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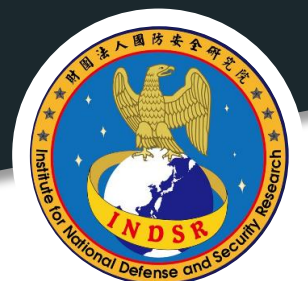
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# SINGAPORE AND BIDEN’S INDO-PACIFIC POLICY

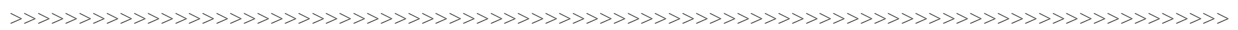
By Bilveer Singh

## INTRODUCTION

By definition, the room for maneuver for small states in international relations is immensely constrained. This is especially for Singapore, with a total land area of slightly more than 700 square kilometers and hemmed in between Malaysia to the north and Indonesia to the south, and lying at the southern end of the strategically important Straits of Malacca. Mainly due to these geo-political and geo-strategic constraints, worsened by its near-total dependence on international trade and resources, and being essentially a Chinese state in a ‘Malay Sea’, Singapore has historically been extremely sensitive to postures and policies of the great powers, both in the Cold War and post-Cold War eras.<sup>1</sup> This was also evident from Singapore’s response to Donald Trump’s Indo-Pacific policy that was enunciated in November 2017 and since then, to Joe Biden’s Indo-Pacific policy.

## SINGAPORE AND TRUMP’S INDO PACIFIC POLICY

Singapore’s response to Trump’s Indo-Pacific policy was essentially determined by the fact that the republic had close ties with both the United States and China, and did not want to be placed in a position to choose sides to support or oppose one or the other. More fundamentally, since its inception as a sovereign state in August 1965, the



<sup>1</sup> See Lee Kuan Yew, “Basis of Singapore’s Foreign Policy”, *The Mirror (Singapore)*, 14+ August 1965; Lee Hsien Loong, “Security Options for Small States”, *The Straits Times (Singapore)*, 6 November 1984; Obaid Ul Haq, “Foreign Policy”, Jon S.T. Quah, Chan Heng Chee and Seah Chee Meow (eds.), *Government and Politics of Singapore*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 280-285; G.G. Thompson, “Formative Factors in Shaping Singapore’s Foreign Policy”, in *Singapore’s International Relations, Radio Talks, Series 7*, (Singapore: Lembaga Gerakan Pelajaran Dewasa, 1966), p.80; Rahim Ishak, “Foreign Policy Based on Sound Premises”, *The Mirror*, 23 December 1968; S Dhanabalan, “Foreign Policy: Opportunities in the Margin of Possibilities”, in *Issues Facing Singapore in the Eighties*, (Singapore: Information Division, Ministry of Culture, 1982), pp.1-28; Bilveer Singh, *Singapore: Foreign Policy Imperatives of a Small State*, (Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, 1988; Bilveer Singh, *The vulnerability of small states revisited: a study of Singapore’s post-cold war foreign policy*, (Jogjakarta, Indonesia: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1999).

fundamental *mantra* that has driven Singapore’s foreign policy is the desire to ensure a balance of power in Southeast Asia and to promote the existence of as many great powers in the region. It is essentially to ensure that no single great power or a coalition of great powers dominate the region.

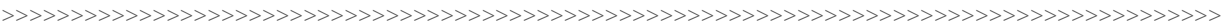
This has been consistently enunciated by various official pronouncements. In May 1975, Singapore’s foreign minister, S. Rajaratnam stated that that “my Government believes that for us small countries, the more the big powers are around in this area [Southeast Asia] the better for us because our options are bigger”.<sup>2</sup> On 28 June 1976, Rajaratnam stated, “we in Singapore accept the fact of great powers and the fact of great powers’ rivalry in Southeast Asia”.<sup>3</sup>

Adopting a ‘balance of power’ foreign policy, namely, trying to balance the interests of great powers in the region, Mr. Rahim Ishak, the Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs stated: “The best way to ensure that no single power or coalition of powers exercise hegemony over Southeast Asia is to have a multiplicity of external great powers involved in the region, balancing each other. With such a state of affairs there are better chances for a power equilibrium to emerge, allowing small states in Southeast Asia greater room for maneuver”.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Rajaratnam reiterated in June 1976 “we accept the existence of great powers and their rivalries as an immutable fact of international life”.<sup>5</sup> Using the metaphor of great powers as ‘suns’, he argued that “when there is a multiplicity of suns, the gravitational pulls of each is not only weakened but also by a judicious use of the pulls and counter-pulls of gravitational forces, the minor planets have greater freedom of navigation”.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, the *raison d’etre* of Singapore’s foreign policy is to ensure, as many great powers are present in Southeast Asia and to resist any policy by any great power to gain dominance in the region. Equally pertinent, Singapore has resisted attempts by great powers to compel Singapore to take sides on issues, whether they are in the Southeast Asian region or beyond.

