

Fortnightly Review

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Implications of Taiwan's Demographic Decline

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

Taiwan President Calls for Unity Against China's Coercion in National Day Address

By: J. Michael Cole

Taiwan's High-End and Low-End Defense Capabilities Balance

By: Michael Mazza

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Taiwan's Future Military Manpower Gap

According to trends inferred from data released by Taiwan's National Development Council (國家發展委員會)—a cabinet-level policy planning agency for sustainable national development—the country's military will face a recession in prime conscription age personnel starting next year and a military manpower gap will emerge in the coming decade. Barring a dramatic change in the current population growth trajectory, population growth estimate for the country from the NDC reportedly indicates that people aged 15 to 26, which is around 3.413 million in 2019, is forecasted to drop to 2.478 million by 2029—a difference of 935,000 persons.

A senior official cited by [Storm Media](#) stated that the force scale of the military will likely have to be further reduced based on a net assessment that takes into consideration other variables such as the size of the military to the total population, as well as missions, equipment, and firepower. According to the [Storm Media report](#), the Ministry of Defense brings in an average of about 15,000 recruits each year and the number of military officers that graduate from Taiwan's military academies per year is around 2,400 (including professional officers and non-commissioned officers), so there is reportedly a total of 17,400 persons brought into military services every year.

Against the backdrop of the country's demographic trajectory, this trend line does not bode well for the military. The country's troubling demographics trends of both an aging and shrinking population are consistent with overall national trends (and for North-east Asia as well). In Taiwan, the number of newborns in 2000 was around 305,000 and dropped to around 181,000 in 2018. [1] Based on the aforementioned data comparing the number of conscription age adults and population growth estimate, according to one media [report](#), there could be a 3,000 manpower gap per year in 10 years (this figure appears to assume a constant recruitment goal of the military).

The Global Taiwan Brief is a bi-weekly publication released every other Wednesday and provides insight into the latest news on Taiwan.

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Specific targets aside, this particular challenge is not lost on the military planners on the island. As pointed out by GTI Senior Non-Resident Fellow Mike Mazza in the [Global Taiwan Brief](#), the Ministry of National Defense's National Defense Report of 2011 underscored this challenge:

"The number of draft age men has trended downwards in recent years due to the low birth rates; statistics show that the number of draft age men each year has dropped from over 120 thousand to some 110 thousand, and this number will continue to drop in the future [...]. Moreover, competition from similar agencies, such as the police and coast guard, has made talent recruitment more and more difficult."

The [National Defense Report](#) also noted that the number of "draft age men" was projected to drop from 123,465 men in 2010 to 75,338 in 2025. Most notably, the report also projected how "draft age men" will peak in 2020 at 112,370, then drop to 94,017 (2021), 90,398 (2022), 83,453 (2023), 80,044 (2024), and finally hit 75,338 in 2025. As Mazza observed in the [Global Taiwan Brief](#):

"... population change is an important impetus behind Taiwan's shift to an all-volunteer military, which will require greater investment in personnel, materiel, and training if it is to be an effective fighting force. How Taipei manages this tension will have far-reaching effects on Taiwan's national security in the coming decades."

Furthermore, Mazza [noted](#):

"Ideally, moving to a smaller, all-volunteer force will contribute to a better allocation of human resources in Taiwan, while creating a leaner, more professional military. On the other hand, all-volunteer forces are expensive to maintain due to the need to offer competitive pay, benefits, better healthcare, and pensions. This will present a challenge as government revenues decline. Over time, personnel costs in Taiwan will threaten to crowd out spending on training and advanced armaments, which, if anything, become more important the smaller a military becomes—and if tax revenues do decrease over time, mounting political pressure could see the active-duty force shrunk further."

Since 2010, Taiwan has planned to [transition](#) from a conscription force to an all-volunteer force and reduce its active-duty force from 275,000 to approximately

175,000 personnel. Currently, Taiwan's military personnel system is a combination of recruited and volunteer armed forces. Conscripted soldiers are trained for four months while volunteers need to serve for at least four years. According to an [MND spokesman](#), Taiwan's defense ministry says it has already met 84 percent of its goal for a volunteer armed force and that number should reach 90 percent by 2020. Currently, Taiwan has a [reserve force](#) of 2.3 million men and about 900,000 of them left the military less than 8 years ago. This demographic trend and the shift to an all-volunteer system would only further underscore the importance of the reserve systems.

