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By: Russell Hsiao

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### KMT Think Tank Warns of Possible Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis

A think tank affiliated with Taiwan's main opposition party, the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT), is [warning](#) that tensions in the Taiwan Strait are at its highest in 25 years. In 1995-1996, Beijing fired two sets of missiles across the Taiwan Strait in an attempt to intimidate voters in the lead up to the country's first direct presidential election. According to speakers at a recent seminar hosted by the National Policy Foundation (國家政策研究基金會), the probability of a Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis is now the highest since the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis over two decades ago.

Lin Yu-fang (林郁方), a former legislator and a prominent voice on the country's defense affairs, made the ominous assessment at a public forum organized by the think tank, which Lin convenes, entitled "Risky Strait: The Possibility of Military Conflict in the Taiwan Strait" (危險的海峽：台海爆發軍事衝突的可能性) on July 21. According to the former lawmaker and chairman of the Legislative Yuan's Diplomacy and National Defense Committee, it is now more likely than at any time in the past 25 years for another military conflict to occur since the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996. Lin reportedly [stated](#): "The situation in the Taiwan Strait has been indeed very tense in this period. The number of military aircraft and warships of the Chinese Communists circumventing Taiwan has increased significantly. What is particularly significant is that the number of US military aircraft and warships that have appeared in the waters around Taiwan has also been the highest in 20 years."

Lin [pointed out](#) that after the collision between US and Chinese military aircraft in the South China Sea in 2001 (also known as the EP-3 incident), the two sides have agreed that they will observe certain codes of conduct when they encounter each other in the

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air or at sea. In contrast, there is no such mechanism between the two sides of the Strait. Therefore, according to Lin, the possibility of an accident has increased in light of the increased frequency and aggressiveness of these military exercises.

While most analysts would likely agree that a large-scale war in Taiwan Strait is unlikely in the near future, the United States has had an operational plan (OPLAN) in case a large-scale war broke out since as early as 2001. According to one account, it was “one of only three completed and full-fledged war plans of the US military.” [1] As an article for *The Washington Post* in 2006 carefully detailed:

*“The 5077 plan to defend Taiwan from a Chinese attack dates back from the Reagan administration, and has been successively updated and expanded over the years. Until 2001, the plan was what was called a “CONPLAN,” which is an operations plan in concept only. This means that the general American courses of action were identified but the plan itself was only kept in abbreviated form, lacking either the assignment of forces or much of the details of logistics and transport needed for implementation.*

*In August 2001, “Change 1” to the previous CONPLAN 5077 upgraded the contingency to a full OPLAN, with assigned forces and more detailed annexes and appendices. The Pacific Command developed a new “strategic concept” for the Taiwan contingency in December 2002, and an updated plan was produced in July 2003. Last year based upon new 2004 guidance from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the joint chiefs of staff, and after two conferences worked out the assignment of US forces in detail, a final Taiwan defense plan was published.*

*Pacific Command OPLAN 5077-04, as it is currently known, includes air, naval, ground/amphibious, and missile defense forces and “excursions” to defend Taiwan. Options include maritime intercept operations in the Taiwan Straits, attacks on Chinese targets on the mainland, information warfare and “non-kinetic” options, even the potential use of American nuclear weapons. [2]”*

Also speaking at the think tank seminar was the for-

mer director of the National Security Bureau, Tsai Der-sheng (蔡得勝). According to the former intelligence chief (2009-2014), there “will be no large-scale war in the Taiwan Strait at this stage, but the chances of accidental misfire are constantly [increasing](#).” Furthermore, Tsai [noted](#) that “If mainland [sic] really were to strike Taiwan, China would not want to completely destroy Taiwan and create a bloodbath on Taiwan; it would [instead] fight a war of paralysis.”

Another speaker at the event was the former Deputy Commander of the Taiwan Air Force Chang Yen-ting (張延廷). Lt. Gen. (ret.) Chang also believed that China would adopt a strategy of “[war of paralysis](#)” if it attacks Taiwan. However, he pointed out that if Beijing were to launch such a war against Taiwan, there would be [six signals](#): The first is the evacuation of overseas Chinese from various countries. The second is that China would mobilize for blood donations and other provisions. Thirdly, Taiwan stocks would fall sharply because foreign investors would be well informed and quickly pull their money out of Taiwan. Fourthly, the CCP would issue warnings and their rhetoric would escalate from warnings to threats. The fifth signal would be large-scale military exercises and sixth is that China would first send its leaders to warn the United States ostensibly about intervening.

The former deputy commander and vice chief for intelligence in the general staff, Chang, [agreed](#) that the possibility of low-level conflicts between the two sides of the Strait is higher than that of high-level conflicts (full-scale war), and he believed that low-level conflicts are more likely to occur on Taiwan’s outer islands. He speculated that such a conflict could occur over Dongsha (Pratas), Taiping, and Wuqiu Islands (烏坵). Wuqiu is a group of islands administered by the ROC-controlled Kinmen county that some military planners believed PLA would attack back in 1995-1996—the closest territory under PRC control is the neighboring Luci Island (鶯鶯島), which is only 9 nautical miles to the north-northwest. According to Chang, these islands are all easy to attack but hard to defend. Moreover, the characteristic of low-level conflicts is that they tend to be quiet and end in a short time, making prevention even more necessary.

Indeed, as early as 2014, US analysts had reportedly [concluded](#) that ‘the PLA has been given the new task

to be able to conduct a short sharp war to destroy Japanese forces in the East China Sea following with what can only be expected [as] a seizure of the Senkakus or even southern Ryukyu [islands].” This [assessment](#) of a “short sharp war,” delivered then by Captain James Fanell, who was serving as deputy chief of staff intelligence and information operations for the US Pacific Fleet, could also be applied to a scenario involving territories administered by Taiwan and other neighboring countries in the South China Sea. In fact, this was the focus of a scenario that was gamed out in a Sasakawa Peace Foundation [tabletop exercise](#) that involved Beijing’s occupation of Taiwan-administered islands in the South China Sea.

These statements by former senior intelligence and defense officials within Taiwan have been accompanied by a rare and open dispute among Taiwan policy researchers across China. This [debate](#) is captured by the open feud between Zhang Nianchi (章念馳) and Li Yi (李毅) via online articles that may be described as representing the contrast between so-called “doves” and “hawks,” respectively, with the former promoting “peaceful unification” and the latter advocating for “unification by force.” Zhang is currently the director of the Shanghai Institute of East Asian Studies. Since 1988, he has been the secretary-general of the Cross-Strait Academic and Cultural Exchange Promotion Association (海峽兩岸學術文化交流促進會) and has long been involved in China’s cross-strait policy research. Li is the director of the Fuzhou University’s Taiwan Research Center (福州大學臺灣研究所).

