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Democratic Party's Platform Omits "One-China Policy" in Reference to Taiwan

In a sign of the changing political winds in Washington, DC, the Democratic Party's [2020 platform](#) made a not so subtle and significant adjustment in the party's policy towards Taiwan—bringing it more into alignment with the Republican Party's position on the island-democracy. A party platform encapsulates the view of mainstream members of the party's principles, goals, and positions on domestic and foreign affairs. In the paragraph underscoring the "China challenge" facing the United States, [the Democratic Party's 2020 platform](#), adopted on August 18, states:

"Democrats believe the China challenge is not primarily a military one, but we will deter and respond to aggression. We will underscore our global commitment to freedom of navigation and resist the Chinese military's intimidation in the South China Sea. Democrats are committed to the Taiwan Relations Act and will continue to support a peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues consistent with the wishes and best interests of the people of Taiwan."

For the first time since [1996](#)—at the height of cross-Strait tension during the 1995-96 Third Taiwan Strait Crisis—the Democratic Party conspicuously omitted reference to a "One-China Policy" in reference to Taiwan in its party platform. Indeed, in all the platforms adopted between 1996 and 2016 ([2012](#), [2008](#), [2004](#), [2000](#)), the party's platform included reference to a "One-China Policy" in sections referring to its approach to China and Taiwan. For example, the [2016 platform](#) stated:

"We are committed to a "One China" policy and the Taiwan Relations Act and will continue to support a peaceful resolution of Cross-Strait issues that is consistent with

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the wishes and best interests of the people of Taiwan.”

As noted earlier, this shift in the Democratic Party’s platform brings it more in line with mainstream Republican views on Taiwan policy. As the Republican Party’s [2020 platform](#)—which is identical to the [2016 platform](#)—states:

“We salute the people of Taiwan, with whom we share the values of democracy, human rights, a free market economy, and the rule of law. Our relations will continue to be based upon the provisions of the Taiwan Relations Act, and we affirm the Six Assurances given to Taiwan in 1982 by President Reagan.”

Like the Democratic Party’s 2020 platform, there was no mention of a “One-China Policy.” The closest a Republican Party platform has come to *implying* a “One-China Policy” was in its [2004 platform](#), which stated: “The United States government’s policy is that there is one China, as reflected in the Three Communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act.” On the contrary, in perhaps the strongest language adopted by the Republican Party, the [2000 platform](#) stated: “If China violates these principles and attacks Taiwan, then the United States will respond appropriately in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act. America will help Taiwan defend itself.”

While party platforms are largely symbolic and non-binding for whoever is elected to hold the top executive office in the world’s most powerful democracy, they nevertheless influence the framing of the issues that are addressed during presidential debates. Although foreign policy is generally not a priority issue in most presidential elections, the focus on Russian interference over the past four years, the ongoing US-China trade war, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could all help to position China policy as an issue in the national dialogue. In turn, this could—and perhaps should—make Taiwan policy a matter of presidential debate. As the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal* [argued](#): “The candidates should be pressed to explain their views on Taiwan beyond platitudes about warm feelings. The island is at the center of a great-power rivalry, and voters deserve to hear how the next president would handle it.”

Despite its non-binding function, a radical departure

from the party’s platform could also result in some political costs for the elected president. This is especially true in the case of Taiwan policy, as the prevailing views of both major political parties seem to align on the issue. As noted earlier, the platforms do reflect broader sentiments within the party towards these issues. It is worth noting how, after being elected into office in 2000, then-President [George W. Bush](#) said that the United States would do “whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself” in the event of attack by China. This was very much in line with the strong language used in the 2000 Republican Party platform.

These changes to the party’s platform do not occur in isolation; indeed, they also seem reflective of deeper changes in American society, which have been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis. While the change in the party’s platform may only reflect a certain segment of the broader population, the shift is also consistent with a deeper souring of American attitudes toward China. In an [April 2020 survey](#) of public attitudes in the United States toward China conducted by the Pew Research Center, the number of people with unfavorable views toward China reached a new high of 66 percent, increasing six points from 60 percent just the year before. This marks the second consecutive year of increases in the percentage of people who see China as unfavorable, rising from 47 percent in 2018. Simultaneously, the proportion of those with favorable views of China dropped from 38 percent in 2018 to 26 percent in 2020.

