

DEFENSE SECURITY BRIEF

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Navigating Security Challenges and Geopolitical Shifts: Assessing Taiwanese Public Perspectives on Defense and Foreign Policy

*Christina Chen and Kuan-chen Lee*¹

As China continues to expand its military capabilities and presence in the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan faces an increasingly severe security threat.² Meanwhile, uncertainty surrounding U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly its commitment to the security of the Taiwan Strait, has been heightened by the U.S. presidential election, positioning the future of Taiwan-U.S. relations as a critical area of concern.³

Taiwan's ability to navigate these evolving security challenges and geopolitical shifts is crucial for its national security and long-term development. Public backing for defense and foreign policy initiatives is essential to the government's ability to effectively implement these policies. In light of this, this paper draws upon the latest public opinion survey from the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) to analyze how Taiwanese people perceive the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), evaluate current defense preparedness, regard Taiwan's existing foreign policies, and assess their trust in international allies.⁴

1. Christina Chen is Assistant Research Fellow of Division of Chinese Politics, Military and Warfighting Concepts, INDSR. Kuan-chen Lee is Assistant Research Fellow of Division of Chinese Politics, Military and Warfighting Concepts, INDSR.

2. "China is Using an 'Anaconda Strategy' to Squeeze Taiwan," *The Economist*, October 3, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/10/03/china-is-using-an-anaconda-strategy-to-squeeze-taiwan>.

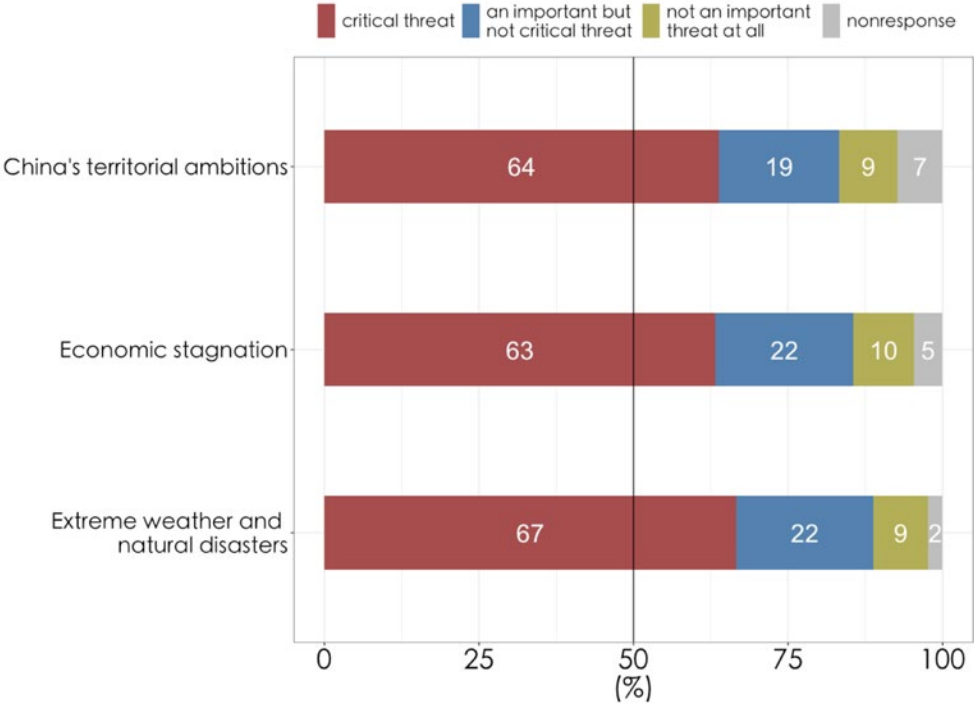
3. Bonny Lin, "U.S. Policy toward China and Taiwan," CSIS, September 26, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-policy-toward-china-and-taiwan>.

4. The survey was commissioned by the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) and conducted by the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University. The target population consisted of residents of Taiwan aged 18 and above, with the survey carried out through random sampling via telephone interviews. The data collection period spanned September 11 to September 16, 2024. A total of 1,214 valid responses were obtained, comprising 851 landline samples and 363 mobile phone samples. At a 95% confidence level, the maximum margin of sampling error is estimated to be $\pm 2.81\%$.

I. THE PUBLIC VIEWS THE CCP AS A CRITICAL THREAT

The survey used the following question to assess public perceptions of various threats to Taiwan’s vital interests: “The following are potential threats to Taiwan’s major interests in the next ten years. For each, please indicate whether you believe it is a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all.” When asked about “China’s territorial ambitions,” 64% of respondents identified it as a “critical threat,” 19% viewed it as an “important but not critical threat,” and only 9% considered it “not an important threat” (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Taiwanese Public Perceptions of Threats

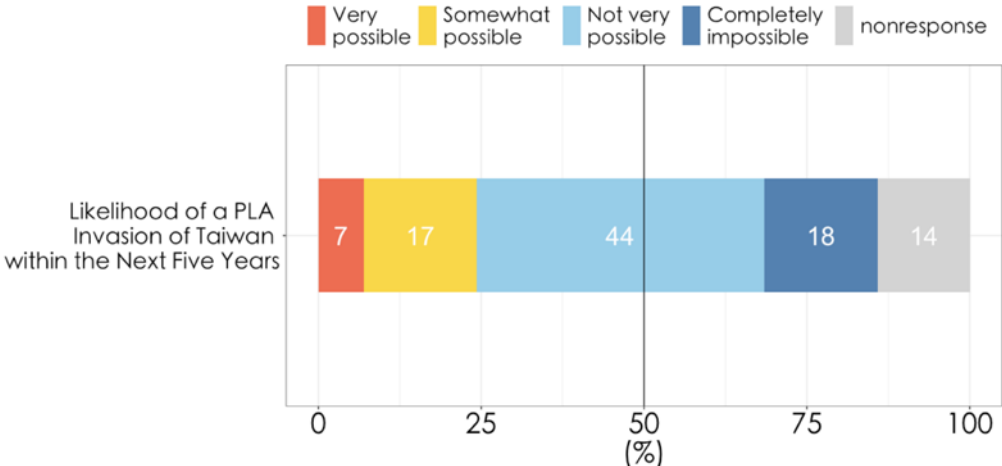


Source: INDSR (September 2024)

Compared to other challenges Taiwan faces, the survey found that the percentage of respondents viewing “China’s territorial ambitions” as a critical threat (64%) was similar to those who saw “extreme weather and natural disasters” (67%) and “economic stagnation” (63%) as critical threats. Since issues like climate change and economic development are more directly related to people’s daily lives, the result indicates that the public perceives security challenges posed by the CCP to be just as significant as threats from economic and environmental crises.

It is noteworthy that the majority of the public does not believe an imminent military invasion by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is likely. Figure 2 indicates that only 24% of respondents think it is possible that the PLA will attack Taiwan within the next five years, while approximately 62% believe such an event is unlikely. Despite most respondents viewing China’s territorial ambitions as a critical threat, more than half do not believe that these ambitions will manifest in the form of a military invasion. Instead, the public seems more concerned about the CCP’s use of military exercises, grey-zone incursions, cognitive warfare, legal warfare, and other unconventional tactics, which are perceived as encroaching on Taiwan’s territorial integrity, sovereignty, and overall security.

Figure 2. Public Assessment of the Likelihood of a PLA Invasion of Taiwan within the Next Five Years

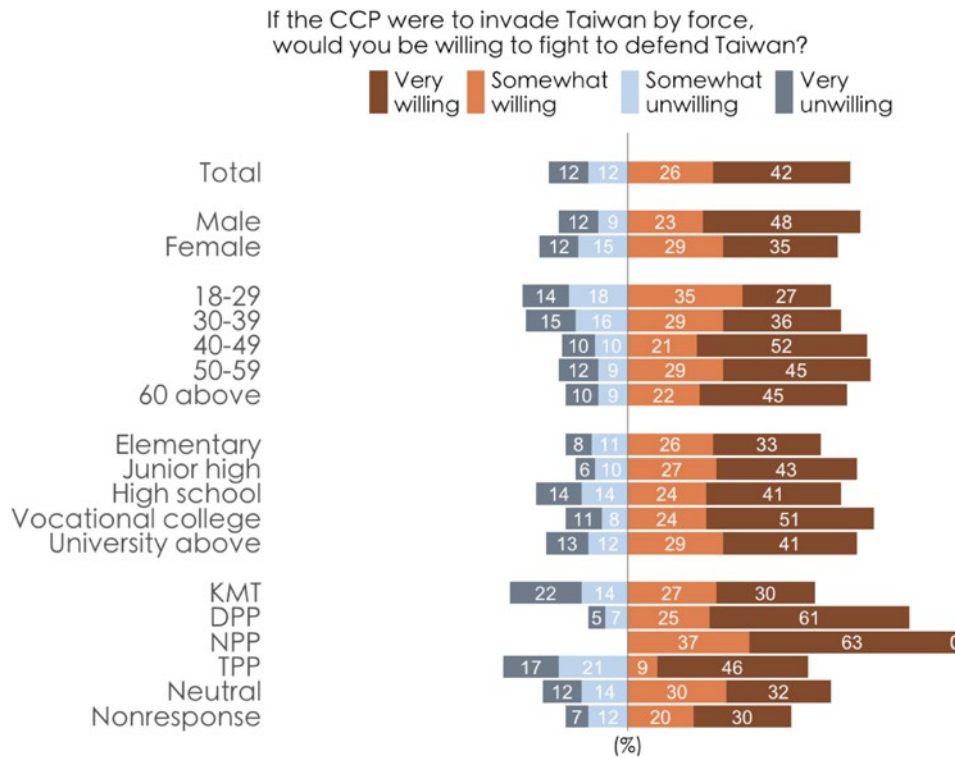


Source: INDSR (September 2024)

II. TAIWANESE PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD DEFENSE PREPAREDNESS

When asked, “If the CCP were to invade Taiwan by force, would you be willing to fight to defend Taiwan?” approximately 68% of respondents expressed a willingness to stand up and defend the nation, demonstrating a strong sense of self-defense and resolve among most Taiwanese citizens (Figure 3). Further cross-analysis reveals that this willingness is notably higher among Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) supporters, respondents in their 50s, and individuals with technical or vocational education backgrounds. In contrast, the percentage of those willing to fight is lower among supporters of the Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People’s Party (TPP).

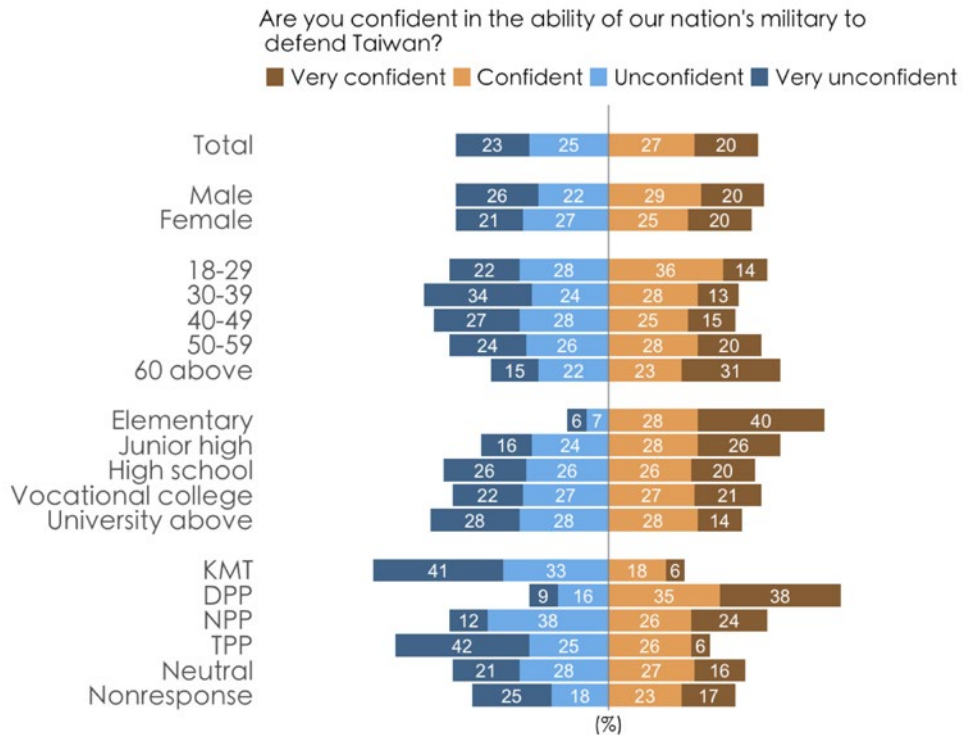
Figure 3. Cross-Analysis of Taiwanese Public's Will to Defend



Source: INDSR (September 2024)

In terms of evaluating the defense capabilities of Taiwan's military, Figure 4 shows that 47.5% of respondents expressed confidence in the military's ability to defend the nation, while 47.9% were less confident. Although the difference between these two groups is minimal, it reflects a slight lack of overall public confidence in the military's defense capabilities. Cross-analysis indicates that DPP supporters, those aged 60 and above, and individuals with lower educational level tend to have more confidence in the military's defensive strength. On the other hand, KMT and TPP supporters, as well as respondents with a university education or higher, exhibit less confidence in the military's ability to defend Taiwan.