**The main point:** A Taiwanese think tank affiliated with the Kuomintang warns about the possibility of a Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis as former intelligence and defense officials point to China’s strategy of “war of paralysis.”

[1] William M. Arkin, “America’s New China War Plan,” *Early Warning* (Washington Post), May 24, 2006.

[2] *Ibid.*

### US-Taiwan-Japan Focus on Latin America and Caribbean for International Cooperation

The governments of the United States, Taiwan, and Japan [announced](#) that they will be co-hosting the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) workshop

with Guatemala this year, for the first time ever in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the second time outside of Taiwan. [1] In a series of statements released by the three governments on July 15, the US State Department Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere Julie Chung [stated](#):

*“It is an honor to announce that Guatemala will be the next host of the Global Cooperation and Training Framework. This event is the preeminent platform for collaboration between the United States, Taiwan, and Japan, and partners who share our democratic values. It is our first time bringing this event to Latin America. The theme for the event is the digital economy: options for Latin American and the Caribbean’s insertion into the chain of production and commercialization of high technology. [...] The United State supports Taiwan’s relations with its nine diplomatic partners in our hemisphere, as well as the economic and cultural relations Taiwan maintains with the whole region, because Taiwan is a democratic partner committed to sustainable development.”*

Guatemala, and moreover the broader LAC region, was ostensibly chosen as the location for this important forum not only for its strategic importance to Taiwan’s international space as China has stepped up its diplomatic offensive but also because its encroachment on the region for over the past decade—accelerating in pace over recent years—is stoking concerns in Washington about Beijing’s growing footprint in its backyard.

The Republic of Guatemala has been a longstanding diplomatic partner of Taiwan—[unbroken since 1933](#)—and is its most significant partner in Central America after Panama [broke diplomatic ties](#) with Taipei in June 2017. Indeed, as Colin Alexander, a professor at Nottingham Trent University and author of the book [“China and Taiwan in Central America: Engaging Foreign Publics in Diplomacy”](#) wrote:

*“From the Taiwan perspective, Guatemala is one of their most important remaining strategic allies. It has the largest population of the Central American countries and possesses trade road routes to Mexico and into the United States for the rest of mainland Latin America. As a result, the size of the Guatemalan economy in compar-*

*ison to the other countries bestowing diplomatic recognition on Taiwan results in Taiwan's focus being more economics than arguably any of its other formal allies."*

The move to host GCTF in Guatemala is consistent with the recommendations of a study published by the federally-funded US research center RAND entitled "[Countering China's Efforts to Isolate Taiwan Diplomatically in Latin America and the Caribbean The Role of Development Assistance and Disaster Relief](#)" co-authored by Scott Harold, Lyle Morris, and Logan Ma. In the RAND study, an anonymous US interviewee [pointed out](#):

*"US interests in Latin America and the Caribbean include helping preserve Taiwan's access to the international community and ensuring that it is not cut-off entirely. To this end, the US government now coordinates across departments and agencies to ensure that all relevant parts of the bureaucracy focused on the Western Hemisphere are attentive to this interest."*

Since 2016, Taiwan has lost 7 diplomatic allies to Beijing's diplomatic blitzkrieg, three of which were in the LAC (Dominican Republic, Republic of El Salvador, and Republic of Panama). Taiwan now has nine diplomatic partners remaining in the Latin America and Caribbean with a total of [16 missions](#) in the region. The nine countries Taiwan has maintained diplomatic ties with are: Belize; Republic of Guatemala; Haiti; Republic of Honduras; Nicaragua; Republic of Paraguay; St. Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Taiwan's last remaining diplomatic partner in South America is Paraguay. This relationship has also been under significant pressure from Beijing. Asunción has—for some time now—been [on the fence](#) about maintaining its longstanding diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Most recently in April, the Paraguayan Senate [voted against](#) a proposal to switch ties to Beijing by a thin margin of 25 to 16. For its part, Taipei has been trying to shore up its formal ties with Paraguay with [two presidential visits](#) since May 2016 and President Mario Abdo Benitez's [trip](#) to Taiwan in 2018 for the National Day celebrations. Paraguay Defense Minister Bernardino Soto Estigarribia just [visited](#) Taiwan in late November for military exchanges. It is noteworthy that

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made the first visit to Paraguay by a US secretary of state in 53 years in April 2019 and even more telling that during the visit, Pompeo explicitly [praised](#) Paraguay for "standing up for their own interests and beliefs by supporting a democratic Taiwan."

The Paraguayan Ambassador to Taiwan recently openly [stated](#) that the country is maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan despite efforts by the Chinese government to persuade Asunción to switch allegiance. According to local media reports, the Paraguayan ambassador to Taiwan made the comments during the launch of the [Taiwan-Paraguay parliamentary friendship association](#) at the legislature. The friendship association is currently comprised of 23 members—interestingly all its members are legislators from the opposition party Kuomintang (KMT).

As Ambassador Miguel Li-jey Tsao (曹立傑), the country's vice minister for foreign affairs, [makes clear](#):

*"Latin American and the Caribbean is an important region to Taiwan's international relations, as the majority of Taiwan's diplomatic allies are located, and they have long supported my country's participation in the international arena. Because of this, not only do we desire to continue deepening and expanding the Taiwan-US-Japan partnership, we also hope that the successes reached by GCTF in recent years can also be extended to our diplomatic allies and friends in the region."*

**The main point:** With the official announcement of the first GCTF workshop in Guatemala, the United States, Taiwan, and Japan are signaling their growing focus on Latin America and the Caribbean region and underscoring the strategic importance of LAC for Taiwan's international space.

[1] The first GCTF forum held outside of Taiwan was in Palau, a diplomatic partner of Taiwan in the South Pacific, in November 2019. Japan joined in March 2019 as a "full partner" and the Netherlands is reportedly [planning to join](#) the initiative.

## Taiwan's Uneasy Relationship with North Korea

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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As recently as May 19 of this year, [Tsai Ming-yen](#) (蔡明彥), then-deputy secretary-general of Taiwan's National Security Council (國家安全會議), reportedly told the US State Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for North Korea Alex Wong that Taiwan is still abiding by United Nations (UN) Security Council sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Taipei's emphasis on its adherence to international sanctions on North Korea comes after several Taiwanese nationals have been accused in recent years of engaging in illicit trade activities with North Korean entities [in violation of UN sanctions](#) imposed since 2017. Despite the Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) administration's decision to [suspend all trade](#) with North Korea in late 2017, such incidents involving Taiwanese citizens highlight the tension in Taiwan's policy towards the DPRK, which seeks to balance existing trade links with its desire to play a [responsible role](#) in international affairs.