Prior to the onset of the Biden administration, in his annual National Day Rally, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong stated that the republic would resolutely adhere to its policy of maintaining good ties with both the US and China, especially since both powers were in conflict over an array of issues. The situation was particularly critical for Singapore, as over and above its close all-round ties with both great powers,



<sup>2</sup> *The Straits Times (Singapore)*, 14 May 1975.  
<sup>3</sup> *The Mirror (Singapore)*, Vol. 12, No. 28, 12 July 1976, p.1.  
<sup>4</sup> *The Mirror*, Vol. 9, No. 17, 23 April 1973, p.1.  
<sup>5</sup> Cited in Lee Khoon Choy, “Foreign Policy”, in C.V. Devan Nair, (ed.), *Socialism that Works...The Singapore Way*, (Singapore: Federal Publishers, 1976), p.110.  
<sup>6</sup> Cited in Lee Khoon Choy, “Foreign Policy”, p. 110.





negotiations, on what basis are you going to settle the outcome? Might is right? We want a rules-based multilateral system".<sup>10</sup>

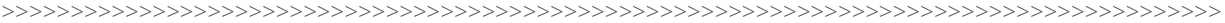
This was in part a reference to Trump’s preference for bilateral deals, especially in trade over multilateral ones. Hence, while Singapore had close and deep political, economic, security and social-cultural ties with both the US and China, when it came to Trump’s Indo-Pacific policy, it preferred to walk a tight rope of working closely with both great powers in the name of championing Singapore’s interests that valued close ties with both extraneous powers.<sup>11</sup>

**SINGAPORE AND BIDEN’S INDO-PACIFIC POLICY**

With Biden’s accession to the White House in January 2021, many of Trump’s policies were reversed but one area where this did not take place was with regard to the Indo-Pacific policy. Interestingly, during his presidential campaign and even Democratic Party platform, the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ was missing and Biden preferred to use the older term, ‘Asia-Pacific’. Since January 2021, this has changed with Biden adopting a robust Indo-Pacific policy.

The question then is - since Singapore’s discomfort with Trump’s Indo-Pacific was clearly enunciated based on the view that it was seen as being driven by Washington’s anti-China policy, partly aimed at undermining the BRI, the need to organize the Asia-Pacific region in a new anti-China united front and where the US intended to place its political, economic, strategic, military and even ideological imprimatur in the region, and expected other states to follow suit - what has changed under Biden that Singapore would look anew at the Indo-Pacific policy of the new American administration.

May be one area where Singapore may be concessionary towards Biden would be the more conciliatory tone of Biden towards the Asian region even though America-first policies were now to be achieved through cooperation with friends and allies. While Biden continues to give premium to the Indo-Pacific region, he has stressed that his approach is somewhat different from Trump. He believes in ‘competitive co-existence’ with its rivals, including China and Russia. This was clearly laid out in the *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* released in March 2021. For Biden, the Indo-Pacific remains the ‘front and center’ of US’s diplomacy. This was evident in Biden’s first major multilateral summit with Quad, with the leaders of India, Japan and South Korea. The US’s Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State made their first foreign visits to India, Japan and South Korea even though there was also a frosty meeting with Chinese leaders in Alaska in March 2021. Following the 1 February 2021 coup in Myanmar,



<sup>10</sup> Charrisa Yong, “Singapore will not join Indo-Pacific bloc for now: Vivian”, *The Straits Times*, 15 May 2018.  
<sup>11</sup> Masayuki Yuda, “ASEAN seeks to steer middle path between US and China”, *Nikkei Asia*, 23 June 2019; William Choong, “How Long Can Singapore Walk the Tightrope between the U.S. and China?”, *The Strategist (Australian Strategic Policy Institute)*, 24 January 2020.







economic and even security ties with the US and China, Singapore is unlikely to join the US in condemning China or supporting China in opposing the US in the region as Singapore's strategy is to ensure that both powers should remain embedded in the region. How long Singapore's policy can be sustained remains to be seen but judging from its past postures, this is likely to be the course of Singapore's response to Biden's Indo-Pacific policy.

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The views expressed are strictly personal and not of any institution, the author may be affiliated with.