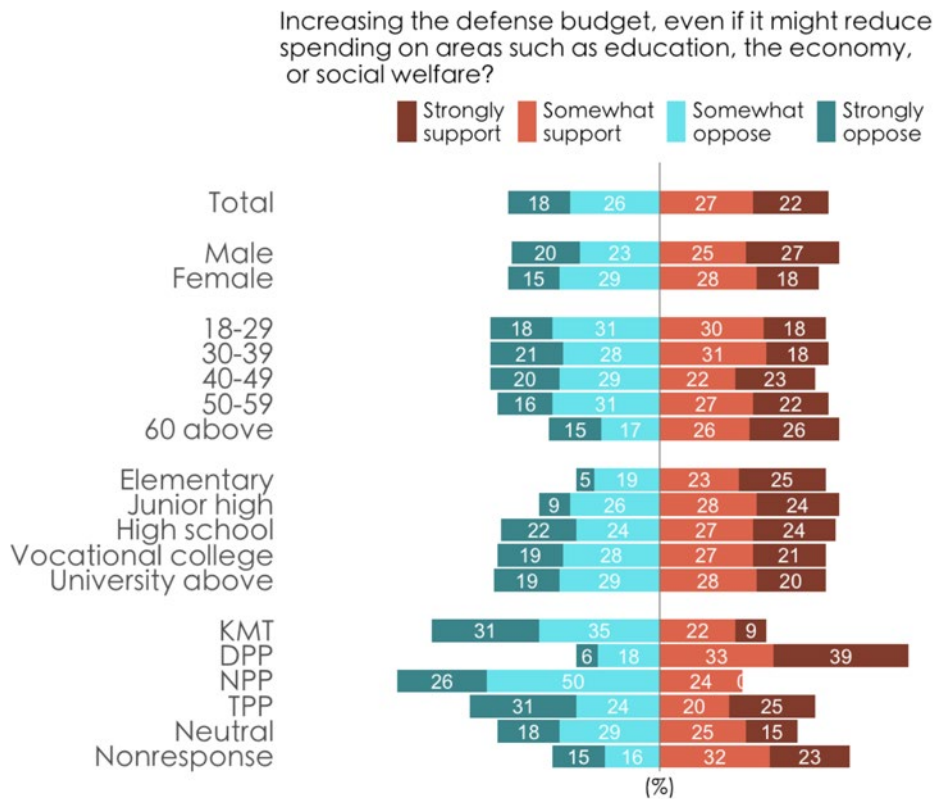
Figure 4. Cross-Analysis of Taiwanese Public’s Confidence in Military



Source: INDSR (September 2024)

Taiwan’s defense preparedness not only hinges on the public’s resolve and the military’s capabilities but also on the size of the defense budget. Increasing the defense budget is seen as a means to bolster Taiwan’s defense capabilities and public confidence. The survey posed the question: “Do you support the government increasing the defense budget, even if it might reduce spending on areas such as education, the economy, or social welfare?” The results show that 49% of respondents supported the increase, slightly higher than those who opposed it (44%, Figure 5). Among those expressing support, DPP supporters had a higher level of support compared to other political party identifiers, and respondents aged 60 and above were more likely to endorse the defense budget increase than younger respondents. Conversely, KMT supporters and politically neutral individuals expressed more reservations about raising the defense budget.

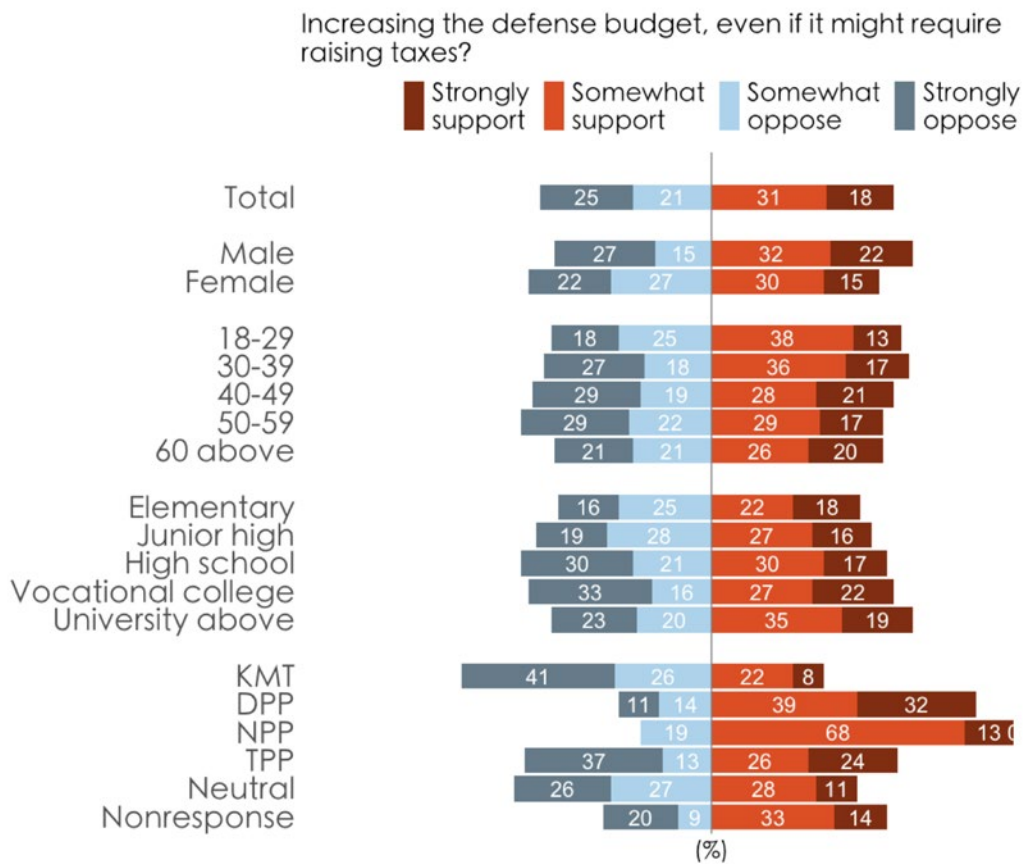
Figure 5. Cross-Analysis of Taiwanese Public’s Views on Increasing the Defense Budget (Resource Crowding-Out)



Source: INDSR (September 2024)

In addition to concerns about resource allocation, the survey also asked, “Do you support the government increasing the defense budget, even if it might require raising taxes?” Figure 6 reveals that approximately 49% of respondents expressed general support for this idea, slightly exceeding the 46% who opposed it. Again, party affiliation continues to be a significant factor influencing attitudes toward the defense budget. Among supporters of the DPP, around 71% favored raising taxes to increase the defense budget. In contrast, only about 30% of Kuomintang (KMT) supporters agreed with raising taxes for this purpose. This disparity indicates that there is still no consensus in society regarding the need to increase the defense budget.

Figure 6. Cross-Analysis of Taiwanese Public’s Views on Increasing the Defense Budget (Raising Taxes)



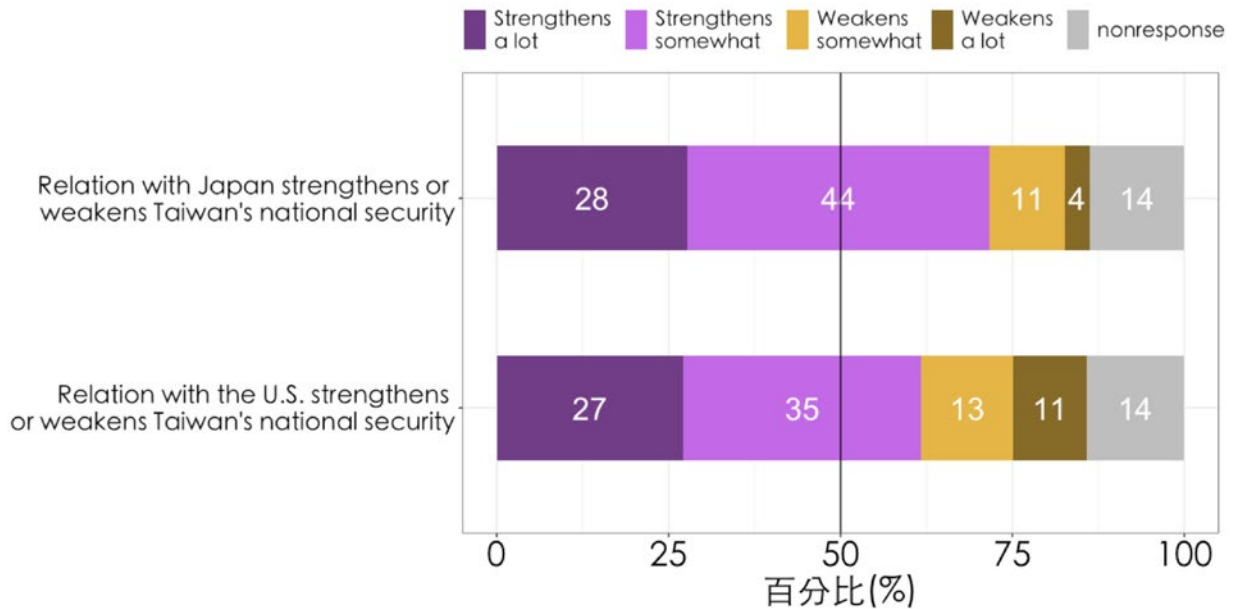
Source: INDSR (September 2024)

III. TAIWANESE PUBLIC PERSPECTIVES ON FOREIGN POLICY

Taiwan collaborates with its democratic allies to collectively address the challenges posed by China and authoritarian regimes. The survey measured public support for this foreign policy strategy through two items: “Do you think that Taiwan’s relationship with the United States (or Japan) strengthens or weakens Taiwan’s national security?” Figure 7 indicates that 72% of respondents believe that Taiwan’s relationship with Japan strengthens national security, with 28% indicating it strengthens it significantly and 44% stating it strengthens it somewhat. Regarding Taiwan’s relationship with the United States, more than 60% of respondents perceive that the Taiwan-U.S. relationship contributes positively to enhancing national security, while approximately 24% feel that it weakens Taiwan’s security. These results demonstrate that a majority of the public supports the current diplomatic

approach, believing that strengthening ties with both the U.S. and Japan benefits Taiwan’s national security.