### **Taiwan's Trade with North Korea**

Prior to the Tsai administration's [September 2017 announcement](#) that Taiwan would end all trade with North Korea, economic and trade relations between the high-tech, industrialized economy and the isolated, totalitarian state were surprisingly solid. The upper levels of Taiwan-North Korea trade over the past decade hovered between [USD \\$21 million](#) in 2010 and [USD \\$30 million](#) in 2015, reaching a peak of [USD \\$53 million](#) in 2012. Beginning in 2016, bilateral trade began to drop precipitously to [USD \\$12.7 million](#) that year. In 2017, bilateral trade fell to [USD \\$2.75 million](#), with Taiwan's imports from North Korea ([USD \\$2.7 million](#)) far surpassing its meager exports to its northern neighbor ([USD \\$45,465](#)). North Korea ranked as Taiwan's [173<sup>rd</sup> largest trading partner](#), [139<sup>th</sup> importing partner](#), and [216<sup>th</sup> exporting partner](#) in 2017. By contrast, Taiwan was North Korea's [fourth-largest export destination](#) in 2016, trailing only China, India, and the Philippines. Taiwan's [main imports](#) from North Korea consisted of mineral products, followed by base met-

als, vegetable products, and textiles. The island's [main exports](#) to North Korea included chemical products, textiles, machinery, mechanical appliances, and electrical equipment. For instance, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was photographed using a Taiwanese HTC mobile phone.

In 2009, the [Taiwan-DPRK Trade Association](#) (台灣朝鮮經貿協會) was established to promote economic, trade, culture, and tourism exchanges between the two sides. Its major objective is to help [Taiwanese manufacturers](#) gain a foothold in the North Korean market. According to its website, the association is overseen by Taiwan's [interior and economic affairs ministries](#) and is the only Taiwanese economic and trade organization with a counterpart in North Korea, the [DPRK-Taiwan Exchange Promotion Association](#) (朝鮮台灣交流促進協會), a unit presumably under North Korea's [trade ministry](#). In the absence of diplomatic relations between the two sides, the Taiwan-DPRK Association is reportedly the only Taiwanese counterpart [recognized by North Korea](#). However, Taiwanese businesses have still been [restricted](#) in their economic and financial activities with North Korea due to the stringent international and US sanctions regime targeting North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. [Huang Yen-lang](#) (黃延朗), chairman of the Taiwan-DPRK Economic and Trade Association, has argued that more and more trade barriers have been erected between the two sides in recent years and that past trade cooperation has almost disappeared.

### **Taiwan's Policy on UN Sanctions on North Korea**

In September 2017, following Pyongyang's [sixth nuclear weapons test](#), the UN Security Council passed [Resolution 2375](#), requiring member states to export no more than 500,000 barrels of refined petroleum products to North Korea from October 1 to December 31 of that same year, and then no more than 2 million barrels per year starting in 2018. The resolution also [banned](#) natural gas sales, exports of textiles (Pyongyang's [second-largest export](#)), and work authorizations for DPRK nationals. US Ambassador to the UN [Nikki Haley](#) maintained that the resolution's sanctions, aimed at striking Pyongyang's ability to fuel and fund its nuclear program, "would only work if they were observed strictly by all states." Although Taiwan is not a UN member, and thus not obligated to follow UN res-

olutions, Taipei subsequently announced [a comprehensive ban](#) on imports and exports with North Korea, stating that [North Korean actions](#) violated past UN resolutions and affected regional stability. Following this announcement, Taiwan officially suspended [refined oil and liquefied natural gas exports](#) to North Korea, along with textile imports, in line with UN requirements.

Later, in June 2018, Taiwan's [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) (MOFA) announced that Taiwanese fishing boats would no longer employ North Korean nationals as crew members to comply with the UN ban on hiring DPRK nationals. The move also came after the US Departments of State, Treasury, and Homeland Security listed Taiwan in the [North Korea Sanctions & Enforcement Actions Advisory](#) as one of 41 countries and jurisdictions that had employed North Korean laborers in 2017 and 2018, mostly in Taiwan's seafood industry. As of July 2018, Taiwanese fishing boats only had [three](#) North Korean crew members who were set to return to North Korea later that month, compared to the nearly [278 North Korean workers](#) employed in August 2016.

### ***Taiwanese Nationals Involved in Illicit Trade with North Korea***

However, several incidents involving Taiwanese nationals in illicit weapons procurement and trade activities with North Korea have complicated the perception that Taipei is committed to the international sanctions regime. In 2013, the [US Treasury Department](#) sanctioned one Taiwanese entity, the Taichung-based Trans Multi Mechanics Co. Ltd. (鳳笙公司), and one Taiwanese citizen for their active roles in the procurement of dual-use machinery for the DPRK. In August 2017, a [former Taiwanese judge and his son](#) allegedly purchased and shipped four tons of coal from North Korea to Vietnam after the [UN Security Council](#) implemented a full ban on coal, iron, and iron ore exports from the DPRK earlier that month. Then, in November 2017, [South Korean authorities](#) seized a Hong Kong-owned cargo ship that was delivering oil to North Korean vessels in contravention of UN sanctions. Kaohsiung businessman [Chen Shih-hsien](#) (陳世憲) was suspected of renting the Lighthouse Winmore (方向永嘉號) cargo ship in order to sell more than [600 tons of refined oil](#) to a North Korean tanker on the high seas. After being [spotted by US satellites](#), Chen was handed over to Taiwanese authorities for prosecution.

The UN Security Council issued [new sanctions](#) in late December 2017 aimed at restricting the supply of crude oil and refined petroleum products to North Korea. Less than a week later, [US President Donald Trump](#) accused China on Twitter of secretly providing oil to North Korea. In response, [Beijing](#) stated that it had been enforcing all UN resolutions against North Korea, though South Korean spy satellites found at least [30 instances](#) of ship-to-ship oil transfers between Chinese and North Korean vessels since October. The US pressure on China to sever [all economic ties](#) with the DPRK also put Taiwan in a tight spot. In the years prior to the 2017 resolutions, Taiwan was suspected of providing nearly [80 percent](#) of North Korea's refined oil products. If China indeed took substantive steps to comply with UN sanctions on North Korea, then Taipei, which aspires to join the UN and other international organizations, would also need to decouple economically from North Korea. Furthermore, Taipei's calculus is quite clear: the [economic](#) and strategic relationship with the United States disproportionately outweighs the benefits of trade with North Korea. Also, Taiwanese businesses do not want to become [targets of US sanctions](#) on third parties doing business with North Korea.