To be fair, the US “One-China Policy” is not codified in law, nor has it ever been clearly defined. Furthermore, it wouldn’t be precisely clear what it would mean in terms of both the substance and conduct of US informal relations with Taiwan if an administration were to dispense with a “One-China Policy” while still maintaining the [Taiwan Relations Act](#) (TRA)—which legally governs relations with Taiwan in the absence of diplomatic recognition.

It is perhaps worth remembering how then-President-elect Donald Trump stirred a hornet’s nest in December 2016 when he [stated](#): “I don’t know why we [the United States] have to be bound by a ‘One-China Policy’ unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things, including trade.” Similar to reactions to the president-elect’s brief phone conversation with

the democratically elected president of Taiwan, most responses to this statement ranged from fear, to disbelief, to contempt. [Some observers](#) were shocked that President Trump had the audacity to question the seemingly sacrosanct “One-China Policy.”

This is to say that, in spite of the Democratic Party’s subtle but significant adjustment of its policy towards Taiwan, this does not mean that the Democratic presidential nominee, Joseph Biden, would discard the “One-China Policy” if he were to win the presidency. Indeed, such an event is very unlikely. And, to be clear, President Donald Trump, a Republican, did not discard the “One-China Policy,” even after winning the presidency running on a pro-Taiwan Republican platform.

While hyper-partisanship continues to consume the broader policy ecosystem in the United States, Taiwan policy remains a bright spot, allowing for a strong demonstration of bipartisanship. This political consensus appears to be growing stronger as Beijing intensifies its pressure on the island-democracy. This bipartisanship was clearly reflected when Congress unanimously passed legislation in support of Taiwan, such as the [Taiwan Travel Act](#) and the [TAIPEI Act](#). It will become increasingly difficult for Beijing to define the US’ “One-China Policy” as closely aligned with its own anachronistic “One-China Principle.”

There is politics and then there is policy—the two are different but not mutually exclusive. Especially during an election year, politics are not always reflective of policy, while politics are a necessary but insufficient component of policy change. The two are hard to align, and rarely do, especially across the political aisle. But now, for once in a long time—at least since the last Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996—the political and policy stars seem to be aligning between the two major political parties on US policy towards Taiwan.

The main point: In the first time since 1996, the Democratic Party conspicuously omitted reference to a “One-China Policy” in reference to Taiwan in its party platform, making it more aligned with the Republican Party’s platform.

Former Senior US National Security Officials Imagine a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan in 2021

As the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) approaches in July 2021, a cautionary tale penned by two former top American intelligence and defense officials has re-ignited an ongoing debate among Taiwan watchers about the possible timeline for a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. In a [think piece](#) for the US Naval Institute imagining a hypothetical conflict scenario titled “The War that Never Was?”, former Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Michael Morell and former Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral (ret.) James Winnefeld imagined how a Chinese invasion of Taiwan that could take place as early as in January 2021 could unfold.

Morrell and Winnefeld envision a Chinese invasion of Taiwan that exploits the distraction caused by the turmoil of a disruptive political transition in the United States in January 2021, quickly resulting in a successful Chinese conquest (due in large part to the non-response of the United States) of the island. The piece ostensibly serves to underscore the United States’ lack of political and military preparedness as well as readiness to respond to a surprise crisis scenario in the Taiwan Strait. A summation of the authors’ warning to current policymakers can be found in the [article’s](#) closing line: “In the end, the conflict for which the United States, and in particular the American military, prepared for so long and for which it provided billions of dollars in military hardware to Taiwan, had been lost before it started.”

Setting aside the glaring assumptions that the two former officials made in the efficacy of the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) ability to execute a complex amphibious invasion of Taiwan, the willingness of Taiwanese forces and population to grind out the fight, and the United States and other allies’ (lack of) resolve to become involved in the conflict, the authors essentially imagine a scenario in which a surprise Chinese attack catches everyone politically and militarily off-guard—thus creating a *fait accompli*.

The imagination that went into creating the whole scenario of course begs another question: Why would China want to invade Taiwan in 2021?

“It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the

future,” once said American professional baseball player Yogi Berra. So why 2021? Interestingly, this is not the first time that the year has been put forward as a possibility. Besides Chinese propagandists, Ambassador (ret.) Chas Freeman, who served as the principal interpreter during the late President Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, [wrote](#) as recently as 2017:

“President Xi has not publicly set a deadline for formalizing Taiwan’s reunification [sic] with the rest of China. It’s doubtful that he will. But vanity, in the form of the search for a historical legacy, and national pride, in the ramp up to the July 1, 2021, hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, provide ample motivation for China’s current leadership to adopt this as a goal.”