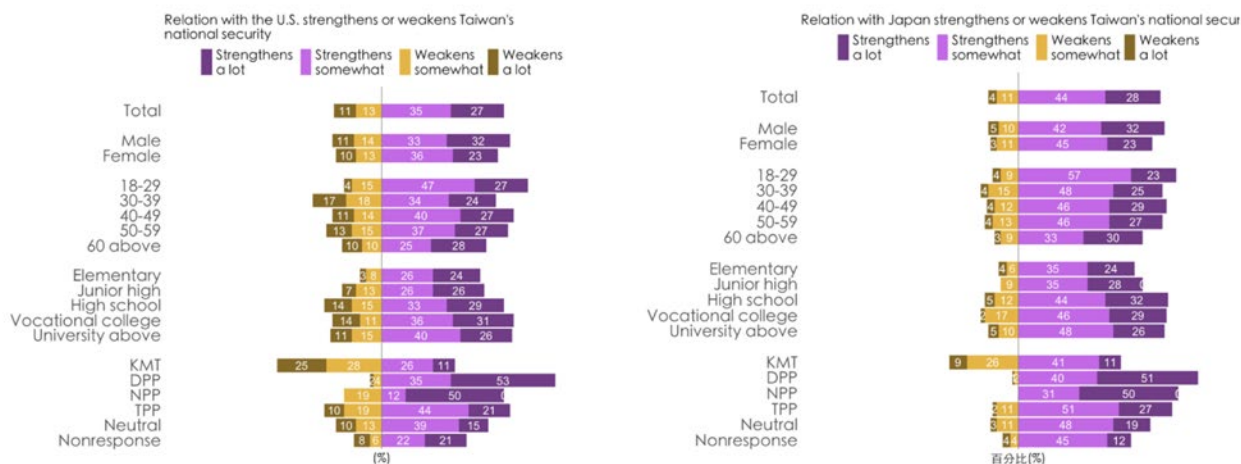
Figure 7. Taiwanese Public’s Views on Foreign Policy (Relations with the U.S. and Japan)



Source: INDSR (September 2024)

Despite the majority supporting engagement with the United States and Japan, cross-analysis reveals that party affiliation significantly influences public evaluations of foreign policy (Figure 8). Among supporters of the DPP, approximately 88% believe that the Taiwan-U.S. relationship strengthens national security. In contrast, only about 37% of KMT supporters share this view, with over half (53%) of KMT supporters believing that the Taiwan-U.S. relationship undermines Taiwan’s national security. Regarding Taiwan’s relationship with Japan, more than 90% of DPP supporters feel that this relationship enhances national security, while around 52% of KMT supporters hold the same view. This indicates a clear partisan divergence in perspectives on Taiwan’s foreign policy.

Figure 8. Cross-Analysis of Taiwanese Public's Views on Foreign Policy



Source: INDSR (September 2024)

IV. TAIWANESE PUBLIC ASSESSMENTS OF U.S. DEFENSE ASSISTANCES AND POSSIBILITIES

During his presidency, U.S. President Joe Biden has stated five times that he does not rule out the possibility of deploying forces to defend Taiwan.⁵ However, the U.S. government continues to adhere to a policy of strategic ambiguity. The manner in which the U.S. responds to a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan not only affects its credibility in Asia and globally but also has profound implications for Taiwan's defense and public morale.⁶ The survey conducted by the INDSR sought to gauge the Taiwanese public's assessment of the methods and likelihood of U.S. assistance in resisting a Chinese invasion.

Figure 9 indicates that if China were to invade Taiwan, approximately 74.8% of respondents believe the U.S. might "airlift food or medical supplies to Taiwan"; around 73.4% think the U.S. would "impose economic and diplomatic sanctions on China"; about 76.3% believe the U.S. would "provide Taiwan with weapons and

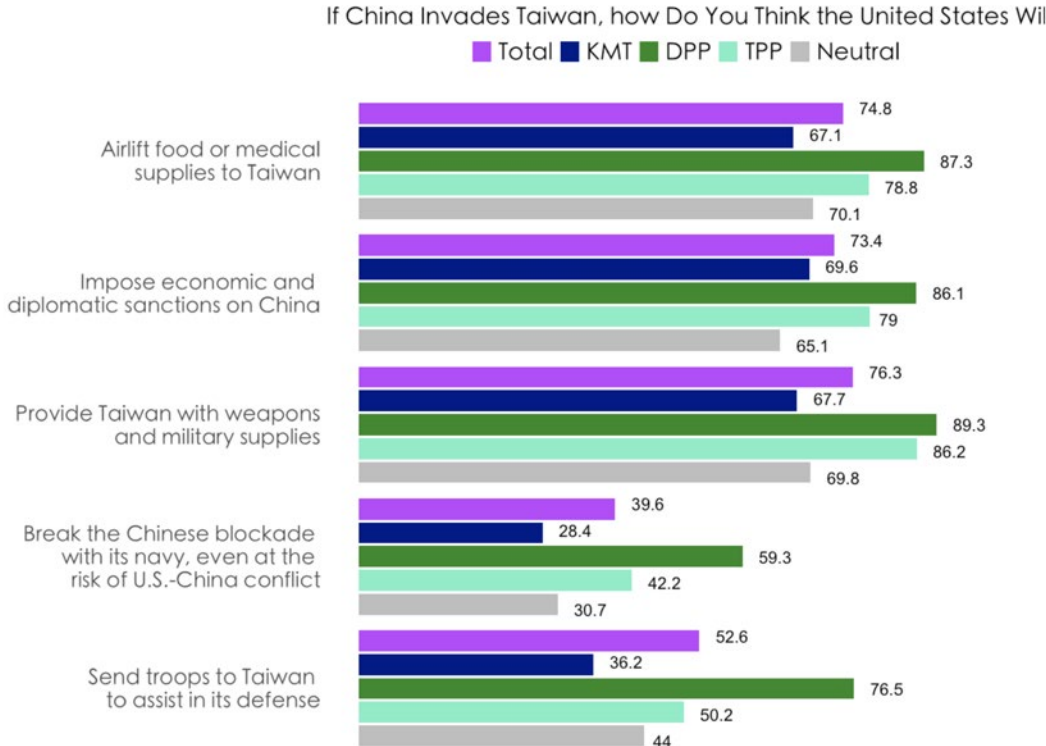
5. "Biden Does not Rule Out Possibility of Using Forces to Defend Taiwan," *Focus Taiwan*, June 4, 2024, <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202406040025>.

6. Kuan-chen Lee, Christina Chen, and Ying-Hsuan Chen, "Core Public Attitudes toward Defense and Security in Taiwan," *Taiwan Politics*, January 9, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.58570/WRON8266>.

military supplies”; approximately 39.6% think the U.S. would “break the Chinese blockade with its navy, even at the risk of U.S.-China conflict”; and about 52.6% believe the U.S. would “send troops to Taiwan to assist in its defense.” This suggests that if China were to resort to military action against Taiwan, over 70% of the public believes the U.S. would offer indirect support, including arms supplies, sanctions against China, and airlifting essential goods. The Taiwanese public appears more reserved regarding the likelihood of direct U.S. military intervention in a Taiwan Strait conflict.

Furthermore, public perceptions of the various methods and possibilities of U.S. assistance in repelling a Chinese invasion are influenced by party affiliation. For all assessed forms of U.S. support for Taiwan, DPP supporters tend to view the likelihood of assistance more favorably compared to KMT supporters. This divergence is particularly pronounced regarding U.S. naval actions to breach a blockade and the deployment of American troops to assist Taiwan, highlighting the complex relationship between domestic political polarization and confidence in international alliances.

Figure 9. Taiwanese Public Assessments of the Methods and Likelihood of U.S. Assistance to Taiwan



Source: INDSR (September 2024)

V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The INDSR survey reflects the attitude of the Taiwanese public regarding current security challenges and the international situation. The results show that over 60% of respondents consider China's territorial ambitions to be a serious threat to Taiwan; however, only a minority believe that the Chinese military will invade Taiwan within five years. This indicates that while the public recognizes the rising threat, they remain calm in the face of it.

Moreover, the Taiwanese people's resolve vis a vis self-defense is relatively strong, but their confidence in the military's defensive capabilities appears to be somewhat lacking. In terms of defense spending, there is a clear divide in society regarding increases, whether in the context of resource allocations or tax increases. Regarding foreign policy, the public supports strengthening cooperation with democratic nations like the U.S. and Japan, viewing this as beneficial for Taiwan's national security. However, considering changing international circumstances and pressure from China, the Taiwanese government needs to enhance communication with the people to broaden consensus. Based on these findings, this paper proposes the following policy recommendations:

(I) Strengthen Defense Preparedness and Enhance Public Confidence

Given that the Taiwanese public generally views China as a critical threat, the government should continue to push for defense reforms that bolster the military's capabilities and enhance public confidence in its effectiveness. Specific measures include improving military transparency, fostering trust between the military and the public, and enhancing defense education to promote a nationwide awareness of defense issues.

(II) Enhance Responses to Non-Traditional Security Threats

The public regards issues like climate change and economic development as equally important challenges compared to traditional security threats. The recent establishment of the "National Climate Change" and "Whole-of Society Defense Resilience" committees indicates the government's recognition of the threats posed by climate change, natural disasters, and authoritarian expansion, as well as its determination to strengthen national resilience. Taiwan should integrate domestic resources in this direction and collaborate with the international community to seek effective experiences and jointly develop strategies to address non-traditional threats.

(III) Promote Social Consensus and Resolve Party Differences

Political affiliation significantly influences attitudes toward defense budgets

and confidence in international alliances. The Taiwanese government should enhance cross-party communication to build a social consensus on defense policy and avoid defense issues sparking partisan conflict. Hosting national security forums can help unify public opinion, ensuring that defense policies are consistent and stable.

(IV) Deepen International Cooperation and Expand Diplomatic Space

The majority of the public support collaboration between Taiwan and democratic nations such as the U.S. and Japan, viewing it as beneficial for national security. The government should continue to deepen strategic partnerships with the U.S. and Japan while actively seeking support from other international allies to expand diplomatic space, thereby strengthening Taiwan's position in the international arena.

(V) Enhance Public Awareness and Confidence in Alliances

Policies should consider how to bolster the Taiwanese public's confidence in U.S. assistance. This can be achieved through clear communication about the direction of defense cooperation and by integrating track 1.5 or 2 strategic dialogues. This approach will ensure that the Taiwanese people understand the forms of assistance the U.S. can provide, avoiding expectations that are either too high or too low.

India – Taiwan Ties in Modi's New Third Term

*C Balasubramanian*¹

As Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi entered office for the third time, global powers including the US and Russia congratulated him on securing another term. Taiwan also extended congratulations, expressing eagerness to strengthen their “fast-growing” ties with India. PM Modi responded positively, anticipating closer relations between the two nations.²

Concerned by these exchanges, China restated its stance that Taiwan is an “inalienable part” of its territory. During a media briefing in Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning emphasized that China had protested to India regarding the messages exchanged between Modi and Taiwan's Vice President Lai Ching-te.³ The Chinese Embassy in India underscored the principle of “one China,” stressing that Taiwan is an integral part of it. China urged India to acknowledge and resist any political maneuvers by Taiwan authorities related to the one-China policy. Mao Ning also dismissed the title of President for Taiwan, stating categorically, “there is no such thing as 'President' of the Taiwan region.”⁴

The article explores the growing ties between India and Taiwan, which have significantly strengthened in recent years. In February 2024, the countries signed a migration and mobility agreement aimed at enhancing bilateral labor

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2. News Desk, “PM Modi Responds To Taiwan President Lai's Greetings On NDA Election Win, China Protests,” *News 18*, June 6, 2024, <https://www.news18.com/world/taiwan-china-modi-congratulate-message-lok-sabha-elections-8922933.html>.

3. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference,” June 6, 2024, http://www.brisbane.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/fyrth/202406/t20240606_11405886.htm.

4. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference,” June 6, 2024, http://www.brisbane.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/fyrth/202406/t20240606_11405886.htm.

cooperation, allowing Indian workers to be employed in Taiwanese industry.⁵ In another noteworthy development in 2023, Taiwan established the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in Mumbai, marking its third such center in India.⁶ The first center was established in New Delhi in 1995, followed by the second in Chennai in 2012. These moves are seen as Taiwan's efforts to deepen its relations with India, especially as India's relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) are at an all-time low.

Over the years, Taiwan and India have made significant progress across various domains, including trade, technology, culture, and education. These efforts are integral to Taiwan's "New Southbound Policy", aimed at enhancing cooperation and exchanges with countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific region. For India, this partnership has the potential to complement its Act East Policy and broader Indo-Pacific strategy. Within this framework, both New Delhi and Taipei maintain cordial relations with the US, Australia, and Japan. Apart from Taiwan, all are part of the QUAD framework alongside India.