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# **THE FUTURE IS SMALL AND FAST: ASSESSING TAIWAN'S 2021 QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW AND U.S. DEFENSE POSTURE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC**

*By Thomas J. Shattuck*

Every four years, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) is required by law to conduct a defense review to provide overarching guidance for the Republic of China's Armed Forces and to set priorities for acquisition, research & development, and force posturing. In 2021, the Tsai Ing-wen administration released its second Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). Given the current state of U.S.-China relations, increasing bipartisan support for Taiwan in Washington and the growing assertiveness of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) against Taiwan since President Tsai took office in 2016, the 2021 QDR is perhaps the most important Taiwanese defense document produced since the end of the Cold War. In the first few months of 2021, U.S. President Joseph Biden and administration officials expressed strong support for Taiwan, concern for Chinese aggression, and willingness to increase partnership with regional allies over security issues in the Taiwan Strait. Certainly, the chances of greater and consistent U.S.-Taiwan defense cooperation have not been higher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, words must be backed up by actions, and doctrinal planning comes before action. Militarily, the most important way for two countries to work more closely is for some alignment in defense posture and hardware compatibility. If one country has completely different defense priorities and is planning for a different sort of conflict than another country, then cross-defense collaboration and integration would be more difficult to achieve. Such priorities are expressed in key defense-planning documents, such as the QDR for Taiwan. The United States has a plethora of defense-planning documents across the armed services and even within geographic regions. Regardless of the number of documents, the U.S. Department of Defense is planning for a contingency against a near-peer or peer-level adversary, specifically against the Russian Federation or People's Republic of China. The U.S. armed forces are changing their emphasis from countering violence extremism in the Middle East to countering revisionist powers and their tailored anti-access capabilities that seek to deny U.S. power projection forces.

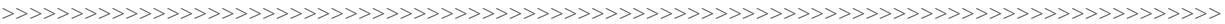
Given the threat that Taiwan faces against China—principally preparing to repel

and stop an attempted invasion—the doctrinal changes announced by the U.S. Army and Marines in 2020 and 2021 are useful to compare against the QDR. The type of defense that Taiwan is preparing for matches the existing remit and portfolios of the U.S. Army and Marines: stopping an amphibious assault and potentially a land war. In the event of a PLA invasion of Taiwan and American involvement in the defense of Taiwan, the U.S. Army and Marines would play a key role in such a conflict.

This article seeks to analyze the procurement and posture priorities of the 2021 QDR, *Marines’ Force Design 2030*, and *Army Multi-Domain Transformation*<sup>1</sup> and what their changes mean for a contingency against China. All three documents emphasize the need for larger numbers of small, fast, and cheap weapons and hardware.<sup>2</sup> They accept Chinese military strength and are seeking to adapt to the circumstances, which means an emphasis on agility and the use of missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). Gone are the days of large contingents since they’d make for easy targets as the Chinese military works to ensure the success of its anti-access aerial denial strategy. Is Taiwan—and are the U.S. Army and Marines—preparing for the same type of war that many predict is inevitable?

**ACHIEVING A VIABLE DEFENSE IN TAIWAN**

Similar to the 2017 QDR, the theme of the 2021 QDR is to achieve “resolute defense and multi-domain deterrence.” Achieving this goal requires Taiwan’s armed forces to “resist the enemy on the opposite shore, attack it at sea, destroy it in the littoral area, and annihilate it on the beachhead.”<sup>3</sup> The document also emphasizes the strength of having the Taiwan Strait as a natural barrier to help in Taiwan’s defense. PLA naval forces are forced to make a perilous journey across the Strait before landing on Taiwan proper. Multi-domain deterrence is achieved through attacking PLA forces in assembly areas on Chinese territory in order to slow the invading forces. As the



<sup>1</sup> See, *Quadrennial Defense Review, Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of China, March 2021*, <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>; James C. McConville, *Army Multi-Domain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict*, Department of the Army, March 16, 2021, <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2021/03/23/eeac3d01/20210319-csa-paper-1-signed-print-version.pdf>; and David H. Berger, *Force Design 2030*, Department of the Navy, March 2020, <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/CMC38%20Force%20Design%202030%20Report%20Phase%20I%20and%20II.pdf?ver=2020-03-26-121328-460>.