The main point: Taiwan's shrinking conscription age population over the next decade and the shift to an all-volunteer system will reportedly lead to a manpower gap of 3,000 per year and further underscore the importance of developing the country's reserve systems.

[1] A presentation delivered at a conference in Maryland in early October 2019.

Taiwan's Military Commemorates 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Gunningtou

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the battle that saved Taiwan from falling into Communist control 70 years ago during the Chinese Civil War. On October 24, 1949—only a week after the People's Liberation Army (PLA) captured the offshore island of Xiamen from the Nationalists—around 9,000 PLA soldiers landed on Kinmen. Three days of intense fighting ensued between Communist and Nationalist forces in a battle that came to be known as the Battle of Gunningtou (古寧頭戰役). All PLA soldiers who landed in the initial wave were captured or killed, resulting in a rare victory for the Nationalist forces that had just been routed from the mainland. The battle not only safeguarded Kinmen—which is still under administration by Taiwan's government—but also stopped the PLA from advancing on to Taiwan.

On October 18, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense organized an opening ceremony for a special exhibition at the Armed Forces Museum (國軍歷史文物館) commemorating the 70th anniversary of this battle and invited veterans of the battle to participate in the event. In a [speech at the opening ceremony](#), the chief of staff of the Ministry of National Defense, Shen Yiming (沈一鳴), thanked and commended the veterans for their determination to defend their homeland and will to fight. Their service and the sacrifices of those

who died laid the foundation of peace and security in the Taiwan Strait for the last 70 years. Shen appealed for the people to recognize the historical significance of the Battle of Gunningtou and Battle of Dengbu Island (登步島戰役) and hoped that the commemorative exhibition will inspire the officers and members of the military by the sacrifices of their predecessors as protectors and defenders of the country.

The significance of “[The Great Victory at Gunningtou](#),” (古寧頭大捷) is also remembered by the Chinese side—albeit for different reasons. Former PLA general Liu Yazhou (劉亞洲)—the husband of Li Xiaolin (李小林)—has reportedly written a paper analyzing this battle. According to a [media report](#), General Liu—lamenting the bad timing of the attack—wrote: If we attacked three days earlier, we would have been able to rout the KMT forces before Hu could arrive. If we attacked three days later, we would have known about Hu’s arrival and had a chance to reevaluate our strategy.” According to the PLA’s official report released on October 29, 1949, the main reasons for their defeat was “rashness of the plan and underestimation of the enemy.”

The former president of Taiwan, Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), posted pictures of him visiting the battle exhibition on his Facebook page and [commented](#) how the young soldiers who defended the coastlines at Gunningtou laid the foundation for victory in this first battle to defend Taiwan. To the soldiers, the former president [added](#): “Thank you for your sacrifice and dedication, thank you for defending Taiwan, and thank you for safeguarding the Republic of China!”

This wartime commemoration stands in stark contrast to efforts on the Chinese side, especially in recent years, to use commemorative events of significant battles during the Sino-Japanese war to lure retired generals and senior military officers from Taiwan to China. For instance, in August of this year, the “[Symposium on Passing on Chinese Anti-Japanese War History and Anti-War Spirit](#)” (中華民族抗日戰爭史與抗戰精神傳承研討會) was held in Nanning, Guangxi province. The meeting was the third iteration in a series that included previous conferences held in Nanjing in 2017 and Wuhan in 2018—both places were also major battle sites in the Second Sino-Japanese War. For instance, the conference in Nanjing was held to mark the 80th anniversary of the [Marco Polo Bridge Incident](#) (also known as the July 7th Incident, 七七事變) in July 2017. These cross-Strait symposiums have been occurring on a more high-profile and frequent basis after the mid-2000s and are part of a concerted effort by the CCP to reframe the country’s narrative on history, especially

those events involving the Communist and Nationalist parties during the Republican period. This is ostensibly an effort to forge a common and [united narrative](#) between the two parties, particularly the retired military officers.