As development partners, India and Taiwan have deepened mutual respect, with democracy and diversity serving as key principles for their collective growth. Both nations share similar values, including a commitment to freedom, human rights, justice, and the rule of law, which continue to strengthen their partnership. To further enhance trust at the political level, the India-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Forum was established in December 2016.⁷

India mediated between the PRC and the US during the Formosa Crisis of 1958, hence, India's role in the Indo-Pacific assumes great importance in the regional security landscape. Taiwan and India share a vision of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. About 55 percent of India's trade passes through the South China Sea, specifically through the Taiwan Strait.⁸ This economic

5. "India, Taiwan sign migration agreement to strengthen bilateral cooperation," *Business Standard*, February 16, 2024, https://www.business-standard.com/economy/news/india-taiwan-sign-migration-agreement-to-strengthen-bilateral-cooperation-124021601307_1.html.

6. Huma Siddiqui, "Taiwan to Establish Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in Mumbai, Strengthening Ties with India," *Financial Express*, July 5, 2023, <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence/taiwan-to-establish-taipei-economic-and-cultural-center-in-mumbai-strengthening-ties-with-india/3157250/>.

7. Rudroneel Ghosh, "New Synergy: Parliamentary friendship forums can open a new chapter in India-Taiwan ties," *The Time of India*, December 24, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/talkingturkey/new-synergy-parliamentary-friendship-forums-can-open-a-new-chapter-in-india-taiwan-ties/>.

8. "Question No. †4832 Indian Trade Through the South China Sea" *India Ministry of External Affairs*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/35118/question+no+4832+indian+trade+through+south+china+sea>.

dimension increases India's stakes in the peace and stability of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and the security of its trade in the South China Sea. According to noted foreign policy analyst C. Raja Mohan, "the unfolding dynamic around Taiwan will have significant consequences for India's Act East Policy and its emerging role in the Indo-Pacific region".⁹ It is also worth noting that Taiwan's role in the emerging Indo-Pacific order has been under-appreciated and yet to be tapped to its fullest potential.¹⁰ Ties can further benefit from collaboration in areas of trade, research, and defence. The emerging convergence of security interests can be encouraged through interactions between the strategic communities on both sides. Immediate avenues for cooperation may include maritime security, including maritime domain awareness, joint exercises on counter-terrorism, sharing best practices in disaster management and resilience-building, institutional arrangements for combating misinformation and disinformation in cyber and other domains, and cooperation in the domain of cybersecurity.

Taiwan has officially started focusing on South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.¹¹ India can facilitate Taiwan's efforts to deepen its engagement in the region. The ongoing tensions between the US and China is compelling Taiwan to accelerate its plans to move its large manufacturing bases away from China to Southeast Asia and India. For India to promote and scale-up its industrial production and create jobs, the Taipei connection with its impressive small and medium enterprises is more than opportune. Learning of best practices from Taiwan in high-end manufacturing in the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is a step in the right direction for India.¹²

Taiwan's reputation as a world leader in semiconductors complements India's aspirations to become a leader in the semiconductor ecosystem. Taiwan's expertise in R&D and entrepreneurship can complement India's talent pool and digital economy, fostering collaboration in strategic and emerging technologies. Taiwan produces over 60% of the world's semiconductors and over 90% of the most

9. C. Raja Mohan, "Raja Mandala: Modi's Taiwan Opportunity," *Indian Express*, May 28, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2019/05/raja-mandala-modis-taiwan-opportunity?lang=en¢er=india>.

10. "Taiwan, India, and the Indo-Pacific Order: Current Trends and Future Possibilities," *ORF*, August 19, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/event/taiwan-india-indo-pacific-order-current-trends-future-possibilities>.

11. Sumit Kumar, "South Asia Ties Need to Be Nurtured," *Taipei Times*, June 26, 2022, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2022/06/26/2003780566>.

12. Srinivas Prasad, "Design Excellence to Manufacturing Powerhouse: Shortening India's Semiconductor Journey to Success," *The Economic Times*, September 30, 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/sme-sector/design-excellence-to-manufacturing-powerhouse-shortening-indias-semiconductor-journey-to-success/articleshow/104058239.cms?from=mdr>.

advanced ones.¹³ This is a solid foundation for collaborations between universities, research institutions, think tanks, and technology enclaves in both countries. In return, Taiwan can benefit from India's leadership in Information Technology-Enabled Services (ITES). This convergence can create new opportunities for both countries.

Obstacles to Taiwan's greenfield investments in India need to be addressed as a priority. Improving the "Ease of Doing Business" in India will attract Taiwanese businesses to shift their ties from China to India. Beyond semiconductors, Taiwan's agro-technology, organic farming, and food processing technology can greatly benefit India's agriculture sector by helping Indian farmers double their income, thereby improving their living conditions and contributing to India's growth.

For Taiwanese companies in electronics, automotive engineering, and green technologies, India offers a large market and opportunities for expansion. This complements New Delhi's 'Make in India' initiative. Taiwan has long been acknowledged as a world leader in electronics and high-tech equipment manufacturing, and thus can significantly contribute to the vision of "Digital India."

With a declining birth rate and rapidly growing emigration, Taiwan's industry, education, and technology sectors can benefit from India's skilled workforce, such as engineers and scientists. The signing of the MoU on migration and mobility, which strengthens bilateral labour cooperation, can be seen in this light.

India, in 2021, donated 1.5 million rupees (NT\$570,000) to Taiwan's National Research Institute of Chinese Medicine (NRICM) to boost cooperation in the area of traditional medicine.¹⁴ India has also set up a permanent "AYUSH Information Cell," providing data about traditional Indian medicine and managing exchanges with the Chinese medicine community in Taiwan. The time is ripe to expand cooperation in the field of healthcare. To advance this, both sides can consider pooling their respective strengths in medicine and launching health security initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region. This has become imperative, especially in the post-COVID era, for mitigating future health emergencies.

As a new form of soft power diplomacy, Taiwan can strengthen cultural and people-to-people ties with India by leveraging its "Tea Culture." In 2018, India hosted the first-ever Taiwan Film Festival to showcase and promote Taiwanese culture

13. "Taiwan's Dominance of the Chip industry Makes It More Important," *The Economist*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023/03/06/taiwans-dominance-of-the-chip-industry-makes-it-more-important>.

14. Matthew Strong, "India Makes Donation to Taiwan to Boost Cooperation on Traditional Medicine," *Taiwan News*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/4137331>.

in India.¹⁵ Since 2004, Taiwan has been offering the ‘Taiwan Scholarship’ and the ‘National Huayu Enrichment Scholarship’ (HES) to Indian students to study in Taiwan. This initiative can be enhanced to tap the potential of ‘Education Diplomacy.’

To accelerate the flow of Taiwanese tourists, connectivity in the “Buddhist Pilgrimage Circuit” can be strengthened, showcasing India’s incredible diversity. An India-Taiwan Buddhist Circuit, making Taiwan more accessible for Indians, can foster people-to-people ties and leverage ‘Travel Diplomacy.’

Buddhism is not only a powerful cultural force but also a geopolitical asset. To put into perspective India has given birth to four major religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism. With the shift from the Trans-Atlantic to Asia, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as the geopolitical center of gravity today. Many major countries in the region are Buddhist nations, including Myanmar, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, and nearly half of the ASEAN countries with whom India share a lot of cultural and civilizational connections. For instance,¹⁶ in the second half of the second century BC, two Indian Buddhist monks, Mahajavaka and Kalyanacuri, are credited with founding Buddhism in Vietnam.

India’s rich Buddhist heritage offers a unique opportunity to create jobs and improve services for locals, while preserving sacred sites and catering to global Buddhists. Globally, tourism employment consists of 50 percent women and 50 percent youth (under 25), illustrating tourism's inclusive growth potential. Well-structured tourism can be labour-intensive, benefiting both skilled and unskilled workers. It promotes small-scale entrepreneurship, especially among poor women and youth, and funds infrastructure and hospitality services in areas often neglected by traditional development schemes. Usually, visitors to Buddhist sites in India from Taiwan seek more authentic experiences and are interested in Buddhist practices and religious values. They often avail themselves of high-priced group packages with value-added services, placing them in the upper tier of high-budget travellers.

The spread of Buddhism across Asia began with the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka (268-232 BCE), who structured his empire based on Buddhist precepts. He is reputed to have erected over 84,000 stupas, pillars, and rock edicts across

15. IANS, “Taiwan Film Fest to Be Held in Delhi,” *The Millennium Post*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.millenniumpost.in/delhi/taiwan-film-fest-to-be-held-in-delhi-317795>.

16. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, “India-Vietnam Relations: Contextualizing the Indo-Pacific Region,” *The Economic Times*, June 11, 2021, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-vietnam-relations-contextualising-the-indo-pacific-region/articleshow/83427128.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

his empire. These monuments and edicts are scattered across India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, with around 20 pillars still standing. Emperor Ashoka's legacy significantly contributed to the spread of Buddhism across Asia. Hence, India has a spiritual, moral, and cultural duty to revive the international role of Buddhism that Ashoka once established and there is, therefore, an urgent need to map, assess and explore 'Buddhist Circuits' as part of 'Buddhist Diplomacy' by India. Reliable, fast, safe, multimodal, and affordable connectivity between the sites of the Buddhist Circuit, as well as between the Buddhist Circuit and its main source markets, is critical for its sustained and holistic development in the Indo-Pacific region. India must take the lead in enhancing this initiative.

In conclusion, India's foreign policy priorities, especially concerning New Delhi's 'Near Abroad' under Modi 3.0, should include accommodating Taiwan and building upon the foundations established in previous years, nurturing this relationship further. In addition to military preparedness and aligning interests with key countries, India should include Taiwan in a central role in its long-term strategy concerning China.

THE DRAGON'S EMBRACE: CHINA'S GUANXI DIPLOMACY IN AFRICA

*Samir Bhattacharya*¹

The stakes are often high in the intricate power play of international politics, and the paths to resolution are mired with political negotiations. An aspiring power like China has a primordial desire to build influence. Thus, in Chinese diplomacy, the art of influencing is a nuanced yet indispensable tool. Some international relations scholars also refer to this power of influence as “structural power.”

Without doubt, the power of influence is crucial in navigating any delicate situation. A country builds a strong image by fostering dialogue among all the concerned parties and paving the way for positive discussions. While the USA has remained the most influential international mediator, China is becoming increasingly assertive in its international mediator role, as evidenced during the Saudi-Iran or Niger-Benin dispute resolution.

As China sets out to create an alternative world order, complementary and sometimes contradictory to the West-led world order, China needs Africa by its side in different multilateral bodies. With 55 countries, indeed Africa is a substantial block in international negotiations and discussions. Therefore, Beijing is increasingly intensifying its efforts to influence Africa as it attempts to tilt the global order in its favor.

Yet, Western IR scholars, stuck in the binaries of centre and periphery or hegemon and challenger, are unable to comprehensively understand China's rise in Africa due to the Eurocentrism in their analysis. Indeed, their overemphasis on economic aspects, such as trade, economic aid or resource interests, prevent them from exploring the cultural underpinnings of this relationship. This article attempts to evaluate China's approach towards Africa from a relational perspective. Moving

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beyond Western-centric concepts such as sovereignty, anarchy, and democracy, the article introduces the traditional Chinese notion of Guanxi and its influence on China's foreign policy practices. Further, the article evaluates China's motivations behind setting up political party schools in Africa under the framework of guanxi diplomacy.

DEFINING GUANXI AS A DIPLOMATIC TOOL

Guānxì (關係) is a defining feature of Chinese diplomacy. Although it is loosely translated as 'relationship', the meaning goes beyond the conventional Western definition. Its entry into English vocabulary is a relatively recent phenomenon. However, historically, it has been a cornerstone of China's interstate relations, where Chinese rulers treated diplomacy as an extension of interpersonal relations. As a matter of fact, Guanxi is part of the Chinese word for international relations, 'guoji guanxi'.

Guanxi continues to be an integral part of Chinese culture, built on the principles of reciprocity through personal ties and mutual obligations. Originating in pre-modern Chinese society, in Guanxi, an individual who benefits is obliged to return the favour to allow the relationship to continue and to ensure one's goals are secure, creating a "win-win solution" (liǎng quán qí měi; 兩全其美). Structured both horizontally and vertically, it describes the particularities in an asymmetric relation between two unequal partners. In other words, it is a way of harmonising relationships based on responsibilities towards each other.

