several high-ranking military commanders and government officials who have issued ominous warnings.⁷ In February 2023, CIA Director William

⁴ Authors discussions with Taiwanese security experts in Taipei, June 2023.

⁵ See “Full Committee Hearing: Open/Closed: United States Indo-Pacific Command,” *Senate Armed Services Committee*, March 9, 2021, at <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/21-03-09-united-states-indo-pacific-command>.

⁶ C. Todd Lopez, “Stratcom Commander Say U.S. Should Look to 1950s to Regain Competitive Edge,” *U.S. Department of Defense News*, November 3, 2022, at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3209416/stratcom-commander-says-us-should-look-to-1950s-to-regain-competitive-edge/>.

⁷ Courtney Kube and Mosheh Gains, “Air Force general predicts war with China in 2025, tells officers to prep by firing 'a clip' at a target, and 'aim for the head',” *NBC News*, January 27, 2023, at <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/us-air-force-general-predicts-war-china-2025-memo-rcna67967>; and Mallory Shelbourne, “China's Accelerated Timeline to Take Taiwan Pushing Navy

Burns said that Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the CCP and Chairman of the PRC, ordered his military to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027. “We know, as a matter of intelligence, that he’s instructed the People’s Liberation Army to be ready by 2027 to conduct a successful invasion,” said Burns. “Now that does not mean that he’s decided to conduct an invasion in 2027, or any other year, but it’s a reminder of the seriousness of his focus and his ambition.”⁸

Taiwanese military leaders are even more concerned. In 2021, Taiwan’s Minister of National Defense, Chiu Kuo-cheng, said that the PLA could be capable of launching a full-scale invasion by 2025.⁹ Taiwanese experts see the PRC’s rapid military buildup and provocative actions as clear indicators of hostile intent, which signal that the Communist Party has given up on compromise agreements and is preparing to use force. “As long as China’s one-party authoritarian political system doesn’t change...it should be obvious that unifying Taiwan will not be a question of ‘if’ but rather a question of ‘when,’” wrote Admiral Lee Hsi-min, the former supreme commander of Taiwan’s military and author of the book, *The Overall Defense Concept: An Asymmetric Approach to Taiwan’s Defense*.¹⁰ “The goal of those providing ‘strategic warning’ is to get the nation to prepare for war as fast as possible, thereby producing a deterrence effect.”¹¹

in the Pacific, Says CNO Gilday,” *U.S. Naval Institute News*, October 19, 2022, at

<https://news.usni.org/2022/10/19/chinas-accelerated-timeline-to-take-taiwan-pushing-navy-in-the-pacific-says-cno-gilday>.

⁸ “Watch: Trainor Award Ceremony Honoring CIA Director William J. Burns,” *Georgetown University*, February 9, 2023, at <https://isd.georgetown.edu/2023/02/09/watch-trainor-award-ceremony-honoring-cia-director-william-j-burns/>.

⁹ “China capable of full scale Taiwan invasion by 2025: Defense minister,” *Focus Taiwan*, October 6, 2021, at <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202110060016>; and Eric Cheung, “China could be ready to mount a ‘full-scale’ invasion of Taiwan by 2025, island’s defense minister says,” *CNN*, October 6, 2021, at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/06/asia/taiwan-defense-minister-china-attack-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹⁰ The exact quote in Mandarin is: 只要中國一黨專政的政治體制不改變...那麼統一台灣當然就不“會不會”，而是“什麼時候”的問題了。See Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept: An Asymmetric Approach to Taiwan’s Defense* [台灣的勝算：以小制大的不對稱戰略，全台灣人都應了解的整體防衛構想] (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Books, 2022), p. 57.

¹¹ The exact quote in Mandarin is: 提出“戰略預警”的目的，為的就是儘早準備以達嚇阻之效。Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, p. 57.

Rising Risks

As a consequence of Taiwan's worsening threat environment, ROC government officials and military officers have watched the war in Ukraine with their own futures in mind. Their concerns were amplified by the CCP's decision to conduct unexpectedly intense, live-fire military exercises around Taiwan in August 2022, directly after then U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched 11 ballistic missiles around Taiwan. Four of the missiles passed over Taipei before plummeting into the Pacific Ocean off the island's east coast. Amid the crisis, large numbers of PLA navy ships and aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait median line, which Beijing said it no longer recognizes, and Chinese drones buzzed Taiwan's outer islands in the Kinmen, Matsu, and Dongyin groups, located just off the PRC coast.¹² After four weeks of provocative drills, PLA activities slowed down, but then began spiking again in an intermittent and reoccurring fashion, creating a "new normal," or near constant state of heightened tensions.

In the wake of the crisis, Taiwanese leaders face a dilemma. They must strengthen their country's ability to weather long-term campaigns of coercion and harassment, while concurrently managing escalation and warding off a potential invasion. This is a balancing act that demands difficult tradeoffs. For Taiwan, the stakes of realizing a successful national defense strategy and deterring war are of the highest possible consequence. Russia's surprise assault shattered the long peace that European nations enjoyed after the end of World War II, and it raised questions about the durability of the American-led, liberal international order. The war in Ukraine also falsified and supplanted long held assumptions about interstate warfare and deterrence. Could the outcome embolden the CCP to accelerate timelines for a blockade or invasion of Taiwan?¹³

There may be reason to believe that Vladimir Putin's Ukraine gamble could enhance Xi Jinping's appetite for conquest. It seems possible that a "copycat effect" (which refers to the potential for mimicked criminal behavior) applies to violence-prone rulers. When one

¹² Bonny Lin, Brian Hart, Matthew P. Funaiole, Samantha Lu, Hannah Price, Nicholas Kaufman, "Tracking the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, undated, last visited July 13, 2023, at <https://chinapower.csis.org/tracking-the-fourth-taiwan-strait-crisis/>.

¹³ Evan Montgomery and Toshi Yoshihara, "Leaderless, Cut Off, and Alone: The Risks to Taiwan in the Wake of Ukraine," *War on the Rocks*, April 5, 2022, at <https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/leaderless-cut-off-and-alone-the-risks-to-taiwan-in-the-wake-of-ukraine/>.

dictator sees another dictator challenge their shared ideological adversary and invade a smaller neighboring state, does that make the first more inclined to follow suit? It is too early to know whether the coming years will be characterized by cascading state-on-state warfare, or whether we are witnessing an anomaly in Ukraine that will serve as a cautionary tale for other would-be aggressors in the future, including those in the CCP. Accurately assessing what the future might look like will require the development of insights into how the CCP perceives the current war in Ukraine, what Taiwan is preparing to do in the event of an enemy attack, and how far the United States might go to support Taiwan.¹⁴

The Ukraine Effect

Events in Ukraine are reverberating around the world. While it is unknowable how and when combat might end, it seems likely that the war marks an inflection point, after which Taiwanese leaders view their security picture in a new light and undertake significant military reforms. In early 2022, Taipei initiated a pilot program to make reserve force training more rigorous and called up reservists more frequently for refresher training.¹⁵ In March 2022, Taiwan's *de facto* ambassador to the United States, Hsiao Bi-khim, wrote that Ukraine's experience inspired Taiwan to more closely cooperate with the United States and other democracies to "stand against authoritarianism."¹⁶

On December 27, 2022, President Tsai Ing-wen announced that Taiwan will undertake a series of military reforms, based on a comprehensive review of the nation's defense capabilities. This multi-part plan includes the extension of mandatory military

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of lessons the CCP is drawing from the war in Ukraine, see Chris Buckley, "China Draws Lessons From Russia's Losses in Ukraine, and Its Gains," *New York Times*, April 1, 2023, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/01/world/asia/china-russia-ukraine-war.html>.

¹⁵ Wu Shu-wei, "Legislature Runs Preliminary Trial of Special Bonuses for Reservists Called Up Five Times (立院初審 後備軍人接受教召第 5 次發獎金)," *Liberty Times*, March 31, 2022, at <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/3878488>; Joseph Yeh, "New intensified reservist training program set to launch," *Focus Taiwan*, March 2, 2022, at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202203020008>; and Kelvin Chen, "Taiwan defense ministry launches reservist training program," *Taiwan News*, February 7, 2022, at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4433732>.

¹⁶ Bi-Khim Hsiao, "Ukraine has inspired Taiwan. We must stand against authoritarianism," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2022, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/03/24/ukraine-resilience-has-inspired-taiwan/>.

conscription times from four months to one year, starting in 2024.¹⁷ In her speech, Tsai suggested that her government's decision was influenced by the war in Ukraine.

“Thousands of miles away in Europe, as we all celebrated Christmas last weekend and with the New Year fast approaching, Russia's invasion of Ukraine passed its 300th day and continues unabated. Ukraine, though, has not fallen, and it is still fighting. The determination of the Ukrainian people to defend their homeland has moved democracy- and freedom-loving people around the world ... Taiwan stands on the frontlines of authoritarian expansion, at the vanguard of the global defense of democracy. Only by preparing for war can we avoid it – only by being capable of fighting a war can we stop one.”¹⁸

Tsai's defense reforms have been bolstered by a wave of popular support from the general public. Programs have sprung up across Taiwan's society to train civilian volunteers in skills such as combat medicine, backup radio operations, and urban guerilla warfare tactics.¹⁹ Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Taiwanese civil defense programs have been flooded with so many applicants that organizers have been unable to keep up with demand.²⁰ This suggests a remarkable change has occurred in the Taiwanese public's attitudes toward defense and security affairs. As the threat of interstate warfare has become more apparent, the Taiwanese people's willingness to defend their democracy has increased, according to polling data and interviews.²¹ But many analytic gaps and uncertainties remain.

¹⁷ “President Tsai announces military force realignment plan,” *Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan)*, December 27, 2022, at <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6417>.

¹⁸ “President Tsai announces military force realignment plan,” *Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan)*, December 27, 2022, at <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6417>.

¹⁹ Chao Shih-hsun, “Between Crisis and Daily Life: Taiwan's Civil Defense Awareness Rises (危機與日常之間 台灣民防意識崛起),” *Central News Agency*, July 27, 2023, at <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/ahel/202307275004.aspx>.

²⁰ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese defense experts and civil society leaders in Taipei, June 2023. See also Natalie Tso, “Taiwan's Civilian Soldiers, Watching Ukraine, Worry They Aren't Prepared to Defend Their Island,” *Time*, March 18, 2022, at <https://time.com/6158550/taiwan-military-china-ukraine/>.

²¹ “Continuation and Evolution of Taiwan's Public Awareness of ‘Self-Defense’ During the Russia-Ukraine War (俄烏戰爭下台灣民眾「自我防衛」意識的持續與變遷),” *Institute for National Defense and Security Research*, April 22, 2022, at <https://indsr.org.tw/respublicationcon?uid=12&resid=1885&pid=1944&typeid=3>; and authors' discussions with scholars, civil society leaders, and defense and security experts in Taiwan, June 2023.

Developing Strategic Empathy

The United States has a national interest in understanding the Taiwanese government, military, and public's worldview and, to the maximum extent possible, partnering more closely with Taiwan to ensure Xi Jinping does not draw potentially dangerous conclusions. If the PRC's ruler concludes that either Washington or Taipei lacks the requisite willingness and ability to defend Taiwan's democracy, he could take actions that might precipitate a war. On the other hand, it remains possible that Chairman Xi will watch as Russia is diplomatically isolated, militarily defeated, and sanctioned into bankruptcy, leaving Putin's regime crippled and encircled by a solid American-led alliance network – a fate that he is keen to avoid.

American officials might assume their counterparts in Taiwan are drawing the same conclusions they are about the war in Ukraine. Mirror imaging – projecting one's views onto those with different lived experiences, perceptual frameworks, and patterns of behavior – can result in mistrust and unnecessary friction, even in a relationship that both sides want to foster. Mirror imaging is commonplace in Washington's halls of power. Few American executive branch officials and senior military officers visit Taiwan and attempt to achieve strategic empathy by assessing the situation from the viewpoint of their security partners and allies. Decades of underfunded area studies programs, academic self-censorship, and a dearth of Mandarin linguists/analysts have produced a situation in the United States where ignorance of Taiwan is not the exception, but rather the rule.²²

By eschewing mirror imaging, American leaders can better empathize with – and respond to – the evolving threat picture in the Taiwan Strait area and develop an informed policy that enhances deterrence, improves interoperability, and maintains regional stability. To succeed in what will likely be the supreme strategic test for the United States in this generation, scholars and policy analysts can seek to learn Taiwanese views, and observe how they see the war in Ukraine, China's military buildup, and what it could mean for the future of war and peace in Asia.

When it comes to Taiwan's defense, there are many variables worthy of consideration, but the realm of ideas may prove to be the most important to study. Ideas control actions, so understanding how the Taiwanese government and military thinks is indispensable. With

²² This assertion draws from the authors' discussions and interviews with both American and Taiwanese officials, military officers, and scholars.

such knowledge in hand, it becomes possible to build improved models of partnership and pioneer future areas of cooperation. White House, State Department, and Defense Department officials are quick to assert that the U.S. commitment to Taiwan is “rock solid.” Ensuring that this is true will require the development of a more normal, stable, and constructive relationship based on trust and mutual understanding.

Methods and Approach

This monograph will attempt to provide insights into Taiwan's evolving defense strategy and assess the associated opportunities and challenges for the American-led, regional security architecture. In the following pages, we will examine Taiwanese leadership speeches, strategy reports, military writings, and media articles. We will recount findings from interviews and discussions with experts across Taiwan's government, military, and civil society – as well as U.S. government officials, military officers, and subject matter experts. The central research questions that we hope to shed light on are as follows: *How is the war in Ukraine informing Taiwan's evolving defense strategy? What policy options exist for the U.S. to assist Taiwan and enhance deterrence?*²³

²³ The authors benefitted greatly from the rich literature and policy debates about how to ensure deterrence and preserve the peace in the Taiwan Strait. For example, see David J. Scheffer, “Deterrence Lawfare to Save Taiwan,” *Just Security*, August 7, 2023, at <https://www.justsecurity.org/87486/deterrence-lawfare-to-save-taiwan/>; David Sacks and Ivan Kanapathy, “What It Will Take to Deter China in the Taiwan Strait,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 15, 2023, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/what-it-will-take-deter-china-taiwan-strait>; Oriana Skylar Mastro, “Testimony: The Challenges of Deterrence in the Taiwan Strait,” *American Enterprise Institute*, April 28, 2023, at <https://www.aei.org/research-products/testimony/the-challenges-of-deterrence-in-the-taiwan-strait/>; Bryan Burack, “Four Steps to Enhance Deterrence in the Taiwan Strait: Taiwan is Prioritized in Landmark Heritage Foundation Report,” *Global Taiwan Institute*, April 5, 2023, at <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/04/four-steps-to-enhance-deterrence-in-the-taiwan-strait-taiwan-is-prioritized-in-landmark-heritage-foundation-report/>; James Carafano et al., *Winning the New Cold War: A Plan for Countering China* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, March 2023), at <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/winning-the-new-cold-war-plan-countering-china>; Taylor Fravel, Elbridge Colby, and Melanie Sisson, “Deterring a Cross-Strait Conflict: Beijing's Assessment of Evolving U.S. Strategy,” *CSIS Interpret China*, March 29, 2023, at <https://interpret.csis.org/deterring-a-cross-strait-conflict-beijings-assessment-of-evolving-u-s-strategy/>; Michael D. Swaine, “What the US Gets Wrong About Taiwan and Deterrence,” *The Diplomat*, January 23, 2023, at <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/what-the-us-gets-wrong-about-taiwan-and-deterrence/>; Raymond Kuo, “‘Strategic Ambiguity’ Has the U.S. and Taiwan Trapped: Washington's long-held policy has outlived its usefulness,” *Foreign Policy*, January 18, 2023, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/18/taiwan-us-china-strategic-ambiguity-military-strategy->

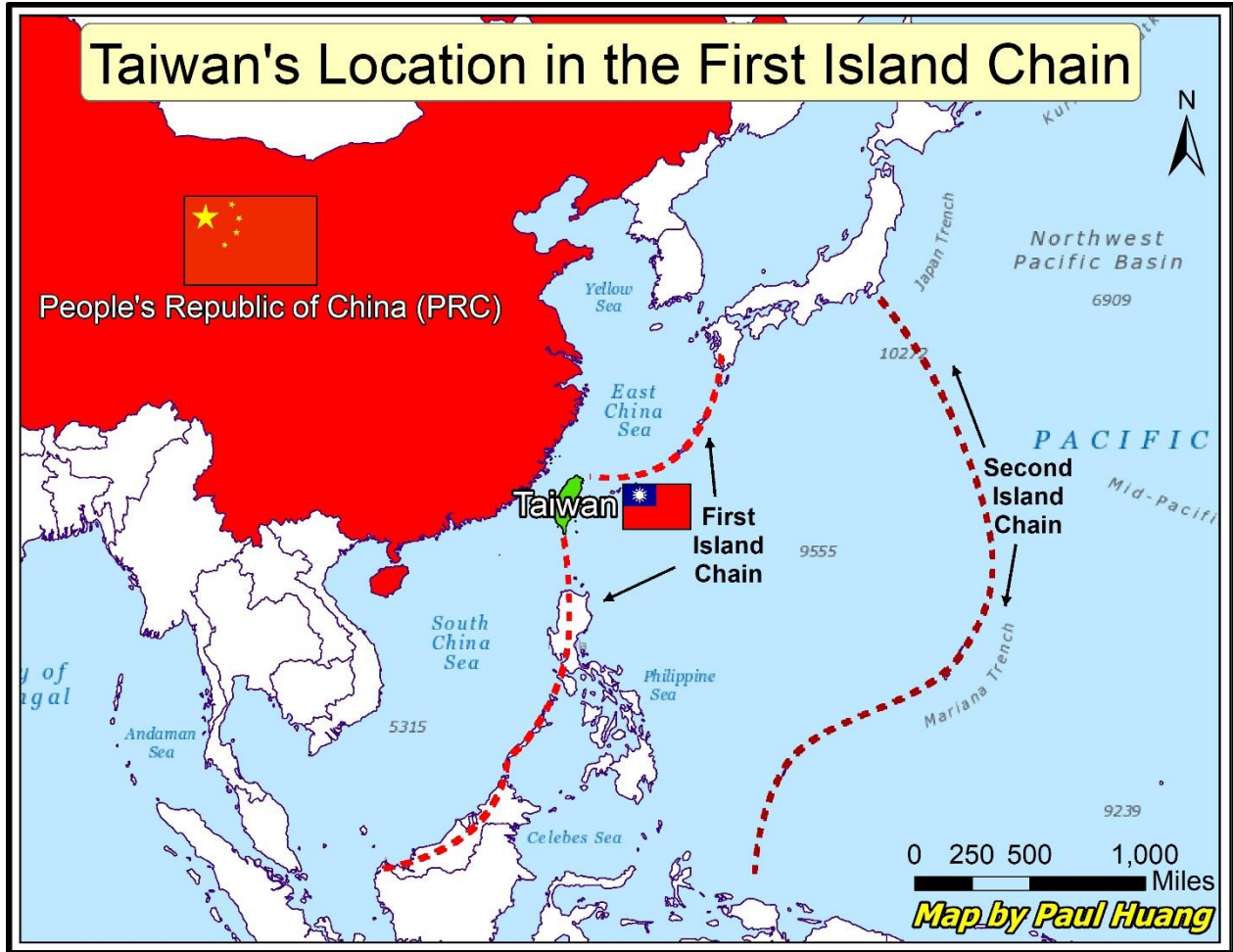
We will explore what Taiwanese national security experts are saying, writing, and doing differently in response to this new period of interstate war, and look to indications that watching the war in Ukraine has affected their thinking and will to fight. This report will refrain from making directive recommendations to Taiwan's elected officials and military professionals regarding how they should protect their own homes and democratic way of life. The literature on innovative strategies Taiwanese leaders could consider is already robust.²⁴ Rather, we aim to provide the reader with an overview of Taiwan's defense strategy and describes its history, current developments, and outstanding challenges.

[asymmetric-defense-invasion/](#); William W. Newmann, "Deterrence and Commitment Across the Taiwan Strait: Lessons from Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy," *War on the Rocks*, December 19, 2022, at <https://warontherocks.com/2022/12/deterrence-and-commitment-across-the-taiwan-strait-lessons-from-truman-eisenhower-and-kennedy/>; Thomas J. Christensen, et al. "How to Avoid a War Over Taiwan: Threats, Assurances, and Effective Deterrence," *Foreign Affairs*, October 13, 2022, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/how-avoid-war-over-taiwan>; Elbridge Colby, "America Must Prepare for a War Over Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs*, August 10, 2022, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/america-must-prepare-war-over-taiwan>; Melanie W. Sisson, "Taiwan and the dangerous illogic of deterrence by denial," *Brookings Institute*, May 2022, at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/taiwan-and-the-dangerous-illogic-of-deterrence-by-denial/>; Elbridge A. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2021); Michael J. Mazarr et al., *What Deters and Why: The State of Deterrence in Korea and the Taiwan Strait* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2021), at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3144.html; Matthew Kroenig and Jeffrey Cimmino, "Washington Should Deter an Attack on Taiwan," *The Dispatch*, October 8, 2021, at <https://thedispatch.com/article/washington-should-deter-an-attack/>; Michael Mazza, "Shoot It Straight On Taiwan," *War on the Rocks*, August 3, 2021, at <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/shoot-it-straight-on-taiwan/>; David Keegan, "Strengthening Dual Deterrence on Taiwan: The Key to US-China Strategic Stability," *Stimson Center*, July 6, 2021, at <https://www.stimson.org/2021/strengthening-dual-deterrence-on-taiwan-the-key-to-us-china-strategic-stability/>; Alastair Iain Johnston et al., "The Ambiguity of Strategic Clarity," *War on the Rocks*, June 9, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/06/the-ambiguity-of-strategic-clarity/>; Charles L. Glaser, "Washington Is Avoiding the Tough Questions on Taiwan and China," *Foreign Affairs*, April 28, 2021, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2021-04-28/washington-avoiding-tough-questions-taiwan-and-china>; Bonnie S. Glaser et al., "Dire Straits: Should American Support for Taiwan Be Ambiguous?" *Foreign Affairs*, September 24, 2020, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-09-24/dire-straits>; and Richard Haass and David Sacks, "American Support for Taiwan Must Be Unambiguous," *Foreign Affairs*, September 2, 2020, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/node/1126429>.

²⁴ For example, see Matthew Revels, "Denying Command of the Air: The Future of Taiwan's Air Defense Strategy," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, April 24, 2023, at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3371516/denying-command-of-the-air-the-future-of-taiwans-air-defense-strategy/>; Joel Wuthnow et al. (eds). *Crossing the Strait: China's Military*

In the following pages, we will learn the perspectives of Taiwanese policymakers, military officers, diplomats, strategists, and everyday citizens, and seek insights into how they are reacting to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Because the Taiwanese people's efforts to maintain peace and prevent the destruction of their nation are a work in progress, the report can offer only snapshots of a moving enterprise. Finally, the report will make recommendations for the future of U.S.-Taiwan relations, based on the requirement to counter possible CCP operations across the entire spectrum of violence, from psychological warfare and intimidation campaigns to amphibious invasion and urban warfare.

Prepares for War with Taiwan (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2022), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Publications/Books/Crossing-the-Strait/>; James Timbie and James O. Ellis Jr., "A Large Number of Small Things: A Porcupine Strategy for Taiwan," *Texas National Security Review* Vol. 5, Issue 1 (Winter 2021/2022), <https://tnsr.org/2021/12/a-large-number-of-small-things-a-porcupine-strategy-for-taiwan/>; Michael A. Hunzeker and Alexander Lanoszka, *A Question of Time: Enhancing Taiwan's Conventional Deterrence Posture* (Arlington, Virginia: George Mason University's Center for Security Policy Studies, November 2018), at <https://csps.gmu.edu/publications/a-question-of-time/>; Tanner Greer, "Taiwan's Defense Strategy Doesn't Make Military Sense: But It Does Make Political Sense," *Foreign Affairs*, September 17, 2019, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/taiwan/2019-09-17/taiwans-defense-strategy-doesnt-make-military-sense>; Michael Lostumbo et al., *Air Defense Options for Taiwan: An Assessment of Relative Costs and Operational Benefits* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1051.html; Jim Thomas, Iskander Rehman, and John Stillion, "Hard ROC 2.0: Taiwan and Deterrence Through Protraction," *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, December 21, 2014, at <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/hard-roc-2-0-taiwan-and-deterrence-through-protraction>; William S. Murray, "Revisiting Taiwan's Defense Strategy," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 61, No. 3, 2008, at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol61/iss3/3/>.



Taiwan's Location in the First Island Chain (By Paul Huang)

CHAPTER TWO

Historical Background

If we want to understand where Taiwan's strategy is heading, we must first know something about the extraordinary events that paved the path to the present day. American political and military support for Taiwan has had a profound and altogether positive influence on the country. The antagonist has also made a deep impression on Taiwan's national psyche, which is haunted by fears of abandonment, invasion, and death, but also buoyed by the confidence that comes from surviving and prospering against all odds.