In February 2018, [Taiwan](#) publicly urged local companies to comply with international sanctions after an independent report to the UN implicated a Taiwan-based network of ships for participating in illicit ship-to-ship transfers of petroleum products to the DPRK. Taiwan "again calls on our people and companies not to carry out any financial or commercial activities that contravene relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, to avoid facing sanctions," stated its [foreign ministry](#). However, the government's pleas, coupled with [tougher financial sanctions](#) against perpetrators, did not deter some Taiwanese citizens from continuing to engage in unsanctioned activities with the DPRK. More recently, in August 2019, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced the [designation](#) of two Taiwanese individuals and two Taiwanese shipping companies, Jui Pang Shipping Co Ltd (瑞邦海運股份有限公司) and Jui Zong Ship Management Co Ltd (瑞榮船舶管理有限公司)—both based in [Kaohsiung](#)—for conducting ship-to-ship transfers of petroleum products to North Korea during the previous year.

Despite the numerous incidents involving Taiwanese nationals and companies, Washington has praised the Taiwan government's commitment to the international sanctions regime targeting North Korea. "The United States acknowledges and is grateful for Taiwan's continued efforts to combat the DPRK's efforts to evade sanctions and to obtain resources for its WMD and missile programs," stated a [US Treasury press release](#) in 2019. Indeed, Taipei has chosen to forgo its economic and trade links with North Korea not only to demonstrate its commitment to UN sanctions on North Korea, but also to uphold the perception that it is a [responsible member of the international community](#), despite being barred from participating in many international organizations. For Taiwan, not being a UN member does not provide a justification to ignore UN resolutions. Taipei also has the additional imperative to show that it is doing a better job than China at adhering to UN resolutions on North Korea.

When tensions have flared between Washington and Pyongyang, the [Tsai administration](#) has been inclined to avoid any sort of exchange or contact with North Korea. However, during the warming of relations leading up to the [historic Trump-Kim summit meeting](#) in Singapore in June 2018, some Taiwanese businesses hoped that [barriers to trade](#) between Taiwan and North Korea would be dismantled. Indeed, Taiwanese businesses stand to [indirectly benefit](#) from North Korea's domestic economic reforms and opening up if there is also parallel progress towards reducing tensions and fostering peace on the Korean Peninsula. However, as long as US-DPRK tensions remain at heightened levels and China continues to play a less than supportive role in reining in North Korea's nuclear program, Taipei will likely continue to take a hardline position against any new economic activity with the Hermit Kingdom.

**The main point:** Taipei has forgone its trade and economic relations with North Korea amid its desire to become a responsible international stakeholder.

## Congressional Initiatives Shifting US Towards Strategic Clarity

By: Michael Mazza

*Michael Mazza is a senior nonresident fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute, a visiting fellow with the American Enterprise Institute, and a nonresident fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States.*

Fundamental changes to Taiwan policy could be coming down the pike if Congress has anything to say about it. In response to China's increasingly brazen behavior in the wake of COVID-19, the legislative branch is asserting its traditional leadership role in crafting Taiwan policy. Although the Trump administration's approach to Taiwan—which has featured more robust diplomatic engagement and regular arms sales—has been largely positive, some legislators believe the president should be doing more.

Writing for *National Review* on May 11, Congressman Mike Gallagher [argued](#), "it is time to end our policy of strategic ambiguity." In that 40-year-old approach, Washington has intentionally eschewed clarity on the question of whether the United States would intervene in a cross-Strait conflict, thus hoping to deter either side from acting provocatively. But Gallagher understands that in today's world, the threat to stability in Asia comes not from a Taiwan that is intent on living in peace with its neighbors, but from a Chinese Communist Party intent on bringing its neighbors—especially Taiwan—to heel. "Now is the time for a declaratory statement of policy," Gallagher writes, "committing the United States to the defense of Taiwan."

It is difficult—not impossible—to believe that such a statement is likely to come from President Donald Trump. Despite his administration's commendable record on advancing US-Taiwan relations, the president seems to personally adhere to a view of the world more in line with that of Chinese Politburo member Yang Jiechi (楊潔篪), who once told a Singaporean foreign minister: "China is a big country and other countries are small countries." Former National Security Advisor John Bolton [described](#) the president's troubling mindset in *The Wall Street Journal* last month:

*"Trump was particularly dyspeptic about Taiwan,*

*having listened to Wall Street financiers who had gotten rich off mainland China investments. One of Trump's favorite comparisons was to point to the tip of one of his Sharpies and say, "This is Taiwan," then point to the historic Resolute desk in the Oval Office and say, "This is China."*

If this characterization is accurate, it is hard to envision the president explicitly committing the United States to the defense of Taiwan. Even so, that has not stopped Congress from seeking to move the United States in that direction.

### ***The Taiwan Defense Act***

On June 11, Senator Josh Hawley introduced the [Taiwan Defense Act](#), with Mike Gallagher introducing a [companion bill](#) in the House of Representatives on July 1. The bill's goal is "to maintain the ability of the United States Armed Forces to deny a *fait accompli* by the People's Republic of China against Taiwan." [1] The legislation describes maintaining that ability as US policy. To that end, the proposed law would require the Department of Defense to issue an annual report, for a period of five years, on the Department's progress in ensuring "the ability of the United States Armed Forces to conduct combined joint operations to deny the ability of the People's Republic of China to execute a *fait accompli* against Taiwan."

The legislation does not directly address the question of strategic ambiguity, nor does it seek to explicitly commit the United States to come to Taiwan's defense in the event of an attempted invasion. It does contend, however, that the "sense of Congress" is that Taiwan's fate is "crucially linked to the fates of all countries in the Indo-Pacific region, including to the fate of the United States." It likewise asserts that the Taiwan Relations Act "*requires* the United States to maintain the ability to defeat a *fait accompli*" (emphasis added).

One element of the bill's reporting requirement is of particular interest. The report must include "an assessment of the manner in which different options for pre-delegating authorities, including authorities relating to kinetic strikes against targets on the mainland of the People's Republic of China, may improve the ability" of the US military to deny China a *fait accompli*. In other words, the law seeks to ensure that US forces have the ability to respond quickly to any PRC move

against Taiwan, and the bill's authors envision that such rapid responses could include strikes on Chinese territory.

Were this bill to become law, Congress would be clearly signaling a willingness, if not an intention, to defend Taiwan with force if necessary and to incur risk in doing so. [2] The bill does not do away with strategic ambiguity, but it does attempt to impose some clarity regarding America's commitment to Taiwan's defense.