Many African countries have similar political settings which thrive on these dynamics and patron-client linkages. Different institutions, rules and regulations often play a secondary role in such situations. Thus, China's governance model, characterized by one-party rule, absoluteness of party-state, fragmented authoritarianism model for policy process, strong political meritocracy, and top-down economic governance, particularly appeals to many African ruling parties.

CHINA'S BLUEPRINT FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN AFRICA

Beijing has actively promoted its own model of governance to African leaders since independence days. China supported several African liberation movements in their cause, and after independence, China helped them develop their economies and consolidate the independent government. This includes the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, SWAPO in Namibia, MPLA in Angola, Zanu-PF in Zimbabwe and Frelimo in Mozambique.

However, in recent years, it has intensified its efforts to strengthen its influence over African ruling parties. Every year, China invites hundreds of African officials on “study tours” to China, which often include lectures in Chinese universities, field visits to different provinces for firsthand experiences, as well as cultural programs to sensitize participants to Chinese traditions. In fact, except for very senior-level delegates, most of these courses take place outside Beijing, in the Chinese provinces.

APPLICATION OF CHINESE GUANXI IN AFRICA

During the 8th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Dakar, Senegal, in 2021, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) released a white paper which acknowledged China’s diplomatic ties with 110 political parties in 51 countries out of 54. Now, the CCP has stepped up the training of party and government officials from Africa, as evidenced by the introduction of political schools.

In 2022, China developed its first political training school in the East African nation, Tanzania. Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School, named after Tanzania’s revered founding father, was funded by the CCP with an estimated cost of US\$40 million. Without wasting time, classes in the facility started in February 2022. 120 cadres from South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania have attended the school. Interestingly, all six countries have continued with their post-independence ruling governments without change, and all these six ruling parties have shared a strong historical relationship with China since pre-independence days.

Additionally, all six ruling parties belong to the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa (FLMSA) coalition, which evaluates geostrategic trends and challenges to their governance while coordinating mutual support. China has long been an ideological and military ally to these liberation movements and is now the sole external partner of FLMSA. The group has met regularly, the last meeting in March 2024.

The establishment of the Nyerere Leadership School will further strengthen this strategic alliance by providing a framework for the six FLMSA parties to develop their strategies more effectively through shared training, educational resources, and other collaborative facilities, all with Chinese characteristics.

ADVANCING CHINA’S GUANXI IN AFRICA

China’s efforts to influence African policymaking are not limited to setting up

new physical institutions in Africa. The CCP has also funded the refurbishing of the ZANU-PF party school in Zimbabwe, called the Herbert Chitepo School of Ideology. Additionally, the CCP's National Academy of Governance, which functions as the external arm of the CCP Central Party School, has established year-round training partnerships with governance academies in countries such as Algeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Africa. Since 2018, China has provided successive ruling parties with political leadership training. These efforts underscore China's growing interest in shaping the governance structures of African nations, with a particular focus on entrenching single, dominant party models à la CCP. It is a way of instructing the revolutionary parties of Africa to maintain their permanent grip over power.

Recently, Kenya's ruling United Democratic Alliance has also expressed its interest in building a CCP leadership school in Nairobi. Along with this school, Beijing is also likely to finance and develop Nairobi's new foreign ministry headquarters. Scheduled to be inaugurated as a symbol of celebration for 60 years of China and Kenya relations, these investments will certainly promote China's soft power in Kenya and beyond across the continent. As per some reports, political parties from Burundi, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Morocco, and Uganda have also shown interest in developing similar facilities in their respective countries.

THE WAY FORWARD

Although China has built or supported African party schools since the 1960s, the Nyerere School was the first to be modelled on the Chinese Communist Party's Central Party School. Similar to the CCP, all six participant political parties led their countries to independence. Moreover, they all have exhibited tendencies that undermine democracy and constitutionalism to different degrees.

Despite these countries' official support for multiparty political systems, they have often been highly intolerant of opposition and have used various methods to suppress, limit, and even dismantle opposition parties. Additionally, issues such as fraudulent elections, electoral violence, and widespread corruption have become common, leading to the degradation of democratic institutions. Notably, none of these six nations have experienced a ruling party transition since their independence.

Given the historical connection and ideological similarities, the CCP model is compatible with their style of governance. However, with change of government, a country might decide to break away from the Chinese model and adopt a comparatively liberal Western model of democracy. Therefore, China will also want to nurture the opposition parties in different African countries to protect its interests

in case of a drastic regime change. In that regard, China's political schools, as part of its Guanxi diplomacy, will be highly effective.

Guanxi emphasizes the reciprocal obligations framed by hierarchical social relations. As emphasized in Guanxi, the relationship between ruler and subject provides the framework for the ruling party's dominance over state and government. This concept resonates with the leadership of several African nations. The CCP's training programs often stress the benefits of a robust and centralized party system, which some African leaders believe is a sine qua non for maintaining power and stability without the "messiness" of multiparty democracy.

China has patiently worked for decades to reach where it is today. It understands the long game of influencing and its associated rewards. Despite its rapid emergence in the international power game and accelerated efforts in developing a Sino-centric world order, the country is in no hurry. Clearly, China's long game in promoting Guanxi is working in Africa.

IS THE COST OF REUNIFICATION OF TAIWAN BY INVASION OR BLOCKADE BEARABLE FOR XI JINPING?

Maj Gen (Dr) S B Asthana¹

BACKDROP

On taking over as President of PRC, Xi Jinping continued with 'Peaceful Reunification' of Taiwan as one of his aims and later had it included as a key goal in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Specifically, Article 1 of the PRC Constitution states that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. Additionally, the preamble emphasizes the goal of achieving the complete reunification of the motherland, which includes bringing Taiwan under PRC sovereignty. Xi Jinping has called unification with Taiwan the "essence" of the country's "rejuvenation," which needs to be achieved by 2049, the one hundredth anniversary of the PRC.

Meanwhile, on 10 October 2024, President Lai of Taiwan (Republic of China) or ROC, said on the annual Double Tenth Day marking the 113th anniversary of ROC's founding, that the two sides "are not subordinate to each other" and the PRC has no authority to represent the island. He believes in Taiwan's sovereignty and it emphasises that its "absolutely impossible for the PRC to become the 'motherland' of the ROC's people" because Taiwan has older political and democratic roots.

Consequently, the PLA has held military drills like "Joint Sword-2024B" on 13 October 2024 as a "stern warning to the separatist acts of Taiwan independence forces" to coerce Taiwan. Beijing continues to brand Lai as separatist and has continued coercive military posturing ever since the DPP was elected in 2016.

President Xi had earlier emphasised that the country's reunification with Taiwan was "inevitable" in his last New Year's address and also told President Biden that

1. The views expressed are the personal views of the author, who retains the copyright. The author is a globally acknowledged Strategic and Security Analyst.

'Beijing will reunify Taiwan with mainland China but that the timing has not yet been decided' with the word 'peaceful prominently missing. Notwithstanding the fact that Taiwan has never been ruled by PRC, the fact it has operated as a separate political entity since 1949, with its own government, economy, and military, and other parameters qualify it as independent state. The inference drawn from Xi's assertion is that PRC will continue to make an effort to reunite it with mainland China, but the questions remains How, When and at What cost?

WHY TAIWAN REMAINS A US-CHINA ISSUE, DESPITE PRC'S ONE CHINA PRINCIPLE?

The PRC may keep claiming Taiwan to be its domestic issue, but it has external dimensions. Diplomatically, the US may claim to follow the 'One China Policy' but it treats Taiwan no less than an ally. The Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019, effective from March 26, 2020 is an indicator of this. The Taiwan Relations Act, 1979, Taiwan Travel Act signed in 2018, and National Defence Authorisation Act for Fiscal Year 2024 signed in 2023 to facilitate sale of state of the art weaponry and joint exercises justify the statement.

US will always like to trade and strategically partner with democratic Taiwan outside Beijing's influence, rather than Taiwan under CCP. Moreover, in any potential invasion of Taiwan, the spill over of the battle space to Japan is obvious due to geographic proximity, and it is an ally the US is obligated to defend.

WHAT IS THE PRC TRYING CURRENTLY?

China is trying to pursue the idea of 'Winning without Fighting' using its Three Warfare Concept which entails public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and lawfare along with aggressive military coercion, air violations, firepower power demonstrations and a symbolic economic boycott of Taiwan, thus creating heightened tension around Taiwan to adequately deter the DPP leadership from declaring independence, and sending a stern message to Washington not to abandon the 'One China Principle'. China, therefore, is using its Grey Zone tactics to control Taipei without firing a single shot, before escalating to the next level at appropriate time. In the meantime, the PRC is building its military capability to invade Taiwan in next few years, should its attempt at peaceful reunification fail.

The PRC's warning to the USA not to arm Taiwan hasn't shown results as Taiwan is to receive the first batch of F-16 Block 70 jets from an arms deal worth US\$7.69 billion for 66 jets, with delivery due in September 2024, making Taiwan

the third nation in the world to receive factory-fresh advanced fighter jets, besides approving \$1.1 billion for upgrading its radars and missiles. The US \$2 billion deal includes an advanced air defence system that has been used by Ukraine. In the 2025 budget, the Pentagon seeks US\$500 million in arms support, indicating its intention of empowering Taiwan to have a military with a modern arsenal (HIMAR, ATACM, advanced air defences, anti-ship missile batteries) to defend itself against Chinese aggression.

IS FULL SCALE INVASION OF TAIWAN A VIABLE OPTION FOR PRC?

The cost of reunification by full scale invasion of Taiwan for Xi Jinping would be extraordinarily high, militarily, economically and politically. Chinese strategist Qiao Liang, a retired PLA Air Force Major General, has warned that taking Taiwan by force is 'Too Costly'. The Chinese red line of "Taiwan going nuclear/declaring independence" has not been crossed as yet, giving no worthwhile justification for China to cross the US red line of 'Changing status Quo by Force'.

A military invasion or forced reunification has the distinct possibility of direct involvement by the U.S. under the Taiwan Relations Act, as well as other regional powers like Japan, Australia and South Korea. The capture of Taiwan requires an amphibious assault bigger than the Inchon landing or D Day operations in Normandy in the Second World War, for which the Chinese amphibious fleet is currently relatively inadequate, but which will develop by 2027.

Analysis of the terrain of Taiwan reveals that besides the complexity of amphibious assault, it poses tremendous challenges for an invader. Taiwan's landmass has rugged mountains, built up areas, and limited beaches, unsuitable for rapid moves by the invader. PLA may be able to cross the strait, but there are only few deep-water ports and beaches available in Taiwan which can accommodate a large landing force, which will invariably be hindered by sea mines, barriers, obstacles and anti-ship batteries on rocky terrain, as part of the 'Porcupine or Honey Badger Defence Concept' also referred as "Fortress Taiwan". The east and west coasts of Taiwan have shallow water lined by steep cliffs, posing problems for the invading force. Fighting/movement in the built up areas of Taiwan's major population centres is only possible through a few narrow passes and tunnels, which Taiwan can destroy or defend.

For political consolidation of Taiwan, capture of Taipei is essential. Its closeness to islands of Japan (Yonaguni Island, is just 110 km from Taiwan) will necessitate the PLA violating Japanese maritime space for a viable amphibious operation, which will drag Japan and its defence partner USA into a confrontation with China,

notwithstanding the strategic ambiguity displayed by USA for decades. Mountainous terrain and street fighting in built up area has potential to prolong the war beyond Beijing's expectations.

It may be noted that in case of invasion by the PLA, Taiwanese people will be fighting a 'just war' under a undeterred leadership, vowing to defend the democracy and security of Taiwan. A quick reference to the 1979 Sino-Vietnam War (the last combat experience of PLA) reveals that the PLA, when confronted with the determined people of Vietnam, fighting a 'just war' under strong leadership, and using the terrain to their advantage, were given a bloody nose despite the vast superiority of military assets of PLA. There is no reason that Taiwan can't replicate it, given the kind of modern weaponry, determined military and more than adequate warning of PLA's intentions. Taiwan will have to bear the brunt of the Chinese offensive, hoping US forces with its allies in the region join at the earliest. Taking Taiwan by force, therefore involves mobilisation of all the PLA's combat resources, expecting an escalation from limited war to an all-out war.