To be clear, the PLA’s principal objective is to conquer Taiwan while deterring, delaying, or destroying US military actions to assist in the defense of the island-nation. This is what China refers to as its [“Main Strategic Direction”](#) (主要戰略方向). And, indeed, even General Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平) has [sounded the alarm](#) about the need to bring Taiwan into the fold of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—sooner rather than later. However, while the Chinese leadership has had the motivation to subdue Taiwan since as far back as 1949, an actual decision to use military force would require far more than the mere existence of motivations to act. Rather, any such decision must include consideration of the enormous risks involved—as Ian Easton, senior director at the Project 2049 Institute, meticulously documented in his namesake book *“The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan’s Defense and American Strategy in Asia.”* [1]

Motivations tell us nothing about the decision-making process that the CCP would have to necessarily go through prior to launching an invasion. Chinese leaders would need to consider whether they think they have the capability to succeed under current conditions, and whether a failure would increase the probability of an accelerated collapse of the CCP, as well as many other political-military variables. As [Allison Kauffman](#), the principal research scientist at the federally funded CNA, testifying before the US-China Security and Economic Review Commission, stated: “[...] at present, the potential costs to China of setting off such a conflict are

very high without a guarantee of success.”

Taking a forgiving view of Morrell’s and Winnefeld’s underlying motivations for writing the article, as well as the timing of its publication, it is possible that the two former senior national security officials are trying to warn the US government about the dangers of complacency. Specifically, they seem concerned about possibility of a *fait accompli*—a done deal in the Taiwan Strait—should elected leaders and military planners take their eyes off the ball. For all their warnings about the possibility of an imminent conflict in the Taiwan Strait, the former officials suggested that, given the current level of political turmoil, the US government may find itself in a state of paralysis, impairing its ability to respond to the crisis. From a more cynical view, the authors are inadvertently signaling what they read as a lack of US resolve to come to the defense of Taiwan should the Chinese invade in 2021, which could invite the adventurism by China that they seem to be warning about.

While it seems unlikely that China would take on the enormous costs and risks of initiating a full-scale conflict in the near term, as Dr. Kauffman [argues](#), that is not to say of course that consideration of the possibility is not warranted. The failure to imagine unreasonable risks would be a strategic mistake. Indeed, China has been ratcheting up tensions in the Taiwan Strait in recent years, while members of Congress have proposed several pieces of legislation that seek to address this behavior vis-à-vis Taiwan and improve the ability of the US to respond to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, as GTI Senior Non-Resident Fellow Mike Mazza [argued](#) in his *Global Taiwan Brief* piece “Congressional Initiatives Shifting US Towards Strategic Clarity.”

To be sure, the Chinese military will want to have the element of surprise during a Taiwan contingency. However, the [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance](#) capabilities that Taiwan and the United States have penetrating China’s land, air, and coastal borders have ensured that this is a critical advantage that the PLA does not currently enjoy. Moreover, barring a dramatic turn of events accelerating Beijing’s timeline for unification, there will be likely more (non-military) signals to come before China decides to act on its desire to take Taiwan. Most likely—and perhaps in the near future—there will probably be a tightening of the 2005

Anti-Secession Law (反分裂國家法) that Chinese leaders could use as a legal pretext for the invasion of Taiwan. Indeed, as recently as the 2020 National People's Congress, there were [murmurs](#) of a revision to the language of the law to more precisely capture what China sees as Taiwanese moves toward *de jure* independence. Indeed, Beijing may think that it could deter such behavior by adding specific language to the legislation.

Although a full-scale war between China and Taiwan seems unlikely in the near future despite the scenario presented by the two former senior national security officials, the possibility of a more limited conflict is growing. Ultimately, Beijing does seem to have a deadline for the unification of Taiwan. However, it is likely not 2021, as Ambassador Freeman suggested, but sometime before 2049, the centennial of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and, more importantly, the year that Xi has set as his deadline for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation—for which the unification of Taiwan with China is a necessary prerequisite.

The main point: The article by two former senior national security officials presenting a hypothetical scenario in which China invades Taiwan as soon as in January 2021 should be read as a cautionary tale rather than a forecast of things to come.

