Fortnightly Review

By: Russell Hsiao

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Former Top Defense Official Highlights Taiwan’s Role in US Competitive Posture in the Indo-Pacific

The former top defense official in the Trump administration in charge of implementing the defense component of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIPS) recently visited Taiwan. Among a series of public and private engagements—which included a meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen—Randall Schriver was in Taiwan for his first overseas trip after stepping down as assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs in late December 2019. During his visit, Schriver delivered public remarks at Taiwan’s Ministry of Defense-affiliated Institute for National Defense and Security Studies (INDSS). In his talk, Schriver highlighted his views of Taiwan’s role in the United States’ Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIPS), noting specifically that the United States and Taiwan have a “shared vision” for the Indo-Pacific and calling the island-democracy the “linchpin” for security throughout the Indo-Pacific.

After returning to private life, Schriver is now serving as the chairman of the Project 2049 Institute—an Arlington-based think tank focused on Asia policy. In that capacity, Schriver delivered a keynote speech at INDSS, which was approximately 30 minutes in length, and covered a wide range of topics related to Taiwan’s role in the Indo-Pacific region. Perhaps most notably, the former assistant secretary of defense highlighted how the United States and Taiwan have a “shared vision” for the Indo-Pacific region and that this vision provided a strong basis for enhancing the bilateral partnership. Specifically, he addressed how Taiwan fits into the “competitive posture” prescribed by the United States’ National Defense Strategy (NDS) for long-term strategic competition with China.

Schriver began his remarks by laying out the current conditions of cross-Strait relations in 2019, which was set by General Secretary Xi Jinping’s January 2019 speech on Taiwan policy. Schriver explained that Xi basically called on Taipei to adopt “one country,
two systems”—the formula that Beijing has in place in Hong Kong. Schriver observed that Xi wants to solve the “Taiwan problem” on his watch and has not ruled out using force to do so. He noted that this may be an expression of Xi’s confidence—perhaps resulting from Taiwan’s November 2018 local elections—in which the opposition-KMT won an overwhelming number of seats in the local elections.

While 2019 was not a good year for Taiwan-China relations, Schriver asserted that it was a good year for US-Taiwan relations. Specifically, he noted that it was a year of improvement for the US-Taiwan bilateral relationship—some very visible, such as the release of new weapon systems—as well as other less visible forms of cooperation in areas such as cyberspace in the lead up to and through the elections. Bilateral defense dialogues and military exchanges continue to mature and develop; and Schriver highlighted how the Taiwan Travel Act, which was unanimously passed by the US Congress in February 2018, has contributed to a richer partnership between the two countries.

Since President Tsai’s election in 2016, China has adopted a more aggressive posture against Taiwan. Schriver highlighted a number of recent provocative actions taken by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in February 2020, specifically the aerial activities and incursions by Chinese bombers and aircraft. While it was not clear whether those actions reflected confidence or insecurity on the part of the PLA, Schriver believes that it shows that the Chinese leadership has little imagination and he expects to see more of the same from China going forward.

In terms of how Taiwan fits into the “competitive posture” for US-China strategic competition, Schriver underscored the “Three Ps” highlighted in the NDS: (1) preparedness, (2) partner and allies, and (3) promoting a networked region. In terms of preparedness, Schriver highlighted that it depends on the lethality of the joint force—China being the “pacing element.” In relations to Taiwan, Schriver highlighted that Taiwan is a “key element” since “preparedness” depends on the United States having a close intelligence relationship with Taiwan to better understand China.

With regards to partners and allies, Schriver emphasized that the United States is heavily reliant on partners and allies for basing, access, and to bring their own capabilities to increase security in the region. Taiwan is a “focal point” and the country’s ability to protect itself and its sovereignty make it the “linchpin”—a description often used in reference to South Korea—for security throughout the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, Schriver added that, as a partner, Taiwan is key since a strong deterrent and ability to defend itself are part of keeping the Indo-Pacific free and open, and part of keeping the PLA uncertain to affect security through the use of force.

Schriver said that Taiwan can be part of the solution for promoting a networked region. According to Schriver, there ought to be expanding cooperation not just in intelligence exchange, but also real-time intelligence cooperation to make sure that all the partners and allies are on the same common operating picture to effectively respond to the nature of the threats. Indeed, Schriver argued that it is time to go beyond bilateral US-Taiwan relations since to effectively respond to security challenges it is important to also share insights with partners and allies.

Going forward, the former assistant secretary of defense assessed that Chinese pressure on Taiwan will continue to grow and that the US-Taiwan bilateral partnership must be able to move forward as well and not just think in the same space. Schriver prioritized six areas for development in US-Taiwan relations. First, restart the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) between the United States and Taiwan—the last one was held in 2016—with the goal of negotiating a bilateral trade deal. Second, the United States should help Taiwan expand its international space. The current WHO/ICAO debacle over the novel coronavirus originating from Wuhan is a lethal reminder of how Taiwan is being squeezed by the PRC. Moreover, in cases where existing organizations cannot/will not accept Taiwan, the United States and Taiwan should create new organizations and groupings that can help augment Taiwan’s international space. He highlighted the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) as one such important example. Third, in terms of defense, the United States should continue to faithfully implement the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and support Taiwan’s Overall Defense Concept (ODC). The United States and Taiwan should continue to seek out creative ways to enhance training opportunities, which Schriver said is important for deterrence. Schriver notably pointed out that such training not only benefits Taiwan but also the United States by making the forces fully interoperable. Fifth, Schriver recommended strengthening intelligence exchanges between the United States and Taiwan in real time to help facilitate a common operating picture in order to respond more effectively and in a timely manner. Finally, the former top defense official for the Indo-Pacific region stated that the United States should explore how the United States can be
a bridge for Taiwan to other countries and militaries who share the same vision for free and open Indo-Pacific. According to Schriver, Japan should be on the top of the list and, as Schriver noted, the Japanese want to work more closely with Taiwan.