According to a report, when KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) heard that the Nationalist army had defeated the Communist forces at Kinmen at Gunningtou, he shed tears of relief, [stating](#), “Taiwan is safe [...]. This is the turning point of our revolution.” Generalissimo Chiang was correct that this is a “turning point.” As Wang Yizhen (王翼薊), who was one of the veterans of the battle that spoke at the opening ceremony, [said](#): “without the battle of Gunningtou there would not be the stable and prosperous Taiwan [that exists today].”

The main point: Taiwan’s military hosted a special exhibition commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Gunningtou, which saved Taiwan from falling into Communist control 70 years ago.

Implications of Taiwan’s Demographic Decline

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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In the first half of 2019, the number of births in Taiwan fell to the [lowest point in eight years](#) for the same period. If this trend continues, the annual number of births could fall below [180,000](#) this year. In 2018, the island hit an eight-year low with only [181,601 newborns](#), while the population continues to rapidly age, creating a number of challenges in the labor market, economy, health care system, and national security that will be faced by several generations of Taiwanese.

Taiwan’s current population stands at [23.58 million](#), with a total fertility rate of [1.06 children](#) per woman aged 15 to 49 years in 2018, ranking among the [lowest in the world](#). In other words, women of reproductive age in Taiwan had an average of 1.06 children last year. Compared to its neighbors in East Asia, Taiwan’s fertility rate ranks lower than Japan, which reached a rate of [1.42](#) children in 2018, but higher than South Korea’s [0.98](#) rate in the same year. Taiwan’s low birth rate is part of a broader regional trend of declining fertility rates across East Asia.

Taiwan’s population figure is often cited by Taiwan’s

leaders as justification for self-determination and for greater representation across the Taiwan Strait and in the international community. A common refrain is that Taiwan's 23 million people—and not China—[will decide their own future](#). Indeed, for the Double Ten National Day celebration on October 10, 2019, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) said, "[The overwhelming consensus among Taiwan's 23 million people is our rejection of 'one country, two systems,' regardless of party affiliation or political position.](#)" In other words, Taiwan has a sizeable population whose voices cannot be discounted on significant national issues and need to have proper representation on major decisions regarding its future, international status, and relations with China.

However, if Taiwan's falling birth rate does not change over the long run, then its politicians will need to revise this oft-cited statistic. By 2060, Taiwan's leaders might refer to the island's 19 million people whose opinions need to be heard. In fact, Taiwan's National Development Council estimates that its population will reach between [17.3 million](#) and [19.8 million](#) in 2060. Taiwan's population will peak at [24 million](#) between 2021 and 2025 before starting to decline as early as [2022](#), according to the council's statistics.

This difference of at least 4 million people—from 23 million to potentially 19 million or less—makes Taipei's message perceptually less powerful. That is because more people bring more weight to bear to assert certain national goals vis-à-vis China and the international community, such as more balanced representation in cross-Strait relations and participation in international organizations and forums. Indeed, it is more difficult to ignore societies that have larger populations than smaller ones.

Taiwan's falling fertility rate is symptomatic of the shared challenges faced by post-industrialized economies. In the period after World War II, when Taiwan was mainly an agrarian society, annual births peaked around [300,000 to 400,000 newborns](#) a year. Families were large, and it was common for women in Taiwan to have an average of [six](#) or [seven](#) children in the 1950s and 1960s.

However, the current generation of Taiwanese women are choosing to have fewer children, if any at all. Nearly [51 percent](#) of Taiwanese women 15 years and over were in the labor force in 2017. Many women in Taiwan have higher levels of education than previous generations and are [focused on their careers](#), and even married Taiwanese women may decide not

to have any children. Some women have expressed concern that pregnancy could [negatively impact their careers](#) or worry that their employers may treat them in a disapproving light after they return from maternity leave. Other reported common concerns about starting a family were [inadequate finances](#), [long work hours](#), [high housing costs](#), and [dissatisfaction with Taiwan's educational system](#). Furthermore, some married couples facing stagnant wages and the [need to care for older parents](#) simply cannot afford to raise children.