<sup>2</sup> T.X. Hammes discussed the implications of shifting to this type of hardware change in 2014, T.X. Hammes, “The Future of Warfare: Small, Many, Smart Vs. Few & Exquisite?,” *War on the Rocks*, July 16, 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/the-future-of-warfare-small-many-smart-vs-few-exquisite/>. See, also, his other writings on the topic, “Technologies Converge and Power Diffuses: The Evolution of Small, Smart, and Cheap Weapons,” *Cato Institute*, January 27, 2016, <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/technologies-converge-power-diffuses-evolution-small-smart-cheap-weapons>; “Cheap Technology Will Challenge U.S. Tactical Dominance,” *Joint Force Quarterly* vol. 81, (March 29, 2016), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/702039/cheap-technology-will-challenge-us-tactical-dominance/>; and “In an Era of Cheap Drones, US Can’t Afford Exquisite Weapons,” *Defense One*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/01/cheap-drones-exquisite-weapons/125216/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Quadrennial Defense Review, MND, p. 19.*





“large-scale amphibious operation”<sup>14</sup> due to a shortage of certain equipment as well as the complexity of an invasion. Even if the PLA improves its amphibious operations capabilities, Taiwan’s armed forces can still create doubt by fully embracing its asymmetric capabilities—hardware that is small, mobile, cheap, and numerous—to ensure a full-scale invasion is too costly to initiate.

**MODERNIZING THE U.S. MARINES AND ARMY**

Taiwan’s 2021 QDR has emphasized continuing to develop the country’s asymmetric capabilities to achieve “resolute defense and multi-domain deterrence,” and changes announced by the U.S. Army and Marines appear to envision a similar conflict. The multi-domain operations for which the U.S. armed services are preparing will determine the types of weapons and hardware that they acquire, and they emphasize countering a near-peer or peer-level adversary between 2025 and 2050.<sup>15</sup> This type of warfare shifts from the past 20 years’ focus on countering extremism in the Middle East. *Army Multi-Domain Transformation* seeks to modernize Army doctrine by preparing it to “maneuver and prevail from competition through conflict with a calibrated force posture of multi-domain capabilities that provide overmatch through speed and range at the point of need.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the U.S. Marines are changing its force posture to “possess littoral capabilities to include high-speed, long-range, low-signature craft capable of maneuvering Marines for a variety of missions.”<sup>17</sup> These two high-level directives in the Army and Marines documents could be easily mistaken for having come from Taiwan’s 2021 QDR. They all emphasize the same capabilities of having a long attack range and mobility.

Reading the Army’s future plans, it is quite clear that the branch is planning to fight a similar war as Taiwan. Like Taiwan’s plan to fight Chinese forces from Chinese territory through the sea and coast to Taiwanese beaches, the U.S. Army “will sustain, enable, extend, and expand the reach of both defensive and offensive actions.”<sup>18</sup> And much of the envisioned future battlefield almost sounds like how a conflict over Taiwan would be. The Army seeks to prevent an enemy from achieving a fait accompli, and specifically in the Indo-Pacific region with “light multi-domain forces, capable of engaging in all domains . . . [that] will be prepositioned in parts of the first island chain and act as the linchpin of effective joint and combined defenses. Joint and combined



<sup>14</sup> *United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2020 Annual Report, December 2020, p. 464-5, <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>.*  
<sup>15</sup> Andrew Feickert, “Defense Primer: Army Multi-Domain Operations (MDO),” *Congressional Research Service, December 8, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF11409.pdf>.*  
<sup>16</sup> McConville, *Army Multi-Domain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict*, p. 1.  
<sup>17</sup> Berger, *Force Design 2030*, p. 4.  
<sup>18</sup> McConville, *Army Multi-Domain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict*, p. 6.



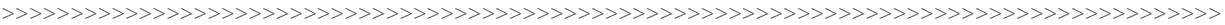


beaches and ports fell to PLA forces—would require the Marines to “fight at sea, from the sea, and from the land to the sea.”

As a result, the Marines—in order to achieve agility—are eliminating or reducing slower and more robust systems, such as tanks and cannon artillery batteries in favor of more mobile rocket artillery and UAVs. Tanks artillery batteries have higher signatures and could easily be targeted by PLA UAVs. As the Marines continue to study the effects of the proposed changes, one of its guiding principles will be to “focus on capabilities that create a competitive, asymmetric advantage in maritime gray zone operations globally.”<sup>24</sup> When it comes to preparing for gray zones operations in Asia, the U.S. Marines have much to learn from the Taiwanese, who are at the forefront of confronting Chinese gray zone tactics in the military, society, and government. While *Force Design 2030* is part of an ongoing reform of the Marines, the basic tenets and changes expressed throughout the document show that Commandant Berger envisions fighting a similar war as Chief of Staff McConville. Both the U.S. Army and Marines are responding to the same strategic direction called for the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS).<sup>25</sup> As the NDS names China a “strategic competitor” that “will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future,”<sup>26</sup> McConville and Berger are consistent when they both name China as a threat to global security and as an adversary that can and will challenge U.S. power around the globe. However, what goes unsaid is where a potential conflict with China would actually occur. The most likely places are the South China Sea or Taiwan, which are both well within China’s range of attack.