**The main point:** During his visit to Taiwan, former top defense official Randall Schriver delivered remarks at the INDSS, highlighting Taiwan’s role in the United States’ FOIPS and improvements in US-Taiwan bilateral relationship, and pointing out key areas for future development in US-Taiwan relations.

**US-Taiwan Bolstering Efforts to Counter PRC Propaganda and Disinformation**

Heightened awareness within democracies about authoritarian influence and political interference by countries like China, Russia, and Iran are spearheading international efforts to counter these malign activities in new and innovative ways. The means by which authoritarian regimes wield sharp power may be different and evolving, but, in relations to democracies, share at least two common characteristics: they exploit open systems and utilize technology to achieve their objectives. Taipei is on the frontlines of China’s authoritarian influence, and the United States and Taiwan have been working closely together over the past several years to develop new initiatives to combat propaganda and disinformation, especially from the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

A newly launched joint initiative, which follows programs focused on promoting media literacy held under the auspices of the **Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF)**, is indicative of this new line of effort. Held over the course of two days from February 20 to 21, the US-Taiwan Tech Challenge (美台科技挑戰赛) is an international competition that sought technological solutions from the private sector to counter propaganda and disinformation. That the global competition was organized jointly by the US State Department and Taiwan—and held in Taipei—is reflective of an increasingly global partnership and burgeoning ties between two democracies brought together by a shared vision facing similar threats from the rise of revisionist authoritarian powers. As AIT Director Brent Christensen, the top US diplomat in Taiwan, noted at the forum:

“Taiwan is also on the frontline of the disinformation battlefield and faces challenges from a determined opponent. China has invested heav-

ily to develop ever-more sophisticated ways to anonymously disseminate disinformation through a number of channels, including social media. As their malign methods evolve, the motivation remains the same—to weaken Taiwan’s hard-won democracy and freedom.”

With seven finalists from Taiwan, Australia, and Israel vying for grants from the US government to develop innovative technological solutions for combating propaganda and disinformation, the top place **winners** were Trend Micro from Taiwan and Cyabra from Israel.

The winner from Taiwan, **TrendMicro**, is an enterprise data and cyber security firm. The technology that won the award is called “Dr. Message,” which is a free detection tool for identifying disinformation on Line, the leading messaging app in Taiwan. The technology is able to verify content as well as trace its path, and then offer users options to filter out disinformation. The winner from Israel, **Cyabra**, is a cybersecurity and social listening tool focused countering disinformation. It is a platform for social listening and detection of fake news across major social media platforms using AI-based technologies to detect bad actors and identify visual content manipulations via deep fakes.

The event was co-organized by GEC in conjunction with the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), Park Advisors, and Taiwan’s Institute for Information Industry (III). Created by Congress in 2017, the **GEC is charged to** “direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States and its allies and partner nations.” – Section 1287 of FY17 NDAA (as amended by the FY19 NDAA).

According to the deputy director of the State Department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC), **Daniel Kimmage**, who spoke at the competition:

“ Awareness of a common threat brings us together. Malicious actors all over the world are using propaganda to undermine our institutions, norms, democratic processes, free economies, and social cohesion. Our adversaries subvert online environments even as they mount offline efforts—some overt and many covert—to attack democratic values and exploit societal divisions. Taiwan is directly confronted by these threats, as is the United States.”
While previous initiatives between the United States and Taiwan tackling propaganda and disinformation had been primarily and critically focused on government-to-government cooperation at the leadership level, this new line of effort leverages the asset of Taiwan’s robust civic-tech community and strengthens private-public partnerships. As Director Christensen stated:

“all sectors of society—not just government—must work together to find innovative solutions to the pressing problem of disinformation and the manipulation of the truth by malign actors. Civil society – including the tech community, NGOs, academics, and journalists—people like you that are assembled here today—are key players in leading the charge in bringing cutting-edge technology tools to the battlefield against disinformation.”

Indeed, the civic tech community in Taiwan is at the leading edge worldwide for combating propaganda and disinformation—in part because of the massive scale of the challenge it faces. It is worth noting that Taiwan has been ranked by an European study as the place most affected by foreign online disinformation campaigns in the world in the 2019.

To be sure, much ink has been spilled on China’s interference in Taiwan’s elections following the November 2018 local elections. Concerns over Beijing’s plans to interfere in the general elections led to heightened vigilance by the two governments to prepare and respond to the challenge. As highlighted by Taiwan’s digital minister, Audrey Tang, at a recent conference in Washington, DC on China’s political interference in Taiwan, there are several measures that have been particularly effective in countering authoritarian propaganda. These measures include transparency measures with fact-checking initiatives as the most effective, social media platforms banning foreign-sponsored propaganda, and a campaign donation roster.

The main point: The United States and Taiwan are working closely together to develop new initiatives to combat propaganda and disinformation, especially from the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The US-Taiwan Tech Challenge is indicative of this new line of effort.

Impact of Wuhan Coronavirus on Cross-Strait Relations

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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Taiwan scored a small diplomatic breakthrough when it participated in a technical meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO), albeit in an online capacity on February 11 and 12, to discuss the Wuhan coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak that has already killed more than 2,600 people in China and infected over 79,000 people around the world—including 30 infection cases and one death in Taiwan as of February 25. Normally, Beijing possesses and exercises its clout to exert political pressure on international organizations to exclude Taipei. However, the epidemic’s dramatically rising death tolls and skyrocketing infection cases—which have already surpassed the numbers for the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) pandemic in 2002-2003—have created extraordinary circumstances for Taipei to carve out a sliver of international space on the coronavirus issue. Indeed, the Wuhan coronavirus has become an urgent global health issue that is presenting challenges to Beijing’s authoritarian governance and global image and is forging new dimensions in cross-Strait relations and Taiwan’s international space.