According to Taiwan's Ministry of Interior, the number of births is linked to the [number of marriages](#) in Taiwan. As the number of people in Taiwan who marry each year declines, the lower the annual number of births. In 2018, [135,404 couples](#) got married, marking a drop of [2,630 couples](#), or a 1.9 percent decrease, from the previous year. As of late 2018, there were [4.42 million unmarried people](#) in Taiwan between the ages of 20 and 40, and more than [1 million unmarried people](#) above the age of 40.

A hidden factor behind Taiwan's low birth rate is the island's [high abortion rate](#). After Taiwan legalized abortion in 1985, the island's abortion rate has skyrocketed. According to medical estimates, there are as many as [500,000 abortions a year](#) in Taiwan. When some [400,000 women](#) are using the RU486 abortion medicine (often called the "morning after" pill) a year, coupled with other women who undergo surgical abortions, the combined total surpasses the roughly [200,000 newborns](#) each year. Taiwan's government needs to tackle not only the low fertility rate but also the high number of unplanned pregnancies, many of which are terminated through elective abortions.

Taiwan needs a [2.1 replacement rate](#) in order to maintain its current population. The National Development Council said that Taiwan government is making efforts to increase the fertility rate to [1.4 by 2030](#). In the past, the government has offered [subsidies](#) for couples with young children and provided [exemptions for educational expenses](#). Taiwan's government has also expanded its [child care subsidy program](#), which provides monthly payments to families with young children. These measures aim to lower the financial costs of having kids and encourage young couples to have more children.

However, the effects of the island's declining birth rate have been felt in the education system for more than a decade. Fewer students have led to the mass closure of schools and loss of jobs for teachers. Faced with approximately [100,000 fewer students per year](#), Taiwan closed [594 schools](#) between 2012 and 2018. According

to the Ministry of Education, enrollment at college and universities will drop from [273,000 in 2015 to 158,000 by 2028](#). Furthermore, an increasing number of private and public universities will either have to [merge](#) or face [closure](#).

Meanwhile, Taiwan is becoming the fastest aging society in the world. Taiwan's people are living longer with the average life expectancy at [80.7 years](#) in 2018. The lifespan of Taiwanese men in 2018 averaged [77.5 years](#) while that of women reached [84 years](#), according to the Ministry of Interior's statistics. Taiwan will become the world's first "[super-aged society](#)," with the group of people 65 years and over expected to exceed over [20 percent of the population](#) by 2026. The island has already become an "aged society" with [14 percent](#) of the population at 65 years of age or over. The municipalities with the most senior citizens are [Chiayi County](#), [Yunlin County](#), [Nantou County](#), and [Taipei City](#).

Long-term care of elderly citizens has become a highly salient social, personal, and political issue for Taiwan, and will continue to be so for future generations. Coupled with Taiwan's low birth rates, its growing elderly population will require more support from younger generations—and assistance from the government in cases where senior citizens lack extended family networks. Approximately [133,000 Taiwanese have quit their jobs](#) to take care of elderly relatives. Later on, they may find it difficult to rejoin the labor force—not to mention facing social and psychological issues after the caregiving ends. Meanwhile, a shrinking labor market could negatively impact [economic productivity](#), particularly for Taiwan's high-tech economy and manufacturing sector. Taiwan may need to fill in the gaps through the development and integration of [artificial intelligence and smart machinery](#) or recruitment of foreign talent.

Taiwan's government would have to absorb the costs of government programs and initiatives to help the elderly. Taiwan already offers preventive care programs and community-based social services for its elderly population. Taipei has ramped up spending to [fund and broaden the array of government services](#) to assist the elderly. Moving forward, the government is expected to [raise its healthcare budget](#) to provide services for senior citizens.

Another challenge for Taiwan's government is to invest more in infrastructure—in the economic, social, and security spheres—to manage the myriad of issues brought about from an aging population and falling birth rate. Taipei needs to grapple with a shrinking tax

base, increased social and financial pressure on the working population to care for elderly relatives, and [lower recruitment for the military](#), among a host of other issues. This demographic challenge will impact various aspects of Taiwan's political, economic, and social arenas, and remain a pressing issue for future generations of Taiwanese and Taiwan's government.