Numerous think tanks' wargames on a Chinese invasion of Taiwan have revealed a variety of results depending on the country wargaming it. CSIS (USA) developed one such wargame and ran it 24 times. In most scenarios, the United States, Taiwan and Japan defeated a conventional amphibious invasion by China and maintained an autonomous Taiwan. However, this defence came at a very high cost to all the parties. PRC is also aware of such consequences, namely, that invasion might put its overarching aim of 'National Rejuvenation' in jeopardy, even if it gets some success in Taiwan.

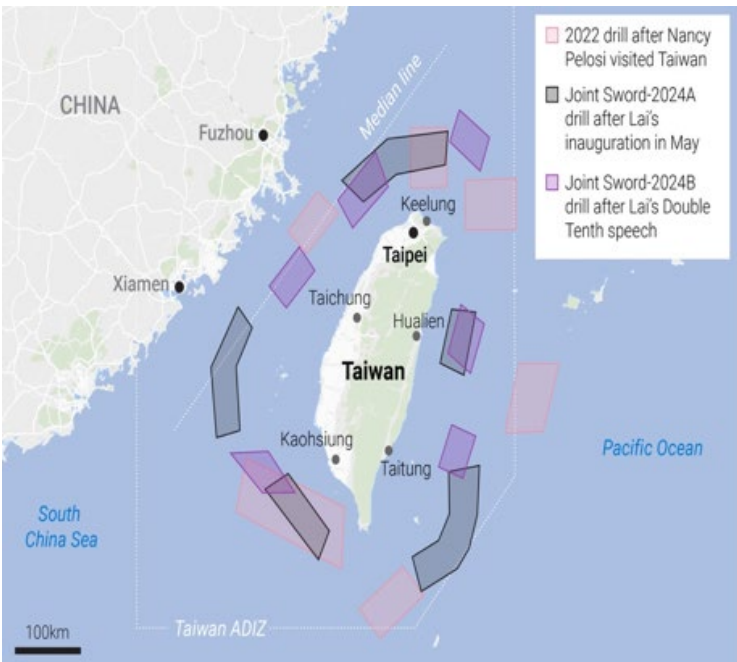


Photo Credit – Mai, Jun et al (2024), "PLA wraps up a day of joint force blockade drills around Taiwan", South China Morning Post, Hongkong, 15 October, 2024, [online web] accessed 17 October 2024, URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3282219/chinas-pla-launches-blockade-drills-around-taiwan-days-after-speech-islands-leader>.

CHINESE OPTION TO QUARANTINE TAIWAN

An option to Quarantine Taiwan is a low cost option, with the cost increasing with the degree of quarantine aimed at. Various scenarios have been worked out by CSIS starting from operations intended not to hermetically seal off Taiwan, but to punish Taiwan, assert Chinese sovereignty over the island, test the response from international shipping companies, and put significant pressure on Taiwan at the lowest level.

While China has the capabilities to successfully execute these and other quarantine variations, their success and risk for China depend on how Taiwan, the USA, and others would respond to it. The limitations of such an operations are that even if successfully executed, it can inflict temporary pain on Taiwan, but it will not force it to surrender its sovereignty. A military blockade will certainly be necessary for PRC to pursue its stated aim.

COST OF NAVAL BLOCKADES AND ECONOMIC DISRUPTION OF TAIWAN

Most of the military drills of the PLA have been to demonstrate the ability to blockade Taiwan, to force it to agree to its terms without risking an all-out war with USA. In order to prevent foreign ships from entering or departing Taiwanese seas, naval forces will be used to encircle the island, limiting access to its ports. Establishing air and sea control exploiting its superiority in quantity of military assets and posturing them to deter any ally of Taiwan is part of Chinese strategy. The idea of “Joint Blockade Campaign” finds mention in Science of Campaigns, a textbook published in 2006 by China’s National Defence University, which the PLA has improved upon incorporating modern capabilities. The PRC might seize one or more Taiwan-administrated outlying islands, including Kinmen or Matsu near China, Penghu near Taiwan, or Pratas in the South China Sea, besides enforcing a blockade of the main island of Taiwan.

A Washington-based think tank, the Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD), held a tabletop exercise in Taipei and mentioned the “Anaconda strategy”, through which the PRC uses covert cyberwarfare and non-kinetic disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, followed by a military blockade or other measures to strangulate Taiwan, rather than attempting an invasion. Prior to imposing a blockade, China might use its cyber capabilities to interfere with communications, vital infrastructure, and logistics, making it difficult for Taiwan to coordinate its supply chains and defences.

In addition, it could use propaganda, psychological and misinformation campaigns to undermine public support for the government in Taiwan and discourage external support. Blockade could also include economic measures, such as targeting trade routes and imports critical to Taiwan's economy, including food and energy supplies. Taiwan's heavy dependence on imported liquefied natural gas and limited energy reserves makes it vulnerable to such a threat. Coercion of countries having diplomatic or trade relations with Taiwan is also part of the blockade planned by PRC.

The effectiveness of such a blockade would depend on Taiwan's readiness in military, economic and all other domains of warfare including reserves of critical resources, as well as the response from the international community. Taiwan will have to bear the brunt of China's initial onslaught and blockade, but the US and its regional allies could synergise their forces and utilize their air and sea resources to cut off Beijing's maritime lifeline both inside and beyond the South China Sea.

Chinese Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) outside the Nine dash line are still vulnerable to choking/blockade like in the Malacca Strait, and it will draw out PLA into conflict outside its comfort zone. The same Anaconda Strategy could thus be used in encircling the PRC and cutting off its SLOC, trade routes and essential energy, thereby "squeezing" it until its economy is crippled. If the US could ensure that Ukraine communications remained functional despite Russian cyber-attacks, there is no reason that 'Star-Link' will not do the same for Taiwan in future.

To this end, USA signed the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Arrangement (EDCA) in 2014 with the Philippines and expanded US military bases to include four new sites in 2023, in addition to the five earlier. In addition, a Marine Rotational Force (MRF-SEA) deployment is likely to continue through March 2025 and includes six additional exercises and security cooperation engagements throughout Southeast Asia. This will ensure swift mobilization in the event of a Taiwan contingency.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COST

Economically, Chinese dependence on the US dollar remains significant, and a conflict over Taiwan would result in a substantial economic setback for China, leading to a rapid exodus of capital and the relocation of companies from the country, at a pace more accelerated than anticipated. This will also destroy the Chinese and Taiwanese economies, a result which does not suit a Chinese leadership struggling to revive its economy amidst trade war, failing BRI, real state crisis and domestic debt. China is Taiwan's top trading partner, with trade totalling

\$224 billion in 2023 with Taiwanese making over \$100 billion investment in PRC. China is the top destination for Taiwanese exports, still accounting for approximately 30.7 percent of total exports in 2024 with Taiwan having substantial trade surplus, despite Taiwanese efforts to diversify, to reduce its dependence on the PRC. Taiwan is the world leader in semiconductor manufacturing, and any conflict that disrupts Taiwan's chip production would have a severe impact on global supply chains including those of China.

In the event of a military invasion, China could face severe economic sanctions from Western nations, similar to or even harsher than those faced by Russia after its invasion of Ukraine. Given China's deep integration into the global economy, these sanctions would likely target its financial system, technology exports, and key industries. Even after the reunification, China could face long-term isolation from Western markets, which could slow down its economic growth further.

Politically, forced reunification could damage China's relationships with key trading partners and their allies. Asian neighbours may become more aligned with the USA and Western countries, undermining China's efforts to position itself as a rising superpower and responsible global leader. Such an image will take a further beating if the invasion doesn't succeed. An invasion of Taiwan would damage China's global reputation and undermine its soft power in many parts of the world.

Domestic unrest could result from a protracted or expensive conflict. The ability of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to sustain stability and economic growth is crucial to Xi Jinping's leadership. Dissent within the Party and among the populace could arise from a conflict, particularly one that does not end in an immediate and resounding victory. Significant Chinese casualties on both sides of the Taiwan Strait could threaten the CCP's grasp on power. The public will increasingly look for democracy, inspired by democratic Taiwan, which the CCP has been stifling up until now.

CONCLUSION

While the leadership under Xi Jinping sees reunification with Taiwan as a central part of its national objectives, the costs associated with forced reunification, especially when considering the Anaconda Strategy or US led containment strategies, could be overwhelming. The potential military, economic, and political blowback could indeed make the operation unbearable for China, depending on how events unfold.

Taiwan's geography, modernised military power, resolute capacity, its vital role within global supply chains and semiconductors dependency will pose a challenge

to the PRC, notwithstanding the asymmetry in terms of military assets compared with the PLA. Taiwan's determination to defend itself, growing defence spending and military capacity, strengthening reserve force, training and diversifying energy sources can increase the cost of the PLA's misadventure.

The conflict if imposed by China will be deadly and Chinese, who want to win without fighting are not known for their appetite to accept body bags of dead compatriots for a cause which doesn't give them economic benefit, but takes it away their dream of national rejuvenation.

Even though China's military has modernized significantly, and maintains substantial numerical advantage over Taiwanese military, a full-scale amphibious invasion does not make any strategic sense for China, with good chance of reputational loss, globally and domestically, if the operations fail or are overly delayed.

The current strategic posturing and gaming will continue since neither the US nor China want to go to war, but neither wants to give a walkover either. In all fairness, Taiwan will expect the US and other allies to conduct military exercises/activities close to the Malacca Strait to relieve Chinese pressure and serve as a subtle reminder of their vulnerable SLOC in the event that any aggression (coercion, quarantine, blockade, or use of force) becomes intolerable.

Although Xi Jinping is renowned for taking measured risks, the sum of these costs may lead China to choose a course of sustained pressure and coercion over direct military action. The PRC wants to keep President Lai under pressure so he refrains from declaring independence, hoping that the DPP loses the next election, and advantageous agreements that benefit China can be worked out with the opposition,.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND NAVAL OPERATIONS – WHAT CAN BE DONE TO RESOLVE DISPUTES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Captain Sukjoon Yoon¹ and Dr. Wonhee Kim²

I. INTRODUCTION

The seas are a unique domain where domestic and international law define an arena for competing powers. Although a collectively determined international legal framework exists, this is interpreted and constrained by domestic laws and regulations which attempt to advance individual national interests.

The South China Sea (SCS) is an especially complicated domain, and perhaps the most contentious of all seas, and where physical confrontations occur frequently.³ There are several actors involved in the underlying disputes, which arise from competing claims to maritime sovereignty, rights and interests; and such claims are sometimes clearly mendacious.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has a proved inadequate to resolve maritime issues in the SCS because there are fundamental differences of opinion about the rights and duties of coastal states, and particularly about defining the entitlement to special maritime zones, such as Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).

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2. Dr. Wonhee Kim, Director of the Ocean Law Research Department, KIOST.

3. Oriana Skylar Mastro, "In the South China Sea, the US Needs to Call Beijing's Bluff before It's too Late," *The New York Times International Edition*, July 27-28, 2024, p. 10.

Besides these difficulties, there are further issues concerning Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing activities, and also unilateral oceanic surveying for seabed resources.

The SCS is thus a hotbed of intractable maritime problems where national rivals face off regularly, and there is a serious risk of uncontrolled and violent escalation.⁴ China is the worst offender, by blatantly violating international law, and by fomenting maritime disorder with its salami-slicing strategy intended to consolidate its excessive claims in the SCS.

II. MARITIME ISSUES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

The primary contention in the SCS is between China and some coastal states which are members of ASEAN, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. Taiwan also maintains a similar stance, rhetorically, to that of China. The maritime security capabilities of all ASEAN members do not compare to those of China, leading them to look to the US for support. The US has not ratified UNCLOS, however, and acts as a third party following its own national interests: it works to contain China by helping to counter China's aggressive and extravagant maritime claims in the SCS, though this is contingent on the weaker states acquiring certain maritime security capabilities.

SCS disputes must be understood within two distinct paradigms: the legal and the military. ASEAN members take recourse in the former, whereas China relies upon the latter, using legal language as a cynical cover for its military aspirations. In theory, UNCLOS should be the principal means for resolving maritime disputes, and the rights and responsibilities defined therein should be obligatory for all signatories. In practice, however, SCS stakeholders interpret UNCLOS rules according to their own interests, and those with sufficient naval resources, particularly China, but also the US to some degree, use it to attempt to consolidate their self-serving interpretations.⁵

In July 2016 an arbitral tribunal at The Hague, ruling on a dispute between the Philippines and China, decided that many Chinese claims in the SCS, including the

4. See Maj Gen Rajiv Narayanam & Gp Capt Sharad Tewari, *From Contest to Cooperation: A Vision for Shared Prosperity in the Indo-Pacific Region* (USI, India: Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2018).