Taipei’s Representation in the WHO

The WHO, after some initial hesitation, declared the Wuhan coronavirus a public health emergency on January 30. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus came under intense criticism for effusively praising China’s efforts on the Wuhan coronavirus and not initially declaring the Wuhan coronavirus a global public health emergency. The coronavirus crisis has raised concerns about Chinese influence in the WHO, particularly after Ghebreyesus continually commended Beijing’s response even after reports emerged that local Chinese authorities initially tried to stifle news about the coronavirus. Taiwan was the only party with coronavirus cases excluded from attending the WHO’s emergency briefings.

Taiwan’s exclusion from the WHO became a point of contention in cross-Strait relations—and between the United States and China—after Taipei challenged the accuracy of data on coronavirus cases in Taiwan that Beijing had provided to the global health organization. On February 6, Taiwan accused China of providing the WHO with incorrect information on the number of
coronavirus cases on the island. Taiwan Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said, “We beseech the WHO not to put Taiwan’s information under China, creating mistake after mistake after mistake.” The foreign ministry also sought to communicate that Taiwan is not part of China, after a few countries including Italy, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Mongolia imposed travel bans blocking Taiwanese tourists or suspended flights from Taiwan. The United States stepped into the fray when US ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Bremberg told the WHO to communicate directly with Taipei. “For the rapidly evolving coronavirus, it is a technical imperative that WHO present visible public health data on Taiwan as an affected area and engage directly with Taiwan public health authorities on actions,” Bremberg told the WHO’s Executive Board.

In addition, US politicians including Senators Mitt Romney and Cory Gardner, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe voiced support for Taipei’s participation in the WHO, along with Taiwan’s diplomatic allies Eswatini, Haiti, and Paraguay.

In a Facebook post on February 10, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) thanked additional countries including the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, and Germany for speaking up for Taiwan at a WHO meeting. President Tsai wrote on Facebook, “Taiwan is on the front-line of epidemic prevention. We hope that the WHO does not exclude Taiwan because of political factors.”

Both sides claimed credit for Taipei’s online participation in the WHO meeting on the coronavirus. The Chinese foreign ministry said Beijing gave approval for Taipei’s participation. The Taiwanese government refuted that claim, arguing that it directly communicated with the WHO regarding the meeting without needing Beijing’s permission. “The participation of our experts at this WHO forum was an arrangement made by our government and the WHO directly. It did not need China’s approval,” Taiwan’s foreign ministry spokeswoman Joanne Ou said.

**Xi versus Tsai’s Performance on the Coronavirus**

Although the scale of the coronavirus threat differs, which side of the Taiwan Strait can do a better job at protecting their respective populations from the coronavirus and maintaining social stability? Each government’s response to the Wuhan coronavirus has become a new criterion in assessing the performance of democratic versus authoritarian governance. Tsai wrote on Facebook, “Please rest assured that the government will go all out to continue to protect Taiwan from the threat of the Wuhan coronavirus.” Less than a month after her re-election victory, Tsai has sought to foster national calm on the coronavirus, notably over the domestic supply of face masks, which ignited a public frenzy over stockpiling surgical face masks until the government instituted a rationing system for distributing face masks.

The Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) handling of the Wuhan coronavirus could emerge as a new challenge to the party’s governance and its national image abroad. Unlike the traditional pillars of CCP’s legitimacy such as economic performance and Han Chinese nationalism, the coronavirus is a life-or-death issue that galvanizes the Chinese public and more directly leads to anti-government sentiment and protests. Therefore, Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) is mounting an aggressive public relations campaign to convince the Chinese public and international opinion that his government has—or will eventually have—effective control over the virus. On February 10, a CCTV video showed Xi donning a face mask while inspecting the coronavirus prevention and control work and speaking to medical staff in several locations in Beijing. Chinese state media have sought to paint Beijing’s actions in a positive light by pumping out articles featuring international praise from foreign governments and individuals. What Xi desperately wants, but still lacks, is validation from major Western countries, though Trump’s statements of confidence in China’s ability to handle the crisis are an exception.

A prevalent attitude in the West is that China has botched the handling of the Wuhan coronavirus. Early missteps include Chinese authorities clamping down on initial reports on the coronavirus in December 2019, notably with the silencing of Li Wenliang (李文亮), a doctor at the Central Hospital of Wuhan and an early whistleblower who was reprimanded by local police for sharing information about the mysterious virus and later died after contracting the coronavirus. Also, Chinese authorities failed to provide early warnings to the public or take crucial early measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Furthermore, China’s shifting data collection methods, which led to a dramatic surge in domestic coronavirus cases from 15,152 cases on February 13 to 59,804 cases the next day, threw into question the reliability and accuracy of the Chinese government’s information. The spread of the coronavirus, and subsequent measures by foreign governments to limit travel to and from China, coupled
with existing strands of anti-Chinese sentiment around the world, have dealt a new blow to China’s international image.

**Testing Cross-Strait Ties**

The coronavirus crisis also has tested Taipei and Beijing’s working relationship. Taiwan has mainly depended on the Chinese government to coordinate the repatriation of Taiwanese citizens residing in Wuhan and other parts of Hubei Province. Despite an initial lack of communication between the two sides, a China Eastern airline flight returned 247 of the estimated 500 Taiwanese citizens stranded in Wuhan amid the Chinese lockdown back to the island on February 3. On that day, Tsai affirmed Chinese assistance in returning Taiwanese back to the island and thanked the personnel of both sides for their joint efforts to complete this operation in a post on Facebook. She wrote that although there are different political views across the Taiwan Strait, the current epidemic should take precedence over political considerations. However, after an infected passenger boarded the first return flight to Taiwan, a spat ensued between Taipei and Beijing, and there have not been subsequent return flights to Taiwan for the remaining Taiwanese still trapped in Wuhan.