The story of modern Taiwan begins in December 1949, when Chiang Kai-shek moved the ROC capitol from the Chinese mainland to Taipei.²⁵ He intended the relocation to be temporary. He had already moved his government multiple times. First, when the Empire of Japan invaded China. Next, when World War II ended. Then again when Mao Zedong's Communist insurgents devastated his army and took the upper hand in the Chinese Civil War. To Chiang's eyes, Taiwan was the ideal place to refit his tattered forces and prepare them for the long struggle ahead to defeat the Communists. The main island was protected by dozens of tiny fortress islands, many just off the PRC coast, and surrounded

²⁵ The following section draws from Ian Easton, "Will American Defend Taiwan? Here's What History Says," *Strategika*, June 30, 2021, at <https://www.hoover.org/research/will-america-defend-taiwan-heres-what-history-says>. For further historical details, see Toshi Yoshihara, *Mao's Army Goes to Sea: The Island Campaigns and the Founding of China's Navy* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2022); Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Eastbridge Books, 2019), pp. 21-49; Edward J. Marolda, *Ready Seapower: A History of the U.S. Seventh Fleet* (Washington, D.C.: Naval History and Heritage Command, 2012); Bernard D. Cole, *Taiwan's Security: History and prospects* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Zhao Yiping, "Taiwan Strait Attack Strategy: The Beginning and End of Planning and Preparation for Taiwan Liberation Operations just as New China was Established (台海攻略：新中国成立前后解放台湾作战计划与准备始末)," *Junshi Lishi* (Military History Monthly), No. 1, Issue 130, January 2005; and Zhao Yiping, "Early Liberation, Operational Planning for Attacking Taiwan (解放初期的攻台作战计划)," *Juece Tansuo* (Policy Research and Exploration Journal), 2005 (2).

by rough seas. While Chiang's army had sustained crushing battlefield defeats and mass defections, he believed his superior navy and air force would make Taiwan impervious to invasion. He was right about the viability of Taiwan. On other scores, however, things did not go as expected.

Korean War

In January 1950, the U.S. government announced it no longer intended to defend its erstwhile allies the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Republic of China (Taiwan). According to Secretary of State Dean Acheson, those governments were to be considered outside of America's defensive perimeter in Asia. This policy change encouraged the newly established People's Republic of China to accelerate plans to invade Taiwan. But before Mao Zedong and his generals could act, their North Korean ally Kim Il-sung launched an invasion of South Korea. On learning of the attack, President Harry Truman decided that the United States would defend both Korea and Taiwan, and ordered the U.S. Navy to forestall the CCP from attacking the ROC redoubt on Taiwan.

On June 29, 1950, an American aircraft carrier, heavy cruiser, and eight destroyers sailed into the Taiwan Strait to conduct a show of force within visual range of CCP forces arrayed along the mainland coast. Soon thereafter, armed American seaplanes were stationed on the Penghu Islands in the Taiwan Strait. To further enhance its early-warning picture, the United States sent submarines to monitor Chinese ports across from Taiwan, areas where enemy vessels were expected to marshal if an invasion was imminent, and four American destroyers were stationed in Taiwan. Their mission was to patrol near the PRC coast, with at least two warships watching around the clock for any troop movements or other signs of a pending amphibious assault. The Taiwan Patrol Force, as the surveillance fleet became known, operated continuously for three decades to come.²⁶

In 1951, Washington established a defense command in Taipei and sent a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to Taiwan under the command of a two-star general. This organization was tasked with providing training, logistics, and weapons to the ROC military in order to develop it into a modern fighting force. By 1955, there were tens of thousands of American troops stationed in Taiwan, including over two thousand military advisors, making MAAG the largest of the U.S. advisory groups then deployed around the

²⁶ For an excellent history, see Bruce A. Elleman, *High Seas Buffer: The Taiwan Strait Patrol Force, 1950-1979* (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2012).

world. In the following years, MAAG transformed the ROC military into one of Asia's most capable fighting forces.

1954–1955 Taiwan Strait Crisis

In August 1954, the Chinese Communists launched a string of operations against ROC forces along the mainland coast. Mao and his top lieutenants judged that by attacking the offshore islands they could drive Washington and Taipei apart and set the stage for a final invasion of Taiwan. They began by shelling Kinmen and Matsu, island groups located just off the coast of Fujian Province. Not long after, the PLA launched air and sea raids on the Dachens, a group of islands 200 miles north of Taiwan, near Taizhou in the PRC's Zhejiang Province.

That November, the PLA encircled Yijiangshan, a ROC island base located at the extreme northern flank of the Dachens. Using modern equipment and tactics from the Soviet Union, the PLA carried out a successful amphibious assault, taking the island on January 18, 1955. In response, the U.S. Navy moved into the area with 70 ships, including seven aircraft carriers. The Americans then launched Operation King Kong, the evacuation of the Dachens. American Marines assisted ROC forces to safely move some 15,000 civilians, 11,000 troops, 125 vehicles, and 165 artillery pieces back to Taiwan with no casualties. On March 3, 1955, Washington formally cemented a mutual defense treaty with Taipei.²⁷ President Dwight Eisenhower received permission from Congress to exercise special powers in the defense of Taiwan, granted by the Formosa Resolution. In May 1955, the PLA stopped shelling Kinmen, and, three months later, Beijing released 11 captured American airmen. The 1954-1955 Taiwan Strait Crisis was over, but the standoff continued.

²⁷ The U.S.-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty was signed on December 2, 1954, and entered into force on March 3, 1955. The treaty, which was limited in territorial scope to the defense of Taiwan and the Penghu Islands, was the foundation for contingency planning that helped guide U.S. military responses during the Taiwan Strait crises of the 1950s. See "Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of China; December 2, 1954," *The Avalon Project*, at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/chin001.asp.

1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis

On August 23, 1958, the PLA launched a surprise attack on Kinmen, showering the island group with tens of thousands of shells as a prelude to planned amphibious landings. Mao sought to test the resolve of the Americans, seeing if the seizure of Kinmen and the threat of war could break the U.S.–ROC alliance apart and demoralize Taiwan. The plan failed almost immediately. ROC military engineers had tunneled deep into Kinmen's granite, carving out subterranean bunkers and strongholds that allowed the defenders to weather the shelling with few casualties. The PLA made an amphibious assault on the nearby island of Tung Ting and was repulsed. To the north, Communist units launched artillery strikes against the Matsu Islands, but those were just as ineffectual.

The U.S. Navy sent in four aircraft carriers, along with a large number of cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and amphibious ships. The American fleet was equipped with low-yield atomic bombs, designed to stop potential human-wave attacks on the islands, a PLA tactic previously seen in Korea. After PLA torpedo boats and artillery began to target ROC Navy ships resupplying Kinmen, the U.S. Navy began escorting the convoys from Taiwan with cruisers and destroyers. On September 18, 1958, special artillery guns were rolled ashore Kinmen that were capable of firing tactical nuclear shells that could incinerate any invader (the shells were kept aboard U.S. Navy ships located nearby). The colossal guns also fired conventional rounds that increased the garrison's firepower and morale.

During the crisis, ROC Air Force pilots used new Super Sabre jets and Sidewinder missiles from America to engage PLA MiG-17s in air-to-air combat. The results were decisive: they achieved 33 enemy kills in return for the loss of four of their own. On October 6, Beijing announced a cease-fire under pressure from its Soviet allies, who feared the fighting could escalate and go nuclear. The 1958 Crisis was over and Taiwan's offshore island bases remained in friendly hands.

1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis

In the early 1990s, Taiwan began peacefully transitioning to a democracy. With the Cold War over, it seemed hopeful that the United States and other nations would recognize Taiwan as a legitimate, independent country. Taiwan's president, Lee Teng-hui, publicly signaled that, in his view, the Chinese Civil War was over. He said Taiwan was now the

ROC, the ROC was Taiwan, and his country would no longer claim sovereignty over territory controlled by the authorities in Beijing.

In June 1995, President Lee returned to his alma mater, Cornell University, to announce Taiwan's plans to hold free and fair elections. The CCP responded by conducting a series of ballistic missile tests, firing rockets into the waters north of Taiwan. In August, the PLA moved a large number of troops to known invasion staging areas, conducted naval exercises, and carried out further missile firings. That November, the Chinese military staged an amphibious assault drill. In March 1996, just before the elections, the PLA fired more ballistic missiles into waters directly off Taiwan's two largest ports, and implicitly threatened to turn a planned exercise into a real invasion.

The United States played an important role throughout the crisis. President Bill Clinton responded to Beijing's provocations by sending two carrier battle groups to waters near Taiwan. The American demonstration succeeded: the PRC backed down, and Taiwan's elections went ahead as planned. President Lee won the elections with a decisive margin, and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis seemed to end on a positive note. Nonetheless, Taiwan remained diplomatically isolated, while the PRC surged military production, and the balance began to tip. Taiwan slowly became more vulnerable over time, a trend that continues unabated to present day.

Uncertain Future

Taiwan transformed itself into a democratic success story, but the country has also turned into a strange outlier in the international community. Under its current ROC Constitution, Taiwan has existed as an independent sovereign state for over seven decades. However, in 1971, the ROC lost its seat at the United Nations to the PRC, and since that time Beijing has used its growing clout to erode Taiwan's ability to engage with other countries. Taiwan's continued survival as an independent country is uncertain. Although never under PRC rule or control, Beijing has laid claim to the territory and its people and continues to deny the existence of the ROC government.

Today the PRC is actively preparing to conquer Taiwan through a combination of coercion and armed force. Xi Jinping claims that annexing Taiwan is critical to the success of what he calls "the Chinese Dream." His speeches and writings express the belief that the PRC cannot achieve its larger global ambitions until it asserts political control over Taiwan,

portraying that mission as important in its own right, but also as a means to a utopian end state.²⁸ According to Xi, the PRC seeks to “construct a community of common destiny for all mankind” (jargon for his vision of world socialism and international communism), and he believes that goal will not be obtainable without first taking Taiwan.²⁹

U.S.-Taiwan Relations

The United States has a decisive role to play in Taiwan's security, yet the degree of American commitment to Taiwan's defense has evolved over the decades. In 1979, President Jimmy Carter cut ties with Taiwan, annulled the U.S.-ROC defense treaty, and closed the American embassy in Taipei in order to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. That same year, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), a unique legal instrument that ensured the continuation of close U.S.-Taiwan ties and carried over some of the content of the former defense pact. The TRA (U.S. Public Law 96-8) makes it the policy of the United States to maintain the ability to defend Taiwan. While the Law supplanted the defense treaty as the legal basis for continued U.S. support, it did so at a curtailed level. Accordingly, it is U.S. government policy “to maintain the capacity to resist the use of force and other forms of coercion” against Taiwan, and to provide Taiwan with arms sales and training support.³⁰ Although the TRA states that “any effort to determine

²⁸ On January 2, 2019, Xi Jinping asserted that Beijing's long-standing policy for cross-Strait unification is a “One Country, Two Systems” formula. He underscored that the CCP's vision for China's future requires Taiwan's capitulation. According to Xi, his nation cannot rise and become a truly successful great power until Taiwan submits to Beijing's “One China Principle.” According to this principle, there is “One China,” Taiwan is part of China, and the PRC is the sole representative of China in the international community. The CCP's official narrative holds that the ROC ceased to exist as a sovereign state in 1949, and the authorities on Taiwan are “splittists” or “separatists” who must be assimilated, by force if necessary. See Xi Jinping, “Speech at the 40th Anniversary Conference on ‘Message to Taiwan Compatriots’ (在《告台湾同胞书》发表40周年纪念会上的讲话),” *Xinhua News*, January 2, 2019, at http://www.xinhuanet.com/tw/2019-01/02/c_1210028622.htm. The China Central Television (CCTV) recording of Xi Jinping's speech is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHc8xstPoHs>.

²⁹ Ian Easton, *The Final Struggle: Inside China's Global Strategy* (Manchester, UK: Eastbridge Books, 2022), pp. 1-11 & 53-87. See also, Liu Jieyi, “Adhere to the Party's Overall Strategy for Resolving the Taiwan Issue in the New Era (坚持贯彻新时代党解决台湾问题的总体方略).” *CSIS Interpret: China*, Original work published December 1, 2022, <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/adhere-to-the-partys-overall-strategy-for-resolving-the-taiwan-issue-in-the-new-era/>.

³⁰ “H.R. 2479 - Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 et seq.),” *American Institute in Taiwan*, January 1, 1979, at <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreignpolicy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>.

the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means” would pose “a grave concern to the United States,” it does not expressly require U.S. intervention in a cross-Strait conflict.³¹

How far the United States might go to defend Taiwan is unknown and would be the serving president's decision to make. Washington's longstanding policy, commonly referred to as “strategic ambiguity”, treats the question as unresolved to maximize diplomatic flexibility, while accepting the increased risk of strategic miscalculation that such a policy incurs. Nonetheless, if the PRC launched a large-scale military campaign against Taiwan, it would likely trigger a conflict with the United States and its allies. In what appears to be a deliberate attempt to enhance deterrence, President Joe Biden has repeatedly said the United States will defend Taiwan militarily.³² Since 1979, American presidents have suggested they might order troops to defend Taiwan, depending on the circumstances surrounding the conflict. Biden is the first to make his intentions plain.

In a further evolution of policy, President Biden said, “Taiwan makes their own judgements about independence...We are not encouraging them to be independent. That's their decision.”³³ Past American presidents have refrained from acknowledging Taiwan's fundamental right to self-determination. Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush reportedly said they opposed Taiwanese *de jure* independence.³⁴ Whatever their

³¹ “H.R. 2479 - Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 et seq.),” *American Institute in Taiwan*, January 1, 1979, at <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreignpolicy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>.

³² See “President Biden on Taiwan,” *60 Minutes*, September 18, 2022, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EddUGD8jcR4>. See also Jennifer Jett, “U.S. forces would defend Taiwan against Chinese attack, Biden says,” *NBC News*, September 19, 2023, at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/joe-biden-china-us-forces-defend-taiwan-rcna48271>; and Kevin Liptak, Donald Judd, and Nectar Gan, “Biden says US would respond ‘militarily’ if China attacked Taiwan, but White House insists there's no policy change,” *CNN*, May 23, 2022, at <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/23/politics/biden-taiwan-china-japan-intl-hnk/index.html>.

³³ See “President Biden on Taiwan,” *60 Minutes*, September 18, 2022, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EddUGD8jcR4>. See also Jennifer Jett, “U.S. forces would defend Taiwan against Chinese attack, Biden says,” *NBC News*, September 19, 2023, at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/joe-biden-china-us-forces-defend-taiwan-rcna48271>; and Kevin Liptak, Donald Judd, and Nectar Gan, “Biden says US would respond ‘militarily’ if China attacked Taiwan, but White House insists there's no policy change,” *CNN*, May 23, 2022, at <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/23/politics/biden-taiwan-china-japan-intl-hnk/index.html>.

³⁴ Shirley A. Kan, “China/Taiwan: Evolution of the “One China” Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei,” *Congressional Research Service*, October 10, 2014, available online at <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL30341.html>.

other disagreements, Taiwanese presidents past and present have all held that Taiwan (ROC) is already an independent, sovereign country with a legitimately established government, and it is not part of the PRC.³⁵

Cost Calculations

In spite of Washington's strong track record and positive rhetoric, some Taiwanese foreign policy experts are nonetheless concerned that Washington may lack the requisite determination to back up President Biden's words with action when the test comes. They point out that administration officials have sought to walk back the President's commitment and continue to say they don't seek to "contain" the PRC. Others observe that American intentions can change, so capabilities are what really matters, and, after decades of distraction and neglect, the United States military is not well-positioned to defend Taiwan.³⁶

A related concern is that the PRC leadership could view the costs of a Taiwan invasion as well worth the expected rewards. The PRC is ruled by a centralized, one-party dictatorship, and all political power ultimately rests in the hands of one man. This system elevates the likelihood of an intelligence failure or top-level miscalculation. Xi Jinping could believe the overall balance of power favors the PRC and will allow for a rapid victory. Or he might think that an American-led intervention effort will be limited, and war wouldn't threaten the stability of his regime.³⁷

Even in a scenario where Xi was obviously mistaken, it seems unlikely that anyone in his high command would tell him that. An atmosphere of intense fear and paranoia dominates contemporary PRC politics. The last decade has been characterized by wave after wave of arrests, purges, disappearances, and executions. In 2022, Xi publicly humiliated the former leader Hu Jintao, ousted the premier Li Keqiang, and installed a new politburo loyal to his personal worldview. The following summer he systematically fired his foreign minister, defense minister, the admiral in charge of the PLA's top military court, and three generals in charge of the PRC's nuclear forces.³⁸ By extinguishing the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Authors discussions with subject matter experts in Taipei and Washington, May-July 2023.

³⁷ Authors discussions with Taiwanese security experts in Taipei, June 2023.

³⁸ Ellen Ioanes, "What's up with China's disappearing senior military officers?" *Vox*, September 16, 2023, <https://www.vox.com/2023/9/16/23876562/china-disappearing-senior-military-officers-li-shangfu-xi->

careers of so many senior officials, Xi has drastically minimized the already limited space available in the CCP for critical thinking and the development of a moderate foreign policy.

[jinping-peoples-liberation-army](#); Keshav Padmanabhan, “‘And then there were none’: On G20 eve, US’s Japan envoy says China’s ‘missing’ ministers a mystery,” *The Print*, September 9, 2023, at <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/and-then-there-were-none-on-g20-eve-uss-japan-envoy-says-chinas-missing-ministers-a-mystery/1753967/>; Ishaan Tharoor, “China’s Xi fights fires at home and abroad,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 2023, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/05/xi-jinping-issues-domestic-global-economy-trouble/>; Jesse Johnson and Alyssa Chen, “China ousts foreign minister as world grasps for clues as to why,” *Japan Times*, July 26, 2023, at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/07/26/asia-pacific/politics/china-qin-gang-dismissed-analysis/>; and Christian Shephard, “China raids another global business consultancy, cites spying concerns,” *Washington Post*, May 9, 2023, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/05/09/china-raid-capvision-bain-business/>.

PLA Joint Island Attack Campaign		
<i>Phase of Operations</i>	<i>Main Objectives</i>	<i>Missions</i>
1. Blockade and Bombing	Obtain uncontested control over the airwaves, airspace, and seascapes across Taiwan Strait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execute massed missile raids behind screen of electronic and cyber attacks • Secure air superiority • Battle Taiwanese naval fleet • Blockade major ports • Bomb Taiwan
2. Amphibious Landing	Capture beaches, ports, and airfields near Taipei and other targeted cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather invasion forces • Attack Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu • Embark amphibious troops • Sail armadas across the Strait • Clear mines and beach obstacles • Anchor and disembark troops • Conduct surprise assaults on targeted beaches, sea ports, and airstrips • Land multiple amphibious divisions in two major waves of attack
3. Combat on the Island (Urban and Mountain Warfare)	Occupy Taiwan and impose will on the survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure footholds on Taiwan • Buildup major landing zones and offload massive army • Capture strategic terrain and military bases inland • Capture Taipei and other major cities • Institute martial law • Clear defenders out of mountains
*Source: Ian Easton, The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia		

CHAPTER THREE

An Evolving Strategy

With a growing threat from the CCP and uncertain commitment from the United States, Taiwan's defense strategy has evolved over time to reflect Taipei's diminishing power.³⁹ Between 1949 and 1966, the ROC's strategy was one of "Offensive Defense." This strategy was developed by Chiang Kai-shek in the initial decades of his reign on Taiwan, when his paramount objective was to retake mainland China and overthrow the Communists. Offensive Defense required a strong military presence on Taiwan's offshore islands and frequent raids on the PRC's coast. However, when it became clear to Chiang that his ambitions were out of reach, he shifted Taiwan's military strategy to one of "Forward Defense." Between 1966 and 1979, the ROC military reduced its raids on the PRC's coastline, scaled back its striking power, and concentrated on fortifying its offshore islands instead. The new strategy kept enormous numbers of troops deployed just miles from enemy territory, but refrained from instigating direct military engagements.

Defense in Depth

In 1979, when the United States broke diplomatic ties with Taiwan, it prompted a third revision of Taiwan's military strategy. The outcome was something Taipei called "Defense-in-Depth." Based on then ROC Chief of the General Staff Hau Pei-tsun's operational concept of "Decisive Campaign at the Water's Edge," Defense-in-Depth called for a three-layered defense of Taiwan:

- First, disrupting the enemy's amphibious embarkation operations through punishing raids along the PRC coast;

³⁹ Unless otherwise noted, the following section draws from Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, pp. 87-100; and York W. Chen, "The Evolution of Taiwan's Military Strategy: Convergence and Dissonance," *China Brief*, November 19, 2009, at <https://jamestown.org/program/the-evolution-of-taiwans-military-strategy-convergence-and-dissonance/>.

- Second, sinking the enemy's invasion fleets in transit across the Strait through heavy strikes; and
- Third, destroying the enemy in detail on Taiwan's beaches and landing fields (if the PLA made it that far, which seemed unlikely).

This conventional military concept was intended to be backstopped at the strategic level with nuclear weapons. After years of clandestine research and development, by the late 1980s Taiwan was approaching the point at which it might become a nuclear weapons state and have the ability to stand on the same rung as the PRC on the escalation ladder. While Taiwan's aspirations were understandable, its nuclear gambit generated a sense of unease in Washington, where nonproliferation had become a dominate feature of American foreign policy. The CIA infiltrated Taiwan's secret labs and secured the defection of a key scientist. This intelligence windfall provided the government with the evidence needed to confront Taipei and negotiate a closure of its nuclear weapons project. Taiwan would have to use other means to deter the CCP and secure peace.⁴⁰

While Taiwan no longer had an answer to the PRC's nuclear threat, it remained feasible for the ROC Air Force and Navy to conduct heavy conventional strikes along the PRC coast and sever its maritime trade lines. There was little doubt that an invasion could be stopped, probably before it even started. The idea of a layered defense posture still remained at the core of Taiwan's military thinking. Taiwan's National Defense Report (NDR) of 1996, said that, for Taipei, a "resolute defense and effective deterrence" were the overarching principles of national military strategy. That report summarized Taiwan's defense strategy as follows:

"Our strategy is to fight the enemy vehemently with coordinated manpower and firepower, to let the enemy pay the unbearable price as to deter the enemy from invasion and ensure our national security. Should the enemy dare to land, we will gradually annihilate the enemy in the prepared positions by destroying the enemy on the beachhead, firmly defending our strongholds, and striking the enemy via our mobile forces. We will also mobilize the reserves to wear down the

⁴⁰ For an excellent history of Taiwan's nuclear weapons program, see David Albright and Andrea Stircker, *Taiwan's Former Nuclear Weapons Program: Nuclear Weapons On-Demand* (Washington DC: Institute for Science and International Security, 2018).

enemy. The enemy's attrition will be so high as to contribute to our final victory."⁴¹

Taiwan's 1998 National Defense Report portrayed its strategy as "a kind of defensive deterrence." Its purpose was "to dissuade the opponents by convincing them that the cost of using military forces would outweigh the gain."⁴² In effect, Taiwan embraced a blended form of deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. Given its superiority in the air and on the sea, the ROC military could credibly threaten to sink an invasion force and humiliate the CCP for making the attempt. Unfortunately for Taiwanese war planners, this favorable situation would not last for much longer.

The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis revealed shortfalls in the Defense-in-Depth strategy. When the PRC conducted missile tests across the Taiwan Strait, it demonstrated the ease with which ballistic missiles could penetrate Taiwan's layered defenses and achieve strategic results, to include the possible decapitation of Taiwan's leadership and the destruction of Taiwan's large airfields and naval bases. Taiwan's defense spending had dropped from over seven percent of GDP in the late 1970s to four percent by 1996, and the ROC military had little ability to counter the evolving missile threat.⁴³ In response, the ROC military ramped up its missile defense capabilities and initiated programs to develop indigenous cruise and ballistic missiles that could reach China's missile brigades at their most vulnerable point (on the ground), and neutralize them before they could fire.

After President Lee Teng-hui of the Kuomintang (KMT, or Chinese Nationalist Party) won Taiwan's first direct elections in 1996, Taiwan began a long campaign of downsizing the military, shedding itself of units formerly needed to bolster regime security. From 1997 to 2001, Taiwan undertook the *Jingshi* Program, shrinking the military from its martial law era high point of approximately 600,000 troops down to 380,000 troops. The program also reduced mandatory conscription service from two years to one year and 10 months.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) is obligated to periodically report "what it has done, what it is doing, what it prepares to do, why it is going to do so" to the people in accordance with Article 30 of the National Defense Act. "1996 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, 1996.

⁴² "1998 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, 1998.

⁴³ Data was acquired from SIPRI military expenditure database.