The main point: Taiwan's long-term challenge stems from its low fertility rate and rapidly aging population. This demographic challenge is a salient issue that will have long-lasting implications for its society, economy, and politics.

Taiwan President Calls for Unity Against China's Coercion in National Day Address

By: J. Michael Cole

J. Michael Cole is a senior non-resident fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) called for an unremitting defense of country's sovereignty and democracy during her [National Day address](#) on October 10, emphasizing that national unity was essential if Taiwan is to successfully counter China's intensifying coercive campaign. Directly referring to the mounting discord in Hong Kong, which has experienced months-long spasms of violence on the streets, the Taiwan president underscored the unviability of Beijing's "one country, two systems" (一國兩制) formula for Taiwan. "The overwhelming consensus among Taiwan's 23 million people is our rejection of 'one country, two systems,' regardless of party affiliation or political position," she said.

"One Country, Two Systems" Not an Option

"The Republic of China has stood tall on Taiwan for over 70 years," President Tsai continued. "But if we were to accept 'one country, two systems,' there would no longer be room for the Republic of China's existence. As President, standing up to protect national sovereignty is not a provocation—it is my fundamental responsibility." Besides fringe elements such as the China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) and the New Party (新黨), parties across Taiwan's political spectrum have rejected the "one country, two systems" offer.

Yet, the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) continues to affirm that the key to reducing tensions in the Taiwan

Strait is to recommit to the “1992 Consensus” (九二共識) and that adherence thereto would not lock Taiwan down the path to “one country, two systems.” Critics of such an approach, President Tsai included, have countered that following Chinese Communist Party Secretary-General Xi Jinping’s (習近平) [January 2 address to “Taiwanese compatriots](#), the “1992 Consensus” and “one China” (一個中國) clause have become coterminous with the unpalatable “one country, two systems” formula, which Xi maintains is the only possible offer to Taiwan, notwithstanding signs of its failing in the former British colony.

Su Chi (蘇起), now among the group of advisers to KMT presidential candidate Daniel Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) and the politician who in 2000 invented the term “1992 Consensus,” claimed recently that the ruling party has [misrepresented](#) the “1992 Consensus” by linking it to “one country, two systems.” Xi’s intransigence on the “one country, two systems” formula, however, means that any arrangement with “one China” at its core could eventually lead to that construct. In other words, to argue that “one country, two systems” does not reflect the spirit of the “1992 Consensus” requires a suspension of disbelief that Taiwan, facing a determined aggressor, cannot afford. Moreover, the Taiwan side’s ability to insist upon “different interpretations” of “one China” has also been eroded, largely due to the fact that the CCP—and the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—regard themselves as successor regimes to the Republic of China (ROC) rather than co-equals.

Amid overwhelming public opposition to “one country, two systems” and in the light of the debacle in Hong Kong SAR, no political party in Taiwan hoping to prevail in the January 2020 elections could afford to present the formula as a viable option for Taiwan and/or the ROC. Han, regarded by some as a favorite of Beijing, has himself [declared](#) his view that “one country, two systems” is not a viable option for Taiwan; and on October 10, he went even further, [stating](#) that “Taiwan lacks conditions for either unification with or independence from mainland China,” adding that the current generation “has no right to choose for the next generation. Our generation’s responsibilities are trying hard to create conditions for Taiwan to be more powerful and peaceful.” Such views went directly against Xi’s strong willed statement on January 2, where he said that the dispute between the two sides—and its resolution in the form of unification—“cannot be passed on from generation to generation.”

Unity, Unity, Unity

President Tsai then switched to national unity, stating that “we must ensure that the people continue to remain united under the banner of freedom and democracy to defend our sovereignty,” adding that “we cannot be divided amongst ourselves, regardless of party affiliation.”

“No one has a patent on the Republic of China, and no one can monopolize Taiwan. The words ‘Republic of China (Taiwan)’ are not the exclusive property of any one political party, and that is the overwhelming consensus of Taiwan society,” she said.