[1] Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia* (United Kingdom: Eastbridge Books, 2019)

Guatemala's Role in Taiwan's Diplomatic Strategy in Central America

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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Taiwan, the United States, and Japan announced in mid-July their plan to host the next workshop of the [Global Cooperation and Training Framework](#) (GCTF, 全球合作暨訓練架構) in Guatemala. The three formal

GCTF partners will organize several [virtual seminars on the digital economy](#) for the Latin American and Caribbean region in hopes of extending the forum—a US-Taiwan cooperation platform established in 2015—to a region where Taiwan still enjoys significant diplomatic support. In a video remark, Taiwan's [Vice Foreign Minister Miguel Tsao](#) (曹立傑) called Latin America and the Caribbean “an important region of Taiwan's international relations as [it is where] the majority of Taiwan's diplomatic allies are located.” “We hope to enhance cooperation among Taiwan, the US, Japan, and our diplomatic allies in the region to create a closer circle of friendship,” [Tsao](#) added. After [Panama](#) switched diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2017, [Guatemala](#) has become the Republic of China's (ROC)—the formal name of Taiwan—most enduring and consequential diplomatic ally in Central America. Currently, Taiwan's relations with Guatemala are characterized by mutual support for each side's national interests, solid economic and trade ties, and joint resistance against Chinese pressure.

Guatemala's Importance for Taiwan

The ROC and Guatemala established diplomatic relations in [1933](#). Guatemala is now the ROC's longest-lasting ally in Central America, after Panama—which had previously maintained relations with the ROC since [1912](#)—switched recognition to the PRC in [June 2017](#) following a long-running contest between Beijing and Taipei. Guatemala is also one of the ROC's [15 remaining diplomatic allies](#) worldwide, as well as one of its [five diplomatic partners](#) in Central America, along with Honduras, Paraguay, Belize, and Nicaragua.

Former Taiwan leaders [Lee Teng-hui](#) (李登輝), [Chen Shui-bian](#) (陳水扁), and [Ma Ying-jeou](#) (馬英九), as well as President [Tsai Ing-wen](#) (蔡英文), have all visited Guatemala during their tenures in office. During his state visits to Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, and Honduras in 2001, former president Chen Shui-bian urged these diplomatic allies to support Taiwan's [membership into the United Nations](#) (UN). Furthermore, in his 2016 farewell tour of Central America prior to leaving office, Ma Ying-jeou delivered a speech thanking regional allies for their support of Taiwan at the [Central American Parliament](#) (Parlamento Centroamericano, PARLACEN), the parliamentary body of the Central American Integration System (SICA), headquartered in

Guatemala City. Taiwan's [permanent observer status](#) in PARLACEN, which was established in 1991, has helped deepen strategic cooperation with regional countries. [PARLACEN](#) has passed resolutions supporting Taiwan's participation in the World Health Association (WHA), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

President Tsai has also visited Central American allies since she took office in 2016. In January 2017, she delivered an address at [Guatemala's Congress](#), stating that "For many years, Guatemala has spoken up on Taiwan's behalf in the international community. On behalf of the government of the Republic of China, I thank Guatemala." Her address was broadcast on Guatemala's congressional channel on a [new broadcasting system](#) that Taiwan had helped to set up. During Tsai's visit, Guatemala's then-president [Jimmy Morales](#) asked the Taiwan government for more aid to help fund a major highway project connecting Guatemala City to the Atlantic Ocean. In her public remarks, [Tsai said](#) Taiwan was pleased to have participated in the previous three stages of the highway project and indicated that Taipei would also provide assistance for future projects. During Morales' visit to Taipei in April 2019, Tsai maintained that both sides have had [robust cooperation](#) in areas including infrastructure, public health, education, commerce, and technology.

Following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Taiwan has provided related assistance to Guatemala and other Central American allies. Earlier this year, Taipei sent [180,000 surgical masks](#), along with other medical equipment, to Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei, who assumed the presidency in January. Additionally, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) said in June that it will be donating [10,000 COVID-19 test kits](#) to Guatemala and Belize as part of its broader coronavirus assistance to its allies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Guatemala, in return, has been one of several of Taiwan's staunchest diplomatic allies and friends that have publicly expressed support for Taipei's most recent bid to participate in the [WHA](#) meeting in Geneva this past May. A [representative from Guatemala](#) also spoke up on Taiwan's behalf at a World Health Organization (WHO) meeting in February, arguing that Taiwan is an important public health partner for his country.