⁴⁴ In Mandarin, this program is known as 精實案.

Deep Cuts

By the time that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) came into power in 2000, Taiwan's defense spending had dipped under three percent of GDP.⁴⁵ President Chen Shui-bian's administration adjusted Taiwan's defense strategy to that of an "Active Defense" that promoted "effective deterrence and resolute defense."⁴⁶ The Chen administration viewed "Defense-in-Depth" as too passive and instead emphasized the need to destroy a large number of Chinese military units before they could board ships to cross the Taiwan Strait. The 2004 National Defense Report said the ROC military sought to "actively develop, research and acquire precision stand-off weapon systems and establish electronic counter-measure forces in order to augment our deep strike capabilities."⁴⁷

Taiwan continued cutting the size of its military. From 2002 to 2011, the *Jingjin* Program reduced the military to around 270,000 troops.⁴⁸ It also shortened conscription service by two months each year from 2004 to 2008, stopping at a mandatory service period of one year. When the KMT returned to power in 2008, President Ma Ying-jeou's administration implemented further changes to Taiwan's military, reducing defense spending and downsizing the military even further. When Ma stepped down in 2016, Taiwan's defense spending was only 1.8% of GDP.⁴⁹

From 2011 to 2013, the *Jincui* Program shrank the military to 215,000 troops, and drastically shortened military service periods to four months.⁵⁰ Then, in 2014, the *Yonggu*

⁴⁵ Data was acquired from SIPRI military expenditure database.

⁴⁶ "2002 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, July 2002, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Taiwan-National-Defense-Report-2002.pdf>.

⁴⁷ "2004 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, 1994, at <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/NewUpload/%E6%AD%B7%E5%B9%B4%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8%E7%B6%B2%E9%A0%81%E5%B0%88%E5%8D%80/%E6%AD%B7%E5%B9%B4%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8%E5%B0%88%E5%8D%80.files/%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8-82%E8%87%B383/%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8-82%E8%87%B383-%E4%B8%AD%E6%96%87.pdf>.

⁴⁸ In Mandarin, this program is known as 精進案.

⁴⁹ Data was acquired from SIPRI military expenditure database.

⁵⁰ In Mandarin, this program is known as 精粹案.

Program planned to cut Taiwan's standing military to a mere 170,000 troops by 2019, and even considered abolishing the ROC Marine Corps and Military Police Command, two of Taiwan's most elite branches.⁵¹ This program received widespread backlash and was halted by Taiwan's legislature. It was replaced by the *Jingjien* Program, and the targeted force size was adjusted upwards to 190,000.⁵² In spite of recruitment shortfalls, Taiwan continued the move toward Ma's vision of a small, professional, all-volunteer force.⁵³

Hard ROC

The Ma administration's defense cuts were guided by what it called the "Hard ROC" strategy.⁵⁴ This strategy sought to deescalate tensions to the maximum extent possible by taking a more passive stance in the early days of conflict and husbanding forces for a long fight. The strategy envisioned drawing the PLA into a protracted fight in the Taiwan Strait area, while keeping an invasion force bogged down to "gain more time for international assistance." The Ministry of National Defense rephrased Taiwan's military objective, which it said was "resolute defense and credible deterrence." Yet while the slogans changed only marginally, this period represented a significant change in the defense debate in Taiwan. The rapidly shrinking size of their military meant Taiwanese planners had to begin focusing on the question of how to fight and win a war when the balance favored the other side.⁵⁵

⁵¹ In Mandarin, this program is known as 勇固案.

⁵² In Mandarin, this program is known as 精簡案. Lu Zhaolong, "Military's new Jingjien program replaces Yonggu program (軍方新版精簡案 取代勇固案)," *China Times*, September 7, 2015, at <https://www.chinatimes.com/newspapers/20150907000328-260102?chdtv>.

⁵³ Ian Easton, Mark Stokes, Cortez A. Cooper III, and Arthur Chan, "Transformation of Taiwan's Reserve Force," *RAND Corporation*, 2017, at https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1757/RAND_RR1757.pdf.

⁵⁴ The Amendment to Article 31 of the National Defense Act passed by Taiwan's Legislative Yuan on July 17, 2008, mandates the MND to submit a Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) within ten months after every new president takes office in order to review and confirm defense strategy and military strategy, and provide a vision for future development. "2009 ROC Quadrennial Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, March 2009, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2009-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Ma Ying-jeou, "A New Military For a Secure and Peaceful Taiwan," *KMT*, September 2, 2007, at <http://www1.kmt.org.tw/english/page.aspx?type=article&mnum=111&anum=3284>.

The PRC invasion threat was growing at the very same moment that Taiwan's military was shrinking. The PLA had embarked on a massive military modernization program, which included the deployment of a large numbers of ballistic missiles on road-mobile launchers that are exceedingly difficult track. In the past, the ROC Air Force and Navy might have been able to hit the PLA hard enough in the first days of war to force Beijing to reconsider invasion plans and find a path to de-escalation. Such prospects now appeared to be dimming. In a worst-case scenario, Taiwan's ability to fight across the Strait could be crippled, and its early-warning radar network could be wiped out, leaving national leaders blinded. An enemy invasion force could then marshal, load aboard ships near Taiwan, and strike with ease. Such circumstances would increase the confidence of PLA war planners, undermine deterrence, and destabilize cross-Strait relations. It became clear that a new operational concept was required.



Patriot Missile Defense Radar Coverage (By Louis Martin-Vézian)

The Balance Tips

Asymmetric warfare had previously been a term used to describe the PRC's military strategy against Taiwan. The ROC's 2008 National Defense Report said the PLA planned to use asymmetric warfare to "physically damage infrastructure that are important to Taiwan's political, economic, and military needs, in hopes of yielding the most benefits with the least costs."⁵⁶ The use of the term "asymmetric" changed in a remarkable fashion in Taiwan's 2009 Quadrennial Defense Review, which stated:

*"The goal for the ROC Armed Forces is to prevent enemies from landing and establishing lodgment. Defense resources therefore shall mainly be allocated to major combat forces, and applied to develop basic and asymmetric forces in order to ensure the sustainability of the total warfighting capability."*⁵⁷

MND began to introduce asymmetric warfare concepts into Taiwan's force planning, weapons research and development, joint warfighting, and military tactics. Taiwan's 2011 National Defense Report said, "The ROC Armed Forces [will apply] the concept of 'asymmetry' in its development of 'resolute defense and credible deterrence' capabilities... Defense reformation and transformation [will be] carried out based on concepts of innovation and asymmetry."⁵⁸ However, little was actually done to turn this vision into a reality.

⁵⁶ "2008 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, May 13, 2008, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Taiwan-National-Defense-Report-2008.pdf>.

⁵⁷ "2009 ROC Quadrennial Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, March 2009, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2009-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>.

⁵⁸ "2011 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, July 2011, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Taiwan-National-Defense-Report-2011.pdf>.

Overall Defense Concept

When the DPP returned to power in 2016, President Tsai Ing-wen changed Taiwan's defense slogan to "resolute defense and multi-domain deterrence."⁵⁹ The first half of the Tsai administration saw the introduction of the "Overall Defense Concept (ODC)."⁶⁰ Pioneered by Chief of the General Staff Admiral Lee Hsi-min, the ODC not only continued to emphasize the idea of asymmetric warfare, but defined what that meant for Taiwan in terms of capabilities and how such capabilities would be integrated in the military's force buildup and concept of operations. The ODC focused primarily on bolstering the ground forces responsible for third phase of the defense of Taiwan.

Lee noted that while the CCP invested in an alarming armaments buildup and a top-to-bottom military reform and reorganization program, Taiwan's elected leaders kept defense spending low and made deep cuts to their combat forces in an unsuccessful attempt to field an all-volunteer force. From 2008 to 2016, Taiwan's active-duty force was officially reduced from 275,000 to around 215,000 troops. Recruitment shortfalls pushed the actual force numbers much lower, and many personnel were assigned to administrative and maintenance duties, leaving an estimated 120,000 to 130,000 troops in actual combat roles.⁶¹

During Taiwan's protracted period of fiscal austerity, ROC military bases and training ranges were closed and their land was sold to commercial developers. ROC Marine Corps, army combat engineer, and military police units – vital for the defense of Taipei and other major urban centers – were drastically reduced in size. In many cases, important auxiliary units were disbanded altogether.⁶² As a result of the cuts, Taiwan's armed forces began to face a number of pressing challenges. To meet recruitment quotas, education and training standards were relaxed, reducing the overall quality of the force. With fewer men with

⁵⁹ "2017 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, December 2017, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Taiwan-National-Defense-Report-2017.pdf>.

⁶⁰ "2017 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, December 2017, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Taiwan-National-Defense-Report-2017.pdf>; and "2019 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, September 2019, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Taiwan-National-Defense-Report-2019.pdf>.

⁶¹ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, p. 99.

⁶² Authors' discussions with retired Taiwanese military officers in Washington, D.C., May 2023.

military experience as a percent of the general population, those in uniform felt more distant from a civilian society that no longer seemed to understand and sympathize with them. Pay raises and recruitment incentives for volunteers also meant reduced investments into needed weapons, equipment, and maintenance.⁶³

The new defense concept acknowledged Taiwan's inability to stockpile sufficient standoff strike capabilities to win an arms race with the PRC and emphasized the effective allocation of increasingly limited resources to defend the nation in a close-up fight. The ODC sought to integrate force buildup directly with its concept of operations. It stipulated that large and expensive defense systems like fighter jets and destroyers were needed to counter CCP coercion campaigns and useful for fighting limited wars, but asymmetric capabilities were the most critical and must be prioritized.

The ODC defined asymmetric defense capabilities for Taiwan as those that are mobile, resilient, lethal, cost effective, numerous, and survivable. Taiwan had long invested heavily in large, sophisticated platforms with the intention of dominating the entire Taiwan Strait battlespace. Admiral Lee observed that such capabilities could now be detected and destroyed by PLA missiles early in a war. Even though Taiwan could no longer hope to achieve parity, it still had significant advantages along its shores and inside its cities, and the military could ensure that the PLA never achieved the conditions necessary to successfully occupy Taiwan. The ROC military had placed far too little emphasis on capabilities that could deny the PLA uncontested control over the electromagnetic, air, sea, and land domains. That would have to change.

Continuing Debate

Admiral Lee called for a sweeping change in focus and demanded painful tradeoffs that were not always popular with other senior leaders.⁶⁴ In 2019, after he retired, the Taiwanese military began to shift away from the ODC. Two years later, Taiwan's National Defense Report and Quadrennial Defense Review both excluded any mention of the ODC.⁶⁵ While these reports continued to highlight the need to acquire more asymmetric

⁶³ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, pp. 99-100.

⁶⁴ Lee Hsi-min and Eric Lee, "The Overall Defense Concept, Explained," *The Diplomat*, November 3, 2020, at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained/>.

⁶⁵ "2021 ROC National Defense Report," *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, November 9, 2021, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Taiwan-National-Defense->

defense systems, they also said Taiwan's military would expand the scope of the battlefield and focus its force buildup on air superiority and sea control.⁶⁶

Many generals and admirals were reluctant to embrace the ODC because they saw it as too pessimistic. For them, the ROC military was still strong enough to fight the enemy far from Taiwan's shoreline, and they were duty bound to focus on that mission. If the PLA was ever allowed to cross the Strait and land on Taiwan, the ensuing urban warfare would devastate their country and their strategy would have failed – especially if the Americans didn't show up on time. In contrast to the traditional, layered defense approach, the ODC eschewed strikes on political and military targets in the PRC. It saw the PLA's greatest moment of vulnerability as Zero Day, rather than the days before it, and called for the military to save its maximum strength for a decisive battle along Taiwan's coast. From Lee's perspective, if coordinated anti-invasion plans should break down, urban warfare and guerilla warfare were something to welcome rather than fear. The only strategic failure would be to let the enemy succeed in occupying the nation.⁶⁷

At the current time, Taiwan's military leadership is focusing on a blend of asymmetric warfare and traditional defense without communicating what the overall theme of Taiwan's military strategy is. Political slogans aside, it remains to be seen whether each approach involves distinct theories of deterrence and victory. Yet to be determined is also the degree to which their operational concepts, acquisition priorities, and training programs are mutually exclusive. Reformers and conservatives appear to be at loggerheads, but the passion stirred by their debates in the media likely obscures the extent to which they have common ground and room for compromise.⁶⁸ “Right now, whatever course of action we decide on, the only mistake would be to do nothing new at

[Report-2021.pdf](#); and “2021 ROC Quadrennial Defense Report,” *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, March 2021, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>.

⁶⁶ “2021 ROC National Defense Report,” *ROC Ministry of National Defense*, November 9, 2021, at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Taiwan-National-Defense-Report-2021.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, pp. 430-448.

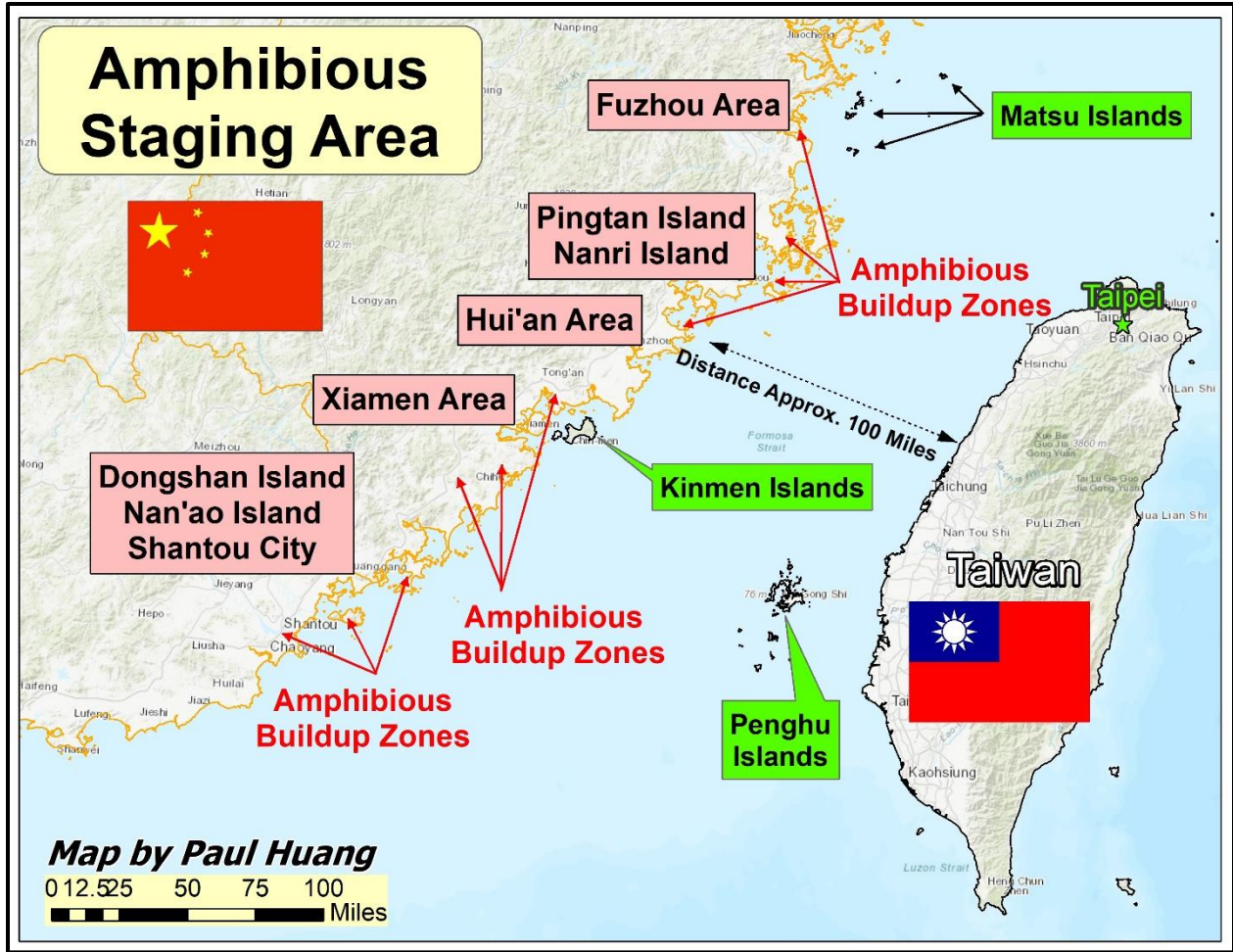
⁶⁸ For an analysis of the political debate in Taiwan, see Dee Wu, “The KMT's Defense Policy: Toward a Symmetric Posture,” *The Diplomat*, April 1, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/the-kmts-defense-policy-toward-a-symmetric-posture/>.

all. That would totally waste the absolutely staggering costs Ukraine has paid for in war, which give us inspiration and teach us lessons!” wrote Lee.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, p. 447.

Taiwan Defense Operations*		
<i>Enemy Status</i>	<i>Interdicting Forces</i>	<i>Potential Targets</i>
Assembling and loading amphibious ships along PRC coast (Z-15 to Z-1)	Surface launched cruise missiles (HF-2E, Yun Feng)	Enemy leadership targets, command posts, power grid, air bases, ports
	Fighter jets (F-16, IDF) armed with joint standoff weapons (JSOW, Wan Chien), Harpoon missiles, Maverick missiles, etc.	Airfields, docked ships, ground transportation infrastructure (rail and road bridges), logistics (fuel depots), radars
	Special operations forces (frogmen)	Harbor facilities, radars, command posts, bridges
	Anti-radiation drones	Early warning radars
Crossing Taiwan Strait (Z-1)	Anti-ship missiles (Harpoons, HF-2, HF-3) launched from aircraft, ships, subs, land bases, multiple launch rocket systems (RT-2000)	Amphibious assault ships, escort vessels, mine sweepers, hovercrafts
Anchoring and disembarking troops (Z- Day)	Attack helicopters (AH-1W Super Cobras)	Amphibious assault ships, escort vessels, mine sweepers, hovercrafts, helicopters
	Fighter jets (F-16, IDF, Mirages, F-5s)	
	Frigates (Perry, Knox, Layette-class)	Landing craft, amphibious tanks
	Stealth corvette (Tuo-Chiang-class)	
	Missile boats (Kuang Hua VI-class)	
Artillery (203mm, 155mm, 105 howitzers, 120mm mortars)		
Approaching coast in landing crafts (Z-Day)	Attack helicopters (AH-64E Apaches)	Landing craft, amphibious tanks
	Multiple launch rocket systems (Kung Feng IV)	Landing craft, amphibious tanks, bulldozers, officers, combat engineers, infantry
	Heavy tanks (M60A3, M48H)	
Storming the beaches and moving inland (Z-Day & Beyond)	Armored fighting vehicles (M48A3, M42, CM-32 Cloud Leopard)	Landing craft, amphibious tanks, bulldozers, officers, combat engineers, infantry
	Infantry with anti-tank missiles (FGM-148 Javelin, etc.)	
	HUMVEE with anti-tank missiles (BGM - 71 TOW, etc.)	
	Snipers	
	Gun emplacements, machine gun nests, mortar pits, grenade launchers	
	Gun emplacements, machine gun nests, mortar pits, grenade launchers	

*Source: Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia*



PLA Amphibious Staging Areas (By Paul Huang)

CHAPTER FOUR

Strategic Warning Signs

New ideas are rippling across Taiwan's body politic and military that could have significant implications. Historically, most Taiwanese believed the likelihood of a violent crisis or limited war with the PRC was low. They did not expect the PLA to conduct a blockade operation against them or seize their offshore islands. To the eyes of most people, the possibility of high-intensity conflict and invasion was even more remote, almost to the point of making it unthinkable—or at least unworthy of a serious investment in time and attention. The conversation in Taiwan has turned course since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Views have hardened and debates surrounding how a similar attack from the PRC might take shape are now commonplace. In Taiwan's halls of power, strategic deliberations are less focused on the question of if the Chinese Communists will invade, but rather how and when they will do it—and whether it might still be possible to change minds in Beijing or, failing that, buy more time to prepare before the inevitable occurs.

Troubling Developments in the PRC

Analysts consider an invasion of Taiwan to be an irrational option for Beijing due to the high risk of military failure, the incalculable human suffering that would result, and the economic catastrophe that is almost certain to follow. Nonetheless, the available evidence suggests the CCP may prove capable of rationalizing such an attack based on its idiosyncratic approach to policymaking. Xi Jinping and other CCP elites espouse a Marxist-Leninist ideology that assumes the ends justify the means.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *The Fundamentals of Xi Jinping Thought on Chinese Socialism in a New Era* [习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想基本问题] (Beijing: CCP Central Committee Central Party School Press, 2020), pp. 1 & 359-397; and Xi Jinping, "Speech at the General Assembly to Commemorate the 200th Anniversary of Karl's Marx's Birth (在纪念马克思诞辰 200 周年大会上的讲话)," *Xinhua*, May 4, 2018, at

Since 2017, the Chinese government has inflicted horrific levels of violence on ethnic and religious minorities, leading the U.S. State Department to determine that the CCP is committing genocide and other crimes against humanity.⁷¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing instituted a draconian system of lockdowns and built enormous internment camps for suspected carriers of infection. Then, in late 2022, Xi Jinping abruptly declared victory over COVID-19 and ended mandatory quarantines, even though his government had blocked access to effective foreign vaccines on political grounds, leaving the Chinese people vulnerable to lethal infections. “He’s ready to see millions die in the next five years,” said a senior Taiwanese government official. “The CCP is not afraid of mass death.”⁷²

Now empty, the PRC’s pandemic internment camps have not been dismantled, leading worried observers in Taiwan to speculate that the facilities may be intended to house captured Taiwanese political prisoners after a future war.⁷³ Chinese diplomats have

http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-05/04/c_1122783997.htm. For superb English-language sources, see Daniel Tobin, “How Xi Jinping’s ‘New Era’ Should Have Ended U.S. Debate on Beijing’s Ambitions,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, March 13, 2020, at <https://www.uscc.gov/hearings/china-model-beijings-promotion-alternative-global-norms-and-standards>; and John Garnaut, “Engineers of the Soul: Ideology in Xi Jinping’s China,” *Sinocism*, January 16, 2019, at <https://sinocism.com/p/engineers-of-the-soul-ideology-in>.

⁷¹ “Fact Sheet: New U.S. Government Actions on Forced Labor in Xinjiang,” *The White House*, June 24, 2021, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/24/fact-sheet-new-u-s-government-actions-on-forced-labor-in-xinjiang/>; and Michael R. Pompeo, “Determination of the Secretary of State on Atrocities in Xinjiang,” *U.S. Department of State*, January 19, 2021, at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/determination-of-the-secretary-of-state-on-atrocities-in-xinjiang/index.html>. See also Yonah Diamond, et al, “The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China’s Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention,” *Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy*, March 8, 2021, at <https://newlinesinstitute.org/uyghurs/the-uyghur-genocide-an-examination-of-chinas-breaches-of-the-1948-genocide-convention/>; Helen Davidson, “China is breaching every article in genocide convention, says legal report on Uighurs,” *The Guardian*, March 9, 2021, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/09/chinas-treatment-of-uyghurs-breaches-un-genocide-convention-finds-landmark-report>; and Adrian Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP’s Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang,” *Jamestown Foundation*, June 2020, at <https://jamestown.org/product/sterilizations-iuds-and-mandatory-birth-control-the-ccps-campaign-to-suppress-uyghur-birthrates-in-xinjiang/>.

⁷² Authors’ discussions with senior Taiwanese government official in Taipei, January 2023.

⁷³ Michael Turton, “The imperial silence on Taiwan,” *Taipei Times*, May 1, 2023, at <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/feat/archives/2023/05/01/2003798906>. For further background on the camps, see Erin Hale, “China’s huge quarantine camps standing months after ‘zero COVID’,” *Al*

publicly said that a period of “reeducation” will follow Taiwan’s absorption into the PRC – the same terminology that the CCP uses to describe its harsh practices against Tibetans, Uighurs, and other minority groups whose territory was annexed by the Chinese government.⁷⁴ Border clashes, economic coercion, ultranationalist rhetoric, and enormous military expenditures have raised troubling questions regarding the CCP’s commitment to peace.⁷⁵

Arms Racing

The PRC is engaged in a military buildup that is notable for its size, intensity, and focus on the acquisition of capabilities needed to conquer Taiwan and defeat U.S. forces in the Indo-Pacific region. Since 2015, the PLA has undertaken a sweeping reform and reorganization program, and it now fields of an impressive array of new units and weapons systems that appear to be tailor-made for a war over Taiwan. No country has attempted such radical military transformation and sustained similar investments into its armed forces during peacetime since the 1930s.⁷⁶

The Long Term Strategy Group, a U.S. Department of Defense-funded consultancy, conducted a multiyear study to estimate how much the PRC has invested and is likely to spend on defense in the future. In 2021, Dr. Jacqueline Deal, the study’s principal investigator, observed that, “The annual dollar value of PLA procurement is on course to eclipse that of the U.S. military by 2024.... By about 2030 the United States will no longer

Jazeera, March 23, 2023, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/3/23/china-quit-zero-covid-its-huge-quarantine-centers-stayed-put>.