In a saga that gripped the Taiwanese public, a Taiwanese child with hemophilia in urgent need of medication was trapped in Jingmen, a city in Hubei Province, during the government-imposed lockdown. After the child’s parent appealed to the Straits Exchange Foundation (海峽交流基金會, SEF) for help on January 27, SEF coordinated with the head of an association of Taiwanese businesses in Jingmen and successfully delivered medicine from Taiwan to the stranded child in China. There have been several other cases of Taiwanese citizens with Chinese spouses and their children remaining in sealed-off cities in China. There are nearly 2 million Taiwanese working and living in China who may decide to return to Taiwan due to the coronavirus outbreak. Indeed, many Taiwanese workers in China who recently returned to the island after the outbreak expressed little interest in resuming work in China.

If the coronavirus cases start to reach high infection rates in Shanghai, which has a large population of Taiwanese residents, some of these Taiwanese expatriates in Shanghai may decide to return to Taiwan, where they could receive better health care. Taiwanese expatriates in Shanghai—and elsewhere around China—may chafe under stringent Chinese measures that have put communities in mass confinements and erected barriers to normal social and physical contact, likely to create bouts of social isolation as well as economic and political discontent. According to Shanghai’s municipal bureau of statistics, approximately 44,900 Taiwanese resided in the city in 2010. For a long time, Shanghai has been part of China’s charm or “soft power” for many Taiwanese people, and the mass return of Taiwanese expatriates from Shanghai back to Taiwan amid the coronavirus might diminish China’s lure for the rest of the population.

**The main point:** The Wuhan coronavirus has become an urgent global health issue that is challenging Beijing’s governance and international image, as well as creating new dimensions in cross-Strait relations and Taiwan’s international space.

**Experimental Education and the Preservation of Taiwan’s Indigenous Culture**

By: Ivory Lee

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On February 22, the Foundation for the Research and Development of Indigenous Languages was launched in Taiwan. The purpose of this new foundation is reportedly for “the research and development of teaching methods for indigenous languages, collection of indigenous corpora, compilation of indigenous language dictionaries, and the establishment of indigenous language databases.” This initiative follows the current Taiwanese government’s efforts to restore indigenous rights, heritage, and identity. While the new Foundation represents a much-needed step in the right direction, there is still more to be done to augment Taiwan’s education system to better reflect the diverse cultural and ethnic identities on the island.

In 2016, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) apologized to the indigenous people of Taiwan for the “four centuries of pain and mistreatment [they] have endured,” referring to the military subjugations and policies under different external powers. Aboriginal tribes, people of indigenous Austronesian descent, hunted and farmed the island for thousands of years before the Dutch, the Chinese, and the Japanese. Their cultures have shaped Taiwan’s national identity, while the Taiwan government’s efforts at national reconciliation have become important in bolstering Taiwan’s domestic legitimacy in the face of external threats.
The Presidential Office established the Indigenous Historical and Transitional Justice Commission (總統府原住民族歷史正義與轉型正義委員會). With the five committees of culture, languages, reconciliation, history, and land claims, its aim is to *restore indigenous rights, heritage, and identity*. Though the founding of the Commission is an important step forward in bringing equity to the indigenous peoples, it did not, however, reform the existing education system, which has failed to create a setting for aboriginal students that fully encompasses their diverse ethnic backgrounds. [1]

Yet, the current education system does not facilitate a comprehensive environment for indigenous language learning, let alone indigenous culture preservation. An alternative to the mainstream curriculum is experimental education. *Article 3 of the Enforcement Act for School-based Experimental Education* (學校型態實驗教育實施條例) defines school-based experimental education as “specific education concepts within a school” that are “student-based and respectful of students’ diverse cultures, beliefs, and multiple intelligences; guiding students’ adaptive learning; and promoting diverse education development.” Experimental education has great potential in promoting and preserving the cultures of indigenous peoples, perhaps even to a greater degree than initiatives put into place so far by Taiwan’s government.

The current thinning of indigenous cultures in Taiwan, perhaps unintended through education, is problematic and renders their preservation to be highly important. Preserving indigenous cultures is not only a matter concerning human rights, but also a way to distinguish Taiwan from the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Currently, there are 16 distinct indigenous peoples or tribes that are officially recognized by the Taiwanese government. These 16 groups represent 559,036 people, roughly 2.37 percent of the national population, and have helped shape Taiwan’s identity politics. [2]

**Historical Context**

Throughout Taiwan’s history, the indigenous populations had limited rights and were subject to government pressure to assimilate them into Chinese-speaking society. Indigenous languages were previously unrecognized, whereas government policy emphasized teaching, learning, and speaking Mandarin Chinese and English.

In the educational system, the indigenous people of Taiwan have been neglected. Challenges such as inadequate educational resources from residing in more remote geographical locations, lack of full-time teachers, inadequate facilities, and insufficient funding have resulted in the deprivation of learning opportunities for students. [3] Course contents have mostly been based on mainstream culture and tend to marginalize indigenous perspectives and experiences. The inconsistencies between educational content and social environments create disadvantages for indigenous students. The government’s education curriculum is contextually less relevant for them as compared to their non-indigenous peers. [4] This lack of synergy between the students’ home lives/backgrounds and education results in low levels of academic achievement and motivation.