**READY FOR A CONFLICT WITH CHINA?**

Reviewing the key defense-planning documents of Taiwan and the U.S. Army and Marines is instructive because they all show how different countries and armed services view the future of warfare. Taiwan continues to prepare to deter a Chinese invasion or incur costs to a military escalation. The U.S. Army and Marines are both planning for a future conflict with a near-peer adversary, most likely in the Indo-Pacific. What all three documents agree on is that the future of warfare will require mobile, small, and long-range capabilities to enhance asymmetric advantages. The Marines’ proposed elimination of the tank shows how bulky hardware may not have a future in a fast-paced conflict in the Indo-Pacific. The way in which the Army and Marines discuss the envisioned battlefield points to Taiwan as being a likely theater of war. They are preparing to fight within an adversary’s missile range,



<sup>24</sup> Berger, *Force Design 2030*, p. 12.  
<sup>25</sup> James Mattis, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge,” Department of Defense, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.  
<sup>26</sup> Mattis, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy,” p. 2.

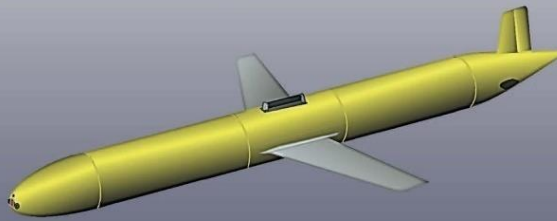








## Chinese 'Sea Wing' (Haiyi) underwater gliders found in Asia



Reported Incidents of Sea Wing gliders found:

- A 16 November 2016. Quang Ngai, Vietnam
- B 12 February 2019. Bangka, Indonesia
- C 23 March 2019. Riau Islands, Indonesia
- D 22 January 2020. Masalembu, Indonesia
- E 20 December 2020. Selayar Islands, Indonesia

1. Malacca Strait, 2. Sunda Strait, 3. Lombok Strait

Red lines are ship tracks of selected Chinese survey ships, 2019–20. Data provided by MarineTraffic.com

H I Sutton, 2021. With analysis by The Intel Lab



### FIGURE 1: China’s Unmanned Underwater Vehicles Found Since 2016

(Source: H I Sutton, "Underwater Drone Incidents Point to China’s Expanding Intelligence Gathering," January 15, 2021, Royal United Services Institute, <https://rusi.org/commentary/underwater-drone-incidents-point-china-expanding-intelligence-gathering>.)

In most cases, scientific research vessels are responsible for the recovery of UUVs. For example, a U.S. UUV was seized by the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) of China when USNS Bowditch oceanographic survey ship was about to retrieve it in the South China Sea.<sup>3</sup> The situation of China is no different. China’s scientific research vessels are used to deploy and recover Haiyi UUVs. Logically, during the deployment phase, we should be able to observe the occurrence of survey vessels before UUVs. That is to say, survey vessels are followed by UUVs in the case of China. During the recovering phase, the sequence is just the opposite. One thing to note is that Haiyi UUVs, equivalent to Slocum G3 gliders, are small in size and could be deployed and recovered by means other than survey vessels.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "China 'seizes US vessel' in S China Sea," BBC, December 16, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-38347221>.

<sup>4</sup> "Slocum G3 Glider Operators Manual," Teledyne Webb Research, December 2017, [http://gliderfs2.coas.oregonstate.edu/glideweb/docs/slocum\\_manuals/Slocum\\_G3\\_Operator\\_Manual\\_20171219.pdf](http://gliderfs2.coas.oregonstate.edu/glideweb/docs/slocum_manuals/Slocum_G3_Operator_Manual_20171219.pdf).