5. See George Galdorisi, Doug Bandow, M. Casey Jarman, *The Law of the Sea Institute Occasional Paper No. 38, The United States and the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention: The Cases Pro & Con* (Hawaii, HO: William S. Richardson School of Law, University of Hawaii, 1994).

so-called “nine-dash line”, have no lawful effect under UNCLOS.⁶ China rejected the ruling, and continues to intrude into the Philippines’ 200-mile EEZ with unwelcome activities such as military exercises, surveying, and ISR patrols and flights.

Chinese rhetoric regards the SCS as essentially an internal sea which is almost entirely under Chinese jurisdiction. China’s actions match its rhetorical claims, especially through its aggressive efforts to entrench Chinese power in the SCS by working stealthily to alter the facts on the ground, most conspicuously by creating artificial islands atop remote reefs and atolls, and then transforming them into forward military bases. These ongoing actions create the biggest risk for military escalation in the SCS.

At present, the China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), is less directly relevant to SCS disputes than the unified Chinese Coast Guard (CCG), command of which was transferred in 2018 from the Maritime Affairs Ministry to the Central Military Commission, which is a paramilitary police organization.⁷ The CCG has since played the major role in overturning the established maritime status quo, by enforcing China’s SCS claims which now use a new baseline, dependent on the artificial islands and directly contrary to clear UNCLOS definitions.⁸

III. LAW ENFORCEMENT AND NAVAL OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

China’s misbehavior in the SCS sets an unfortunate example of advancing nationalist ends under the cynical cover of putative law enforcement actions. This is all the more egregious because a legal framework exists, UNCLOS, which could have been the basis for a mutually agreed settlement of the outstanding disputes.

The US has engaged in a rhetorical battle with China, challenging China’s excessive claims in the SCS and criticizing its reckless and dangerous disruption of rules-based maritime good order and stability.⁹ US actions have so far been limited to Freedom of Overflight and Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), which

6. Camille Elenia, “Beijing’s Ships Hover Offshore,” *The New York Times International Edition*, August 14, 2024, pp. 1-2.

7. See Ian Bowers and Swee Lean Collin Koh, *Grey and White Hulls: An International Analysis of the Navy-Coastguard Nexus* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

8. Damien Cave, “China Uses Coast Guard to Exert Its Power at Sea,” *The New York Times International Edition*, June 14, 2023, pp. 1-2.

9. See Department of Defense United States of America, *Department of Defense Report to Congress: Annual Freedom of Navigation Report Fiscal Year 2022* (DoD, USA: Department of Defense, 2022).

the US considers in lawful accord with Article 87 of UNCLOS and also with Innocent Passage as defined in Article 17.¹⁰ China sees FONOPs as unlawful, citing its own its domestic laws, and therefore considers its resistance to FONOPs to be justified. Likewise, Chinese harassment of vessels belonging to other disputing SCS parties are portrayed as law enforcement maneuvers in accordance with Chinese domestic laws.

China maintains that its SCS claims are a matter of historical rights and an ongoing historical imperative. The use of the CCG to bully other parties into accepting China's extravagant claims are similarly justified. The PLAN stands behind these 'law enforcement' activities of the CCG as the ultimate backstop. Indeed, Chinese military doctrine confirms the expediency of this approach under the slogan of Three Warfares: media and public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.

China's disruption of regional stability by upending the existing rules-based international order is no accident, but rather a deliberate challenge to the SCS status quo, using grey-zone tactics to gradually create a *fait accompli* in which the SCS has become an internal Chinese sea: China claims "indisputable sovereignty" over the SCS. Unfortunately, however, China's obsessive pursuit of the historical status it believes it deserves could easily escalate into a regional or even a global emergency.¹¹

China denounces lawful naval operations by other SCS nations and by third parties as evidence of a Cold War mentality, calling them reckless, coercive, aggressive, provocative and dangerous. In fact, of course, it is China itself which is behaving in this way, as seen from recent intensive confrontations between China and the Philippines near Mischief Shoal, Scarborough shoal, and Second Thomas Shoal. The CCG has conducted intrusive patrols into the Philippines' territorial waters and its 200-mile EEZ, and wantonly harassing smaller Philippine vessels with high-pressure water cannons, long-range acoustic devices, and ramming and shouldering tactics.¹²

10. See Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea Office of Legal Affairs United Nations, *The Law of the Sea: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (New York, USA: United Nations, 1997).

11. See Tran Truong Thuy, John B. Welfield, Le Thuy Trang, *Building a Normative Order in the South China Sea: Evolving Disputes, Expanding Options* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019).

12. See Philippine military condemns China air force for 'dangerous' acts in South China Sea - CNA (channelnewsasia.com).

China is likely to become ever more aggressive in asserting its excessive maritime claims in the SCS, and will also vigorously pursue the associated fishing and energy-exploration rights as part of its agenda to alter the territorial and maritime status quo of the SCS. China lied repeatedly about the militarization of its artificial SCS islands, and such protestations of peaceful intent are now extremely difficult to believe. China already dominates the SCS through its 'law enforcement' and naval operations, and it seems clear that China's ultimate aim is to expand its maritime power until it also dominates the entire Indo-Pacific region.¹³

These Chinese ambitions pose a troublesome challenge for the US, since a direct confrontation with China in the SCS would divert US resources away from the ongoing wars in Europe and the Middle East which are already stretching US capacities rather thin. The FONOPs conducted by the US and its allies have now degenerated into a token protest which China believes it can ignore.

China's neighbors are also in difficulties, although the US still supports many of these weaker coastal states whose capabilities cannot match Chinese coast guard and naval forces. Since 2012, when China occupied the Scarborough Shoal, a traditional Philippine fishing ground located within the country's EEZ, the trend has been clear. The US presence and naval power in the SCS is becoming marginalized, and China has already gained such a strong foothold by weaponizing its putative law enforcement activities and by militarizing the artificial islands it has created that restoring the status quo ante of the early 21st century is all but impossible without a full-scale war.¹⁴ China's regional maritime hegemony is practically a foregone conclusion: China has managed to expand its maritime borders unilaterally without firing a single shot.

As a consequence of China's blatant military expansionism, which it justifies by excessive maritime claims, security in the SCS has deteriorated markedly. China is determined to become the dominant regional maritime power, and has long been pursuing a gradualist strategy which is now approaching a *fait accompli*.

The US, meanwhile, is resisting China's efforts, and many other interested parties in the Indo-Pacific region have been affected by China's coercive and provocative behaviors, and by the challenge of maintaining a strategic balance

13. Agens Chang and Hannah Beech, "The Chinese base that isn't there: Satellite images from shipping hubs show clear signs of Beijing's growing global influence," *The New York Times International Edition*, August 17-18, 2024, p. 3.

14. See Bill Hayton, *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia* (New Haven, USA: Yale University Press, 2014).

between the two great powers. Among these stakeholders is the Republic of Korea, which is deeply concerned with regional maritime issues, as stipulated by its National Security Strategy and its Indo-Pacific Strategy.¹⁵

The ROK's National Security Strategy, announced in 2023, envisions the ROK becoming a Global Pivotal State.¹⁶ With this aspiration, the ROK declares its intention to move beyond established strategic patterns and to take a transformative approach to maintaining maritime peace and stability. This new role will likely require the ROK's involvement with the issues, and the status quo of the maritime disputes of SCS maintained through international law-based negotiation among parties.

That said, the ROK is facing steadily increasing nuclear and missile threats from North Korea, and although the ROK is committed to playing a constructive supporting role in the SCS, its first priority has to be deterring North Korea. In fact, the North Korean situation has recently grown more complicated, with a very tricky geostrategic game now playing out between China and Russia, and the US and Japan. Australia, Japan, Canada, India and some EU countries are becoming more directly involved in SCS issues, but the ROK will likely avoid any such direct military or law enforcement activities.¹⁷

IV. CAN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTES BE RESOLVED?

There are fundamental contradictions in the SCS which make it difficult to implement maritime law while simultaneously preserving maritime security. Problems include: overlapping EEZs in the semi-enclosed seas of the region, with maritime boundaries yet to be delimited; extensive IUU fishing by the vessels of several states but especially those of China; and several territorial disputes made more complex by China's creation of artificial islands. There is often confusion about whether force is being used to exercise national jurisdiction, based on a maritime legal regime, or to safeguard national defense, based on a national security regime.¹⁸

15. Scott A. Snyder, "What South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy Says About the Development of a 'Yonn Doctrine'," in Council on Foreign Relations, December 29, 2022.

16. *The Yoon Suk Yeol Administration's National Security Strategy: Global Pivotal State for Freedom, Peace and Prosperity* (Seoul, Office of National Security, President of Republic of Korea, June 8, 2023).

17. David Pierson and Amy Chang Chien, 'China hones its ability to put Taiwan in a chokehold,' *The New York Times International Edition*, October 18, 2024, p. 1-2.

18. See Gordon Houlden, Scott N. Romaniuk, Nong Hong, *Security, Strategy, and Military Dynamics on the South China Sea* (Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2021).

The SCS has seen many naval operations in the past, such as the China-Vietnam clashes at the Paracel Islands in 1974 and 1988, but following the ratification of UNCLOS in November 1997 such confrontations between naval forces, typically involving China and other parties, have gradually declined. Once UNCLOS was codified, it was hoped that law enforcement in the SCS would rely upon a rules-based order applicable to all the surrounding countries.

Unfortunately, China's determination to restore its historical regional hegemony has prevented this from happening. Even after the 2016 ruling that China's "nine-dash line," which was not documented before the 1940s, has no legal significance, China has continued to use its overwhelming maritime forces to mistreat its neighbors. China's main adversary is, of course the US, the current hegemon which China is attempting to displace.

Resolving the intractable maritime issues persisting in the SCS will require a major rethinking of how law enforcement entities and naval forces cooperate and combine. It is hard to see this happening, unless China commits to effective and legitimate international maritime dispute settlement mechanisms.

V. SOME POLICY AND OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

As an absolute minimum, China should engage in good faith with existing bilateral and multilateral risk-reduction mechanisms such as the Code of Conduct (COC) between China and ASEAN, the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) among Western Pacific naval powers, and the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) between China and the US.¹⁹ These agreements are good practical tools for preventing physical conflicts in the SCS, where the boundary between domestic laws and international law is sometimes ambiguous, and the distinction between law enforcement and naval operations is often blurred. China's grey-zone activities are creeping closer to hybrid warfare, and the US-led FONOPs are not a constructive solution. UNCLOS has proved insufficient to preserve security in the SCS, and all parties should support any and all other instruments with potential to stabilize the situation.

Also, China should cease its current practice of unilaterally imposing its domestic laws on all parties and situations in the SCS, as if it were an internal

19. See C.J. Jenner and Tran Truong Thuy, *The South China Sea: A Crucible of Regional Cooperation or Conflict-making Sovereignty claims?* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Chinese sea without any international involvement.²⁰ On the contrary, UNCLOS is the primary legal regime applicable to the SCS, and China should acknowledge this fact. Whatever may have been true in the past, China's ongoing attempts to change the 20th-century status quo through main force clearly demonstrate that China is an irresponsible actor which cannot be trusted to cooperate in partnership with other nations in upholding international law.

China's coercive and tyrannical approach to the complicated maritime terrestrial disputes with its much weaker neighbors is shameful and unnecessary. China should move away from its current "might is right" philosophy and start to treat its neighbors with the respect they deserve.

If China wants to be seen as an honest and trustworthy member of the international community, the best way to prove this is by fully accepting the primacy, in the SCS, of UNCLOS over its own domestic laws. UNCLOS provides the fundamental paradigm for resolving the SCS disputes, and China should negotiate within this framework to reach mutually agreed solutions with its neighbors, treating them as partners on an equal footing, rather than as nuisances to be disciplined.