Amid “China’s rise and expansion, as they challenge free, democratic values and the global order through a combination of authoritarianism, nationalism, and economic might [...], Taiwan has become the first line of defense for democratic values.” To counter this challenge, she said:

“we must remain united. Though disputes have risen in our society due to differences among ethnicities, generations, faiths, and political views, I am certain that we can find the greatest common denominator among us through dialogue ... We must also hold firm our values of freedom and democracy. The Taiwanese people walked the difficult path to democratization together, and though it may sometimes be tumultuous, only democracy can ensure our hard-won freedom and offer the next generation the right to choose their own future.”

Here again, there was little to disagree with, although some KMT politicians, subsequent to Tsai’s address, [argued](#) that the ruling party has not done enough to ensure that collaboration between parties can be realized; it goes without saying that the main opposition party has, for its own parochial reasons, also engaged in behavior which has prevented the emergence of a truly bipartisan spirit. For example, KMT lawmakers have used various measures to prevent the passage at the Legislative Yuan of long-overdue national security regulations (a “Foreign Agents Bill”) that would help defend the nation’s democratic institutions against subversion and China’s “sharp power.”

A few other critics in the blue camp, meanwhile, [ze-roed](#) in on the president’s use of the term “Republic of China (Taiwan)” to describe the nation, arguing that she ought to have limited herself to the official name of the country—the ROC (others nevertheless welcomed her use of the term Republic of China throughout her

speech, which they lamented had been missing in previous years).

Tsai's speech, perhaps, was intended to appeal to the greatest common denominators within Taiwanese society—freedom and democracy, and opposition to “one country, two systems”—while wisely using a combination of “Taiwan,” “Republic of China” and “Republic of China (Taiwan)” to refer to the nation. In so doing, she is widening the tent of the people whom she represents as the head of state. Although references to, and uses of symbols associated with, the ROC raises heckles among a number of Taiwanese—especially those who suffered under authoritarian KMT rule—President Tsai's appeal to overarching support for freedom and democracy, and her equating of the ROC with Taiwan made it difficult for anyone to disagree with the contents of her speech. Whether one identifies with the ROC or Taiwan, in the president's mind the two are the same, joined, as it were, in their opposition to external pressure on unification and “one country, two systems” and, just as important, in their embrace of the values which define the nation.

The overwhelming majority of politicians in Taiwan agree on the fundamentals of freedom, democracy, and the territory that now defines their nation; politicking and a focus on short-term (often electoral) matters have often given the impression of extremely divergent views and disunity. It is important for a president to remind people that, differences aside, the foundations are solid. Her Double Ten address did that.

Taiwan's International Presence

President Tsai also pointed to Taiwan's growing role in international affairs. “Taiwan is responsible and willing to contribute, and we have become an indispensable force for good in maintaining regional peace and stability,” she said. “We will continue to work hand-in-hand with like-minded countries to achieve more opportunities for substantive cooperation.” Those remarks, and the spirit in which they were made, were highly praised in the United States, with members of Congress [stating](#) that “we reaffirm America's steadfast, bipartisan support for the fundamental rights of Taiwan's people and our shared democratic values.”

Some critics have [accused](#) the Tsai administration of over-reliance on the United States, which they warn could cost Taiwan should a new, less amenable administration occupy the White House in the future. Perhaps President Tsai should have spent more time in her address demonstrating the many achievements that have been made between Taiwan and the “like-mind-

ed countries” she alluded to. While American leadership has and will continue to be essential for any effort to expand Taiwan's international participation, there nevertheless has been substantial progress in Taiwan's engagement with other major democracies, where support, in part due to China's belligerent attitude, has been building over the years. Taipei cannot count on Beijing remaining self-defeatingly undiplomatic forever, nor can it take continued US assistance for granted; but in the current context, it has quietly been building and solidifying a network of partners around the world that will help Taiwan withstand China's coercive efforts against it.

The main point: President Tsai's address to the nation provided a clear statement of purpose on defending the nation and its democratic institutions, and reaffirming Taiwan's opposition to “one country, two systems,” while emphasizing the need for unity in meeting those challenges.