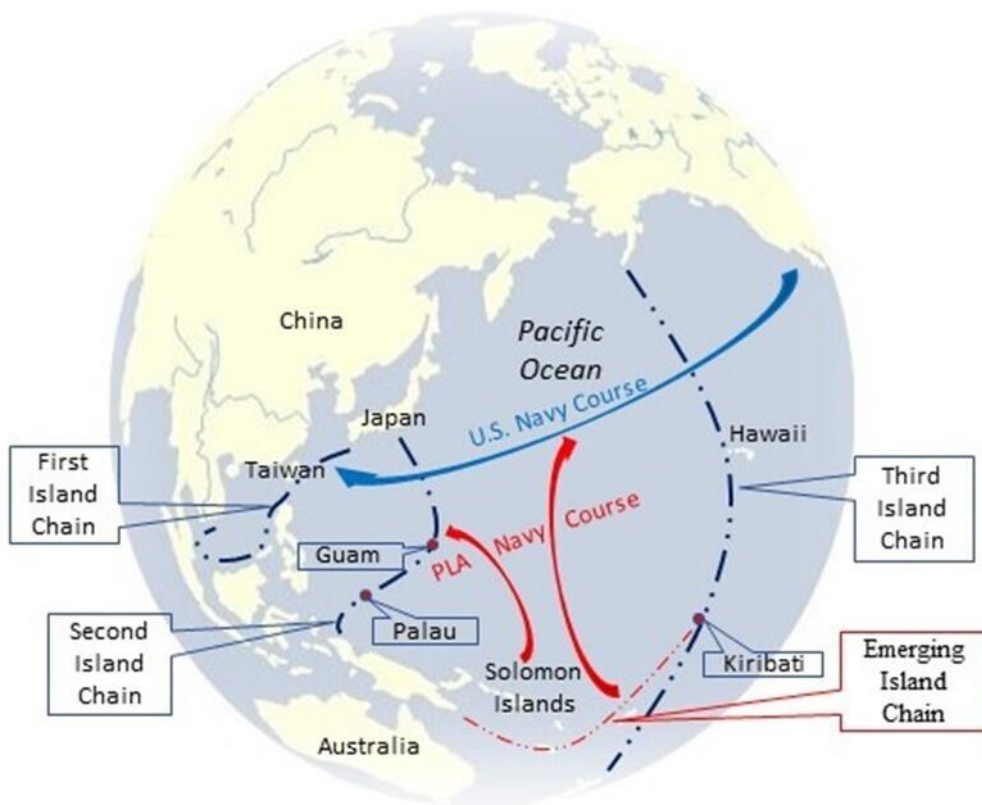
such as the Port of Malau, Port-Vila, the Port of Nuku'alofa, the Port of Neiafu, and the Port of Alofi, which could support PLAN operations in the region. In other words, if the PLAN does not control deep-water ports in the region, regional countries can rest assured that the South Pacific would remain as peaceful as always. As mentioned earlier, China might be using a different way to utilize this island chain that has emerged among the island chains in the South Pacific.

Building upon the emergence of the new island chain, China could make the most out of the Pacific Island states through various means, such as leasing or investing in part of the territories. Commercial use of the ports in Pacific islands states could be the first step, then turn these ports into military use to prepare for a future contingency against the United States. After the PLAN constructs military facilities at the ports of the new island chain, the high seas south of the equator in the Pacific Ocean could likely be under the PLAN's control. Then there comes two implications: 1) Australia will be isolated from the two flashpoints in the Pacific Ocean, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. The emerging island chain could serve the function of keeping Australia out of East Asian affairs by deploying anti-air and anti-ship missile systems on those islands and threatening the regional traffic. Should it happen, not only will Australia lose its strategic importance but also some 1,600 U.S. Marines currently deployed on Manus Island will be refrained from coming to the aid of U.S. allies and partners. 2) The routes for the U.S. Navy vessels are likely to be limited. For maintenance and supply purposes, it is reasonable for the U.S. Navy to utilize the route in the South Pacific. If, however, the route is occupied by the PLAN and becomes hostile, the U.S. Navy will have to abandon using this route. One would argue that the Pacific Ocean is vast and expansive and there should be numerous routes for the U.S. Navy to use. Suppose, however, the flashpoint is in the South China Sea, not being able to use the route close to the emerging island chain could delay the rescue mission dramatically.

## **SOLUTIONS**

Due to the global recognized doctrine of freedom of navigation on the high seas, there is no way to restrict China's scientific research vessels from sailing in the Pacific Ocean. More importantly, UUVs can be deployed through means other than scientific research vessels. Then, is there any solution?

One way to prevent the PLAN from utilizing UUVs in the Pacific Ocean is to keep China from gaining access to Pacific Island states. Since the military perspectives have been inefficient in resolving this issue, diplomatic means that are both time and budget efficient must be better utilized.



**FIGURE 3: Island Chains in the Pacific Ocean**

(Source: Jung-Ming Chang, "Strategic Implications of China's Investment in Papua New Guinea's Daru Port," *Defense Security Bi-weekly*, January 29, 2021, <https://reurl.cc/NXm4bq>)

In October 2020, the U.S. Department of States announced more than \$200 million USD in new funding to the Pacific Islands as part of the Pacific Pledge. Additionally, the U.S. government could coordinate with donor countries, including Taiwan, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, or even France, to allocate and distribute donations more efficiently. Establishing more air traffic routes to connect Pacific Islands is another possible way to win the hearts and minds of Pacific islanders. And It would create a stronger bond between South Pacific countries and other nations at the same.