⁷⁴ “China has chilling plans for governing Taiwan,” *The Economist*, October 10, 2022, at <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2022/10/10/china-has-chilling-plans-for-governing-taiwan>; and Giulia Carbonaro, “China Would Re-Educate Taiwan in Event of Reunification, Ambassador Says,” *Newsweek*, August 5, 2022, at <https://www.newsweek.com/china-reeducate-taiwan-reunification-ambassador-1731141>.

⁷⁵ John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, “Xi Jinping Says He is Preparing China for War,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2023, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/xi-jinping-says-he-preparing-china-war>; and David Lague and Benjamin Kang Lim, “How China is replacing America and Asia’s military titan,” *Reuters*, April 23, 2019, at <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-xi/>.

⁷⁶ Jacqueline N. Deal and Michael Mort, “China Prefers Guns to Butter: As the economy declines, the CCP leans heavily on the army,” *Foreign Policy*, September 7, 2023, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/07/china-economic-slowdown-pla-buildup-taiwan/>.

boast the world's most advanced fighting force in total inventory value."⁷⁷ Deal further said, "If the Chinese can manufacture highly advanced weapons, it would be foolish to believe that they cannot also learn to integrate and use them according to their specific requirements and organizational culture."⁷⁸

Chinese shipyards and defense plants are launching new amphibious assault ships, hovercrafts, and helicopters at a remarkable pace. Admiral Lee Hsi-min, the former commander of Taiwan's military, estimates that 110 new ships have entered the PLA Navy in the last eight years, along with nearly 50 large, roll-on/roll-off civilian transport ships that were built to military specifications for supporting amphibious landing operations. And the PLA Army now has over 1,000 ZTD-05 and ZBD-05 amphibious armored fighting vehicles, the world's fastest swimming tanks, and is on track to field 1,800 helicopters by 2025.

This force could be sufficient for equipping at least six amphibious assault brigades, two air assault brigades, and 15 army aviation brigades – the entire first wave of a Taiwan invasion force, plus reserves. According to Lee, the PLA Air Force has enough transport planes to drop 8,000 paratroopers in a single attack and is expected to have the capability to carry 20,000 paratroopers, including all their heavy equipment, by 2030.⁷⁹ The PLA is also in the process of constructing an enormous network of logistics support capabilities needed for capitalizing on captured lodgments and sustaining a protracted battle on Taiwan.⁸⁰

Constructing the Invasion Fleet

The PLA continues to bolster its ability to project power from the sea. The Chinese navy recently commissioned three Type 075 class amphibious assault ships, large flat-deck

⁷⁷ Jacqueline Deal, "China could soon outgun the U.S.," *Politico*, May 27, 2021, at <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-china-watcher/2021/05/27/china-could-soon-outgun-the-us-493014>.

⁷⁸ Jacqueline Deal, "China could soon outgun the U.S.," *Politico*, May 27, 2021, at <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-china-watcher/2021/05/27/china-could-soon-outgun-the-us-493014>.

⁷⁹ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, pp. 76-78.

⁸⁰ Kevin McCauley, "China Maritime Report No. 22: Logistics Support for a Cross-Strait Invasion: The View from Beijing," *China Maritime Studies Institute*, July 2022, at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/22/>.

motherships for helicopters and landing crafts that can serve as the flagships of amphibious task forces.⁸¹ Studies conducted by Conor Kennedy and his colleagues at the U.S. Naval War College have shown that the PLA is augmenting its traditional amphibious vessels with a colossal fleet of paramilitary, but ostensibly civilian, ferries and vehicle carriers.⁸² Past analyses have generally tended to discount the feasibility of a Taiwan invasion based on a strict tallying of PLA Navy vessels. Such an approach overlooks the majority of the ships that an invasion force would actually use, according to PLA doctrine.⁸³

Updated estimates of PRC-controlled military and civilian fleets have seen remarkable growth in potential cross-Strait transportation capacity, especially in terms of roll-on/roll-off commercial vessels that are well-suited to the invasion mission. Captain Thomas Shugart, a retired U.S. Naval officer who closely tracks Chinese maritime affairs, wrote that the PLA could soon have the amphibious lift needed for a Taiwan invasion.

“When combined with the Chinese navy’s sealift capacity, this means that China could deliver more than eight heavy brigades-worth of equipment, and about 60,000 troops, in the first sealift wave. And this would be in addition to those forces that could be delivered by airdrop, helicopter, or via surreptitious infiltration in the weeks or months leading up to an invasion ... China’s military-associated roll-on/roll-off vessels could deliver more than 2,000,000 square feet of vehicles per day — more than four heavy brigades’ worth of equipment. Over

⁸¹ Conor M. Kennedy and Daniel Caldwell, “China Maritime Report No. 23: The Type 075 LHD: Development, Missions, and Capability,” *China Maritime Studies Institute*, October 2022, at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/23/>.

⁸² Conor Kennedy, “RO-RO Ferries and the Expansion of the PLA’s Landing Ship Fleet,” *CIMSEC*, March 27, 2023, at <https://cimsec.org/ro-ro-ferries-and-the-expansion-of-the-plas-landing-ship-fleet/>; Michael Dahm and Conor M. Kennedy, “Civilian Shipping: Ferrying the People’s Liberation Army Ashore,” *CIMSEC*, September 9, 2021, at <https://cimsec.org/civilian-shipping-ferrying-the-peoples-liberation-army-ashore/>; Conor Kennedy, “Ramping the Strait: Quick and Dirty Solutions to Boost Amphibious Lift,” *China Brief*, July 16, 2021, at <https://jamestown.org/program/ramping-the-strait-quick-and-dirty-solutions-to-boost-amphibious-lift/>; and Conor Kennedy, “China Maritime Report No.4: Civil Transport in PLA Power Projection,” *China Maritime Studies Institute*, December 6, 2019, at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/4/>.

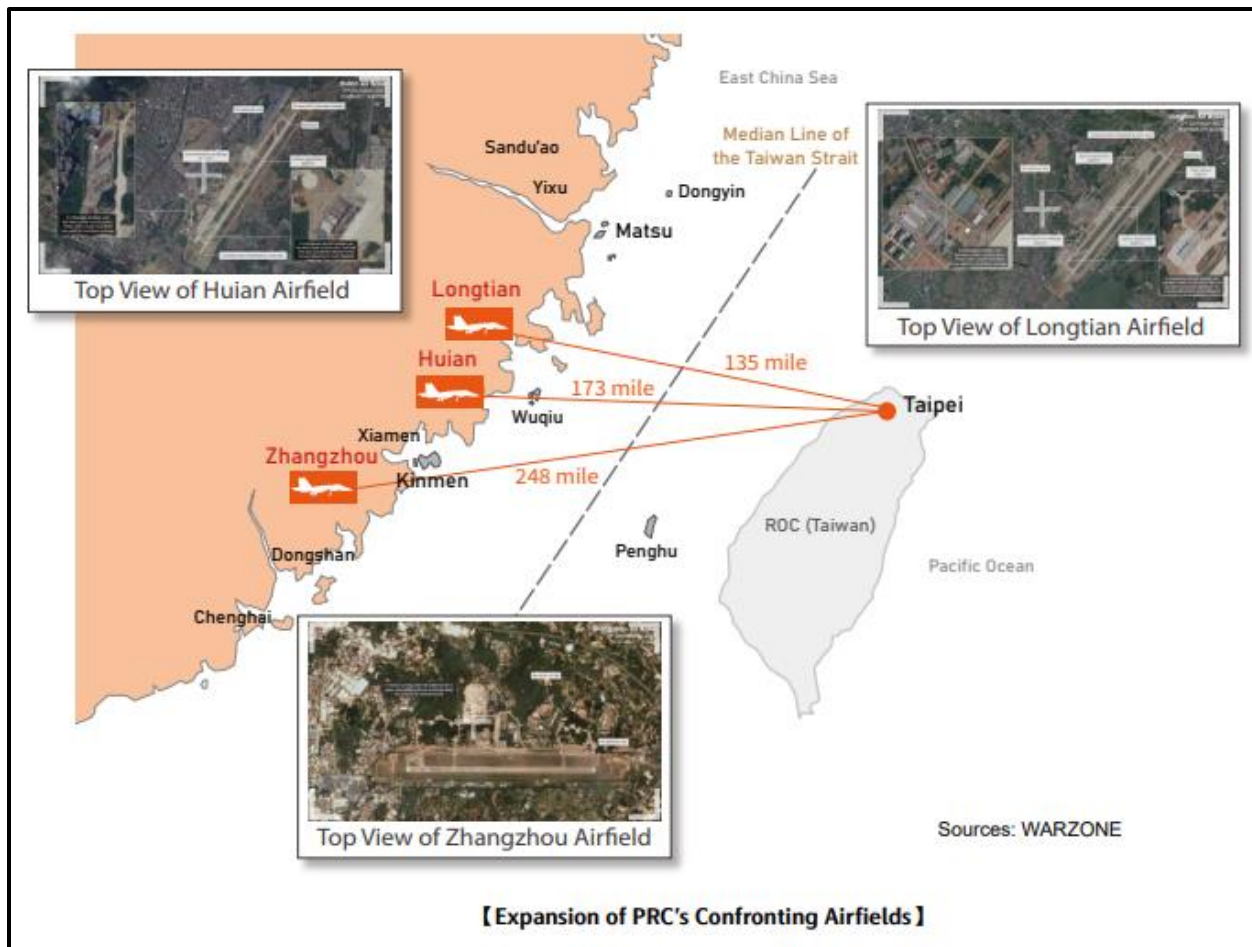
⁸³ See Xu Lisheng and Wang Tiaoyong (eds.), *Research on Port Landing Operations* [港口登陆作战研究] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2015), pp. 16-271; Cao Zhengrong, Sun Longhai, and Yang Yin (eds.), *Informatized Army Operations* [信息化陆军作战] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2014), pp. 109-215.

time, this roll-on/roll-off civilian shipping alone could deliver seven full Group Armies with their associated brigades – likely more than 300,000 troops and their vehicles – in about 10 days ... All this means that China could have the ability to conduct a successful invasion sooner than many would like to think.”⁸⁴

The enormous investments of political capital associated with China's military buildup could be seen as signal that the PRC authorities feel a strong sense of urgency and perceive the need to increase combat readiness levels with rapidity. Taiwan's *2023 National Defense Report* notes that the PLA has construction projects underway to expand and upgrade forward airbases and is positioning large numbers of warplanes and drones near Taiwan – locations where they could launch surprise attacks and attempt to seize air superiority at the outset of war.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Thomas Shugart, “Mind the Gap, Part 2: The Cross-Strait Potential of China's Civilian Shipping Has Grown,” *War on the Rocks*, October 12, 2022, at <https://warontherocks.com/2022/10/mind-the-gap-part-2-the-cross-strait-potential-of-chinas-civilian-shipping-has-grown/>. See also Thomas Shugart, “Mind the Gap: How China's Civilian Shipping Could Enable a Taiwan Invasion,” *War on the Rocks*, August 16, 2021, at <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/mind-the-gap-how-chinas-civilian-shipping-could-enable-a-taiwan-invasion/>.

⁸⁵ *ROC National Defense Report 2023* [中華民國 112 年國防報告書] (Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of National Defense, September 2023), p.34, available online at <https://reurl.cc/nLOGxl>.



PLA Base Expansion (Source: ROC 2023 National Defense Report)

Stacking the Leadership Deck

Xi Jinping has purged more than 100 generals and built a PLA in which all of the surviving military elite owe their promotions to him personally.⁸⁶ The senior officers who now dominate the upper ranks of the PLA have been termed a “Taiwan war council,” based on their backgrounds.⁸⁷ At least 15 of the individuals currently appointed to the CCP’s 24-member Politburo have Taiwan-related experience.⁸⁸ Xi Jinping’s true intentions remain unknowable, yet his actions could provide insights into his aims.

The Chinese government has poured an extraordinary volume of national resources into the PLA, and it appears to be in the process of stockpiling commodities and militarizing the PRC’s civilian economy, steeling society for a protracted war that could involve mass mobilization and profound hardship.⁸⁹ Related laws, policies, and strategic initiatives indicate that wealth creation is no longer a top priority, and the CCP instead perceives

⁸⁶ Chris Buckley, “Xi Rebuilt the Military to His Liking. Now a Shake-up Threatens Its Image,” *New York Times*, August 7, 2023, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/07/world/asia/china-nuclear-military-xi.html>; and David Lague and Benjamin Kang Lim, “How China is replacing America and Asia’s military titan,” *Reuters*, April 23, 2019, at <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-xi/>.

⁸⁷ “Xi Jinping wants ready soldiers and loyal generals,” *The Economist*, November 3, 2022, at <https://www.economist.com/china/2022/11/03/xi-jinping-wants-ready-soldiers-and-loyal-generals>; and Greg Torode, “Analysis: Xi’s new generals offer cohesion over possible Taiwan plans,” *Reuters*, October 27, 2022, at <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/need-speed-china-xis-new-generals-offer-cohesion-over-possible-taiwan-plans-2022-10-27/>.

⁸⁸ Christian Shepherd and Pei-Lin Wu, “Taiwan, missiles and spying set to be China’s priorities under new Xi Term,” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2022, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/28/china-politburo-xi-jinping-policy/>.

⁸⁹ “What war mobilization might look like in China,” *The Economist*, July 27, 2023, at <https://www.economist.com/china/2023/07/27/what-war-mobilisation-might-look-like-in-china>; “Could economic indicators give an early warning of a war over Taiwan?” *The Economist*, July 27, 2023, at <https://www.economist.com/china/2023/07/27/could-economic-indicators-signal-chinas-intent-to-go-to-war>; Clyde Russell, “China hugely boosts crude stockpiling on cheap Russian oil,” *Reuters*, July 26, 2023, at <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/china-hugely-boosts-crude-stockpiling-cheap-russian-oil-russell-2023-07-26/>; and Shin Watanabe and Aiko Munakata, “China hoards over half the world’s grain, pushing up global prices,” *Nikkei Asia*, December 23, 2021, at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Datawatch/China-hoards-over-half-the-world-s-grain-pushing-up-global-prices>. Note that according to Xi Jinping, one of the CCP’s greatest strengths is its unique ability to apply force to direct collective action and execute mass campaigns, especially during emergencies. See Jiang Luwu and Luo Yongguang (eds.), *Realizing the Deep Development of Military-Civil Fusion in our Overall Setup* [形成军民融合深度发展格局] (Beijing: Defense University Press, 2018), p. 203-204.

defense and security to be of much greater importance.⁹⁰ Experts caution that Xi Jinping seems to care much less about the PRC's economic development than he does the creation of an enormous war machine that is loyal to his command.⁹¹

Xi has exhorted the Chinese military to overcome what he calls the “peace disease.”⁹² And he has expressed optimism that once the PLA is strong enough relative to the U.S. military, the PRC will be able to win without fighting.⁹³ This could be interpreted to mean that he believes that American leaders' willingness to support the defense of Taiwan will evaporate once the PRC has closed the gap in military power, or that Taiwan's government could be subverted from within. Experts who closely track Xi's words and watch what he does in practice express concern that he is preparing for war.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ For examples, see “Counter Spy Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国反间谍法),” *PRC Ministry of National Defense*, December 7, 2017, at http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2017-12/07/content_4799261.htm; “State Intelligence Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国国家情报法),” *PRC National People's Congress*, June 27, 2017, at <http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/201806/483221713dac4f31bda7f9d951108912.shtml>; “State Security Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国国家安全法),” *PRC Ministry of National Defense*, April 7, 2017, at http://www.81.cn/2017gjaqjvr/2017-04/07/content_7553456.htm; “Internet Security Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国网络安全法),” *Office of the CCP Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission*, November 7, 2016, at http://www.cac.gov.cn/2016-11/07/c_1119867116.htm; and “The People's Republic of China's National Defense Transportation Law (中华人民共和国国防交通法),” *The PRC National People's Congress*, September 3, 2016, at http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/npc/xinwen/2016-09/03/content_1996764.htm.

⁹¹ Jacqueline N. Deal and Michael Mort, “China Prefers Guns to Butter: As the economy declines, the CCP leans heavily on the army,” *Foreign Policy*, September 7, 2023, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/07/china-economic-slowdown-pla-buildup-taiwan/>.

⁹² Jiang Luwu and Luo Yongguang (eds), *Realizing the Deep Development of Military-Civil Fusion in Our Overall Setup* [形成军民融合深度发展格局] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2018), p. 51. Note that this is an official PLA textbook on Xi Jinping Thought, which draws heavily from his speeches and writings.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹⁴ John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, “Xi Jinping Says He is Preparing China for War,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2023, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/xi-jinping-says-he-preparing-china-war>.

Wither Deterrence?

How has the war in Ukraine informed Taiwan's estimates regarding CCP intentions and the likelihood of a cross-Strait conflict? Overall, our research found a significant degree of pessimism in Taiwan and a concern that the CCP cannot be deterred from continuing to escalate tensions, possibly until they reach the point of conflict, barring a credible commitment from the United States to deter and, if necessary, act in defense of Taiwan across the spectrum of nuclear and non-nuclear warfare. Taiwanese experts expressed the view that Taiwan could not fight the PRC alone and win, although they said that with adequate training and equipment, the ROC armed forces could fight a prolonged battle and force the invader to pay an exorbitant price. Although some disagreed, the majority thought deterrence was still possible, and they emphasized that Taiwan's defense was not a lost cause. If deterrence failed, they believed Ukraine's experience showed that it remains likely Taiwan could work with the United States and allies to devastate an invasion force and prevail in an armed struggle.⁹⁵

According to national security officials in Taipei, the CCP is escalating tensions against Taiwan in ways that suggest it has aggressive aims. One official noted that it used to be possible for analysts in Taipei to link provocative PLA behavior directly to specific "triggers" or events Beijing felt it had to respond to, such as Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. But past analytic models were breaking down and the CCP was starting to act in an unexpected manner. "They use tit-for-tat harassment for things like foreign delegation visits and things that suggest warming U.S.-Taiwan relations," the official said. "But they also have more and more aggressive war preparations that are unrelated to what others are doing."⁹⁶

The official suggested that the Taiwanese government could no longer explain China's actions or understand them as anything other than possible signs of hostile intent. He added that the PLA appeared to be in the process of softening Taiwan up as a precursor to a future attack. "They are using constant harassment to exhaust our air force and navy...So we want to be as resilient and determined as the Ukrainians."⁹⁷ Another government official said that the CCP's escalating campaign of coercion and rejection of Taipei's attempts to have a dialogue, indicated deterrence was breaking down. "China's

⁹⁵ Authors' interviews with Taiwanese experts in Taiwan, June 2023.

⁹⁶ Authors discussions with Taiwanese national security official in Taipei, January 2023.

⁹⁷ Authors discussions with Taiwanese government official in Taipei, January 2023.

pressure will continue to ramp up...They make excuses all the time to justify it, but it's clear they want to invade and annex Taiwan.”⁹⁸ The official said, “We cannot assume a timeline. We might be invaded soon, so we must prepare in a comprehensive way.”⁹⁹

Government officials and defense experts we spoke to in Taiwan thought that likeminded democracies would have to take bold steps to enhance deterrence, and a collective security architecture might be required to ensure a more durable peace and lasting strategic stability. One option would be for the United States, Taiwan, and other friendly democracies, such as Japan and Australia, to establish joint defense mechanisms, a Taiwanese government official said.

“If Taiwan has a one-on-one match with China, of course China has a big chance of winning. But if America leads a team that includes Taiwan and other democracies, China won't dare attack. I hope for an Asian NATO. Strategic ambiguity needs to be adjusted.”¹⁰⁰

Taiwanese experts did not think a collective security arrangement was likely to take shape in the foreseeable future. Some observed that it was unclear how effective a notional alliance would be at curbing Beijing's ambitions. One expert expressed the view that Xi Jinping had delusions of grandeur and probably had already made up his mind to take Taiwan and create a new world order. “Deterrence? There will be no deterrence. How can you deter a dictator like Xi? He is a tyrant and not rational. At best we can only prevent him from successfully winning,” said a senior Taiwanese national security expert. “All of civilization is at stake here, and an apocalyptic battle could happen in Taiwan that will decide the fate of the world. We must be ready to fight in the streets, building to building, until the end.”¹⁰¹

When Might the CCP Invade?

A senior government official said that the CCP seeks to make people in Taiwan nervous about war and raise tensions without sparking a general war in the near term. “Their strategy is to use coercion rather than to invade Taiwan...They are probably not looking

⁹⁸ Authors' discussions with senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

⁹⁹ Authors' discussions with senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Authors' discussions with senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁰¹ Authors' discussions with a senior national security expert in Taipei, January 2023.

for an actual war. But they don't exclude using a limited war to get Taiwan to surrender," the official said. "Still, we have no choice but to prepare for both coercion and invasion scenarios. We are talking about a much shorter timeframe for a possible invasion, and assessing our estimates on both an annual and monthly basis."¹⁰²

Defense officials said that it was difficult to forecast exactly when the PLA would attack and the ROC military needed to be ready to fight at any time. "I don't think it will be in 2025 or 2027. It could be tomorrow. They could attack us in ways we don't expect and at times we don't expect," said a senior defense official in Taipei. "The war will begin whenever Xi Jinping needs it to begin. One man has all the power. He is the one who decides."¹⁰³ A high-ranking Taiwanese defense strategist suggested that it was impossible to use logic to predict when an invasion might come. "Xi Jinping is not a reasonable actor," the strategist said.¹⁰⁴

"Regarding the 2027 invasion timeline. Who knows? But Xi Jinping's objective will not change. The question is how he attacks and when. If Taiwan is vulnerable and weak, or the U.S. abandons Taiwan, then China will definitely attack right away. If the U.S.-PRC capability gap narrows or tilts in China's favor, it might invade Taiwan on that basis. So, the best deterrent is the U.S. helps Taiwan increase defense capability, continually improves our will to fight. And for the U.S. to increase its power relative to China. The U.S. needs to develop a big defense advantage over China."¹⁰⁵

Almost every Taiwanese expert we interviewed expressed a deep sense of concern about their country's security prospects. Most felt that a dangerous future awaited them, with some expecting the PRC to attack within the next two or three years. A minority expressed the view that the only way to avoid conflict was for Taiwan to distance itself from the United States, accept certain CCP's preconditions, and enter into dialogue under a "one China" framework. A surprising number said they thought Taiwan needed nuclear weapons, or would benefit from regional nuclear proliferation involving Japan and South Korea.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Authors' discussions with senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁰³ Authors' discussions with senior defense official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Authors' discussions with senior defense strategist in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese defense experts in Taipei, June 2023.

In the Horns of a Dilemma

Multiple experts highlighted the risks and challenges that would accompany any significant policy decisions Washington and Taipei might make to reverse their withering deterrence posture. They noted, for example, that the CCP could exploit American-led efforts to bolster Taiwan's security as a pretext for executing its invasion plans. If triggered, Xi Jinping could accelerate timelines and launch an early attack. Nonetheless, most experts felt that inaction on the part of the United States and Taiwan in the face of an increasingly grave threat picture seemed likely to prove the most dangerous option available. Since a PLA attack was judged as probable as long as current trends continued, Washington and Taipei had little to lose and much to gain by taking steps that would "provoke" Beijing, but improve their own defensive positions.¹⁰⁷

There seemed to be a deep sense of skepticism regarding CCP intentions even among Taiwanese experts who are in favor of embracing a "one China" policy and have historically taken a positive view of Beijing. A number of experts in this camp expressed hope that a war could be delayed through cross-Strait dialogues, but said that prospects of long-term peace were highly uncertain and the terms Xi would demand were sure to be unfavorable. To placate the CCP and avoid bloodshed, they suggested that Taiwan would have to distance itself from the United States and engage in political talks that could end up costing Taiwan its democracy and way of life.¹⁰⁸

A few seemed to think their situation was hopeless because, in their view, the United States could not be trusted and Taiwan lacked the stomach to defend itself like Ukraine in a brutal, all-out war. Based on these assumptions, it was their opinion that it would be better for the people of Taiwan to risk losing freedom than to risk an armed conflict with the PRC, since they were doomed anyway.¹⁰⁹ This dark view seems to stem largely from intensified CCP propaganda and intelligence operations, which reportedly have gained purchase in recent years, especially among those who have close cross-Strait ties or self-identify as ethnically Chinese.¹¹⁰ But other tangible and intangible factors could also be at play, a possibility we will explore in following sections.

¹⁰⁷ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese experts in Taipei, January and June 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese experts in Taipei, January and June 2023.

¹⁰⁹ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese experts in Taipei, January and June 2023.

¹¹⁰ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese experts in Taipei, January and June 2023.