The *Education Act for Indigenous Peoples* was passed 21 years ago, but large disparities in education levels between indigenous children and their non-indigenous classmates still exist. In 2001, the Ministry of Education revised the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines to add local languages as a required subject. [3] Either the local governments or the schools themselves were required to choose either Southern Min, Hakka, or one of the indigenous languages for a forty-minute period of weekly language learning. While indigenous language learning may have risen, the Ministry of Education also implemented a reform to increase English language competencies. Currently, the Ministry of Education is proposing the *revision of elementary school curriculums* to increase the number of English classes to three per week. There is an increased number of classes solely taught in English in elementary and middle schools. The government’s preference to teach English over indigenous languages is contributing to the erosion of traditional cultures.

**Experimental Education**

Experimental education is not a new concept to Taiwan. In fact, the first school to follow an alternative education system was *founded in 1990*. The creation of an experimental education system specifically for indigenous peoples, however, did not occur until *October 2016*, when the K-12 Education Administration of the Ministry of Education brought together education practitioners, civic groups, experts in education for indigenous peoples, and policymakers to discuss indigenous students’ education affairs. In August 2017, the *Indigenous Curriculum Development Cooperative Center* (原住民族教育及文化研究中心) was officially established. The center is responsible for helping indigenous schools develop curriculums and teaching materials and provide help with teacher training in accordance with the Education Act of Indigenous Peoples. In June 2019, *Articles 20 and 21 of the Education Act of*
Experimental education schemes targeted at indigenous students refer to the “immers[ion] in a learning environment that encourages the preservation of tribal-cultural features and of the local ethnic languages.” In other words, experimental education allows the school and the local education authority to experiment with non-standard curriculum, including those emphasizing indigenous cultures, such as traditional art making, hunting, and food gathering techniques. As of 2018, 16 fully experimental education schools have been dedicated to the indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, several other schools have established experimental education classes tailored for indigenous students.

Student Responses

The path to preserving and promoting indigenous cultures through experimental education is promising. Laiyi Senior High School (屏東縣立來義高級中學) in Pingtung County has indigenous education classes such as indigenous sciences (原民科學) and other classes that have integrated indigenous aspects, though the school itself is not a fully experimental school. In a 2017 interview with Liberty Times, three students explained how their experimental arts classes have helped them connect to their cultures; their goals are to get higher education degrees and return to their tribe to teach. One student, Zhi-lin Liu (劉之林), said that although tribal stories, weaving, and other tribal cultures are not skills and knowledge found in textbooks, they are important assets for Taiwan. These experimental classes have inspired her to connect with and promote her culture. In a 2017 interview with China Times, student Hao-yuan Sun (孫浩元) mentioned that these non-traditional teaching methods have helped him “retrieve his native roots” and that participating in traditional events and practices in a school setting has made him even more appreciative of the resources around him.

At Taiwan’s first experimental education indigenous school, Pu’ma Elementary School in Taichung, students are fully immersed in the Atayal tribal culture, with the Atayal language as the main language of instruction. Student Iwan Bay (陳雨思) said learning about harvesting and preparing traditional foods is “fun and joyous” while student Tahus Wilang (劉格) said learning in nature and outdoors is “exciting.” Non-traditional classes in the afternoon have increased students’ concentration and enthusiasm for learning in the mornings. Many representatives from primary schools have visited to understand how they could implement a similar system to improve students’ motivation in schools.

Successes and the Future

Despite being a new scheme, indigenous experimental education is showing promising results. Already, children have better abilities to express themselves in their indigenous languages than the previous young generations had. The extent to which experimental education can affect culture preservation is unknown, but the way in which local identities and practices are put at the core of curriculum building and learning paves the way for indigenous cultures to become familiar for more and more students.

Taiwanese identity is the outgrowth of the various indigenous cultures of its people in the island. While Taiwan’s indigenous peoples make up only a small portion of the total population, bolstering the indigenous cultures and the people’s understanding of them will help people understand that Taiwan is not just a Chinese-speaking society. In its quest to maintain itself as a distinct entity and distinguish itself from the PRC, experimental education is key in not only preserving the indigenous cultures of Taiwan, but also promoting an inclusive national identity of Taiwan.

The main point: While the Tsai administration has worked to preserve indigenous cultures, the education system still lacks a cohesive learning environment for aboriginal students. Experimental education allows local authorities to build their own curriculums and assists in the promotion of Taiwan’s indigenous cultures, which is important for Taiwan’s efforts to build a cohesive society with strong democratic institutions and strengthen its domestic legitimacy in face of external challenges.


[2] This number, however, does not take into account the ten indigenous groups of the Pingpu (“low plains”) who are still awaiting official recognition, which, according to International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), accounts for 400,000 more people.


Assessing Counterforce Capabilities for Taiwan

By: Michael Mazza

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In the event of an armed conflict across the Taiwan Strait, does Taipei have a role to play in shaping nuclear dynamics amongst the major powers? A key concern for Taiwan’s political and military leaders is whether the United States will come to their aid in the event China opts to use force. Even if Taiwan can hold out for the days and weeks it will take the United States to mobilize—politically and militarily—for a fight with China, intervention is no sure thing. One important reason Washington might opt not to get directly involved is that in doing so, it will incur a risk of nuclear escalation. But by investing in conventional counterforce capabilities, Taipei may be able to alter the calculus in Washington and Beijing in way’s conducive to Taiwan’s interests.