This is, especially, the case after Palau, Federal States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Kiribati announced on February 4, 2021, in a joint statement to withdraw their membership from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). One of the consequences was that the PIF became porous and vulnerable to China's money diplomacy. The United States alone cannot deal with this situation in the South Pacific. It takes collaboration with like-minded countries, such as Taiwan, to tackle the expansion of China's influence in the Pacific region. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Australia, New Zealand,

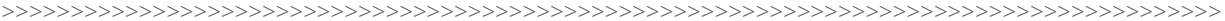


# BIDEN’S TAIWAN POLICY UNDER THE MOUNTING CHINA’S THREAT

By Shao-cheng (Michael) Sun

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, cross-Strait tensions have mounted as China has increased its military aggression on Taiwan. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) said that their exercises aimed to send a warning to Taiwan that they would not give in on its “sovereignty.”<sup>1</sup> On March 10, 2021, Admiral Phil Davidson, the former commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, stated that China’s threat against Taiwan will manifest in the next six years.<sup>2</sup> On April 12, U.S. President Joe Biden sent a delegation to Taiwan led by former Senator Chris Dodd, a close friend of Biden’s. The White House called this visit as a “personal signal” of the Biden’s solid commitment to Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> In response, China dispatched 25 warplanes intruding on Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ). The Taiwan Affairs Office of China commented that the PLA’s response was an “actual combat” exercise aimed to curb “Taiwan-U.S. collusion.”<sup>4</sup> Since the PLA warplanes’ intrusion have become frequent, the Taiwan’s Ministry of Defense said jet pilots would no longer scramble to encounter the PLA aircraft each time and would instead track them with ground-to-air missiles.<sup>5</sup> With the rising cross-Strait tension, The Economist labeled Taiwan as “the most dangerous place on earth.”<sup>6</sup> This paper examines what the Chinese government has done to increase its threat against Taiwan and what the Biden administration’s response has been to deescalate the crisis and ensure Taiwan’s security.



<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, “Taiwan Will Fight ‘to the Very Last Day’ If China Attacks,” *The Diplomat*, April 8, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/taiwan-will-fight-to-the-very-last-day-if-china-attacks/>.  
<sup>2</sup> Chip Gregson, Russell Hsiao, and Stephen Young, “How the Biden Administration Can Support Taiwan,” *The Diplomat*, April 30, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/how-the-biden-administration-can-support-taiwan/>.  
<sup>3</sup> Reuters, “As Biden’s emissaries go to Taiwan, China terms exercises ‘combat drills,’” *Reuters*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-its-taiwan-strait-military-drills-necessary-address-security-2021-04-14/>.  
Yimou Lee and Ben Blanchard, “Taiwan says China bolstering ability to attack, blockade island,” *Reuters*, March 19, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-defence/taiwan-says-china-bolstering-ability-to-attack-blockade-island-idUSKBN2BB16V>.  
<sup>4</sup> Reuters, *ibid*.  
<sup>5</sup> Erin Hale, “Is China really about to invade Taiwan?” *Aljazeera*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/14/is-there-really-a-risk-that-china-will-go-to-war-with-taiwan>.  
<sup>6</sup> Justin Metz, “The most dangerous place on Earth,” *The Economist*, May 1, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/05/01/the-most-dangerous-place-on-earth>.



Fourth, Taiwan’s collusion with the U.S. After President Tsai took office, U.S. and Taiwan relations have improved. For example, the U.S. Congress passed the Taipei Act in 2019, which committed the U.S. government to help Taiwan improve its international standing. President Trump started to dispatch cabinet members to Taiwan. The visits enraged Chinese leaders, who view the U.S. as violating China’s domestic affairs. More importantly, the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan have increased. Since May to October 2020, the U.S. approved five billion dollars in arms sales. China retaliated by sanctioning U.S. companies selling weapons to Taiwan.<sup>12</sup> Chinese media also threatened Taiwan that they would pay a heavy price for it.<sup>13</sup>

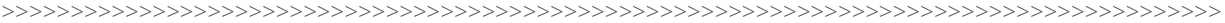
China believed that Taiwan not only pushed for de-Sinicization, but also colluded with the U.S. against China. To prevent this trend, the Beijing regime and their official mouthpiece have threatened the Tsai’s administration that the PLA has prepared to take Taiwan by force.

**2) THE MILITARY THREAT**

China is preparing for military means against Taiwan. Their military threats are listed below.