Options to Enhance Deterrence

“We have to be ready to destroy them, the CCP. Can we lease U.S. nuclear arms?” asked one senior national security expert in Taiwan, who observed that prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the PRC began to rapidly increase its stockpiles of nuclear warheads and delivery systems. “From what we can tell, China seems to intend to use nuclear weapons even against American bases like Guam.” The expert said that he had no faith in deterrence succeeding, and Taiwan needed to do more to prepare for the coming war.¹¹¹

Another defense expert we spoke to agreed. He said it was difficult to imagine that deterrence could prevail in the cross-Strait context when the PRC had nuclear weapons and Taiwan did not. “Maybe the U.S. can allow Taiwan to develop nuclear weapons. Hahaha. But of course, we don’t have that policy. China would still invade if Taiwan had nuclear weapons. Maybe the United States could deploy nuclear weapons to Taiwan. But of course, that’s very unlikely too. China would use it as a pretext to invade,” he said.¹¹² The expert suggested that the United States could announce it would immediately recognize Taiwan as an independent country if the PRC attacks. “That’s perhaps a double edge sword too. It could work. But it could backfire.”¹¹³ Given Taiwan’s political landscape, the most feasible option was judged to be the deployment of a significant number of American troops to Taiwan.

“Are we preparing for deterrence or preparing for war? These two are not totally reconciled. Some political parties are preparing, at best, for deterring war. But they are not ready for war. Others are preparing for both, and we need to be ready for both. The idea of American soldiers garrisoned here in Taiwan gives confidence to the Taiwanese public and sends a strong signal to both Taiwan and the PRC. Both sides of the aisle in Taiwanese politics likes to see that. But we are not sure if Washington is willing to make its support for Taiwan more public. We need to send strong signals for deterrence. But some things must be kept secret to win war.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Authors’ discussions with a senior national security expert in Taipei, January 2023.

¹¹² Authors’ discussions with Taiwanese defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹¹³ Authors’ discussions with Taiwanese defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹¹⁴ Authors’ discussions with Taiwanese defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

What Scares Xi Jinping?

When asked about how to deter an attack on Taiwan, a senior ROC military official said, “We need to convince Xi Jinping that the whole world will isolate him if he attacks Taiwan.”¹¹⁵ A senior government official agreed. “For both China and Taiwan, one of the lessons of Ukraine’s experience is that it matters a great deal what other countries do. We hope that all democracies will signal that they will sanction China if it attacks us. But so far that hasn’t happened,” the official said. “We hope that the U.S. will intervene militarily if needed because perhaps economics won’t be enough to deter the CCP. We also need to improve our own self-defense,” the official added. “We want to be as resilient and determined as Ukraine. And so, we are extending conscription and building up asymmetric capabilities.”¹¹⁶

The senior Taiwanese official said that the United States and Taiwan had to effectively signal to Xi Jinping that he is in a hopeless position because Taiwan cannot be conquered and any attempt to take the island would have devastating repercussions for him personally.

“The CCP has always wanted to take Taiwan, ever since 1949. We want to make it so that Xi Jinping wakes up every day and says ‘I’m not ready.’ Our strategy is to undermine his confidence. We must improve our military buildup, extend conscription, and enhance all our defenses. We must get more support from the international community... How to deter Xi Jinping? We must convince him that if he invades Taiwan, militarily he has no chance at victory because the Taiwanese will resist and so will the U.S. and allies. Economically, China will be impoverished by boycotts and embargoes. Diplomatically, China will be isolated and loathed. Psychologically, we must make it clear to him that it’s all his fault and make him feel guilty to deter him. We need to let him know that he will lose all his dreams and be the most hated man in Chinese history.”¹¹⁷

A senior government official agreed. “Xi Jinping’s own cost calculation is the key to deterrence. We need to show him how terrible the costs will be and work with other

¹¹⁵ Authors’ discussions with senior Taiwanese defense official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹¹⁶ Authors’ discussions with senior Taiwanese national security official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹¹⁷ Authors’ discussions with senior Taiwanese official in Taipei, January 2023.

democracies to make it credible.”¹¹⁸ A high-ranking general suggested that Taiwan's layered defense plan could contribute to deterrence. Even if Xi ordered an attack, the PLA would first have to fight for control over the air, sea, and information domains before it could cross the Strait. As such, the ROC military might be able to deter an invasion by performing far better than the CCP expected in the early phases of conflict, forcing Beijing to reconsider its options. “Cyber and hybrid warfare will come before the big attack. If we can surprise them in the early days of war and disrupt their preparations to invade before they fully commit, we think we have a chance of soft kill success.”¹¹⁹

A senior Taiwanese official suggested that regime security was Xi's top priority. “Xi Jinping fears his own people. Even though he's removed all political challengers, he's paranoid. He fears the CIA and FBI. Thinks they are trying to foment his overthrow and revolution.”¹²⁰ The official emphasized that Chinese society was growing increasingly turbulent.

“After the pandemic, China's not going to be the world's factory anymore, and the quality of life over there is going to decrease...Their growth rate is only three percent now and relies on a fragile real estate market. They are facing a huge problem. There will be more protests. The potential for revolution in the next five years is very likely. I'm optimistic that as long as we democracies stick together, Xi Jinping is going to have a hard time surviving another five years. We need to work together to make Chinese products less competitive and restructure our supply chains. We estimate that by 2027 the CCP elite will want him to step down. But we must be very, very careful because he could use war against Taiwan to divert attention away from internal problems.”¹²¹

Taiwan's 2023 *National Defense Report* states, “The first and foremost mission of our national defense is to prevent war and deter any external military threats.”¹²² It remains to be seen whether Taipei will receive the kind of international support that could affect Xi Jinping's thinking and alter his plans in a way that preserves peace. Taiwanese

¹¹⁸ Authors' discussions with senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹¹⁹ Authors' discussions with high-ranking general in Taipei, January 2023.

¹²⁰ Author's discussions with senior official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹²¹ Author's discussions with senior official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹²² *ROC National Defense Report 2023* [中華民國 112 年國防報告書] (Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of National Defense, September 2023), p.60, available online at <https://reurl.cc/nLOGxl>.

government officials expressed the view that the outcome of the war in Ukraine will directly impact Xi's war calculations.

“The best outcome is that Ukraine reclaims all its lost territory and Putin falls. That could deter China from attacking Taiwan. But if Ukraine doesn't have justice, it will encourage China to attack us. We will be waiting for another war if the U.S. looks weak and Russia strong.”¹²³

ROC defense officials and strategists said they faced two fundamental and contradictory challenges. First, in the current period of rising tensions and crisis, Taiwan's military must be firm enough against coercion to signal unwavering resolve, but still yielding enough to avoid unnecessary escalation. Second, in the event of an enemy attack, Taiwan's military must be fast and bold to shock the CCP high command in the early stages of war, but deliberate and cautious to preserve strength to fight a long war.¹²⁴

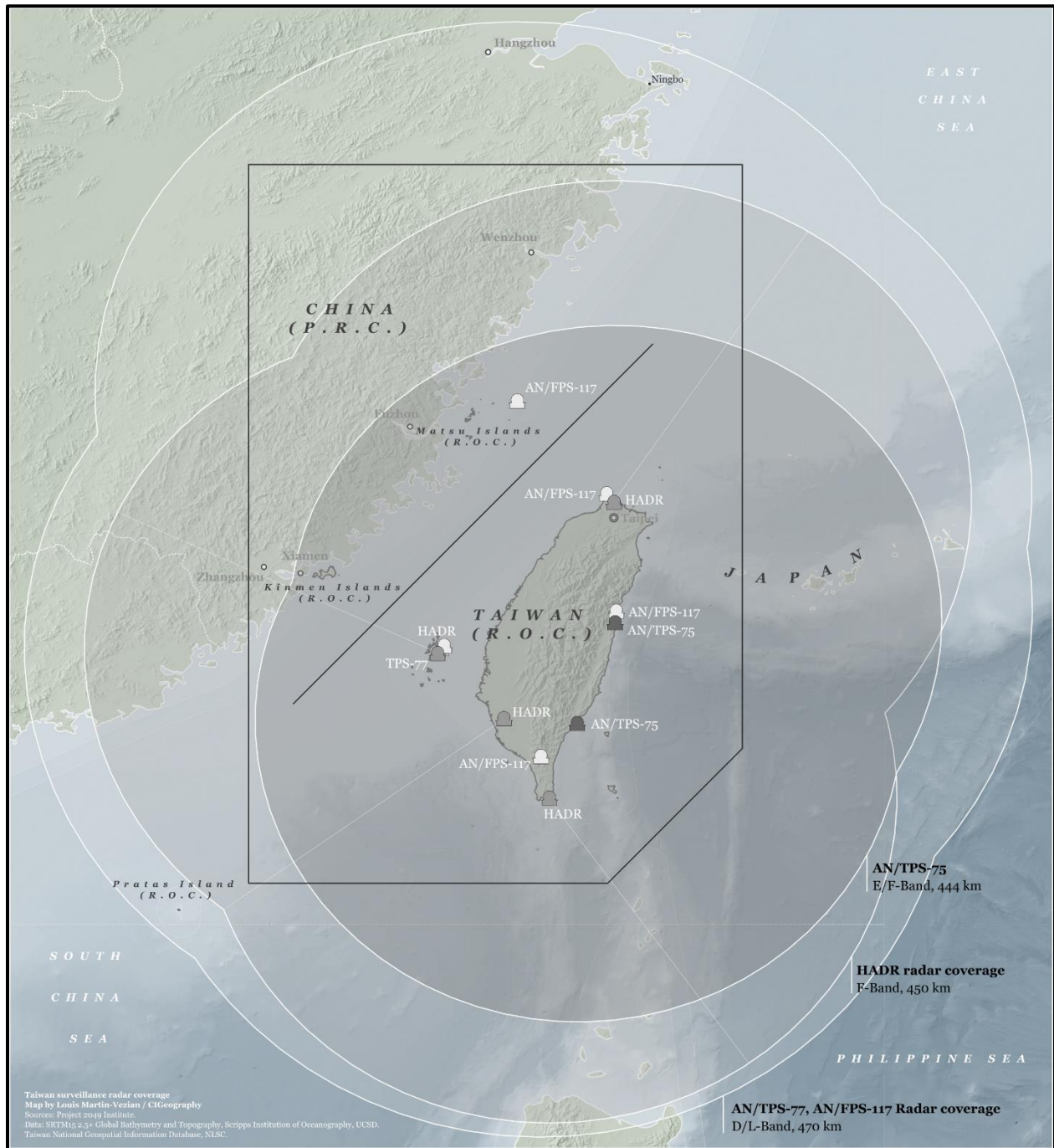
By studying the lessons of the war in Ukraine, Taiwanese military leaders hope to improve their ability to strike the right balance and better prepare for what appears to be an increasingly likely Z-Day. A high-ranking general told us that Taiwan needed to find ways to push back against increasing CCP coercion, while limiting the rising possibility of escalation.

“In 2022, we sustained 1.7 billion cyber-attacks. We face an avalanche of fake news. The week that Pelosi visited us, there were 500 cases just that week. The PLA is working with the Russian military to further coerce us. The CCP wants to create a new normal in the Taiwan Strait. Their aims are to use tit-for-tat coercion tactics that are targeted. But whatever we do, their military exercises will get more and more intense. They want to provoke and get American leaders to bow to pressure. The CCP is looking for any excuse to invade Taiwan. We should show we are not intimidated, without giving them an excuse to escalate. We need to find the best balance.”¹²⁵

¹²³ Authors discussions with Taiwanese national security expert in Taipei, January 2023.

¹²⁴ Author's discussions with defense officials and strategists in Taipei, June 2023. See also, *2023 National Defense Report*, pp. 60-61.

¹²⁵ Authors' discussions with senior defense official in Taipei, January 2023.



Taiwan's Air Surveillance Coverage (By Louis Martin-Vézian)

CHAPTER FIVE

Military Lessons from Ukraine

Parallels have been drawn between the war in Ukraine and a potential CCP invasion of Taiwan. While different in many respects, both Ukraine and Taiwan are countries outside of a collective security network like NATO. They both lack nuclear weapons and they both face existential threats posed by much larger and nuclear-armed neighbors. Still, defense analysts in Taiwan underscore that Ukraine is far more vulnerable to invasion than Taiwan. Ukraine shares a long land border with Russia and 70 percent of its territory is comprised of flat, open plains that are well-suited to rapid mechanized assaults and maneuver warfare. In contrast, Taiwan is surrounded by a large expanse of rough open seas, and its rugged coastline, dense cities, and mountainous geography make it easy to defend and hard to attack.¹²⁶

Taiwanese defense analysts observe that Ukraine is one of the poorest countries in Europe. Prior to the Russian invasion, Ukrainian military units had equipment that was woefully outdated and incompatible with Western systems. Ukraine's defense industry was a rusting shell of Soviet-era weapons plants and shipyards. The country's economic troubles led it to sell off its most valuable arms to the PRC, a move that hallowed out the country's own military. Worse, Ukraine was riven by deep political divisions. It faced a long war along its eastern borders that was fueled by covert Russian units and military proxies. Unlike Ukraine, Taiwan is a wealthy, high-technology powerhouse that has a modern, American-equipped military, burgeoning indigenous defense industry, and advanced economy. Taiwan is politically stable and has one of the highest performing governments in the world.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Lu Hsueh-ren, "Will Taiwan be the Next Ukraine? (台灣是下一個烏克蘭嗎)," *Defence International* (全球防衛雜誌), April 2022, pp. 40-43.

¹²⁷ Lu Hsueh-ren, "Will Taiwan be the Next Ukraine? (台灣是下一個烏克蘭嗎)," *Defence International* (全球防衛雜誌), April 2022, pp. 40-43. There are a number of other important differences that have been

Our analysis suggests that a near universal opinion exists in Taiwan that is strongly in favor of two approaches characterized by (1) enhanced defense and security relations with the United States and other democracies, and (2) self-strengthening to increase Taiwan's readiness and resiliency to withstand a long conflict. While cynics were convinced that neither of these approaches was realistic given the PRC's power and influence, optimists believed that lessons of the war in Ukraine showed that aggressors could be repulsed and a country like Taiwan was highly defensible. Moreover, they thought the international community was capable of making unexpectedly rapid reforms in times of crisis, especially when the survival of a fellow democracy was at stake.¹²⁸

Awareness versus Alarm

The Taiwanese military has been profoundly affected by the war in Ukraine and is making rapid reforms. The most immediate and pressing lesson from Ukraine was that Taiwan's military power and combat effectiveness could be multiplied by a supportive public in the throes of crisis. It was widely agreed that the government should do far more to educate the people of Taiwan and fight CCP propaganda. Numerous officials we spoke to in Taipei believe the CCP seeks to spark panic and drive international investment away from Taiwan. If successful, a campaign of coercion would set the conditions necessary for annexing the country.

“We learned from Ukraine that we need to foster determination. We need to educate the people and gradually improve their knowledge of the threat. We don't want to scare them. We want to prepare them and have much to learn from the Ukrainians, who are very good at this kind of thing. We are learning from

identified by academics when discussing the parallels between the invasion of Ukraine and a potential invasion of Taiwan. Taiwan has a different level of significance to the United States compared to Ukraine. For instance, in 2020, Taiwan was the United States' 9th largest trading partner while Ukraine was 67th. Taiwanese chip-maker TSMC accounts for more than half of global foundry revenues. Moreover, Taiwan sits in a strategic location for the defense of key U.S. allies like South Korea and Japan. The added symbolism of Taiwan as one of Asia's most liberal democracies is a compelling narrative for many. Ukraine has only recently begun receiving modern western military assistance, while Taiwan has been buying billions of dollars' worth of weapons for decades. See Andrew Browne, “Beware of Comparisons of Ukraine and Taiwan,” *Bloomberg*, February 19, 2022, at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2022-02-19/beware-the-comparisons-of-ukraine-and-taiwan-new-economy-saturday>.

¹²⁸ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese experts in Taipei, June 2023.

them...The Pelosi visit was an opportunity to show that the threat is real. It was not bad for us. We need to get our people ready.”¹²⁹

A senior national security official said that Taiwan's government had not yet figured out the best way to defeat hostile propaganda. “We want to fight disinformation, buildup all of our society's resilience, and avoid a panic. We have lots of homework. We need to raise the public's threat perception and increase vigilance without causing panic. It's an awareness versus alarm challenge.”¹³⁰ Another official felt that Taiwan's government was being overwhelmed by the size and sophistication of the CCP's political warfare operations, forcing public leaders on a day-to-day basis to choose between either governing or countering fake news and malicious rumors.¹³¹ Military officials confessed feeling surprised by the aggressive approach being taken by the PLA.

“For the Pelosi visit, which was followed by the 4th Taiwan Strait Crisis, the PLA developed a long, detailed plan. Their missile targeting points were very precise. It was the biggest and strongest exercise we've ever seen. We think the PLA wanted to spark a panic and force Taiwan to sound the air raid sirens. They fired their missiles over Taipei right when it was Father's Day and all our restaurants were packed with families. They did all kinds of things we've never seen before and didn't think they could do. For example, they are breaking their own records when it comes to aircraft sorties. And we are now getting hit by 30 million cyber-attacks a day.”¹³²

A Taiwanese government official said, “We learned from the Ukraine war that the future will be hybrid war. We need to prepare now. So our civilian and commercial entities are ready to fight in the information realm. That is starting in Taiwan.”¹³³

Increasing Military Readiness

Another lesson was that Taiwan needed to strengthen its self-defense capabilities as soon as possible. When asked in a press interview what Taiwan can learn from the ongoing war

¹²⁹ Authors' discussions with senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹³⁰ Authors' discussions with senior national security official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹³¹ Authors' discussions with senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹³² Authors' discussions with senior defense official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹³³ Authors discussions with Taiwanese national security expert in Taipei, January 2023.

in Ukraine, Taiwan's defense minister Chiu Kuo-cheng responded that, for Taiwan, the Russian invasion of Ukraine highlighted the need to maintain high-levels of preparedness during peacetime. While Ukrainians have strategic depth and clearly defined battle zones, Taiwan could become a scene of continuous combat operations, without clear front lines or rear areas.¹³⁴ According to a defense expert at a think tank in Taipei, this meant that the ROC military needed to make difficult defense reforms. It had to toughen up troops through more realistic training, bring back conscription, field a larger standing army, and expand the size and strength of the reserve force.

“We need to enhance training. Our training is very old. The defense policy has changed, going from four to twelve months of conscription. We need to figure out how to combine the conscripts with the volunteers. We are also making reforms to our all-out mobilization system. Training for our reserve force is going from one week to two weeks, and we are increasing the number of female soldiers in the reserves... Our troop numbers are going to start increasing now that we have 12-month conscription. We are expanding our reserve force brigades, going from seven brigades up to twelve Type A brigades. These are the ones that train new soldiers in peacetime and then do coastal defense in wartime. We are going to have ten Type B reserve brigades. These are the ones comprised of all those troops at our military schools and academies. We are going to have 25 Type C brigades, comprised of local county and municipal levels. Each city and county have their own reserve brigades. So that's a total of 47 reserve brigades that can be mobilized right away, and each brigade has around 5,000 troops. And the total number of reservists is two million men. They need much more training. We have enough guns. I should know, I was the commander of ... a reserve unit and in charge of inventory. We have lots of mobilization depots to hand out rifles: M-14s, TK-91s, and T-65s. But lots more training is needed.”¹³⁵

Weathering a Long Blockade

For the CCP and PLA, the extreme costs that would likely be associated with even a successful an invasion are well understood in Taiwan defense circles, and the odds of

¹³⁴ Jonathan Chin, “Taiwan could withstand attack for two weeks, Chiu says,” *Taipei Times*, February 23, 2023, at <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/02/24/2003794954>.

¹³⁵ Authors' discussions with defense experts in Taipei, June 2023.

success seem long. Taiwan's natural and manmade defensive advantages have long been a source of confidence, and some in the ROC Armed Forces still express their conviction that it would be an act of madness on the part of the CCP to attempt an amphibious invasion against their country. They simply do not think the PLA could pull it off, unless the enemy managed to soften Taiwan up over a multi-year coercion campaign, which itself could backfire and strengthen the defenders' resolve.¹³⁶

Taiwanese strategists believe a long-term blockade operation is a more rational choice, and this could involve step-by-step moves by the PLA to seize Taiwan's outer islands and launch limited kinetic attacks on the main island of Taiwan that intensified over time.

"We have to make ourselves resilient. We have to stockpile food and strategic supplies. Actually, we are very strong in agriculture. We don't have a food problem. We have lots of rice overproduction and pigs...our self-sufficiency rate is as high as 70 percent. We'd have to change our diets in a war. The corn and wheat products we love from America and Europe could be cut off. But food is not a big issue. Energy is far more challenging. We want to go green and get lots more solar and wind with storage capability to prepare for a long blockade. Hydropower as well. Wind and solar energy won't run out. We are trying to build household and regional power facilities, so we have at least limited electricity. We have to get people prepared for the worst. We are moving fast in green energy. As for weapons and ammo, we are a major industrial country and have an impressive production capability. The government is increasing production so we are ready."¹³⁷

Emergency Stockpiling

Senior defense officials in Taiwan expressed the view that the war in Ukraine was fundamentally different than a hypothetical war with the PRC. Taiwan was surrounded by water and the PLA had an enormous navy, so it seemed imperative that the government and military stockpile and improve resiliency.

"Simply put, Taiwan is an island, so [unlike Ukraine] our supplies will be cut off. We need to stockpile and prepare for war now. We need to stockpile components

¹³⁶ Authors' discussions with defense experts in Taipei, June 2023.

¹³⁷ Authors' discussions with senior Taiwanese government official in Taipei, January 2023.

that we can use to build our own Stingers, Javelins, and CDCMs (coastal defense cruise missiles). We need resilient C2 (command and control) and an integrated kill chain linked to sensors up and down the first island chain. We are willing to fight. That has never changed. But one of the lessons we learned from Ukraine was to strengthen our ability to mobilize all of society and our reserves.

“We are sending more troops to the U.S. to train on systems before they arrive in Taiwan, so the troops are ready to use them upon delivery. We are testing our social resiliency. Because of Ukraine, we are extending conscription to one year. And those one-year conscripts are going to be trained to use weapons like Stingers, Javelins, drones, and communications equipment.

“Taiwan is racing against time. We have to get ready for a possible 2027 invasion. We need to bolster our special forces capabilities. We need Starlink and other C2 platforms. We need portable C4ISR [command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance]. We are trying to ramp up production of drones and smart mine-layers, things like unmanned ships. Because China has an overwhelmingly larger military budget.”¹³⁸

Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng suggested that the ROC military and society was ready to fight a protracted war. “There is no need to debate whether the Chinese military is stronger and larger than Taiwan’s. Although it is big enough to start a war, it is not capable of defeating Taiwan in two weeks,” he said. “Even if China wins, it will be unable to impose autocratic rule in a year, two years or even more than that, because Taiwanese are free people and will not tolerate being governed by a one-party state.” Chiu expressed optimism that any CCP attempt to blockade Taiwan would fail to force the Taiwanese government to surrender. “[Taiwan] absolutely can outlast a blockade [if] we prepare sufficient materiel, and communications with the outside world are maintained via the myriad means available to us, including the Internet and telecommunications technology,” Chiu added.¹³⁹

A senior military official emphasized the need for flexible command and control arrangements in case units in the field were cut off from their headquarters.

¹³⁸ Authors’ discussions with senior Taiwanese military official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹³⁹ Jonathan Chin, “Taiwan could withstand attack for two weeks, Chiu says,” *Taipei Times*, February 23, 2023, at <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/02/24/2003794954>.