Moreover, China should abandon its practice of deliberately blurring the distinction between the military operations of its naval forces and the constabulary role of its maritime militia and its coast guard forces. This is a cynical strategy to allow the use of overwhelming force in the SCS disputes without obviously crossing a line into actual warfare.

The vast expansion of the CCG, supposedly to enforce Chinese domestic laws and regulations is, in practice, a means to conduct physical operations blocking or harassing the vessels of other parties. China already has the most powerful navy and coast guard in the region, and is essentially turning the CCG into an alternate navy, but with plausible deniability. Taken as a whole, the quantity and the quality of Chinese maritime resources represents a serious threat to all stakeholders in the SCS.

China has made extensive use of the coast guard instead of formal naval forces, deploying the CCG especially in sensitive areas off the Spratly and Paracel Islands, and near Scarborough shoal, Mischief Reef, and Second Thomas Shoal. China should refrain from using its maritime law enforcement forces to stir up

20. Chris Buckley and Camille Elenia, 'China deploys fleet to block Philippine protest flotilla,' *The New York Times International Edition*, May 19, 2024, p. 4.

trouble in the SCS.²¹ Until mutual agreement has been reached, under UNCLOS, on appropriate maritime governance mechanisms, China's so-called constabulary forces are acting as aggressively militaristic bullies. China's true interests would be far better served by cooperating with its neighbors in managing bilateral and multilateral agreements designed to maintain maritime good order and stability.

China's current strategy in dealing with the SCS disputes is certainly not making it any friends in the region: at best, China is seen as a trouble-maker to be appeased; at worst, as an implacable enemy. Its powerful coast guard capabilities do not provide any real benefits to China, and this approach is not helpful in reaching peaceful and long-lasting solutions for the problems of the SCS. The risk of unintended military escalation is increasing, year by year, and China would be best advised to scale back the size of its coast guard forces and to reconsider its expansionary use of its naval forces in the SCS.

Furthermore, China should get serious about agreeing the COC.²² China's current attitude on the negotiations is utterly disingenuous, and its high-flown aspirational rhetoric is nothing but a delaying tactic. This is blatantly obvious to all parties involved, both to China's neighbors and to the international stakeholders with an interest in preserving stability and free navigation in the SCS. This kind of non-binding multilateral mechanism is exactly what is needed to deal with unintended contingencies and other crises in the SCS. To implement the COC effectively, it will require some appropriate identification system, such as Automatic Identification System (AIS), and all vessels should be so equipped, and operating the system 24/7 without any limitations.

As to CUES, when it was first agreed, some commentators hailed it as a major contribution towards peace and stability in the SCS, though China was insistent that no hint of legal force could be imputed to CUES. While it is true that some physical encounters between US and Chinese naval forces have been successfully avoided by means of CUES communication channels, the voluntary nature of CUES and its limitation to purely military naval forces have limited its usefulness. China has sidestepped the application of CUES by using the CCG and its maritime militia in quasi-military roles and operations. CUES was intended only as an interim mechanism to avoid unintended conflict in vessel-to-vessel and aircraft-to-aircraft

21. Camille Elenia, "On a Philippine Boat, Pummeled by China," *The New York Times International Edition*, December 16-17, 2023, p. 3.

22. See Emeritus professor Carlyle A. Thayer, *Diplomatic Challenges in the South China Sea*, A paper of PPT of presentation to Contemporary Challenges in Diplomacy Coral Bell School of Asia-Pacific Affairs ANU College of Asia-Pacific. The Australian National University Canberra, May 16, 2023.

encounters, until a more comprehensive diplomatic agreement could be reached. A broader protocol for dealing with such incidents is in all parties' interests, China included.

Lastly, the US has relied upon FONOPs to assert its legal standing in the SCS but also to demonstrate its military commitment to the region. These are independent aspects of US policy, however, and the use of a single tool to achieve both ends is unfortunate and unsophisticated. The US is a major stakeholder in the region, but its legal position is merely as a third party. If the US were to accede to UNCLOS, however, it would be better placed to maintain peace and good order in the Indo-Pacific. For example, it would be easier to build an alliance within UNCLOS to resist and reject China's attempt to use a new baseline derived from its artificial islands for its territorial and jurisdictional claims. These claims rely upon UNCLOS definitions and conventions, despite the fact that the artificial islands are merely shoals or reefs under UNCLOS, and so do not qualify. The US military presence in the SCS, and in the wider Indo-Pacific, is a distinct issue, which should not be entangled with such legal matters.

VI. CONCLUSION

The South China Sea has become a major theater for geopolitical machinations, but peace and good order in the SCS can only be secured by legal means. UNCLOS provides a good basis, but there are gaps in its application to the SCS which all parties of good intent should work together to fill. Failure to cooperate may well result in a major conflict, but it is not too late for negotiation. Most importantly, a way needs to be found to integrate the law enforcement activities of the coast guard with the naval operations essential for national defense, so that force is always and only used in a measured and appropriate fashion. This will be challenging, but only through closer cooperation can the security and stability of the SCS be preserved, and only by supporting the international maritime legal regime can conflict be avoided.

Why what happened to Israel could be a tactical and strategic lesson for defending Taiwan

*Emanuele Rossi*¹

In the immediate aftermath of Iran’s missile attack on Israel, Taiwan’s diplomatic mission in Israel swiftly issued a strong condemnation. “Over 100 missiles fired by Iran gravely undermine regional and global stability. We join peace-loving democracies worldwide in condemning this move and urge all parties to exercise restraint and seek solutions through diplomacy,” the statement read. Taiwan’s reaction could go beyond mere diplomacy—it might reflect deeper strategic concerns as it faces an existential threat from China. By aligning with Israel, Taiwan might reinforce its place among democracies confronting authoritarian regimes and potentially use this conflict as an opportunity to draw lessons for its defense.

Taiwan’s support for Israel might not only be a matter of diplomatic solidarity; it could also represent a calculated strategic move. The Israel-Iran conflict could offer valuable learning opportunities for Taiwan, particularly in preparing for a potential military threat from China. One year after the beginning of the war in the Middle East, Taiwan’s Ministry of Defense’s primary goal should be identifying weaknesses in Israeli defenses that Taiwan might mitigate within its systems. Taiwan may be especially interested in how Israel addresses missile saturation and asymmetric threats—challenges Taiwan could face from China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA), which possesses one of the world’s largest missile arsenals.

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TACTICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL LESSONS FROM GAZA

Days after Hamas's attack on Israeli on October 7th last year, Taiwan's Ministry of Defense appointed a task force to study the conflict. One instant takeaway, noted Taiwan's then-defense minister Chiu Kuo-cheng, was the need to improve intelligence to avoid surprise attacks. Others within the ministry emphasized the risk that air defenses, such as Taiwan's, could be overwhelmed by "saturation" missile/drone attacks—similar to the situation faced by Israel from Hezbollah (or Iran). In response, Taiwan should urge its partners, particularly the United States, to enhance intelligence sharing regarding Chinese military movements. Strengthening early warning systems and air defense capabilities should become a top priority to counter potential missile threats from the PLA.

Beyond military tactics, Taiwan could study the psychological impact of the Hamas attack on Israeli society. Taiwanese strategists should focus on how Israel has maintained national unity and resilience amid widespread fear and civilian casualties. Taiwan, facing the possibility of an even more structured and powerful assault from China, will need to maintain social cohesion and prevent panic during a military conflict.

ASYMMETRIC WARFARE AND ISRAEL'S DEFENSE STRATEGIES

Hamas's coordinated use of rockets, drones, and paraglider-equipped militants should catch Taiwan's attention as a prime example of modern asymmetric warfare. Taiwan should carefully study how Israel's Iron Dome and other defense systems have responded to these diverse threats, as China might eventually employ similar tactics in a future conflict. Like Israel, Taiwan may need to prepare for multi-domain attacks—air, sea/amphibious, and cyber—and should focus on enhancing its defense infrastructure to counter threats across these domains.

Taiwan can also learn from the role that social media and psychological warfare played in the Hamas assault from Gaza. The rapid spread of images and videos of attacks on Israeli civilians amplified the impact of the chaos, contributing to a broader psychological shock. Taiwan should recognize that, in the event of a Chinese invasion, managing the information environment and maintaining national morale might be as crucial as a military strategy to ensure adequate defense.

MILITARY REFORM AND LESSONS FROM ISRAEL

Taiwan can not only draw immediate tactical lessons from Israel but could also consider broader military reforms. In "The Boiling Moat," a collection of essays edited

by Matt Pottinger, former U.S. National Security Council official, experts suggest that Taiwan should adopt lessons from Israel’s conscription system, even proposing the recruitment of Israeli advisors to instill a “warrior ethos.” While Taiwan has recently extended compulsory military service from four months to a year, it still falls short of Israel’s three-year conscription, which also includes women. Israel’s reserve units are frontline-ready, whereas Taiwan’s reserves are primarily tasked with home defense.

Moreover, despite nearly doubling its military budget since 2016, Taiwan’s defense spending remains at 2.6% of GDP—roughly half of Israel’s pre-Gaza war expenditures. On August 22, the Executive Yuan of the Republic of China approved a budget increase, setting Taiwan’s defense spending for 2025 at approximately 2.45% of GDP, a 7.7% rise over the previous year, reaching NT\$647 billion—a record amount. While Taiwan’s defense budget is growing, the ability to achieve higher targets, such as 3% or even 5%, remains uncertain and subject to factors like the potential easing of cross-strait relations.

Moreover, an increase in the defense budget does not automatically translate into immediate enhancements in defense capabilities. The journey from policy formulation to budget allocation, acquiring personnel and equipment, and ultimately achieving combat readiness usually spans five to ten years.

Notably, a substantial portion of Taiwan’s defense budget is dedicated to procuring weapons and equipment from the United States, which restricts Taiwan’s access to its most advanced systems. Furthermore, significant delays in delivering critical U.S. weapon systems frequently hamper Taiwan’s defense readiness. This is a crucial reason Taiwan maintains a measured approach to further increasing its defense budget. Ultimately, the balance of Taiwan’s defense capabilities will significantly depend on the initiatives and strategic vision that the new U.S. administration adopts in its approach toward Washington-Taipei relations.

These factors contribute to Taiwan’s cautious approach toward further budget increases, highlighting the need for strategic planning in resource allocation and long-term preparedness.

THE BROADER GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Taiwan’s support for Israel could also reflect a broader geopolitical alignment. As China strengthens its partnerships with revisionist regimes like Iran and Russia or North Korea (the so-called “axis of upheaval”), Taiwan can position itself within the global “axis of democracies.” This alignment could be more than symbolic—Taiwan can actively bolster ties with like-minded nations such as the United States, Japan,

and South Korea, which have similarly condemned the attacks on Israel, have a strong position against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, are alarmed by Pyongyang's assertivity and see China as a systemic rival. By condemning Iran's actions, Taiwan can signal its place in the global ideological/governance model, aligning itself with democratic partners against authoritarian threats.

LOOKING AHEAD: TAIWAN'S EXISTENTIAL CONCERNS

While tactical lessons from Gaza are invaluable, Taiwan's overarching concern remains its ability to preserve sovereignty in the face of Chinese aggression. Like Israel, Taiwan can appreciate the vital importance of like-minded nation support yet might also recognize the need to hold the line until such assistance materializes. In light of these considerations, Taiwan would benefit from strengthening its direct defense capabilities and fostering enhanced military technology cooperation and operational experience exchanges with Israel.

Taiwan could prepare a proactive strategy encompassing both the diplomatic and economic realms. Just as an ECFR's report on "Lessons from Ukraine-related sanctions for a Taiwan conflict scenario" suggests that Europe must be ready for "apparently unthinkable measures" in confronting Russian aggression, Taiwan might envision unconventional yet impactful steps to bolster its resilience.

Taiwan should definitely build a defense posture that includes collaboration with like-minded partners and prepares for swift, creative actions that secure both public and private support in times of crisis. By integrating lessons from conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, and from the other fronts around Israel, Taiwan can proactively shape a robust defense strategy that is as adaptive as it is resilient.

Strengthening its military and psychological defenses may not just be a priority but an existential necessity. Specifically, as the global democratic community watches the evolving conflict in Gaza, Taiwan might draw lessons and reaffirm its commitment to resisting authoritarianism, regardless of the odds.

SUBMISSION

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