### ***The Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act***

The Taiwan Invasion Prevention (TIP) Act, which is being proposed by Rep. Ted Yoho, goes even further. Most notably, it includes an authorization for the use of military force (AUMF):

*"The President is authorized to use the Armed Forces of the United States and take such other measures as the President determines to be necessary and appropriate in order to secure and protect Taiwan against the following:*

*(1) Direct armed attack by the military forces of the People's Republic of China against the military forces of Taiwan.*

*(2) The taking of territory under the effective jurisdiction of Taiwan by the military forces of the People's Republic of China.*

*(3) The endangering of the lives of members of the military forces of Taiwan or civilians within the effective jurisdiction of Taiwan in cases in which such members or civilians have been killed or are in imminent danger of being killed."*

The AUMF calls to mind the [1955 Formosa Resolution](#), a joint resolution that authorized President Dwight D. Eisenhower to use force in the defense of Taiwan and the Pescadores. The TIP Act also formally calls for an end to strategic ambiguity and urges the president to "release a public declaration that it is the policy of the United States to secure and protect Taiwan against the actions of the People's Republic of China" described above.

Although the president arguably already has the constitutional authority to use force to defend Taiwan, this AUMF—if it were to become law—would be significant. In particular, it would clearly telegraph to Bei-

jing that Congress does not intend to oppose armed intervention in the event of hostilities. In other words, it contributes to deterrence by making clear that the politics surrounding a decision on intervention would be less complicated than Beijing might hope, and that Congress is likely to step up in providing needed resources. As with the Taiwan Defense Act, the TIP Act makes strategic ambiguity a bit less ambiguous, even if the administration's approach has not changed.

Beyond the AUMF, the bill employs other measures to strengthen Taiwan's security. For instance, it directs the secretary of defense and the secretary of state to launch a multilateral dialogue of "like-minded security partners" to discuss, among other things, "planning for potential military confrontation scenarios." It likewise directs the secretary of defense to "seek to carry out a program of combined military exercises between the United States, Taiwan, and, if feasible, United States allies and partners."

Perhaps most interestingly, the bill encourages the defense secretary to reestablish the Taiwan Patrol Force. The Taiwan Patrol Force was a US Navy operation that existed under a variety of names from 1950 until 1979. Sailing out of Keelung or Kaohsiung, one or two US warships regularly patrolled the waters separating China from Taiwan. As the Naval War College's Bruce Elleman described in his [history](#) of the Taiwan Patrol Force, "US Navy ships acted both as a buffer between the two antagonists and as a trip wire in case of aggression." It is time, the TIP Act suggests, for the US Navy to play that role again. The Navy has conducted semi-regular transits of the Strait of late, but there is something to be said for a constant or near-constant presence. Establishing a "trip wire" is yet another way of taking the ambiguity out of America's approach to the defense of Taiwan.

The preemptive AUMF may be a non-starter for Republicans and Democrats alike, but to dismiss it out of hand would be a mistake. As long as the current administration and its successors insist on sticking to strategic ambiguity—which arguably [contributes](#) to instability in the Strait—Congress will have to get creative in further clarifying the US commitment to Taiwan's defense.

Congress passed the Formosa Resolution just days after

Eisenhower submitted the US-Republic of China (ROC) Mutual Defense Treaty to the Senate for ratification and in the midst of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, when China was bombarding ROC-held offshore islands. Does Washington really want to wait until Taiwan and China are once again exchanging blows before making clear where American stands?

**The main point:** Members of Congress are calling on the American president to do away with strategic ambiguity and writing legislation aimed at clarifying the US commitment to Taiwan's defense.

[1] The bill defines "*fait accompli*" as "the strategy of the People's Republic of China designed to allow the People's Republic of China to use military force to seize control of Taiwan before the United States Armed Forces are able to respond effectively, while simultaneously deterring an effective combined joint response by the United States Armed Forces by convincing the United States that mounting such a response would be prohibitively difficult or costly."

[2] Watered-down language has been included in the Senate and House versions of this year's National Defense Authorization Act, but the reporting requirement is absent.

## Trends in American Perceptions of US-Taiwan Relations

By: Timothy Rich, Andi Dahmer, and Madelynn Einhorn

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American arms sales to Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) play a crucial role in Taiwan's defense, but have also remained a point of contention

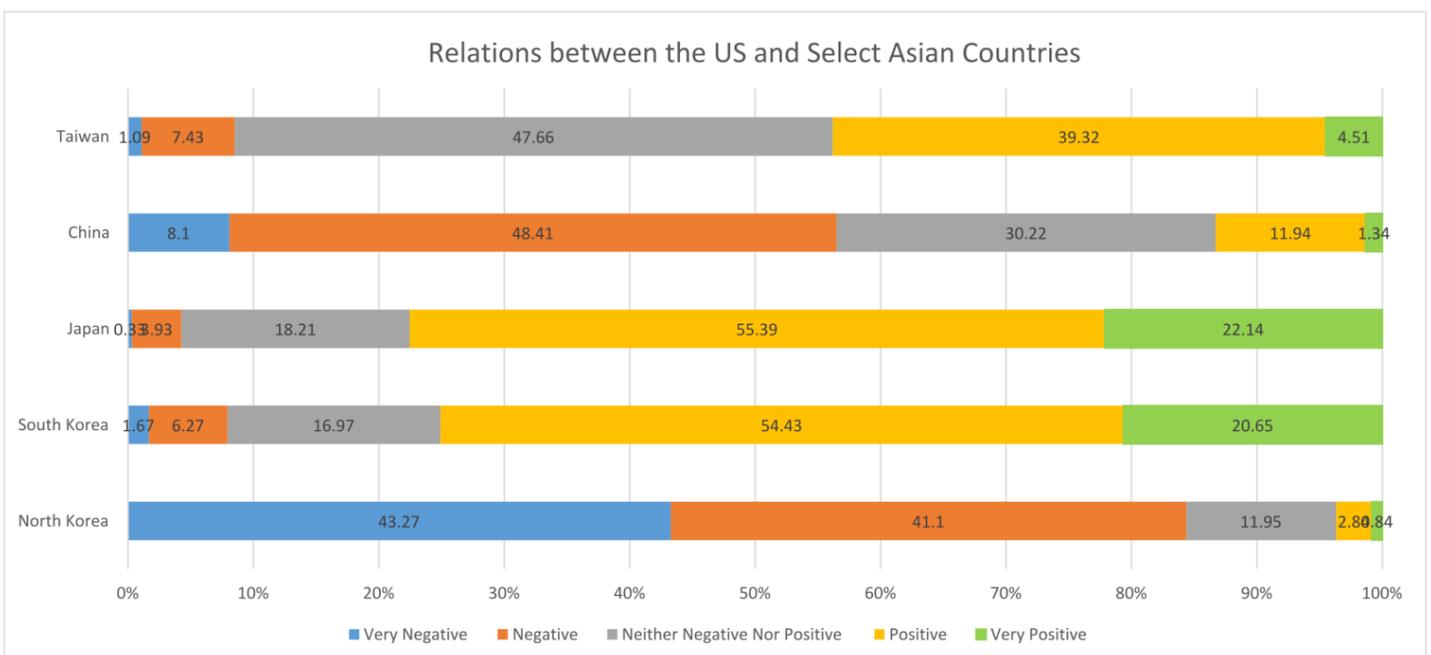
in US-China relations since normalization in 1979. As the only country willing to confront Chinese pressure and sell arms to Taiwan, the United States is the primary provider of the critical armaments Taiwan might need should a military conflict with China develop. As characterized by the Trump administration, the arms sales enhance Taiwan’s capability to [deter threats and “strengthen homeland defense.”](#) Yet, it remains unclear whether the American public supports such efforts, especially considering the public’s limited knowledge of Taiwan and concerns about worsening relations with China. For instance, a [2019 Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll](#) found that 61 percent of Americans were against arms sales to the island democracy.