“Decentralized command is critical. A key supporting element is battlefield transparency. We plan to use a constellation of lower earth orbit satellites to enhance our battlefield transparency. We have a robust defense industry and can make a lot of this ourselves.... Soon, Chinese drones are likely to be flying over Taiwan. We need counter drone weapons, and we need better cyber defense.”¹⁴⁰

More Missiles, Rockets, and Loitering Munitions

Does Taiwan have a credible non-nuclear deterrent option in the form of long-range precision strike? A senior government official said that Taiwan's top defense priority was to build up its missile forces, and the country was racing to stockpile as many missiles as possible, especially those that could be launched from mobile platforms like trucks. “I think, at the end of the day, what is important to us is our missile capability...The current U.S. administration is quite responsive and starting to rethink past limitations on missiles we can use against China.”¹⁴¹ An American defense official we spoke to in Taiwan expressed his personal opinion that, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Taiwan should be allowed to have Tomahawk cruise missiles. “We should let Taiwan have long-range precision strike.”¹⁴²

Taiwan has been making its own cruise missiles and rockets for strikes deep into the PRC. New extended range cruise missiles reportedly could obliterate targets as far as Qingdao, Wuhan, and Beijing, depending on the variant, although only in very small numbers given current production limitations.¹⁴³ Critics of this approach point out that conventional long-range missiles are prohibitively expensive and not as powerful as people think. Russia fired 1,000 long-range missiles at Ukraine in 20 days, but there was no shock and awe. They made little difference. Taiwan's military cannot and should not try to compete

¹⁴⁰ Authors' discussions with senior Taiwanese military official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁴¹ Authors' discussions with senior Taiwanese government official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁴² Authors' discussions with U.S. government official in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁴³ Lo Tien-pin, “Exclusive: ‘Hsiung Sheng’ missile range over 1,000km, military reveals two warhead types and operational capabilities (獨家「雄昇飛彈」射程逾 1000 公里 軍方首曝 2 彈種及作戰效能),”

Liberty Times, April 20, 2022, at

https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/3899056?fbclid=IwAR1x9SUV5ZOGoxyNE1Bm7Xzmdz7jEJvj_FQN8j70HPbhXhK-skIXS9Agcg#google_vignette; and Chen Yu-fu, Wu Su-wei and Liu

Tzu-hsuan, “Missiles can reach Beijing, legislative speaker warns,” *Taipei Times*, June 13, 2022, at

<https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/06/13/2003779812>.

with the PLA in a race to field long-range strike, according to Admiral Lee. That would lead to of a war of attrition and that's a game the PLA will always win.¹⁴⁴

Nonetheless, long-range missiles are hugely popular with the people of Taiwan, and it is felt they are important for boosting morale and making CCP leaders think twice about attacking. Advocates point out that the Ukrainians wish they had more of the kinds of capabilities that Taiwan is building.

*The Ukrainians tell us that they have always wanted to go after the source of attacks (striking Russian units with long-range drones and missiles and rockets), but the U.S. wouldn't let them until the Russians starting killing civilians.*¹⁴⁵

Taiwanese analysts and retired commanders suggest that the main purpose of a deep strike would be to hit back at the enemy's leadership in reprisal for an attempted assassination of Taiwan's president.¹⁴⁶ The purpose of developing these missiles is to stop the CCP from attempting a "decapitation" operation in the first place. If deterrence failed, these missiles could allow Taiwan the ability to hit back at important political and military leaders. In theory, if the CCP used its missiles to hit Taiwan's Presidential Office, Taiwan would have the ability to target the CCP's Zhongnanhai leadership complex in Beijing. If the CCP hit Taiwan's Legislative Yuan, Taiwan could hit the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

To deal with the threat of an amphibious invasion, Taiwan plans to deploy more than 1,000 anti-ship missiles by 2026. Taiwan's indigenous Hsiung Feng II (HF-II) anti-ship missiles have engagement ranges of 148-200km, and the supersonic Hsiung Feng III (HF-III) has an effective range of 150-400km.¹⁴⁷ The ROC military plans to field thousands of drones and loitering munitions. Taiwanese defense strategists believe that the PLA invasion force would be most vulnerable when crossing the Strait and in the early

¹⁴⁴ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, pp. 264-270.

¹⁴⁵ Authors discussions with Taiwanese national security expert in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Authors interviews in Taipei. See also "Cloud Peak Missile in Small Scale Production? (雲峰飛彈少數量產), *Defence International*, August 2022, p. 23.

¹⁴⁷ Lo Tien-pin and Jonathan Chin, "Ministry ramps up missile production," *Taipei Times*, July 2, 2023, at <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2023/07/02/2003802506>.

moments of landing operations.¹⁴⁸ But Taiwan would also have a distinct advantage in an urban fight.

Long War

Taiwanese defense analysts expressed the view that a future war would be protracted.

“The ODC [Overall Defense Concept] is now being implemented for real. We are now thinking about the war after the beach. We have watched the Ukrainians use city guerilla warfare. That shows China it will be a long war if they invade Taiwan. China is also thinking about a long war and provincial mobilization.”¹⁴⁹

Analysts said that, in Ukraine, the defenders have not been 100 percent successful because the invader still occupies some of their territory. “The Russians now want to drag out war to 2024. They believe they can exhaust the West and show the West cannot win. China could fight a very long war.”¹⁵⁰ Before the war in Ukraine, the Taiwanese military focused on what they regarded as the least likely but worst-case invasion scenario. That has not changed, they said, although far more thought was being given to a blockade scenario that escalated slowly over time.

“They (the PLA) of course prefer a flash invasion. But we didn’t think they could do it and didn’t take it that seriously. Now we in Taiwan realize that we have to be ready to fight at any time. We have to be more alert to reduce the possibility of surprise. Now the most likely and worst case seem to be the same: an attempt at (a flash) invasion and long war across the Strait.... China likes the gray zone and is probably going to use it to force negotiations with preconditions attached. If that fails, they are likely to invade some or all of the outer islands of Pratas, Kinmen, Matsu, and Dongyin. Then perhaps they will invade the Penghus. Then they will use a joint fire strike campaign. If that doesn’t work and Taiwan doesn’t surrender, they will launch an all-out invasion. Then they will fight us in a long urban warfare campaign. It could be a step-by-step

¹⁴⁸ ROC National Defense Report 2023 [中華民國 112 年國防報告書] (Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of National Defense, September 2023), p.64, available online at <https://reurl.cc/nLOGxl>.

¹⁴⁹ Authors’ discussions with Taiwanese defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁵⁰ Authors’ discussions with Taiwanese defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

*process where they attack. They pause to see if we will surrender. Then they escalate further and attack again. But the long blockade scenario could be the most popular option in Beijing and that is likely to be the most popular in Beijing initially because heavy invasion loses could destabilize the Chinese government. So a blockade is most likely in the near term.*¹⁵¹

Disrupting Invasion

In theory, Taiwan's outer islands, which are located approximately 190 km (100 nautical miles) west of the shores of Taiwan and within visual range of the PRC coast, could still disrupt the shipping channels into and out of southeastern China's natural harbors, bays, and ports—the very places where PLA troops would need to assemble and load aboard ships before an assault on Taiwan. While no longer forward deployed in large numbers, the soldiers and marines on these islands have some significant assets, including air defense missiles, anti-ship missiles, and land attack missiles. They also have the *Ray-Ting 2000* (Thunderbolt 2000), a wheeled multiple-launch rocket system, which can fire simultaneous volleys of guided munitions and shotgun-like projectiles filled with tens of thousands of ball bearings. The Taiwanese military parks its defensive platforms inside warrens of deep tunnels and hardened bunkers, so they can fight under intense bombardment.¹⁵²

It is anticipated that batteries of missiles and rocket artillery could damage PLA staging areas around Xiamen and Fuzhou, the most direct lines of approach for an amphibious attack on Taiwan. Taken as a whole, the offshore islands represent a critical defensive perimeter, giving Taiwan warning time, tactical flexibility, and strategic depth. But like any first line of defense, it could be quickly overrun by a large and determined enemy force. These islands could be blockaded and pressured to surrender in a pre-invasion intimidation campaign. The elite soldiers and marines on these islands are expected to fight independently, without resupply. Their mission is to defend themselves and hold out for as long as possible – while doing as much damage to the enemy's main amphibious staging areas as possible – thereby buying time for Taiwan to prepare for a coming invasion. While speculative, Taiwan could deploy large numbers of smart mines, loitering munitions, and lethal drones to augment its island garrisons.

¹⁵¹ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁵² This section draws, in part, from Ian Easton, "Why Taiwan's frontline islands matter," *Taipei Times*, July 31, 2023, at <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2023/07/31/2003803993>.

Taiwan's *2023 National Defense Report* states that the war in Ukraine taught the Taiwanese military not to be passive recipients of enemy attacks. Once it was clear that the PLA was about to invade, the ROC military would strike the PLA invasion forces' assembly areas and critical nodes. This is expected to disrupt the Chinese military's operational tempos, slow their ability to mount overwhelming attacks, and give Taiwanese forces the ability to link-up with American reinforcements.¹⁵³

By bolstering its outer islands and building robust networks of long-range strike capabilities capable of devastating PLA forces from mobile launchers around Taiwan, it might still be possible to do enough damage to the PLA in the early phases of an invasion campaign to force Beijing to deescalate, or indefinitely delay its main amphibious assaults. However, the past optimism that once brightened discussions of deterrence and escalation control are diminishing across the Taiwanese defense establishment, and most experts see it as more important than ever to accept grim realities and prepare for a close-in fight on Taiwan's beaches and in the cities.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ *ROC National Defense Report 2023* [中華民國 112 年國防報告書] (Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of National Defense, September 2023), p.64, available online at <https://reurl.cc/nLoGxl>.

¹⁵⁴ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, pp. 246-248.



Maximum Range of Taiwan's Early-Warning Radar (By Louis Martin-Vézian)

CHAPTER SIX

The Will to Fight

Ukraine's success to date in resisting Russian aggression in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds has served to inspire the Taiwanese people and reignite discussions on asymmetric warfare.¹⁵⁵ It has raised questions about the role civil society could play in national defense and, more broadly, the will to fight. To date, the PLA has never mounted an attack on Taiwan proper or the Penghu islands, and no serving personnel in the ROC military have any combat experience. Lacking hard data points, it is difficult to accurately predict how Taiwan's military might perform in a conflict, and what the public reaction might be to an enemy attack.

Taiwan is a liberal, affluent, and cosmopolitan trading nation, and the Taiwanese people are often regarded as mild-mannered, nonconfrontational, and adverse to violence – hardly the warlike traits associated with a fierce Ukrainian-style resistance. Nonetheless, the most important factor that will decide the country's future is the Taiwanese people's will to fight. “With it, all is possible. Without it, the CCP will be even more likely to attack Taiwan and win. The entire society must come together and go all-out, whatever the costs, to win,” according to Admiral Lee.¹⁵⁶

Shaking Off Complacency

It would probably not be realistic or reasonable to expect that a nation that has enjoyed over 60 years of unbroken tranquility – and unremitting social progress and drastic economic growth – could avoid becoming at least somewhat complacent. The last time the ROC military saw combat was in 1958, during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, and

¹⁵⁵ Ben Blanchard, “Analysis: Taiwan studies Ukraine war for own battle strategy with China,” *Reuters*, March 9, 2022, at <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/taiwan-studies-ukraine-war-own-battle-strategy-with-china-2022-03-09/>.

¹⁵⁶ Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, pp. 184-185.

the last major loss of life occurred in 1960, when the CCP responded to President Dwight Eisenhower's visit to Taiwan by shelling Kinmen, killing seven soldiers and six civilians.¹⁵⁷ More recent Taiwan Strait crises have not resulted in any fighting between the two sides, convincing some experts that the PRC is bluffing and won't actually attack unless the United States or Taiwan provokes it.

Ukraine's experience seems to have imbued a large segment of the Taiwanese public with a strong sense of confidence and renewed dedication to defend their country. Polling data suggest that the majority of people in Taiwan will fight if the CCP invades. On March 15, 2022, a public opinion poll, "War in Ukraine and Taiwan Strait Security," found that 70.2 percent of respondents were willing to go to war in defense of Taiwan.¹⁵⁸ On March 23, 2022, another poll, "Today Ukraine, Tomorrow Taiwan," found that 55 percent of Taiwanese respondents believed the United States would not send forces to defend Taiwan in the event of a PRC attack.¹⁵⁹ By way of comparison, a poll conducted in 2011 found that only 27 percent believed that the United States would not intervene militarily to defend Taiwan.¹⁶⁰ In spite of mistrust in American commitments, over 60 percent of Taiwanese between ages 20 and 39 (and ages 50-59) said they were willing to "go to the battlefield" themselves, and 72 percent of respondents between the ages of 40-49 were willing to go to war.¹⁶¹ Both polls found that a majority of the Taiwanese people were willing to defend their country, although only 44 percent of them believed Taiwan could actually stop a Chinese invasion without U.S. military intervention.¹⁶² If accurate, these

¹⁵⁷ Han Cheung, "Taiwan in Time: Greetings by artillery fire," *Taipei Times*, June 16, 2019, at <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/feat/archives/2019/06/16/2003717012>.

¹⁵⁸ Tsai Shao-chien, "Poll Finds 70 Percent of People Willing to Go to War to Defend Taiwan! 69 Percent Support Extending Conscription Periods (民調: 7 成人願為保衛台灣而戰! 6 成 9 支持「義務役期延長」)," *ET Today*, March 15, 2022, at <https://www.ettoday.net/news/20220315/2208488.htm>.

¹⁵⁹ "TVBS Poll: If Chinese Communists Attack Taiwan, Over 60 Percent of ROC Citizens Willing to Go to Battlefield, Over Half Don't Believe America Will Send Troops (TVBS 民調 / 中共若犯台! 6 成國人願上戰場 過半不信美會出兵)," *TVBS*, March 23, 2022, at <https://news.tvbs.com.tw/politics/1747662>.

¹⁶⁰ Cheng Rui, "New Poll Finds 62% of Public Willing to Go to Battlefield if Cross-Strait War Breaks Out, Ages 40-49 Most Willing to Fight (最新民調 / 兩岸開戰 62%民眾願上戰場 40 至 49 歲比率最高)," *United Daily News*, March 23, 2022, at <https://udn.com/news/story/10930/6186134>.

¹⁶¹ "TVBS Poll: If Chinese Communists Attack Taiwan, 60 Percent of ROC Citizens Willing to Go to Battlefield, Over Half Don't Believe America Will Send Troops (TVBS 民調 / 中共若犯台! 6 成國人願上戰場 過半不信美會出兵)," *TVBS*, March 23, 2022, at <https://news.tvbs.com.tw/politics/1747662>.

¹⁶² "TVBS Poll: If Chinese Communists Attack Taiwan, Over 60 Percent of ROC Citizens Willing to Go to Battlefield, Over Half Don't Believe America Will Send Troops (TVBS 民調 / 中共若犯台! 6 成國人願上戰場

polls would seem to indicate that many people in Taiwan will fight to defend their country even if they believe it's a lost cause.

Defense Budget Hikes

At the national level, the government has increased defense spending to purchase more indigenous missiles and weapons from abroad. The United States has committed to selling Taiwan new Abrams tanks, heavyweight torpedoes, HIMARS rockets, and Predator drones. When Washington approved the sale of three squadrons of new F-16s in 2019, Taiwan's legislature passed a \$8.1 billion special budget to pay for the jets.¹⁶³ In October 2021, the legislature passed another special budget of \$8.6 billion to rapidly increase its stocks of indigenous missiles, attack drones, and fast missile corvettes.¹⁶⁴ In 2022, the government initially proposed that the 2023 budget for MND would be a 12.9 percent increase from the year before. Additional money was later allocated towards financing F-16V fighter aircraft, enhancements in naval and air combat capability, and army housing and defense production. Altogether, the budget was a 24 percent increase from the 2022 allocation.¹⁶⁵ Taiwan's government has not engaged in a defense buildup of this size and scope since the early 1990s, before the country became a fiscally conservative democracy with contentious party politics.

Extending Conscription

A notable development is the increased willingness of the Taiwanese public to extend conscription. Until recently, Taiwan's mandatory military service was so unpopular that politicians in Taipei considered it an untouchable issue. Yet polling data after the Russian

場 過半不信美會出兵), *TVBS*, March 23, 2022, at <https://news.tvbs.com.tw/politics/1747662>; and Tsai Shao-chien, "Poll Finds 70 Percent of People Willing to Go to War to Defend Taiwan! 69 Percent Support Extending Conscription Periods (民調: 7 成人願為保衛台灣而戰! 6 成 9 支持「義務役期延長」)," *ET Today*, March 15, 2022, at <https://www.ettoday.net/news/20220315/2208488.htm>.

¹⁶³ Sean Lin, "Legislature passes F-16V special budget," *Taipei Times*, November 23, 2019, at <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/11/23/2003726344>.

¹⁶⁴ John Dotson, "Taiwan's New Special Defense Budget Emphasizes Indigenous Anti-Ship Weapons Production," *Global Taiwan Brief*, November 3, 2021, at <https://globaltaiwan.org/2021/11/vol-6-issue-21/#JohnDotson11032021>.

¹⁶⁵ Jon Grevatt and Andrew MacDonala, "Taiwan proposes large increase in defence spending," *Janes*, August 25, 2022, at <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/taiwan-proposes-large-increase-in-defence-spending>.

invasion of Ukraine showed that 75.9% of respondents in Taiwan believed that their country's mandatory military service period should be extended to 12 months.¹⁶⁶ In 2022, Taipei began a pilot program to make reserve force training more rigorous, and began to call up reservists much more frequently for refresher training.¹⁶⁷ Starting in 2024, Taiwan will extend its mandatory military service from four months to a year. In July 2023, KMT presidential candidate Hou Yu-ih said if elected he would restore the service period to four months as long as there was stability and peace in the Strait. However, he later walked back these comments and stated he did not oppose re-extending the draft to one year and supported Taiwan continuing to purchase arms from the United States.¹⁶⁸ Hou's move indicates that self-strengthening remains a popular policy.

In 2022, Taiwan's MND released a civil defense handbook that outlines safety measures for civilians during an air raid, major fire, building collapse, major power outage, water shortage, or shortage of essential goods. The handbook offers basic survival skills and an emergency hotline people can call.¹⁶⁹ It also includes a section on combat readiness, preparedness, and wartime reserve force mobilization and provides a general guide on where reservists would have to report should war break out.¹⁷⁰ In June 2023, an updated and significantly expanded civil defense handbook was released after the first edition was panned by critics for lacking sufficient information and watering down the severity of an invasion scenario. The new edition features a guide on how to identify enemy troops and offers detailed information on air raid shelters and hospitals. It also explains how to

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Yeh, "Amid Ukraine crisis, Taiwanese call for rethink of mandatory military training," *Focus Taiwan*, April 2, 2022, at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202204020008>.

¹⁶⁷ Wu Shu-wei, "Legislature Runs Preliminary Trial of Special Bonuses for Reservists Called Up Five Times (立院初審 後備軍人接受教召第 5 次發獎金)," *Liberty Times*, March 31, 2022, at <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/3878488>; and Joseph Yeh, "New intensified reservist training program set to launch," *Focus Taiwan*, March 2, 2022, at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202203020008>; and Kelvin Chen, "Taiwan defense ministry launches reservist training program," *Taiwan News*, February 7, 2022, at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4433732>.

¹⁶⁸ Brian Hioe, "Hou You-yi Supports Returning Draft to Four Months, Then Quickly Drops Idea," *New Bloom*, July 4, 2023, at <https://newbloommag.net/2023/07/04/hou-you-yi-draft/>.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Yeh, "Taiwan military issues civil defense handbook," *Central News Agency*, April 12, 2022, at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202204120006>.

identify hostile propaganda and lists local radio stations that listeners can tune into for wartime updates.¹⁷¹

Self-Strengthening

Citizens are taking action to prepare themselves for war. In August 2022, United Microelectronics Corp founder Robert Tsao pledged to spend \$33 million training and arming Taiwanese citizens. Reportedly, he will invest \$20 million into the private military training organization Kuma Academy to train over three million civilians over three years, and \$13 million will be used to train more than 300,000 civilian sharpshooters.¹⁷² Other nongovernmental programs are also training civilian volunteers in civil defense and medical support operations. These programs have been flooded with so many applications that organizers are unable to keep up with demand.¹⁷³

Enoch Wu, a Taiwanese-American banker who gave up his U.S. citizenship at age 34 to become a Taiwanese special forces soldier and later went into DPP politics, is the founder and director of the Forward Alliance, a NGO that trains civilians in disaster preparedness.¹⁷⁴ In March 2022, Wu said that Forward Alliance workshops were at maximum capacity and had over 1,000 volunteers on waiting lists.¹⁷⁵ In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Forward Alliance began to shorten its curriculum and increased training camps to rapidly reach more participants and buildup a foundation for

¹⁷¹ All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency, *National Civil Defense Handbook* (全民國防手冊), available at <https://aodm.mnd.gov.tw/front/down.aspx?menu=069&mCate=069>.

¹⁷² Sebastian Moss, "United Microelectronics founder pledges \$33m to fund Taiwan's defense against Chinese invasion," *Data Center Dynamics*, September 4, 2022, at <https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/united-microelectronics-founder-pledges-33m-to-fund-taiwans-defense-against-chinese-invasion/>.

¹⁷³ Natalie Tso, "Taiwan's Civilian Soldiers, Watching Ukraine, Worry They Aren't Prepared to Defend Their Island," *Time*, March 18, 2022, at <https://time.com/6158550/taiwan-military-china-ukraine/>.

¹⁷⁴ For background, see "Forward Alliance: About Us (壯闊台灣: 關於我們)," *Forward Alliance*, undated, accessed April 12, 2022, at <https://forward.org.tw/about>; and Yen Zhen-kai, "Enoch Wu, Who Gave Up American Citizenship at Age 34 to Serve in Military as 'Uncle Wu', Says Military Morale and Complacency Not Problem, But Troops Disappointed By Lack of Respect for Their Service (34 歲棄美籍入伍被叫「吳叔叔」 吳怡農: 軍心不是渙散, 而是失望沒受到尊重)," *Storm Media*, August 10, 2019, at <https://www.storm.mg/article/1579379>.

¹⁷⁵ Natalie Tso, "Taiwan's Civilian Soldiers, Watching Ukraine, Worry They Aren't Prepared to Defend Their Island," *Time*, March 18, 2022, at <https://time.com/6158550/taiwan-military-china-ukraine/>.

local defense organizations across Taiwan.¹⁷⁶ In June 2023, popular demand remained higher than training capacity and waiting lists were still long, according to Wu.¹⁷⁷

The Kuma Academy and Forward Alliance are part of a broader push by former military personnel and civil society leaders to establish defense-focused, public-private partnerships and a Taiwanese territorial defense force. Such a force could focus on conducting decentralized underground resistance operations and irregular warfare in each of Taiwan's urban districts, towns, and villages.¹⁷⁸ Admiral Lee, who pioneered the ODC, has called for Taiwan to develop a Territorial Defense Force, pushing MND to consider more innovative approaches for mobilizing citizen-soldiers and harnessing the latent combat power that remains dormant inside Taiwanese society.¹⁷⁹

Worried about Washington

Taiwanese citizens say they are determined to fight against an attack from the PRC, but Ukraine's experience is not the only driver of their will to resist. In the past, if people in Taiwan said they felt confident that the United States would intervene, then they would be more willing to fight. However, the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan made the Taiwanese public more skeptical. A defense expert we spoke to also referenced the Hong Kong crackdown as another crucial moment that influenced the public's attitude. He said the Taiwanese public believed the United States "basically did nothing" to stop the PRC's takeover of Hong Kong and they saw the sanctions Washington had levied in an effort to stop the genocide in Xinjiang as a failure. According to a number of those we spoke with, these actions fed into the public's perception of the United States as an unreliable partner.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ "If the Enemy Invades, Then What? Enoch Wu: We Must Translate Our Will to Fight into Credible Deterrence (敵軍入侵怎麼辦? 吳怡農: 要將抵抗意志化為可信嚇阻), *Liberty Times*, March 2, 2022, at <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/3846589>.

¹⁷⁷ Authors' discussion with Enoch Wu in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁷⁸ "If the Enemy Invades, Then What? Enoch Wu: We Must Translate Our Will to Fight into Credible Deterrence (敵軍入侵怎麼辦? 吳怡農: 要將抵抗意志化為可信嚇阻), *Liberty Times*, March 2, 2022, at <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/3846589>.

¹⁷⁹ Lee Hsi-min and Michael A. Hunzeker, "The View of Ukraine From Taiwan: Get Real About Territorial Defense," *War On The Rocks*, March 15, 2022, at <https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/the-view-of-ukraine-from-taiwan-get-real-about-territorial-defense/>.

¹⁸⁰ Authors' discussions with defense experts in Taipei, June 2023.