Taiwan's High-End and Low-End Defense Capabilities Balance

By: Michael Mazza

Michael Mazza is a senior non-resident fellow at GTI. He is also a visiting fellow in foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he analyzes US defense policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

Some defense analysts have criticized Taiwan in recent months for continuing to invest in expensive, high-end weapons systems. Proponents of an asymmetric-first approach to Taiwan's defense have found the US approval of potential sales of new [M1A2T Abrams](#) tanks and [F-16V](#) fighter aircraft to be particularly galling. There are reasonable disagreements over whether these capabilities are necessary (I have argued in favor of new fighter aircraft for the *Global Taiwan Brief* [here](#)) and, if they are, how to balance high-end and low-end systems in the force mix. It is not the case, however, that the Ministry of National Defense (MND) is neglecting to invest in weapons systems that are less “flashy,” but of great value in a potential invasion scenario—the scenario in which so-called “asymmetric” capabilities are perhaps most crucial.

For example, when tank sales were approved in July, the State Department also [green-lighted](#) a possible Foreign Military Sale (FMS) of Stinger missiles and re-

lated equipment and support. Should Taiwan proceed with the purchase of all 250 requested Stingers, which are man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), the acquisition will materially enhance Taiwan's defense (it already has approximately 2,000 in its arsenal). In particular, the new missiles will enhance Taiwan's armed forces' ability to better [counter](#) "helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), cruise missiles, as well as low-level fixed and rotary-wing aircraft." A large Stinger inventory will strengthen Taiwan's capacity for point defense, while complementing the island's Patriot and indigenous Sky Bow air defense batteries and ship borne surface-to-air missiles (SAMs).

The United States, it should be noted, has yet to formally approve the sale of all of the arms requested by Taiwan this year. In the [letter of request](#) that MND submitted in the spring, it not only asked to buy Abrams tanks and Stinger missiles, but also 1,240 TOW (Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided) anti-armor missiles and 409 Javelin anti-tank missiles (these purchases would grow Taiwan's arsenal to well over 3,000 TOW missiles and more than 900 Javelins). The current status of this request is unclear, but it should remain a priority for both Taiwan and the United States. Given that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is expected to attempt to land armor and armored vehicles on Taiwan and outlying islands during an invasion, TOW and Javelin missiles will be of critical importance to soldiers and marines defending the beaches and routes inland. Such missiles complement Taiwan's own tanks in the counter-armor fight, diversifying the nature of the threat to PLA armor and thus complicating Chinese military planning and operations.

PLA invasion planning will be complicated further if Taiwan goes ahead with the purchase of new artillery systems. Last month, *Defense News* [reported](#) that MND is seeking to purchase M109A6 Paladin self-propelled howitzers and possibly the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) from the United States. Taiwan already has more than 2,000 older artillery pieces, including earlier versions of the M109. As a mobile, survivable system, the Paladin would, alongside Stingers, TOW missiles, and Javelins, help transform Taiwan, during a time of war, into a "[porcupine](#)"—a phrase popularized by the Naval War College's William Murray in 2008—making it difficult for the PRC to "swallow." Placed on Kinmen, Paladins could reach out and touch potential PLA invasion staging grounds. On Taiwan, Paladins would be useful for close-in coastal defense and for wreaking havoc on landing beaches.

If Taiwan does wish to transform itself into a porcupine,

HIMARS would make it extra spiny. Taipei does, indeed, appear to be gearing up for an acquisition, with Taiwan's UP Media [reporting](#) earlier this month that there is money in MND's 2020 fiscal year budget to pursue the system. Like the Paladin, HIMARS can "shoot and scoot," making it of potentially great value in circumstances where effective defense will rely on mobility and survivability. Armed with six M270 rockets, HIMARS can fulfill a similar function to new Paladins. Alternatively, Taiwan might opt to fit some HIMARS with the MGM-140 Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), which would provide Taiwan's military with a means of attacking the PRC with capabilities on the island.

Acquisition of HIMARS may make particular sense due to a capability the system does not yet even possess. The US Department of Defense is in the process of procuring for the Army an [updated version](#) of HIMARS, one which will have an anti-ship capability. The US Marine Corps, too, is [seeking](#) an anti-ship missile it can fire from the HIMARS it already has in the inventory. HIMARS platforms that can contribute to the counter-invasion mission by striking ships crossing the Taiwan Strait would be of great value to Taiwan. Even though such a capability remains notional (though likely to be fielded in the coming years), it makes sense for Taiwan to add HIMARS to the force sooner rather than later. As noted above, the system already makes sense for Taiwan's armed forces. Even if the potential anti-ship capability were the main driver for MND's interest in HIMARS, purchasing the system now would allow for speedy incorporation of a new anti-ship missile when one is ready or easy incorporation of new, updated platforms if necessary. With the PRC threat to Taiwan growing year by year, faster integration of new capabilities will only grow in importance to Taiwan in the coming years.