Since 2010, the US has sold over [USD \\$15 billion](#) in armaments to Taiwan. In 2015, [a group of Republican lawmakers](#) called on the Obama administration to supply additional arms to Taiwan, with late Senator John McCain arguing that absent supplementary arms, “Taiwan’s military will continue to be under-resourced and unable to make the investments necessary to maintain a credible deterrence across the Strait.” More recently, the Trump administration approved additional arms sales of USD \$180 million in May 2020. Chinese officials have claimed that these sales [“inflicted further damage to current Sino-US relations.”](#) In response to the sales, [China has imposed sanctions, cancelled military exchanges, and penalized the companies](#) that manu-

factured the armaments.

Despite the potential economic and political ramifications of arms sales to Taiwan, there has been relatively little analysis of American public support for such sales. YouGov, a London based market research and analytics firm specializing in rigorous internet-based public opinion surveys, asked Americans about their perception of Taiwan. In 2017, they found that 44 percent of Americans viewed Taiwan as friendly and 13 percent viewed it as an ally, while 34 percent were unsure, suggesting that the average American has fairly limited knowledge of Taiwan. Our own survey research in March 2020 asking Americans to evaluate relations between the United States and East Asian countries (see the figure below) found that nearly half of respondents rated relations with Taiwan as neither negative nor positive (47.66 percent), higher than any other country in the region. Far more viewed relations with Taiwan positively (43.83 percent) than did negatively (8.52 percent), but this pales in comparison to positive evaluations of relations with South Korea (67.14 percent) or Japan (73.27 percent). Additionally, a [2018 Pew Research Center survey](#) determined that 41 percent of Americans are somewhat concerned about tensions between Taiwan and China, a 3 percent decrease from 2017.

Previous research on Taiwanese public opinion on diplomacy has identified that framing policies as having



the potential to harm relations with China can influence support, leading to increased support for [formal diplomatic relations](#), but less support for [increasing ties with India](#). However, little research addresses American public opinion about Taiwan. Our research sought to find if similar framing effects would be present in the US context.

To address US public support for Taiwan, we conducted a web survey involving 1,026 American respondents via mTurk Amazon on July 7, 2020. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two prompts to evaluate on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The two prompts read as follows:

Version 1: The US should continue arms sales to Taiwan for its defense.

Version 2: The US should continue arms sales to Taiwan for its defense, even if this harms US relations with China.

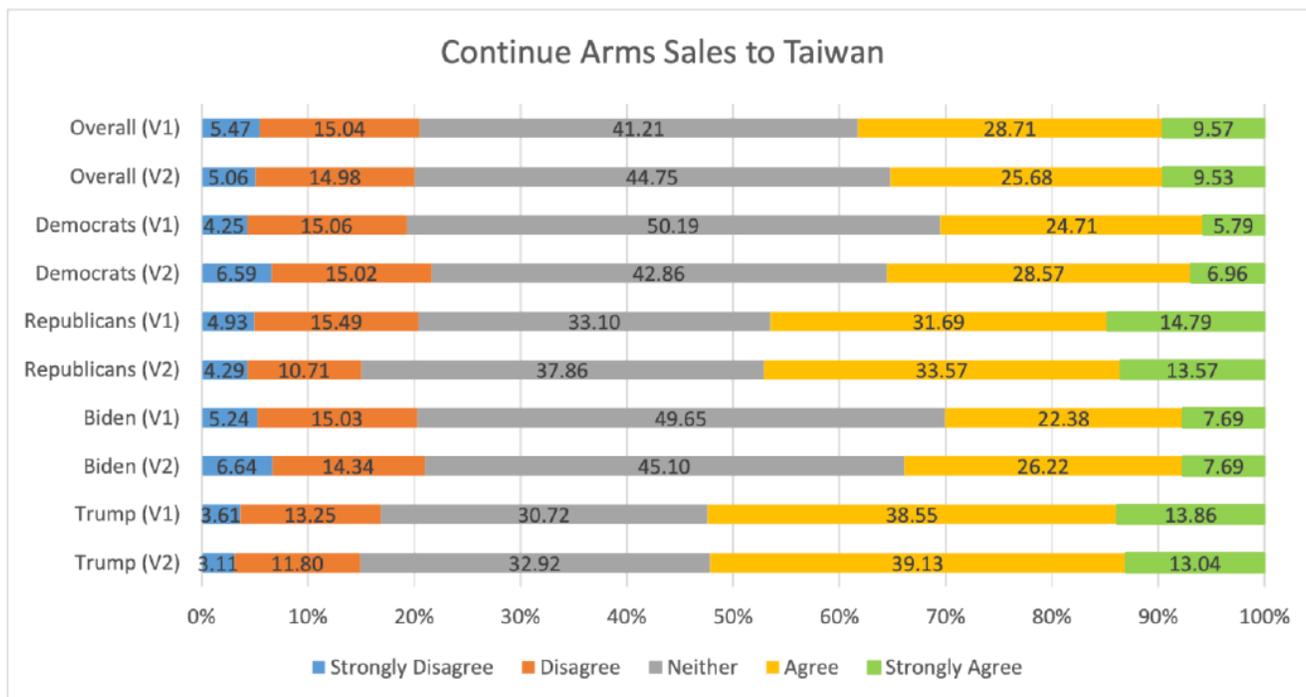
The figure below shows the results not only for the overall sample, but also divided by partisan identification. Overall, we see a plurality of respondents were indifferent (answered “neither”) in both Version 1 (44.75 percent) and Version 2 (41.21 percent). Second, we see that support for continued sales (those answering “agree” or “strongly agree”) was 35.21 percent in Version 1, increasing slightly to 38.28 percent when

framed in terms of relations with China. In other words, we see that mentioning potential worsening of relations with China only has a marginal influence on increasing support for arms sales to Taiwan.