“Lots of people in Taiwan were disappointed that the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan like it did and didn’t do more to support Ukraine early in the war. Public opinion polls in Taiwan showed a comeback in confidence after the U.S. did more to support Ukraine with equipment and economic sanctions on Russia.”¹⁸¹

Another expert agreed, saying, “There’s a social confidence issue in regards to how to convince the Taiwanese public that the U.S. will support them in spite of its one China policy, regardless of which party gets elected into office in America.” He added, “Hong Kong was an example. They lost everything. And when the Taiwanese public looks at what happened to them and sees that the Americans basically did nothing, I don’t think they are going to trust the USA. In Xinjiang, to a certain degree, American sanctions have been deficient too, and the genocide hasn’t stopped.”¹⁸²

“The U.S. needs to stand up for Taiwan. It didn’t do that for Hong Kong. American leaders need to talk to Xi Jinping and threaten him. If he still doesn’t back down, then they could send signals, for example by sending the Marines to visit Kaohsiung harbor. Beijing’s not stupid. They will get the message.”¹⁸³

In the view of several experts, defending Taiwan is America’s last chance to stop the PRC from expanding out and displacing the United States as a global superpower. “If Taiwan falls, China will be better positioned to dominate the world and create a new world order. That’s a worst-case scenario.”¹⁸⁴ They expressed dismay and anger at the apparent ease with which some Americans seem ready to simply write Taiwan off. “I was so mad when some American politicians talked about bombing TSMC.”¹⁸⁵

To what extent might perceptions of American decline be exacerbating anxieties in Taiwan? Undoubtedly, Taiwan’s national security calculus is influenced by the degree to which government officials in Taipei believe they have an ability to garner international support in stressful circumstances. Pessimists in Taiwan believe they have grounds for legitimate concern. They point out that America and its NATO allies failed to deter the

¹⁸¹ Authors’ discussions with defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁸² Authors’ discussions with defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁸³ Authors’ discussions with defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁸⁴ Authors’ discussions with defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Authors’ discussions with defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

Russian invasion of Ukraine even though they had ample early-warning and reportedly knew the attack was coming well in advance.¹⁸⁶ Moscow's nuclear threats deterred Washington and its allies from doing more to assist Kiev in the crucial early weeks of conflict, they noted.¹⁸⁷

Press reports suggest that the Biden administration took military action off the table more quickly than American presidents have in the past, and cast the choice in fearful terms: the United States could either sanction Russia and provide indirect aid to Ukraine's defense, or fight World War Three.¹⁸⁸ This episode raised questions regarding whether the United States might lack the will to confront a nuclear-armed opponent in defense of democratic partners like Taiwan.¹⁸⁹ Some Taiwanese observers believe that Washington "blinked" in a standoff with Moscow, even though America had a lopsided balance of power in its favor. By so doing, Washington may have damaged its *already strained* ability to deter Beijing from attacking Taiwan.¹⁹⁰ The PRC is at least an order of magnitude stronger than Russia in terms of economic power, population size, and latent war-making potential.

One official said the State Department was aware that thousands of Chinese companies are conducting classified work for the PLA, but, to date, less than 100 have had their access to American capital and technology restricted. Contrary to the general view that

¹⁸⁶ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese experts in Taipei, June 2023. See also Zachary B. Wolf, "How US intelligence got it right on Ukraine," *CNN*, February 26, 2022, at

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/26/politics/us-intelligence-ukraine-russia/index.html>.

¹⁸⁷ Authors' discussions with Taiwanese experts in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁸⁸ Aaron Blake, "Why Biden and the White House keep talking about World War III," *Washington Post*, March 17, 2022, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/17/why-biden-white-house-keep-talking-about-world-war-iii/>;

and Aaron Blake, "Biden and the fraught history of presidents promising no war," *Washington Post*, March 14, 2022, at

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/14/biden-fraught-no-war-promise/>.

¹⁸⁹ J. Michael Cole, "Watching the Ukraine Invasion, the Taiwanese fear they could be next," *Globe and Mail*, February 28, 2022, at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-watching-the-ukraine-invasion-the-taiwanese-fear-they-could-be-next/>;

Kyle Mizokami, "With the World's Attention on Ukraine, Could China Turn and Invade Taiwan?," *Popular Mechanics*, February 25, 2022, at

<https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/a39209668/russia-ukraine-impact-on-taiwan-china/>;

and Benedict Rogers, "The free world's reaction to Vladimir Putin's aggression may determine fate of Taiwan," *The Telegraph*, February 25, 2022, at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/25/free-worlds-reaction-vladimir-putins-aggression-may-determine/>.

¹⁹⁰ Author's discussions with Taiwanese military officers and security experts in Taipei, June 2023.

Washington is getting aggressive with Beijing and damaging the PRC economy, in reality little was being done. "It's a pinprick," the official said.¹⁹¹ Many people in Taiwan said they felt unsettled by American foreign policy behavior and expressed concern that the Taiwanese public is growing increasingly skeptical that the United States can be trusted to follow through on its commitments.¹⁹²

In October 2021, over 150 PLA warplanes conducted a threatening exercise inside Taiwan's air defense identification zone. At the time, President Joe Biden refrained from calling President Tsai Ing-wen to express support and demonstrate solidarity and instead requested a call with Xi Jinping, which was granted, and the two leaders held a 3.5-hour virtual summit.¹⁹³ A similar pattern followed the PRC's destabilizing military activities around Taiwan in August 2022 and April 2023, respectively. The spy balloon incident and the revelation that the PRC was providing weapons to Russia for the war in Ukraine did not generate policy changes. In each case, the White House responded to CCP provocations by calling for further leadership dialogues between the United States and PRC, while continuing to tightly restrict senior-level dialogue with Taiwan.

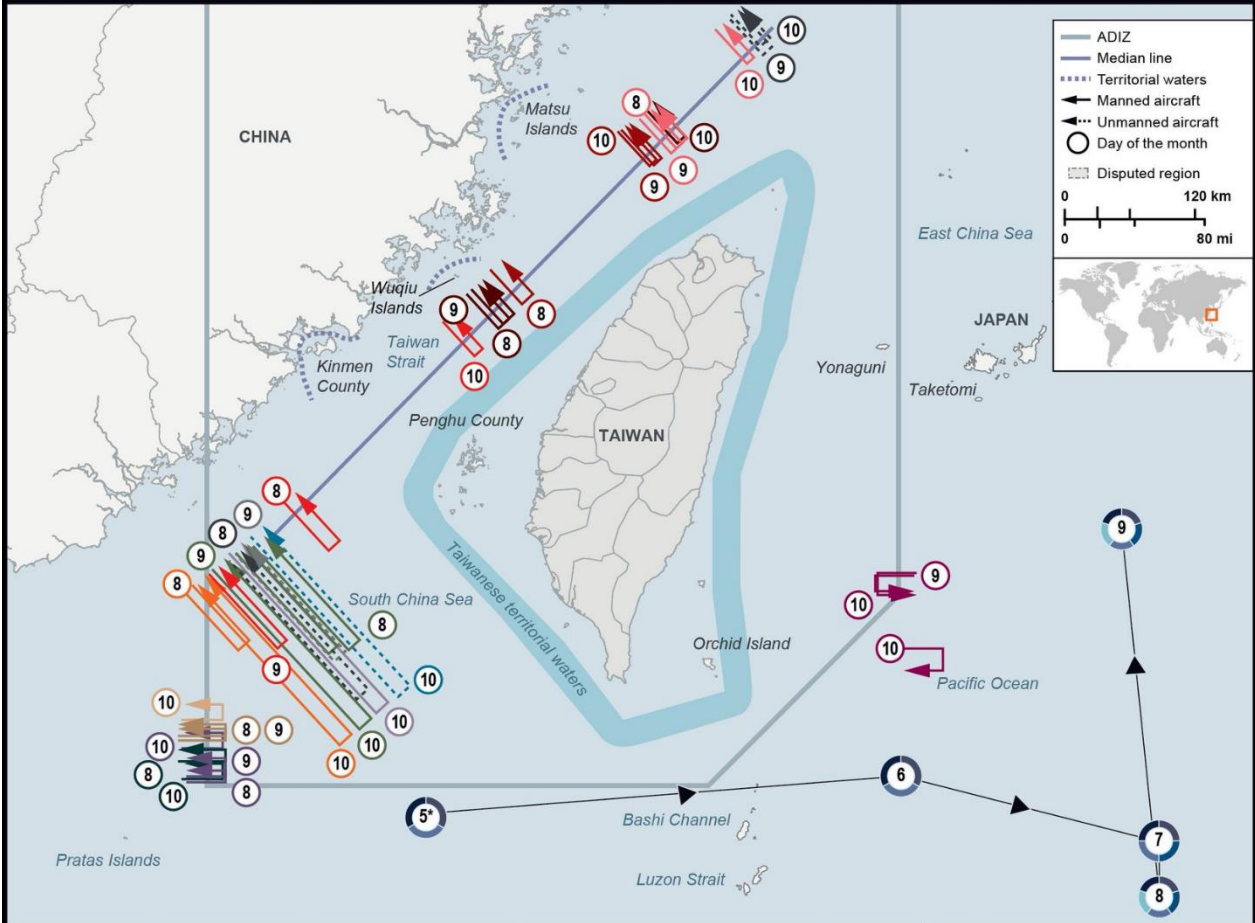
Both Taiwanese and American military officers we spoke to in Taiwan felt strongly that a "say do gap" exists and is growing. The United States is rhetorically strong, but has not backed up its stated policies with sufficient resources and tangible actions necessary to bolster Taiwan's defense. We heard multiple variants of: "Washington says this is the top priority, but where's the money? Where are the resources, the new billets, the new policy reforms, the big bilateral exercises, the clear guidance? When can we really truly prepare and signal deterrence in the ways that we need to? Are we going to defend Taiwan or not?"

¹⁹¹ Authors' discussion with U.S. official in Washington, D.C., May 2023.

¹⁹² Authors' discussions with Taiwanese security experts in Taipei, June 2023.

¹⁹³ Steven Lee Myers, "Biden and Xi Pledge More Cooperation, but Offer No Breakthroughs," *New York Times*, November 16, 2021, at <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/15/world/biden-xi-summit>.

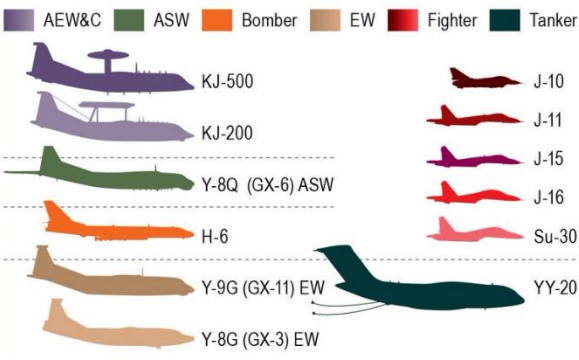
Chinese 'Joint Sword' wargames in Taiwan ADIZ, 8-10 April 2023



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Sources: Taiwan Ministry of National Defense/ Japan Ministry of Defense/Janes: 2021731

Manned aircraft



Unmanned aircraft



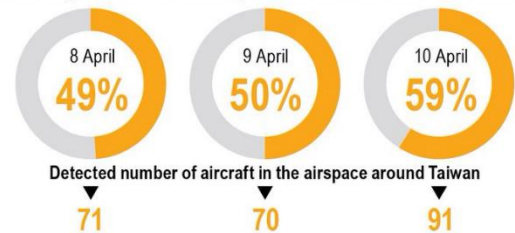
AEW&C = Airborne early warning and control
 ASW = Anti-submarine warfare
 EW = Electronic warfare
 Recce = Reconnaissance
 UAV = Unmanned aerial vehicle
 UCAV = Unmanned combat aerial vehicle

Note: Not to scale with manned platforms

The Shandong carrier group



Percentage of Chinese military aircraft detected that entered ADIZ



PLA Drills Around Taiwan, April 2023 (Source: Jane's)

The Impact of Disinformation

A phenomenon known as “America Skepticism Theory” has been fueled by the coordinated efforts of CCP media outlets and proxy actors in Taiwan that seek to undermine Taiwanese citizens’ trust in America.¹⁹⁴ Taiwan has consistently ranked as one of the top targets of hostile foreign disinformation, with the majority of it coming from the PRC.¹⁹⁵ Well-known promoters of anti-American propaganda include the snack food and media conglomerate Want Want Group and the former KMT legislator Tsai Cheng-yuan.¹⁹⁶

Given Taiwan’s free media environment, a notable concern was the influence of Tik Tok and other social media platforms that are believed to be spreading CCP propaganda. “Tik Tok is very popular and influential, especially for young men in Taiwan...When you look at the content, it’s obviously spreading propaganda,” said one media expert in Taipei.¹⁹⁷ He said there was a growing sense of crisis and concern across Taiwanese society, and it was compelling wealthy Taiwanese to move their money overseas to reduce their exposure if the PRC attacks. The media expert related a story about one of his friends working in finance, whose clients were increasingly coming to him for help offshoring assets. “His business is booming,” he said. As for whether it is the PRC or America that is to blame for the rising tensions, “Public opinion here is divided.”¹⁹⁸ While the older generation reportedly reacted to the invasion of Ukraine by questioning whether Taiwan could and even should defend itself, “The younger generation is saying: ‘We strongly support the U.S. position to defend Ukraine, and down with Putin.’”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ John Dotson, “Chinese Information Operations against Taiwan: The “Abandoned Chess Piece” and “America Skepticism Theory,”” *Global Taiwan Institute*, August 2023, at https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR_ASTAWo8o7FINAL.pdf.

¹⁹⁵ Joyu Wang, “Taiwan is Ground Zero for Disinformation—Here’s How It’s Fighting Back,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 26, 2023, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwans-defenses-against-information-warfare-gain-attention-11661419802>.

¹⁹⁶ John Dotson, “Chinese Information Operations against Taiwan: The “Abandoned Chess Piece” and “America Skepticism Theory,”” *Global Taiwan Institute*, August 2023, at https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR_ASTAWo8o7FINAL.pdf.

¹⁹⁷ Author’s discussions with senior media expert in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁹⁸ Author’s discussions with senior media expert in Taipei, January 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Authors discussions with senior media expert in Taipei, January 2023.

The goal of CCP propaganda is not only to turn the Taiwanese against the United States but to turn them against each other. A government official said that the CCP put labels on people in Taiwan who want to protect their country, calling them “war-mongers” and said that “a vote for the DPP is a vote for war.”²⁰⁰ In Taiwan, there is a generational gap on the unification question, with young people more likely to identify as Taiwanese and support distancing from the PRC.²⁰¹ Hostile propaganda campaigns have reportedly divided families and friends, playing into the CCP's hands.²⁰²

A bill that would stop the unimpeded flow of CCP propaganda into Taiwan was stalled in the Legislative Yuan, due to the concerns that some legislators had regarding possible restrictions on freedom of speech. A senior official said that Taiwan needed to further develop mechanisms to clarify rumors and get the truth out there to the public. The official said that the CCP was using divide and conquer tactics against the Taiwanese government, just like they did to disintegrate Chiang Kai-shek's government and military during the Chinese Civil War. To this end, pro-CCP elements in Taiwan were trying to drive wedges between factions inside the DPP and between the United States and Taiwan.²⁰³

“Many people in Taiwan are thinking about how to handle a long-term blockade. The worst situation would be that the people are divided and turn against each other. Concerns exist that a fifth column could dissolve Taiwan from within, sapping the will to fight, especially if Taiwan lost international support amid a rolling series of invasion scares that resulted in panic.”²⁰⁴

Current and retired military officers we spoke to said they believed that CCP intelligence might control a significant network of sleeper agents spread across Taiwan. According to them, many of the spies that have been planted in Taiwan are PRC nationals who have been co-opted, perhaps for nationalistic reasons or as the result of blackmail. To avoid arousing suspicion, these agents will attempt to blend in and avoid arousing suspicion.

²⁰⁰ Author's discussion with a senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

²⁰¹ Amy Chang Chien, John Liu, and Paul Mozur, “Fight or Surrender: Taiwan's Generational Divide on China's Threats,” *The New York Times*, August 5, 2022, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/05/world/asia/taiwan-response-china.html>.

²⁰² Authors' discussions with Taiwanese citizens at various locations around Taiwan, June 2023.

²⁰³ Authors' discussion with senior government official in Taipei, January 2023.

²⁰⁴ Authors' discussions with defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

The officers expressed the belief that the majority of the agents were women, senior citizens, and even children that had come to Taiwan after receiving special training in the PRC. These demographic groups were selected because they were viewed as unthreatening, and Taiwanese police officers were reluctant to investigate them even when alerted to possible illegal activities such as computer hacking, they said.²⁰⁵

A senior national security researcher told us that the CCP's infiltration of Taiwanese society was "severe," and said he believed Taiwan needed to strengthen its counterintelligence. He said the ROC military was in the process of augmenting its political warfare capability to counter the threat.²⁰⁶ "[The Chinese government] is penetrating into all of Taiwanese society and all political parties. Their reach is massive, especially at the grass roots."²⁰⁷

An official expressed concern that Tik Tok and other CCP-influenced social media platforms were infiltrating Taiwan to spread "very dangerous rumors." One of the messages employed was that people in Taiwan should not trust the United States and should not be a pawn of super power competition.

"There are lots of rumors and fake news being spread about America. People are growing skeptical about America, whether the USA can be trusted. Local CCP collaborators like to point to the Afghanistan case, and say that we have no choice but to get closer to Beijing. For some of them, it goes back to the diplomatic switch in 1979, which they say shows the U.S. is not a reliable partner. They point to the 20 billion in arms sales that have been delayed and backlogged. There is a large effort to sabotage U.S.-Taiwan relations that is underway. But surveys show over 50 percent of Taiwanese still see America as a long-term partner. People believe the Pelosi visit demonstrated real U.S. support for Taiwan...America's policy of strategic ambiguity makes Taiwanese fear they will be abandoned when a crisis breaks out. Still, Biden has committed to defend Taiwan four times. He's shifting toward strategic clarity, and that's more helpful. The National Guard training helps too. If the U.S. increased military exchanges and cooperation, that would give Taiwan a more positive image."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Authors' discussions with current and retired military officers in Taiwan, June 2023.

²⁰⁶ Authors' discussions with senior defense researcher in Taipei, June 2023.

²⁰⁷ Authors' discussions with senior defense researcher in Taipei, June 2023.

²⁰⁸ Authors' discussions with senior defense researcher in Taipei, June 2023.

Nancy Pelosi's trip to Taiwan in August 2022 and President Joe Biden's repeated declarations that America would defend Taiwan have been viewed favorably. Additionally, public confidence in the United States went up after the United States began to provide more robust support to Ukraine after the invasion.²⁰⁹ A senior defense researcher we talked said American diplomats are starting to engage more with the public, but if AIT had more public diplomacy and outreach at the grass roots level then this could improve the United States' image.²¹⁰

When asked what kinds of things would reassure them, multiple Taiwanese experts pointed to rapid delivery of training and arms sales, greatly expanded U.S.-Taiwan dialogues, a bilateral trade deal, ship visits, joint exercises, and air and sea patrols of the Taiwan Strait. In sum, the main theme was that the United States needs to create a consistent message and show it is a reliable partner. They expressed hope that America could surge its own defense buildup and turn into the arsenal of democracy again.²¹¹

Confidence in the Military

While Taiwanese citizens' confidence in the United States has taken a hit, Taiwanese citizens' perceptions of their military have been changing and becoming more positive. In a 2023 Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation poll, 45.3 percent of Taiwanese 20 years or older said they have confidence in the military's ability to protect the island, a significant improvement over past polls.²¹² One defense expert stated that students now go out into the streets and cheer passing troops.

“International support for Taiwan was much higher after the invasion of Ukraine. Our will to fight is higher than before. Perceptions of the military are

²⁰⁹ Authors' discussions with senior defense researcher in Taipei, June 2023.

²¹⁰ Authors' discussions with senior defense researcher in Taipei, June 2023.

²¹¹ Author's discussions with defense experts in Taipei, June 2023.

²¹² “Do people have confidence in the army's ability to protect Taiwan (國人對國軍保衛台灣的能力有信心嗎?)” *Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation*, February 21, 2023, at

<https://www.tpof.org/%e5%9c%8b%e9%98%b2%e5%a4%96%e4%ba%a4/%e5%9c%8b%e4%ba%ba%e5%b0%8d%e5%9c%8b%e8%bb%8d%e4%bf%9d%e8%a1%9b%e5%8f%b0%e7%81%a3%e7%9a%84%e8%83%bd%e5%8a%9b%e6%9c%89%e4%bf%a1%e5%bf%83%e5%97%8e%ef%bc%9f%ef%bc%882023%e5%b9%b42%e6%9c%8821%e6%97%a5/>.

changing and becoming much more positive. Students now go out into the street and cheer passing troops.”²¹³

This renewed confidence can be attributed to an increase in the military's visibility. The government has taken steps to increase interaction between the armed forces and civilians, and the military has changed promotional strategies to maximize public awareness on national defense issues. For example, they highlighted “girl power” and advocated for gender equality.²¹⁴ For Armed Forces Day, MND organized a series of events and campaigns; 100 corporate partners and 1,865 chain stores joined to offer discounts to military personnel and their families to show appreciation. Lianh-wa Foods launched a limited-edition military cookie, and China Airlines gave out military-themed cups on all flights and began to pay tribute to the armed forces during in-flight broadcasts.²¹⁵ MND hosted an aviation carnival event and opened the Ching Chuan Kang Air Base in Taichung. This was the first time in seven years that the base was accessible to the public.²¹⁶

Citizens are taking more initiative to be familiar with defense issues. In a survey, 44 percent of respondents stated they actively search or browse news about national defense and the military while 53 percent of respondents stated they usually pay attention to relevant information.²¹⁷ More people are also paying attention to military exercises, such as Taiwan's annual Han Kuang Exercises. In 2022, 60.7 percent of the population paid attention to the exercises, which was an increase from 49.8 percent in 2021. About 73 percent of respondents said they believed that the military should not avoid high-risk

²¹³ Authors' discussions with defense expert in Taipei, June 2023.

²¹⁴ “Taiwan National Security Public Opinion Survey (臺灣國防安全民意調查),” *INDSR*, August 26, 2022, at <https://indsr.org.tw/focus?typeid=38&uid=7&pid=431>.

²¹⁵ “The Ministry of National Defense announced the September 3rd Military Day activities to promote the sentiment of soldiers and civilians (國防部公布九三軍人節活動 多元豐富促進軍民情感),” *Military News Agency*, August 22, 2023, at <https://mna.gpwb.gov.tw/news/detail/?UserKey=4097cff5-37cb-4992-a985-a04e7e2dabba>.

²¹⁶ “Ching Chuan Kang Aviation Carnival Public participates enthusiastically in support of national defense (清泉崗航空嘉年華 民眾熱情參與支持國防),” *Military News Agency*, August 12, 2023, at <https://mna.gpwb.gov.tw/news/detail/?UserKey=70953295-8cb1-4f3e-99d4-56339670a458>.

²¹⁷ “Taiwan National Security Public Opinion Survey (臺灣國防安全民意調查),” *INDSR*, August 8, 2023, at <https://indsr.org.tw/focus?typeid=38&uid=7&pid=2660>.

training exercises and should make training more intense.²¹⁸ The majority of people reported that they believed that the most important way to maintain national security was to strengthen self-defense capabilities, not to rely on dialogues with Beijing, or help from America.²¹⁹

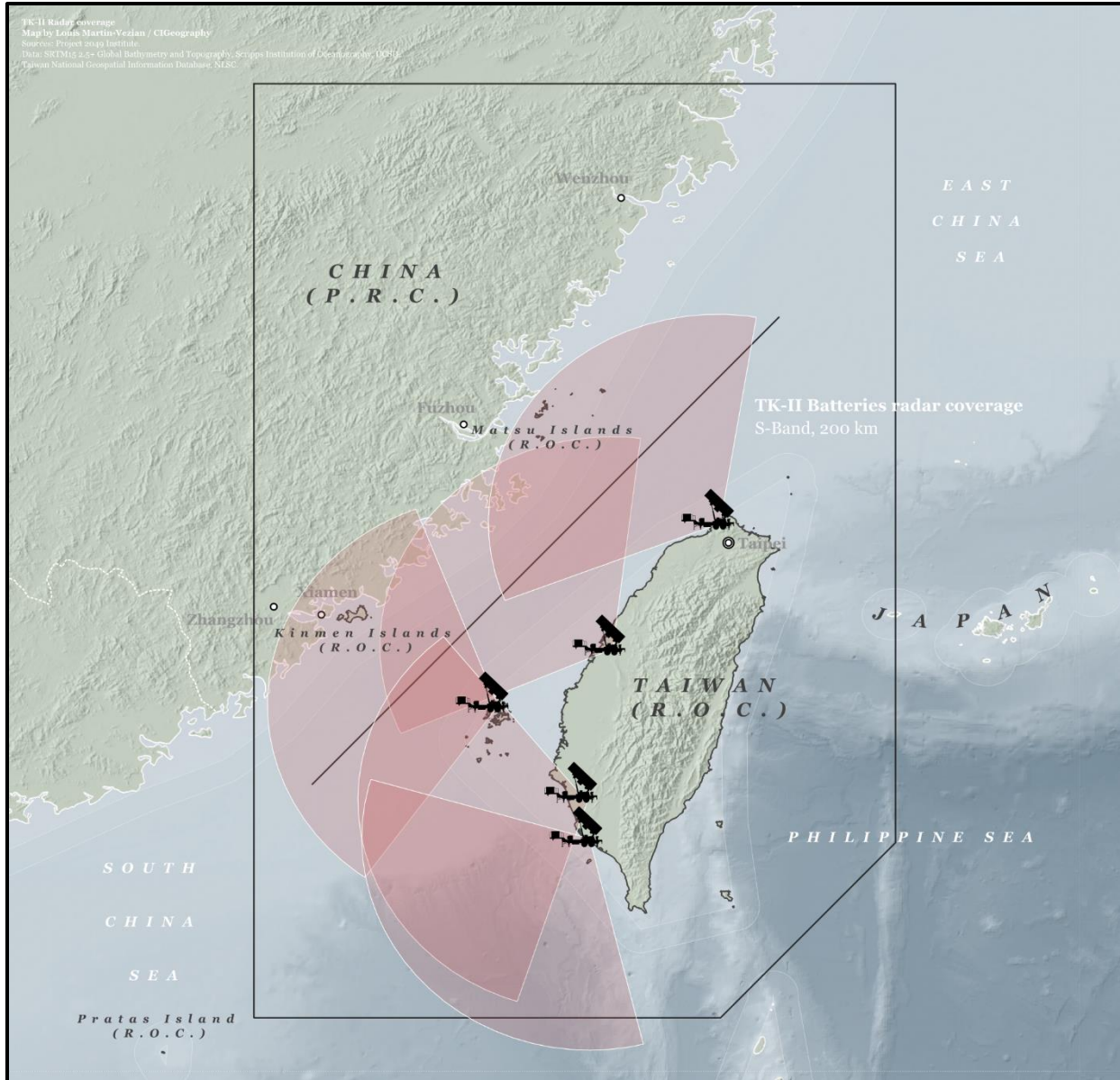
Other drivers behind the Taiwanese people's willingness to fight reportedly include their confidence in their leadership and government and their Taiwanese identity.²²⁰ In a June 2023 survey, 62.8 percent of respondents identified as Taiwanese, 30.5 percent identified as both Taiwanese and Chinese, and only 2.5 percent identified as solely Chinese.²²¹

²¹⁸ "Taiwan National Security Public Opinion Survey (臺灣國防安全民意調查)," *INDSR*, October 11, 2022, at <https://inders.org.tw/focus?typeid=38&uid=7&pid=469>; and Kuan-Chen Lee "Public Opinion in Taiwan Regarding the Han Guang Military Exercise (台灣民眾對國軍漢光演習的觀感)," *INDSR*, August 26, 2022, at <https://inders.org.tw/respublicationcon?uid=12&resid=1910&pid=3373&typeid=3>.