Taiwan's indigenous defense industry has also developed capabilities useful for asymmetric warfare. Since the mid-2000s, [Taiwan's navy](#) has put to sea 32 *Kwang Hua IV*-class missile boats and fielded a new stealthy, fast-attack missile boat, the *Tuo Jiang*-class. Last year, it was [reported](#) that the Navy was studying the possibility of fielding large numbers of even smaller vessels, dubbed "Stealth Mini-Missile Assault Boats." In the event of a conflict these boats will speed out into the Taiwan Strait, loose their anti-ship missiles at PLA Navy (PLAN) vessels steaming towards Taiwan, then scoot back to shore to reload. The Republic of China Navy, of course, still sails destroyers and frigates, and is procuring a large amphibious assault ship, but it has recognized the need for small, high-speed craft as well.

The missiles those ships fire are also indigenously produced. They carry both the subsonic Hsiung Feng II and supersonic Hsiung Feng III anti-ship missiles. These missiles can also be fired from mobile launchers ashore. The Hsiung Feng IIE, meanwhile, is a ground-launched surface-to-surface variant that can strike Chinese territory. Taiwan continues to upgrade these missiles and grow its munitions stores.

All of these capabilities—older, new, and prospective—accord well with Taiwan’s Overall Defense Concept (ODC). Announced in December 2017, the ODC, as [described](#) by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), “seeks to emphasize the development of asymmetric capabilities and tactics to capitalize on Taiwan’s defensive advantage, enhance resilience, and exploit the weaknesses of the PLA.” The USCC report lists three areas that the ODC prioritizes: “(1) preservation of warfighting capability, (2) pursuing decisive victory in the littoral area, and (3) annihilating the enemy on the beach.” In the MND’s 2017 National Defense Report, weapons system useful for asymmetric warfare are characterized by “mobility, stealth, fast speed, low cost, abundance, minimum damage, and high effectiveness.” All of the capabilities described above check at least some of these boxes.

Going forward, additional investments in advanced mobile surface-to-air missiles and ground-based, mobile anti-ship missiles are crucial. Sea mines are also a relatively low-cost, high-reward capability, which would come in useful in complicating a PLA invasion. To that end, Drew Thompson [notes](#) that Taiwan “is currently developing two new types of shallow and deep-water influence mines [and] a self-propelled mine,” all to be deployed in the 2020s. Taiwan is also refurbishing the mines already in its inventory and seeking to buy MK62 Quickstrike air-deployed mines from the United States.

Large numbers of UAVs armed with ASCMs would complement Taiwan’s fleet of attack helicopters, land- and sea-based ASCMs, and sea mines. Taken together, these defensive capabilities would pose a multidimensional threat to an invasion force. Taiwan’s Indigenous Defense Submarines, when eventually put to sea, could add another layer of complexity to that threat, though it remains unclear whether they will have utility in the relatively shallow Taiwan Strait. At the very least, new submarines could cause fits for PLAN surface vessels operating in waters north and south of the Strait or east of Taiwan and force the PLA to divert resources to hunt them down.

It may be the case that Taiwan is not buying enough of

the asymmetric capabilities it says it needs. The capabilities balance—between high-end and low-end, between those optimized for scenarios short of invasion and those crucial for that eventuality—may be off. But MND is not neglecting its asymmetric requirements. It is striving to field a force suited to conducting a variety of missions, from peacetime deterrence to defending against invasion and occupation. For a country of nearly 24 million people, this is no easy task. The United States should stand ready to assist when and where it can.

The main point: Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense is not neglecting its asymmetric warfare requirements. It is acquiring a variety of capabilities needed to defend the island against a PLA invasion.

[1] *International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance 2019 (Routledge, 2019), 309.*