China has long abided by a no first use policy. It has said it will never use nuclear weapons first, will never use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states, and will only use nuclear weapons after first being struck. It has, moreover, stuck to a policy of what some scholars call “assured retaliation.” China scholars M. Taylor Fravel and Fiona Cunningham, leaders in the field, described it this way:

“This strategy uses the threat of inflicting unacceptable damage in a retaliatory strike to deter an adversary from attacking first with nuclear weapons. That is, following a first strike, China would still have enough weapons to retaliate and impose unacceptable damage on its adversary. [1]”

“Unacceptable damage” has typically been understood to mean strikes on a handful of American cities. This is a relatively restrained approach to nuclear use and, for several decades, there was good reason to believe it would hold in the event of a major crisis. Going forward, US strategists can longer be so confident that is the case. Generally speaking, there are two reasons for this. First, over the last decade or so, there has been an open debate within China about whether the country’s nuclear doctrine needs updating. Some have argued that no first use should be relaxed, others that Beijing should adopt a broad definition of what constitutes a first strike against China, and others that nuclear weapons should be used to deter the use of conventional force (rather than only nuclear use). To be clear, there has been no formal change to Chinese doctrine, but that this debate was allowed to proceed is notable. It suggests that Chinese leadership may be less firmly committed to the stated doctrine than it has been in years past and hints that formal changes could be in store in the years to come.

The debate also reinforces a question that has certainly long nagged American leaders: if China were poised to lose a war with the United States over Taiwan’s fate—a loss that could come with severe repercussions for the Chinese leadership’s grip on power—would Beijing eschew nuclear threats or the use of nuclear weapons if it assessed such a move could change the course of the conflict?

Also raising doubts in the United States about China’s commitment to its stated doctrine is an emerging doctrine-capabilities gap. Investments in first strike capabilities, early warning radar, dual-capable intermediate-range missiles, and a far larger nuclear stockpile (DIA has assessed it will double within ten years) all point to a potentially far less restrained Chinese approach to nuclear use in the future. China’s strategic forces are, for the time being, arguably consistent with doctrine, but there is reason to believe that will not remain the case in the decade to come.

Put simply, while it is difficult to imagine the United States going nuclear first in a Taiwan Strait scenario, it is getting easier to imagine China doing so. That is a problem for Taiwan, as it makes US intervention less likely. But is it a problem that Taipei can mitigate?

One option would be for Taiwan to invest in a conventional, counterforce capability. In particular, Taiwan could consider developing the means to eliminate China’s silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). China only has 20 such missiles: 10 single-warhead DF-5As and 10 DF-5Bs, which can carry three warheads each. (China is also considering silo-basing for its DF-41, its newest, longest-range ICBM, but it is as yet unclear whether it will do so and, if so, in what numbers.)

Neutralizing China’s silo-based ICBM force in the open-
ing stages of a conflict would not eliminate the risk of nuclear escalation should the United States ultimately decide to intervene, but it could make rapid escalation less likely. Silo-based weapons are typically considered first-use weapons. Because they are immobile, they are vulnerable. And because they are vulnerable, they are susceptible to use-it-or-lose-it logic. That logic is even stronger for missiles fitted with multiple, independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs), as China’s DF-5Bs are and as the DF-41s likely will be.

China’s mobile ICBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles will make American leaders nervous, as keeping tabs on them will be a challenge, but that mobility makes it easier for Chinese leaders to hold them in reserve. In other words, if Taiwan were to disable China’s silo-based ICBMs before US intervention, Beijing might paradoxically feel less pressure to go nuclear early after American forces join the fight.

Taiwanese conventional counterforce strikes on Chinese missile silos, moreover, would allow the United States to commit limited resources to tracking and, if necessary, targeting Chinese mobile missiles, thus reducing the threat those missiles pose to the United States.

Taken together, these two results—softening use-it-or-lose-it logic in Beijing and simplifying America’s potential counterforce mission—could make US intervention more likely.

This course of action is not without risks for Taiwan. As noted above, some of the debates within China in recent years have focused on how to define “first strike,” raising questions about how China would respond to conventional attacks on its nuclear forces or on critical infrastructure like the Three Gorges Dam. Would Beijing consider a conventional strike by Taiwan on Chinese ICBMs a “first strike” and consider responding with nuclear weapons? This seems unlikely in the case of Taiwan, which does not itself have nuclear weapons and which the PLA would be in the process of invading. [2] To the extent, moreover, that Beijing was attempting to positively shape the international narrative regarding its assault on Taiwan, nuclear use against non-nuclear Taiwan would be, to put it mildly, counterproductive.

China might also consider responding to Taiwan’s counterforce strikes by launching a nuclear strike on the United States, perhaps assuming some level of coordination (and thus considering Washington the responsible party) and seeking to deter active US intervention in the conflict. But in doing so, Beijing would sacrifice any claim to the moral high ground in the court of public opinion and would invite US nuclear retaliation.

Concerns over the role of nuclear weapons in a cross-Strait conflict might lead Taiwan to consider fielding its own nuclear weapons, but doing so might well make Taiwan less secure. First, the United States is less likely to feel compelled to come to Taiwan’s aid if it abandons its commitment to nonproliferation. Washington, moreover, will be far less likely to intervene in a conflict with multiple nuclear weapons states, each with a different threshold for nuclear use. Nor should Beijing consider nuclear weapons as a guarantee against Chinese use of force. Indeed, a perceived need to disarm Taiwan could well prove a casus belli for Beijing.

Whether Taiwan should pursue an indigenous counterforce capability, as posited here, requires more study. Additional analysis may well lead to a conclusion that it would be destabilizing. But, going forward, the role of nuclear weapons in a Taiwan Strait crisis needs far more consideration than it typically receives, at least in unclassified settings. Although Taiwan may often be seen as a passive “observer” vis-à-vis the potential nuclear aspects of a hypothetical conflict, Taipei does have agency. Further research should consider whether Taiwan can positively shape nuclear dynamics in the event that China one day opts for invasion.

The main point: The risk of nuclear escalation is one reason the United States might choose not to intervene in a Taiwan Strait crisis. Taiwan should consider whether it can shape nuclear dynamics in such a way as to make American intervention more likely.