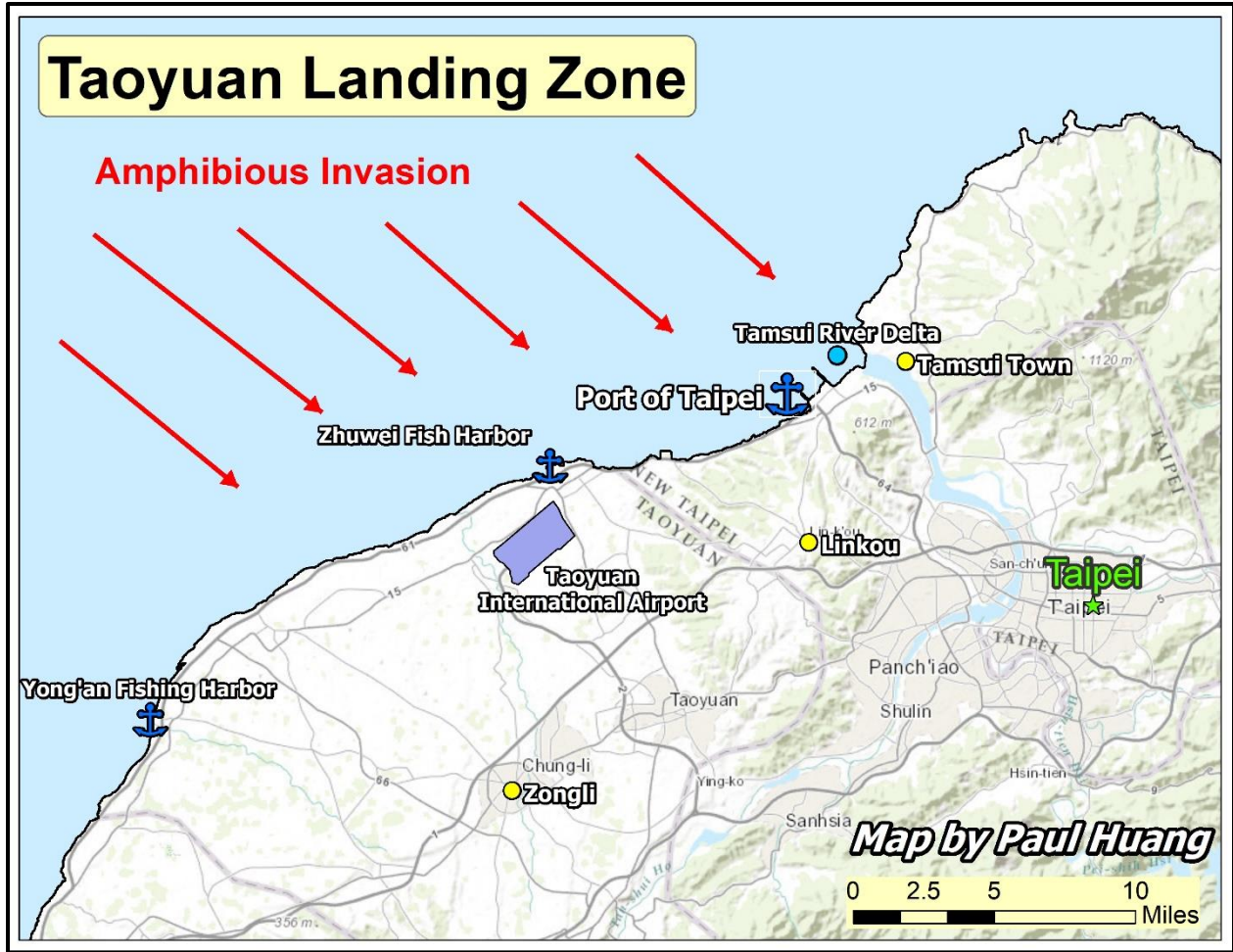
²¹⁹ Kuan-Chen Lee, "Public opinion trends towards strengthening self-defense capabilities during the PLA's military exercises around Taiwan (共軍環台軍演下「強化自身國防戰力」的民意趨向)," *INDSR*, August 16, 2022, at <https://inders.org.tw/focus?typeid=38&uid=11&pid=423>.

²²⁰ Timothy R. Heath, Sale Lilly, and Eugeniu Han, "Can Taiwan Resist a Large-Scale Military Attack by China?," *Rand*, 2023, at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1658-1.html.

²²¹ "Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese (1992-2023.06) (台灣民眾台灣人/中國人認同趨勢分佈)," *NCCU*, July 12, 2023, at <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961>.



Sky Bow Air & Missile Defense Coverage (By Louis Martin-Vézian)



Taoyuan Landing Zone (By Paul Huang)

CHAPTER SEVEN

Future Prospects & Recommendations

As the political-military threat from the CCP worsens, the evolution of U.S.-Taiwan relations may decide whether Asia can enjoy a peaceful future. How might Washington produce a more dynamic and innovative policy toward Taiwan, based on the requirement to prevent future CCP use of force and other forms of coercion? What policy options exist for protecting democracy and enhancing deterrence? To explore this question, we considered ways the United States could further assist Taiwan maintain a credible self-defense and wage a winning campaign of resistance should deterrence fail.

Our research suggests that the war in Ukraine represents an inflection point for the future of Taiwan's defense strategy. A key issue we have explored is what lessons Taiwan's government and military leaders are drawing. We have assessed how that war has affected Taiwan's estimated timelines for a potential PLA invasion, and how the Taiwanese are thinking about and preparing for a potential attack. Taiwan's military strategy is moving in a direction that could improve lethality and combat performance. Given the stakes, everything possible must be done to make sure conflict never comes and defense plans are never tested. Based on shorter timeline predictions by Taiwanese experts, there is a strong impetus for the United States to take swift action now to help bolster Taiwan's defenses and deter the CCP from an invasion. We conclude that Taiwan's armed forces must be appropriately integrated into a regional security architecture for peace to prevail.

Destabilization

In 1998, the PRC's official defense budget was twice as large as Taiwan's. By 2021, Beijing was spending 22.5 times as much on its military as Taipei.²²² Over the past two decades, American arms sales and military assistance programs to Taiwan have been frequently delayed or canceled, further handicapping Taiwan's force modernization plans. At the same time, Taiwanese presidents have opted to invest scarce defense dollars into the recapitalization of legacy forces such as tanks, fighter jets, and surface ships, which are

²²² Lee Hsi-min, *The Overall Defense Concept*, p. 210.

politically popular and important for day-to-day operations, but often so expensive to develop and maintain they crowd out spending on other military essentials that are more survivable and lethal in wartime.

Many of Taipei's past policy decisions were made on the assumptions that the PRC had peaceful intentions and Taiwan no longer needed a large standing army. Those assumptions have been falsified by events and the situation has changed, leading the Taiwanese government to significantly increase defense spending and initiate military reforms that are widely anticipated to bear fruit.²²³ After decades of force reductions, Taiwan's military is on track to grow again starting in 2024, and depleted units will begin to fill back out, with the goal of fielding a standing force of 215,000.

Nonetheless, given the pace of PLA modernization, resource gaps will continue to expand, potentially leaving Taiwan overmatched in terms of both quality and quantity. The PRC has a large and fast-growing nuclear arsenal, while the ROC is a non-nuclear weapon state that is outside the American nuclear umbrella. Taiwan's national security is further complicated by the after effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, its absence from the United Nations, and its lack of official diplomatic relations with all the world's other democracies and market-based economies. The PRC's lopsided political and military advantages over Taiwan weaken the local security architecture and are strategically destabilizing.

Looking Ahead²²⁴

It is conceivable that by the next decade a combination of new weapons, advanced technologies, and an improved international environment will make Taiwan's security outlook a great deal brighter than it appears at the time of this writing. It seems likely that relations with the United States and other friendly democracies will continue to improve. Taiwan may gain additional relief if the PRC is mired in economic stagnation or outright decline. None of these potentialities can be assumed with a sufficient degree of assuredness to provide comfort, however, and it will take a lot of effort for Taiwan to reach

²²³ Authors discussions with Taiwanese defense and security experts in Taipei, June 2023.

²²⁴ The following discussion draws, in part, from Ian Easton, "Taiwan: Not so safe, not so weak," *Taipei Times*, September 11, 2023, at

<https://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2023/09/11/2003806044>; and Ian Easton, "Will American Defend Taiwan? Here's What History Says," *Strategika*, June 30, 2021, at <https://www.hoover.org/research/will-america-defend-taiwan-heres-what-history-says>.

the 2030s unscathed. As Andrew Erickson and Gabriel Collins have argued, we are in the decade of maximum danger now.²²⁵

Conflict in the near-to-medium term seems increasingly probable barring a change of government in Beijing. Taiwan will likely be forced to weather a series of security shocks in this decade. In a worst-case scenario, the island nation will be blockaded and invaded. Still, Taiwan may be better prepared for war than it looks because so many defense programs, activities, and weapons are kept secret in order to avoid “provoking” the PRC. Taken too far, secrecy can undercut deterrence, making Taiwan appear unable or unwilling to make the PRC pay unbearable costs in the event of aggression. Ukraine had a similar problem prior to the Russian invasion. Out of concern for Moscow’s reaction, Kiev kept many of its crucial military developments under wraps, thereby encouraging Putin to develop a false perception that Ukraine was weak and vulnerable. Even after the outbreak of war, the United States and its NATO allies for a time refrained from providing lethal assistance to the Ukrainians that they feared might provoke Putin to escalate.

Like the Russian military, the PLA might be less prepared for war than it looks because it puts such a heavy emphasis on deception and political warfare. The United States and Taiwan could consider the option to be more transparent and publicize certain heretofore classified activities and capabilities as a means to bolster deterrence. In the same vein, they could publish selected intelligence available on PLA weaknesses. Examples of issues that could be amplified in the press include defections, corruption cases, training mishaps, ethnic tensions, large-scale riots, personal rivalries between senior officers, and the inherent friction caused by the political commissar system.

In spite of known shortcomings, the PLA seems to be routinely exceeding American and Taiwanese expectations and making improvements irrespective of endemic challenges. The PLA could be more capable than believed and closer to achieving overmatch, a situation that would place it in a favorable position to launch a war of conquest. Another possibility exists. Xi Jinping could believe the armed wing of the Communist Party is more

²²⁵ Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel B. Collins, “A Dangerous Decade of Chinese Power Is Here,” *Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2021, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/18/china-danger-military-missile-taiwan/>; and Gabriel Collins and Andrew S. Erickson, “U.S.-China Competition Enters the Decade of Maximum Danger: Policy Ideas to Avoid Losing the 2020s,” *Rice university’s Baker Institute for Public Policy*, December 2021, at <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/us-china-competition-enters-decade-maximum-danger>.

capable than it really is thanks to poor intelligence or an ingrained tendency for dictators to buy into their own political rhetoric about the inevitability of victory. As a hedge against the possibility that one of these scenarios might be true, the American and Taiwanese governments should consider applying bolder political-military strategies.

Taiwan Remains Defensible

We assess that Taiwan is not a lost cause and remains defensible. Three variables underpin this assumption. First, we judge that most people in Taiwan can be counted on to fight or otherwise support the war effort in noncombatant roles. As the war in Ukraine showed, even politically and ethnically divided societies will come together in the face of an existential threat.

Second, we judge that Taiwan is not actually outgunned to the degree that is commonly assumed because blockades and missile attacks are not decisive, and any war would have to be decided on Taiwan's beaches and in the cities. Supply shortages, missile strikes, and air raids are far more likely to galvanize the Taiwanese people's will to fight than to break it.

Third, we judge that the United States and other democracies can be counted on to militarily support Taiwan more than they did Ukraine, and probably far more given their own vital interests in Taiwan's survival. The PLA will not be strong enough to invade and occupy Taiwan in the face of a determined resistance from a coalition force, and Taiwan will not surrender if it has outside support.

But the cardinal lesson of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is far more obvious. It's so simple and easily perceived, in fact, that it seems self-evident. The lesson is this: ***Relatively small, non-nuclear democracies cannot and should not be expected to successfully deter large, nuclear-armed dictatorships in isolation.***

Diplomacy & Deterrence

Taiwan's diplomatic isolation makes it uniquely vulnerable. If there were an endangered species list for countries, Taiwan would be the only wealthy liberal democracy on it. As far as the vast majority of world governments are concerned, Taiwan already does not exist as a country. Since 1979, Washington has treated Taiwan (ROC) as a non-country, even though the government in Taipei has always been independent from the PRC, and Taiwan has evolved into a liberal democracy that enjoys popular sovereignty. Taiwan now ranks as one of the top ten democracies in the world.²²⁶ Leaders in Washington and other capital cities hew to the fiction that Taiwan is not a nation-state out of deference to Beijing. This is understandable. They fear that to do otherwise would spark war. But such a policy appears less reasonable when the CCP is escalating tensions and threatening an invasion.

The implications for the future of policy toward Taiwan are that strict diplomatic nonrecognition and strategic ambiguity are risky. The current approach, if continued in perpetuity, would isolate and weaken Taiwan, invite miscalculation on all sides, and heighten the probability of disaster. Diplomacy and collective security have a distinguished track record in the history of American foreign policy. They are the most effective and appropriate antidotes to war. Unfortunately, for a time, the CCP succeeded in conditioning many American leaders to believe that the most powerful instruments of peace they have available—diplomacy and collective security—are actually dangerous war triggers. President Biden's candor about Taiwan indicates that longstanding assumptions in Washington have been falsified by events and are being replaced by something truer.

Reimagining the Relationship

Policymakers have the option to pursue incremental improvements in United States-Taiwan defense and security relations. Yet there are limits to what such an approach might achieve in the near-term. Another option would be to fundamentally reimagine the future of the relationship. It seems imperative that Washington conducts a critical review of its policy toward Taiwan. Government and military efforts could be better aligned with the changing facts on the ground. Beijing's activities and operations demonstrate that the

²²⁶ Erin Hale, "Taiwan Ranks Among Top 10 Democracies in Annual Index," *Voice of America*, February 11, 2022, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/taiwan-ranks-among-top-10-democracies-in-annual-index-/6438806.html>.

status quo in the Taiwan Strait is neither static, nor stable. Continued adherence to legacy decisions that were made in very different strategic circumstances could result in grave outcomes. The opportunity costs associated with inaction out of fear of “provoking” the CCP may seem low in the near-term, but they come with compounding interest rates that generate increasing strategic burdens over time.

For deterrence to be effective, the United States and its allies must play a prominent role in the use-of-force decision calculus of the PRC's party, state, and military leadership. Xi Jinping and his topmost advisors must be certain that they have no prospect of isolating Taiwan for a one-on-one battle, and that an attack on Taiwan equals an attack on the United States and, most likely, the entire free world. There are practical steps the United States and Taiwan could consider taking together to advance the strategic value of their relationship.

To begin, the President of the United States and President of Taiwan should talk with each other. When discussing high-stakes decisions, there is no substitute to direct diplomacy for helping elected leaders better understand each other's opinions, perspectives, and political constraints. Personal communication between presidents can help build rapport and trust and lead to more effective problem-solving. They should have video calls and in-person meetings to discuss the development of a shared vision for the future of U.S.-Taiwan relations.

It may be judged necessary to keep some presidential exchanges secret. For deterrence to be effective, both the United States and Taiwan should seek to improve their own security without allowing their shared opponent to corner them. They should seek to make it as easy as possible for Xi Jinping to back down, but greater transparency is needed to avoid miscalculation. Both Washington and Taipei should seek to publicly highlight the development of a more normal, stable, and constructive relationship between the United States and Taiwan in leadership speeches, published documents, and the press.

Accelerate Defensive Preparations

Our analysis suggests the Taiwanese military is making many important reforms to advance training and war preparations. Still, significant challenges and gaps remain. It is difficult to judge the state of military planning within Taiwan. The most important exercises and war games are classified, and their results are not shared with the public.

What remains clear is that Taiwan's government continues to lack an articulated national security strategy, and the United States and Taiwan do not have the level of military coordination that the growing threat demands.

Overall, U.S.-Taiwan defense and security relations are deepening, yet there remains a remarkable expanse of empty space between the American and Taiwanese militaries. A common thread that ran through and dominated almost every conversation and interview we had was that current modes of cooperation are insufficient. No one was satisfied that enough was being done to persuade Xi Jinping to alter his militant approach to cross-strait relations.

The balance of power continues to shift in the CCP's favor, and China's economic slowdown is not causing the military buildup to slow. Xi Jinping is constructing a huge war machine — and with a surprising level of urgency and determination. That's a very bad sign. In recent years, he has made a series of disquieting policy decisions. The situation today is far more dangerous than it was just months ago.

Washington and Taipei continue to avoid what they believe to be the CCP's "red lines" in the Taiwan Strait. This policy is based largely on an implicit assumption that Beijing does not intend to launch a war of conquest and will only attack Taiwan if provoked. But if Xi Jinping actually intends to annex Taiwan, as seems to be the case, then self-limiting policy behavior is also self-defeating. By ensuring that they do not "trigger" a war, the United States and Taiwan risk forfeiting their ability to deter and prevent one. While U.S.-Taiwan relations are still significantly curtailed, they are no longer a paradigm of diplomatic minimalism. Fewer difficult decisions are being deferred for fear of CCP reaction, and there is a broad and open field ahead for making progress.

Washington should assist Taiwan implement military reforms, while also working to integrate Taiwan into the U.S.-led security architecture for the Indo-Pacific. Our recommendations include engaging in bilateral United States-Taiwan defense exercises, establishing a program for routine ship visits to Taiwan starting with submarines and destroyers, and building up a sizeable presence of American forces in Taiwan for intensive liaison, training, and advisory missions.²²⁷ This would represent a drastic departure from

²²⁷ These recommendations draw from and echo those in Randall G. Schriver, "Memo to the Next President: The Inheritance in the Indo-Pacific and the Challenges and Opportunities for Your Presidency," *Project 2049 Institute*, December 1, 2020, at <https://project2049.net/2020/12/01/memo->

the past several decades of policy. But to avoid a hot war, Taiwan needs to be brought in from the cold.

It would be a positive step to have the ROC military participate in international exercises hosted by the United States. More important still, American policymakers should give close consideration to the idea of reestablishing a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Taiwan under the command of a general officer. This organization would be tasked with providing training, logistics, and weapons to the ROC military in order to rapidly develop it into a cutting-edge fighting force.²²⁸ Over time, thousands of American troops could be stationed in Taiwan, and Marine units in Okinawa could deploy to the island.

The U.S. Navy should consider reestablishing the Taiwan Patrol Force. As a powerful symbol of American resolve, a fleet of ships, submarines, and surveillance aircraft continuously operating up and down the Taiwan Strait would help ensure that friction does not escalate and the situation does not spin out of control. In his history on the Taiwan Patrol Force, Bruce Elleman writes:

“Lasting twenty-nine years, the Taiwan Patrol Force was one of the longest naval operations in modern history. It was also one of the most successful...The Taiwan Patrol Force did its job so well that virtually nothing has been written about it. U.S. Navy ships acted as both a buffer between the two antagonists and as a trip wire in case of aggression.”²²⁹

What worked in the past could work again. Certainly, the need for a buffer and trip wire is more pressing than ever before. In another lesson from history, the U.S. and ROC could patrol the Taiwan Strait together, coordinate intelligence operations, and engage in routine ports visits to demonstrate solidarity.

[to-the-next-president-the-inheritance-in-the-indo-pacific-and-the-challenges-and-opportunities-for-your-presidency/](#).

²²⁸ For concrete areas where the United States and Taiwan should now invest “to make the island tougher to invade, even harder to subdue, and harder still to occupy and govern,” see Andrew Erickson and Gabriel Collins, “Eight New Points on the Porcupine: More Ukrainian Lessons for Taiwan,” *War on the Rocks*, April 18, 2022, at <https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/eight-new-points-on-the-porcupine-more-ukrainian-lessons-for-taiwan/>.

²²⁹ Bruce A. Elleman, *High Seas Buffer: The Taiwan Strait Patrol Force, 1950-1979* (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2012), p. 1.

One of the most important lessons from Ukraine is the value of presidential leadership in wartime. Nothing could be more important for Taiwan than keeping its commander-in-chief safe from potential enemy strikes. This could be another key area of U.S.-Taiwan cooperation.²³⁰ Ukraine's experience also shows the critical role played by internet and telecommunications networks in wartime. PLA war planners envision cutting off and isolating Taiwan at the outset of an attack. This is something they refer to as "information blockade". In many ways, this would be more dangerous than a naval or air blockade. As such, the resilience of Taiwan's communications grid is a critical variable, which should be a top-priority for enhanced U.S.-Taiwan cooperation.

Past as Prologue

Taiwan is taking steps to bolster its self-defense posture and its ability to wage a protracted campaign of resistance to both coercive and annihilative actions, but it remains remarkably isolated and vulnerable, and the CCP has a lopsided imbalance in its favor across many measures of power. The diplomatic and informational imbalance, in particular, is acute and worsening. While all historical analogies are imperfect, precedents previously set could provide American leaders with a guide in subsequent similar circumstances.

The record of past decisions made by Washington demonstrates that, when tested, American presidents have always viewed it in their nation's interest to come to Taiwan's defense, even amid situations that could have escalated to the level of nuclear warfare. In 1958, for example, Washington was resolved to defend Taiwan against invasion even if that required the use of battlefield atomic weapons—and even if such usage invited nuclear retaliation from the Soviet Union, which was then closely aligned with Beijing. In the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, the United States deployed aircraft carrier battle groups to waters near Taiwan in spite of the fact that the CCP had recently detonated two nuclear warheads at a test site, had carried out multiple tests of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, and, in backchannel conversations, had implicitly threatened Los Angeles with nuclear attack. The resolve displayed by Washington in 1996 might be considered

²³⁰ Dan Blumenthal, "The U.S.-Taiwan Relationship Needs Alliance Management," *The National Interest*, December 18, 2021, at <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/us-taiwan-relationship-needs-alliance-management-198147>.

particularly remarkable given that the United States no longer diplomatically recognized Taiwan's government at the time.

To date, there is no known case in which an American president failed to send forces to support the defense of Taiwan in response to a credible CCP threat. If this track record is indicative of future performance, the years ahead are likely to see the government continually improve its operational readiness to defend Taiwan in accordance with the evolving threat picture. In times of crisis, American leaders will likely send overwhelming national resources to the Taiwan Strait area and make their commitments to Taiwan's defense more explicit in hopes of convincing the PRC to deescalate tensions.

Even barring a deadly crisis, it seems probable that the years ahead will see the United States government improve its early-warning intelligence via regular ship, submarine, and aircraft patrols of the Taiwan Strait, more frequent overhead passes of space and unmanned platforms, and expanded intelligence sharing arrangements with the Taiwanese security services. It also seems probable that the United States will make significant enhancements to its diplomatic, intelligence, and military presence in Taiwan. It remains an open question whether a Taiwan Patrol Force or MAAG-like organization will be reestablished—let alone an official country-to-country relationship and defensive alliance. But each could be considered past examples of political and military initiatives that, when combined, were successful in helping to deter CCP aggression and win the struggle for peace. Herein we might find positive lessons for the future.