Moving to partisan identification, we see that 30.5 percent of Democrats supported continuation of arms sales in Version 1, increasing to 35.53 percent when China is referenced (Version 2), yet in both versions, a plurality if not a majority of respondents were indifferent. In contrast, a plurality of Republicans supported arms sales in Version 1 (46.48 percent), with virtually no difference in Version 2 (47.14 percent).

Breaking down support by whether one stated they would vote for Joe Biden or Donald Trump in the 2020 US presidential election produced similar results. For Biden supporters, a plurality were indifferent in Versions 1 (49.65 percent) and 2 (45.1 percent), while support for arms sales increased slightly from 30.07 percent to 33.91 percent. In contrast, a majority of Trump supporters supported arms sales to Taiwan, with nearly identical rates in Version 1 (52.41 percent) and Version 2 (52.17 percent).

The results suggest little public opposition to continued arms sales to Taiwan, even if such sales worsen relations with China. Our findings also show greater support for arms than some surveys, such as the 2019 Chicago



Council on Global Affairs. While this may be due to demographic differences in our web survey recruitment, this discrepancy could be in part due to the wording of the survey. Our survey specifically phrases the question as, “the continuation of arms sales”, and tests whether worsening relations with China influences views. Most previous survey research simply refers to selling arms, an act that respondents may not be aware directly relates to Taiwan. However, that a third or more of the public remains indifferent to sales suggests the importance of making a bipartisan case for Taiwan to the American public. This could include emphasizing sympathetic aspects about Taiwan, such as its longstanding relationship with the US, the importance of assisting a fellow democracy, and the extent of the security threat China poses, particularly as a gateway to other US military bases in East Asia. These efforts will be particularly important if arms sales alone are not enough to secure Taiwan’s democracy. For example, the 2019 Chicago Council survey also found that only 38 percent of respondents would support using US troops if China invaded Taiwan, 20 percent lower than if North Korea invaded South Korea. While gauging public opinion of hypothetical situations remains problematic, these differences in support, along with views of US-Taiwan relations compared to American relations with Japan and South Korea, suggest the urgency of improving Taiwan’s image to the American public.

We should also be cognizant of the timing of our survey, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which originated in China. This has likely—at least temporarily—souring public views on China, which may have limited the effect of framing arms sales as harmful to US relations with China. In other words, concerns of weakening relations with China may be less salient temporarily due to animosity regarding COVID-19. At the very least, the results suggest that the public is not hostile to continued arms sales and that efforts to portray Taiwan as a reliable partner may increase support. However, it is unclear how stable these preferences may be, especially if China responds more aggressively to additional sales beyond rhetorical opposition.

Beyond benefits for Taiwan, arms sales also benefit the United States. The risk of Chinese aggression in the region is ever-present, and Beijing has “[made no promise to renounce the use of force](#)” in unifying Taiwan. How-

ever, arms sales not only allow Taiwan to defend itself but also allow the United States to defend areas of strategic importance in East Asia. Taiwan’s location adjacent to the South China Sea is of prime military importance to the United States, as Taiwan occupies a [key position](#) in the “first island chain.” As such, it is necessary to control Chinese advancements in the event of military conflict. Symbolically, the arms sales agreements also signal US willingness to intervene should China attack first and demonstrate an American commitment to [defending democracy abroad](#) and to maintaining even informal diplomatic partnerships. While Republicans historically have shown stronger support for Taiwan, there is an increasingly bipartisan support for aiding in Taiwan’s defense, including the recent arms sales.

**The main point:** While US arms sales to Taiwan are crucial to American policy in East Asia, there have been relatively few studies assessing US public support for such sales. A new survey has demonstrated that support for continued arms sales is strong, though many Americans remain uninformed or indifferent to Taiwan.

## Han Kuang 36 Exercise Highlight Innovations in Countering PLA Threat

By: Lienhai “Brian” Sung

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In the face of the increasingly assertive Chinese threat, Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) launched the 36th annual joint military exercise called “[Han Kuang 36](#)” (HK36, 漢光) from July 13-17, 2020. This year’s iteration highlighted several noteworthy distinctions from previous exercises. Taken together, these innovations appear to directly support President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文)’s stated goal from her [second inaugural speech](#) of developing asymmetric warfare capabilities to counter the People’s Republic of China’s increasingly menacing military and paramilitary forces.

The most notable [new capabilities](#) displayed at HK36 in-

clude (a) the newly formed [Combined Arms Battalion](#) (聯合兵種營); (b) the joint “anti-decapitation forces” (反斬首部隊) composed of the Military Police Special Services Company (憲兵特勤隊), the Coast Guard Administration Special Task Force (海巡署特勤隊), and the National Police Agency Special Operations Group (警政署維安特勤隊); (c) a battery-sized, mobilized, reserve artillery unit operating howitzers in live-fire training alongside active-duty troops; and (d) the first submarine-launched torpedo live-fire exercise in 13 years. These capabilities reflect incremental, meaningful improvements in Taiwan’s self-defense capabilities and a more subtle change in mindset to countering China’s military threat. A more detailed discussion of each capability is warranted. [1]

The [Combined Arms Battalion](#) is a significant achievement. It mirrors to an extent the US Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF). Essentially, it is a combined arms force large enough to fight independently. The battalion is composed of infantry and armored companies, as well as naval gunfire and a close air support liaison section—similar to the [Marines’ Air, Naval Gunfire Liaison Company](#) (ANGLICO)—as well as an Army aviation liaison section. The battalion also utilizes organic [unmanned aerial vehicles](#) (UAVs) for reconnaissance and surveillance, Stinger missiles for organic air defense, and sniper teams. It is a highly mobile combat unit, utilizing the [indigenous eight-wheeled armored vehicle](#) (雲豹甲車) developed by the Ministry of National Defense (MND) Armaments Bureau (國防部軍備局). With its unified command and control (C2) element and its ground forces combined with the maritime and air liaison team assigned to fire support operations, this battalion is a potentially powerful force.