[2] Taiwan once had a clandestine nuclear weapons program, which was shuttered in the late 1980s. See, for example, David Albright and Andrea Stricker, Taiwan’s Former Nuclear Weapons Program: Nuclear Weapons On-Demand (Washington, DC: Institute for Science and International Security, 2018).
Life on the Edge: A Comparative Analysis of Disinformation in Estonia and Taiwan

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While at first glance Estonia and Taiwan represent vastly different cultural and geographic contexts, they have some important similarities. Both are significantly smaller than their primary geopolitical threat: Taiwan with a population of 23.5 million compared to China’s 1.3 billion, and Estonia with a population of 1.2 million compared to Russia’s 141 million. Both also suffer from one of the greatest challenges of the digital age—the widespread use of disinformation in an attempt to discredit their governments and democracies—at levels higher than almost every other country in the world, including the United States.

Both Taiwan and Estonia also have ethnic populations that are often used as pawns in disputes with their larger neighbors. In Estonia, ethnic Russians constitute a significant portion of the population (27 percent) and their integration into broader Estonian society has been a key challenge for the country since the fall of the Soviet Union. While many people living in Taiwan still identify as both Taiwanese and Chinese, the number of people who consider themselves exclusively Taiwanese has increased since the 1990’s to 54.5 percent of the population, indicating that the joint ethnic identity that contributes to substantiating China’s claims that Taiwan—including its people—is a part of China is weakening.

Recent threatening geopolitical maneuvers by Russia and China have also been a cause for increased concern in Estonia and Taiwan. The 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea marked a new low in relations between Russia and the West, while China’s militarization of the South China Sea is destabilizing for other countries across the region, including Taiwan. Given these similarities, it is valuable to examine how disinformation has impacted each of these societies and how Estonian techniques for combating disinformation could be applicable to Taiwan.

Estonia, alongside its fellow Baltic states of Latvia and Lithuania, occupies a significant geostrategic position along Europe’s Western flank bordering Russia. As post-Soviet states, these three countries remain vulnerable to Russian attempts to subvert their democracy. Estonia’s rise to global prominence in the cybersecurity space following a devastating country-wide cyberattack in 2007 makes it a compelling case study in comparison to Taiwan.

Vladimir Putin’s attempts to assert a Russian sphere of influence around the country’s periphery is a policy born of grander strategic ambitions to assert Russia’s role as a global superpower. His efforts have tapped into deeply held beliefs, not only in his administration but in the Russian public at large, that the fall of the Soviet Union was a tragic loss of prestige and power for the country. In 2017 surveys, a full three quarters of Russians stated that they regretted the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Putin himself has stated on the record that “the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century.” In a recent analysis of disinformation campaigns around the world, 11 of the 30 countries most impacted by disinformation were formerly part of the Soviet Bloc or USSR—a testament to Russia’s capacities in disseminating disinformation in its neighborhood.

Russian disinformation campaigns of the modern day have moved to cyberspace as the internet establishes itself as the central current of information around the globe. Disinformation is a key tool for Moscow as it seeks to influence public opinion in Estonia and attempts to disrupt the flow of information into and out of the country. Russia’s strategy is aimed at creating pockets of chaos and sowing doubt across sectors and industries while maintaining plausible deniability when it comes to taking responsibility for attacks or disruptions.

The most notorious example of this strategy is the 2007 cyberattacks in Estonia that nearly succeeded in cutting the country off from the internet entirely, alongside disruptions of rail service and border crossings. This marked the beginning of the use of cyberattacks as a major tool in conflict operations around the world, including in Russian skirmishes in later years in Georgia and Ukraine. The attacks stemmed from the Estonian government moving a Soviet war memorial, and the remains of Soviet soldiers killed in the Second World War, to the Estonian Defense Forces Cemetery.
outside of Tallinn. The statue’s previous location had been a gathering site for Russian and Estonian nationalists inside Estonia, and the movement was intended in part to reduce that draw.

Putin opaquely referenced the statue in a speech celebrating the USSR’s victory over Nazi Germany around the time of the cyberattacks, stating that “Those who attempt to . . . defile the monuments to war heroes are insulting their own people, sowing discord and new distrust between states and people.” This statement perfectly summarizes Russia’s position regarding Estonia: that the country’s autonomous actions are an affront to the “true” identities of people with Russian heritage living there. These Russian narratives attempt to undermine the Estonian government, portraying Russia and the former USSR as powerful geopolitical actors that are entitled to have influence in the country.

Russia’s disinformation campaigns and attempts to exert control over Estonia’s policy decisions continue today over contentious issues in the relationship, ranging from NATO exercises to Estonian media coverage of Estonian officials stating opposition to the Nord Stream 2 project, a gas pipeline that would connect Germany and Russia. Among other negative impacts for Europe, the project would increase European reliance on Russian gas and weaken the Ukrainian gas transit market, a critical source of income for that country.

Estonia has taken steps to combat these efforts at both the national and multilateral levels. As a member state of the European Union, Estonia benefits from legislation at the EU level for countering disinformation. Prior to the EU parliamentary elections in May of 2019, the European Council implemented the Rapid Alert System (RAS), a dedicated digital platform for information sharing that connects information about potential nefarious campaigns and aggregates them in a single place for access by the public as well as by both traditional and social media. On the defense side, NATO and the EU have partnered to form a European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid COE) which conducts research on countering disinformation campaigns that impact member states.

Taiwan

In an echo of Russian rhetoric and discourse around the former USSR, China has also articulated its view that Taiwan’s existence as an entity separate from the mainland is an affront to national unity. At the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2017, President Xi Jinping asserted: “We stand firm in safeguarding China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and will never allow the historical tragedy of national division to repeat itself. Any separatist activity is certain to meet with the resolute opposition of the Chinese people.” This belief forms a core tenet of Chinese policy under Xi and drives efforts by the Chinese government to eventually bring Taiwan back under Chinese control. In combination with efforts by China to assert its dominance in the South China Sea and with the transformation of its military into a more professionalized force, statements from the highest levels of the Chinese government that highlight this argument should be taken as serious indicators of their focus on controlling territories they view as belonging to China.