To begin with, the PLA intrudes Taiwan’s ADIZ. Since September 2020, the PLA’s warplanes have been flying across the median line of the Taiwan Strait and flying around Taiwan almost daily.<sup>14</sup> On April 12, twenty-five PLA aircraft entered Taiwan’s ADIZ, the largest number of warplanes ever recorded.<sup>15</sup> There are several purposes for the PLA’s warplanes intrusion including intimidating Taiwan’s government and people, wearing out Taiwan’s Air Force, testing Taiwan’s military response, and preparing for a future invasion.

In addition, China began taking steps to prevent a U.S. intervention. The PLA is deploying long-range missiles along the Southeast coastal areas of Mainland China. Their pilots are conducting long distance flight training to prevent U.S.’s military intervention in cross-Strait conflict.<sup>16</sup> As further proof, the PLA released a video displaying H-6 bombers making a simulated strike against Anderson Air Force Base in Guam to deter the U.S. intervention.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Crossley and Ben Blanchard, “China threatens retaliation over new U.S. arms sales to Taiwan,” Reuters, October 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-taiwan-arms/china-threatens-retaliation-over-new-u-s-arms-sales-to-taiwan-idUSKBN2770C6>.  
<sup>13</sup> Global Times editorial, “Tsai’s soft rhetoric cannot fool world on ‘one China,’” Global Times, October 11, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1203125.shtml>.  
<sup>14</sup> Yimou Lee, Ben Blanchard, *ibid*.  
<sup>15</sup> Zhang Han and Liu Xuanzun, “1st reported Taiwan arms sales under Biden admin come early, further strain situation,” Global Times, April 20, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1221502.shtml>.  
<sup>16</sup> Yimou Lee, Ben Blanchard, *ibid*.  
<sup>17</sup> Alex Ward, *ibid*.

Finally, the PLA has conducted exercises simulating the invasion Taiwan. On October 10, 2020, Taiwan’s National Day, China staged an island invasion military exercise. The Chinese media disclosed the entire process of a staged military landing in Taiwan.<sup>18</sup> On April 5, 2021, the PLA Navy announced that the Liaoning aircraft carrier was conducting exercises near Taiwan.<sup>19</sup> China claimed that these exercises could improve their ability to prevent Taiwan from seeking independence.

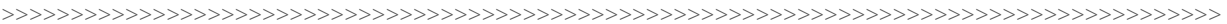
The Chinese government believes that the most effective way to prevent Taiwan from separation of the “motherland” is using military coercion. Therefore, they are using the verbal warnings and military preparations to achieve their political and military goals.

**III. BIDEN’S TAIWAN POLICY**

Amid arm sales and high-level official visits to Taiwan under the Trump’s administration seems to be continuing under President Biden.<sup>20</sup> The Biden team has shown a hardline approach toward China. Biden said China was the U.S.’s most serious competitor. Kathleen Hicks, Deputy Secretary of Defense, commented that the U.S. commitment to Taiwan must be “crystal clear” under the rising China threat.<sup>21</sup> Under Biden, the U.S. will likely provide the following supports.

**1) THE POLITICAL SUPPORT**

The U.S.’s and China’s growing rivalry increases Taiwan’s attraction to the U.S. government to confront China.<sup>22</sup> As containing China becomes the U.S. policy, Taiwan’s geographic location has turned to be more important to the U.S.’s interests. Biden seems to be tough on China while demonstrating commitment to Taiwan. When the PLA’s warplanes approached Taiwan, the State Department urged China to cease its military pressure by affirming that the U.S.’s commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid.<sup>23</sup> On April 16, 2021, Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Suga had a summit on the recent cross-Strait tension. Both leaders “underscore the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.”<sup>24</sup> Maintaining the status quo is the priority for the Biden’s administration. High-ranking U.S. officials also show support for Taiwan. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan called for the U.S. to invest in capabilities that would



<sup>18</sup> Alex Ward, *ibid*.  
<sup>19</sup> Zhang Han and Liu Xuanzun, *ibid*.  
<sup>20</sup> “Tabletop Han Kuang games begin,” *Taipei Times*, April 25, p.3.  
<sup>21</sup> Derek Grossman, “Biden doubles-down on Trump’s Taiwan policy, but will it last?” February 6, 2021, *Nikkei Asia*, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Biden-doubles-down-on-Trump-s-Taiwan-policy-but-will-it-last>.  
<sup>22</sup> John Culver and Ryan Hass, *ibid*.  
<sup>23</sup> Joshua Keating, *ibid*.  
<sup>24</sup> Ralph Jennings, “US-Japan Statement Raises Issue of Taiwan Defense Against China,” *VOA*, April 24, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/us-japan-statement-raises-issue-taiwan-defense-against-china>.











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