During HK36, MND was able to display the battalion’s capabilities, but presumably made sure to operationally test and evaluate its command, control, communications (C3), and firepower prior to this demonstration. One example of the type of issue this evaluation should have addressed is that, under Taiwan’s defense concept, this type of independent battalion requires its regional service support command to provide flexible and swift logistics support during combat and combat maneuvering. For example, if a combined arms battalion home-based near Taipei is ordered south to Taichung, the regional service support command in the Taichung theater is now responsible for supporting

that battalion. Testing and evaluation leading up to HK 36 likely provided important lessons on this combat service support function, but the exercise was likely too short to demonstrate that capability. Another issue is whether these battalions will be “standing” organizations, with a team that works, trains, and (ideally) lives together on a routine basis. So unit manning and realistic training must be paramount concerns if the combined arms battalion concept is to be a success.

HK36 is the first time that it [combined special operations forces](#) from the Army with elements of the Coast Guard and the National Police Agency for a joint “anti-decapitation operations.” A “decapitation strike” refers to the act of “cutting off the head” of an enemy army and its political system by targeting a country’s top leadership in the opening hours of a war, thereby paralyzing the national response to the attack. In Taiwan, which is situated very close to China, such an attack could be carried out by Chinese special operations forces, sleeper intelligence agents, and/or airborne troops. The mission of the new joint force highlighted in HK36 was to counter such a decapitation strike by China against [Taiwan’s senior leadership](#) in the Bo’ai Special District (博愛特區), an area in Taipei containing the presidential palace and presidential residence.

This joint capability should warrant closer attention for several reasons. First and most important, it should signal to General Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership that there will be no easy victories if they are foolish enough to try to capture Taiwan through a quick decapitation strike. Second, and related, the joint capability aligns with President Tsai’s mandate of developing asymmetric warfare capabilities to counter the PRC’s more powerful military capabilities. In recent years, the US military has engaged with Taiwan in the development of this asymmetrical military capability. To this end, senior US officials have recommended that Taiwan establish a Joint Special Operations Command, and integrate branch special forces into a unified command system.

However, when it comes to “jointness”, there is a long history of inter-service rivalry in Taiwan, with each service maintaining a “[stand-alone](#)” posture. Such rivalries and “our service can do it all” mentalities are potentially a recipe for strategic defeat. As a result, Taiwan’s armed forces are belatedly learning to swiftly adapt to a joint mindset,

integrate, and study special operations requirements and techniques to ensure interoperability and equipment standardization. HK36 will help MND and the National Security Council, among others, assess how well the Armed Forces' ability to plan and conduct special operations exercises and training—and to develop truly joint Special Operations integration—is progressing.

The mobilization of [artillery reservists](#) to fire alongside active duty forces is reportedly another “first.” This symbolically important display of reservists standing side-by-side with active duty troops, firing in defense of Taiwan, underpins the military reform that President Tsai [called for](#) as recently as July 15.

These mobilized reserves come from all walks of life and most have been out of the military (a mostly conscription-based service) for many years. They are no longer familiar with military life, and frankly, have often lost taste of it. That is a major challenge Taiwan must overcome. Worse, for unsatisfactory (mostly political) reasons, the reservists' training module is not threat-oriented, and is not intense enough to adequately prepare the reservists physically, psychologically, or professionally to defend Taiwan. Nevertheless, from the tightly supervised training officers' perspectives, as long as there are no accidents, violations of law, or serious disciplinary issues, the reservist training mission is considered “successful.”

Perhaps Taiwan needs to learn from Singapore. [2] The strict standards set by the Singaporean Armed Forces are admirable and could be emulated. Every reservist maintains the same high standards as active duty members: regulation haircuts, well-maintained personally-owned equipment, and a desire to study and work hard. Such high standards are rarely practiced in the Taiwan reserves. These issues may seem small, but if Taiwan's military does not (or is not allowed to) enforce such small disciplinary rules, its reservists will fail when confronted with the life-and-death challenges presented by a PRC attack. The failed reserve system is a problem that must be taken up at the presidential and Legislative Yuan levels, as MND cannot fix it on its own. That is why it is significant that President Tsai highlighted this integrated reserve-active duty live-fire exercise at HK36.

During the exercise, a submarine tested live-firing of

a torpedo. What may seem like a small training success again represents a larger change of mindset in Taiwan. While some analysts argue that China's military is among the most powerful in the world, Taiwan can potentially counter its attack through asymmetric warfare. Submarines play a major role in this [asymmetric strategy](#). At the groundbreaking ceremony for the submarine manufacturing plant in Kaohsiung, Taiwan in 2019, President Tsai [said](#): “These submarines will not only enhance the Navy's asymmetric combat effectiveness, but also can be deployed to the southwest and northeast waters of our island, allowing us to more effectively deter the enemy around Taiwan.”

In light of the difficult historic context, the [launching](#) of a German surface and underwater target (SUT) heavyweight torpedo by the aging Sea Tiger 794 during a July 15 exercise on the southeast coast of Taiwan was momentous. The launch was the first of its kind in 13 years, and it successfully [hit the target](#). This clearly demonstrates the Taiwan Navy's determination to defend the country under austere conditions. Furthermore, this launch does not appear to be a “one-off.” In July, the US State Department [approved](#) the possible arms sale of 18 MK 48 Mod6 advanced technology (AT) heavyweight torpedoes (HWT) and related equipment to Taiwan at an estimated cost of USD \$180 million. It is a start, but more is needed. Taiwan is also advancing the “Indigenous Defense Submarine” program to build eight attack submarines. According to MND sources, as there will be a total of 10 attack submarines equipped with Mk-48 torpedoes and other UGM-84L harpoons, China must think twice about invading Taiwan.

Overall, it is clear that Taiwan's Armed Forces have made significant progress in recent year adapting their asymmetric defense posture to the growing military and security threats posed by the PRC.

**The main point:** The HK36 military exercise highlighted several noteworthy distinctions from previous years, innovations that directly support President Tsai Ing-wen's goal of developing asymmetric warfare and emerging reservist capabilities to counter the PRC's increasingly menacing military and paramilitary forces.

[1] It is important to restate the obvious: the Han Kuang exercises are not field training exercises. They are designed to showcase capabilities, both real and

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aspirational. After extensive rehearsal, the participants make it look easy. But it is not standard force development field training. Accordingly, it is useful to assess the value of the exercises in terms of general aspirations regarding desired capabilities, and not necessarily as a depiction of how well actual training and “across the board” resourcing to achieve this endstate is really progressing.

[2] This author underwent military training with Singapore Army active service members and reservists.