Top Chinese officials have a morbid fascination with the fall of the Soviet Union. President Xi, in particular, focuses on how democratic change and loosening of communist ideology hastened the disintegration of the USSR. In this sense, Taiwan is also viewed as a serious democratic threat to the mainland’s ideological position and assertion that “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is the best system for the Chinese people, particularly in light of other communist systems that met their demise.

China uses a variety of tools to achieve its goal of increasing support in Taiwan for reunification. One of its most powerful is increased mainland Chinese control of Taiwan’s media outlets, both through ownership and through placement of positive stories and advertising about the mainland. Chinese disinformation is also rampant on social media. Instances of mainland interference in the media surged prior to the 2016 Taiwanese elections and as the Hong Kong protests escalated in 2019. Investigative efforts by Reuters in 2019 found at least five cases in which Taiwanese media outlets were paid to publish positive stories about mainland China by the Chinese government, an arrangement that has been going on since economic relations improved a decade ago. As China faces increasing pressure and attention on the international stage due to causes ranging from US sanctions and economic pressure to global support for Hong Kong’s democracy protests, its use of disinformation to maintain as much control over Taiwan as it can will be a key threat to the island’s stability.

In the case of Taiwan, freedom of speech and of the press can be viewed as a powerful tool in countering disinformation, as long as there is transparency about who is posting information online. Careful regulation regarding transparency in political advertising can be a particularly useful instrument to let users know
who paid for—and is advocating for—the positions in an ad or social media post. Efforts to date include a “Real-time News Clarification” page from the Executive Yuan, national legislation penalizing the dissemination of false information from the Legislative Yuan, and fines for media entities who broadcast information that harms public interest. Civil society and the private sector are also working to increase transparency by providing fact-checking services through organizations such as the Taiwan FactCheck Center and popular messaging app Line’s “Line Rumor Verification” chatbot.

**Best Practices and Remaining Challenges**

Taiwan, Estonia and other democracies must continue to address disinformation by maintaining a holistic view of countering it through deterrence, maintaining freedom of speech, and prioritizing transparency on information sharing platforms and in the media.

The greatest future threats to Taiwan in the disinformation space are twofold. First, there is the challenge—faced by democracies around the globe—of maintaining freedom of speech and of information even while nefarious actors use those arenas to spread falsehoods.

Second, there is the continued investment of mainland China in Taiwan’s media outlets and advertising. Taipei should continue to increase transparency across media channels, from traditional print and television to social media, so that citizens can make more informed choices when it comes to how they get their information. Efforts to counter disinformation in both Estonia and Taiwan will require sustained investment in institution-building and financial resources if they hope to see results. This is particularly true as larger actors are putting more financial resources into their programs; in 2018–2019, for example, the Russian propaganda network RT had a budget of over $300 million.

To the extent possible given its isolated diplomatic position, Taiwan would benefit from following Estonia’s example of engaging in multilateral institutions that address disinformation across borders, such as the European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid COE). The Hybrid COE’s position outside of both the EU and NATO allows more flexible participation from countries that are a member of either the EU or NATO (but not both). This broad scope allows it to act as a platform for information sharing among partners and as a repository for knowledge about hybrid threats, including disinformation. Taiwan may be able to connect with international partners in settings like these that are not necessarily directly affiliated with global organizations where sovereignty is required for membership or participation.

Similar to efforts taken by the European Union and the Estonian government, Taiwan has taken significant steps forward to curb the spread of disinformation within its borders, including major amendments to bills passed by the Legislative Yuan and a definition of disinformation as information that is “fake, motivated by malice, and harmful to individuals, organizations, or social order.” Civil society groups have taken steps to increase public awareness of disinformation and to help citizens identify when news is untrue or from a foreign source that may be seeking to deceive. A variety of fake news tracking websites debunk disinformation from sources across the web in countries across Eastern Europe. Stopfake.org is one such site that addresses disinformation surrounding Ukraine in particular, a topic that is often utilized in the context of Estonia to drum up fear of migrants, anti-EU sentiments, and other disruptive viewpoints. Propastop, a volunteer-run Estonian site, distributes knowledge about how information warfare works and debunks disinformation circulating in Estonian media. Similarly, citizens in Taiwan have developed tools to combat disinformation, including channels on the popular messaging app Line that fact-check news through a chatbot.

Under mounting international pressure, social media and web companies have also stepped up their efforts to combat disinformation and protect democratic processes. In Taiwan, Facebook and Google have run fact checking programs, both through partnerships with NGOs and by working with local and international experts. Government and civil society leaders in Taiwan should continue to publicize and encourage the use of tools to identify disinformation, both those created by civil society actors and by social media companies. Policymakers can also learn more about disinformation messaging that could be headed their way by examining what is being spread in neighboring countries.

Disinformation is a key tool for autocracies around the world in maintaining and furthering their narratives and strategic aims. It remains a challenge to attribute disinformation and to measure its impact but taking steps to counter it and bringing public awareness to the problem remain key to combating its effects. In democracies under threat from their larger neighbors, such as Estonia and Taiwan, countering disinformation will require deterrence, increased commitment to freedom of speech, and vigilance in identifying and making transparent the source of news and information for citizens.
The main point: While Estonia and Taiwan represent different cultural and geographic contexts, both suffer from the widespread use of disinformation in an attempt to discredit their governments and democracies. Some of Estonian techniques for combating disinformation could be applicable to Taiwan.