The Guatemalan government has also supported [previous Taiwanese campaigns](#) to join the WHA meetings.

Economic and Trade Relations

The Taiwan-Guatemala Free Trade Agreement ([中華民國台灣 – 瓜地馬拉自由貿易協定](#)) went into force in 2006, enhancing trade and economic exchanges between the two sides. Taiwan also signed [FTAs](#) with other regional countries, including El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama (prior to the severance of relations). The Taiwan-Guatemala FTA [slashed tariffs](#) on Taiwanese exports of industrial and agricultural products to Guatemala, as well as Guatemalan exports of agricultural goods to Taiwan, in addition to more than [7,000 items](#) traded between the two sides. Following the implementation of the FTA, bilateral trade increased to more than [USD \\$150 million annually](#) and reached a height of [USD \\$241 million](#) in 2015. Last year, two-way trade stood at [USD \\$208 million](#). Taiwan [mainly imports](#) sugar cane, coffee beans, and recycled copper from Guatemala, while [exporting auto parts](#) to its Central American ally.

In April, both sides expanded the scope of the FTA by [eliminating tariffs](#) on additional items, including Taiwanese bicycle and motorcycle exports and select Guatemalan agricultural goods. [MOFA](#) has encouraged Taiwanese businesses to invest more in Central American countries, which boast low labor and land costs and could help to buttress the United States in its ongoing trade war with China. Taiwan's government plans to expand cooperation with the United States, Japan, and other friendly countries, including Guatemala, and will explore new commercial opportunities in Guatemala in 2020, said [Phoebe Yeh](#) ([葉非比](#)), director-general of MOFA's Department of International Cooperation and Economic Affairs, late last year.

However, Guatemala's trade with China, which climbed to nearly [USD \\$2.6 billion](#) in 2019, has grown exponentially faster than its bilateral trade with Taiwan. At the end of 2018, China signed a total of [USD \\$600 million](#) in contracts for projects in Guatemala and completed a turnover of [USD \\$450 million](#) in investment. Despite these trade disparities, the Central American country has remained a steadfast ally to Taiwan. Furthermore, Guatemala has purchased arms from the United States and to a lesser extent from Taiwan—but not from Chi-

na. According to the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Taiwan exported [USD \\$2 million](#) in arms to Guatemala in both 1996 and 2012. The [United States](#) is by far the leading supplier of arms to Guatemala, while the [SIPRI database](#) does not list any Chinese arms sales to Guatemala.

China's Pressure Campaign on Guatemala

Beijing has pressured Guatemala to renounce its ties to the ROC for several decades. In the late 1990s, China used its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to [veto](#) a resolution on sending UN peacekeeping missions to monitor Guatemala's peace accords, which ended [36 years](#) of civil war. Beijing was reportedly furious with Guatemala's decision to invite Taiwan's then-Foreign Minister [John Chiang](#) (蔣孝嚴) to witness the historic signing of the accords on December 29, 1996. China has also used its veto-wielding power on Security Council resolutions regarding other countries, such as [Haiti](#), that recognize the ROC.

More recently, [Beijing](#) has been stepping up pressure on the Guatemalan government to relinquish formal relations with the ROC. Guatemala has been under tremendous pressure from China to de-recognize the ROC, according to US Senator [Cory Gardner](#) (R-CO), chairman of the US Senate Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy. [Gardner](#), who made these remarks following a March 2019 meeting with the Guatemalan ambassador to the United States, said that Guatemala has resisted China's demands and that the United States should commend Taiwan's allies and partners who have made the right decision. There were significant concerns that the loss of [Panama](#), a major diplomatic setback for Taiwan, would lead to a domino effect in other Central American countries including Guatemala. Thus far, however, Guatemala has [rejected](#) China's offer to switch recognition, but both Taiwan and the United States remain concerned about Beijing's intensifying [pressure campaign](#) targeting the ROC's diplomatic allies, as well as China's rising [political and economic influence](#) in Latin America.

US-Taiwan Collaboration in Central America

Early this year, the [first quadrilateral talks](#) between Taiwan, the United States, Guatemala, and Honduras convened in Guatemala. [In attendance](#) at the talks were

Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳釗燮), Acting US Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf, the US International Development Finance Corporation's Chief Executive Officer Adam Boehler, and the presidents and foreign ministers of Guatemala and Honduras. Taiwan and the United States discussed [building partnerships](#) with the two Central American countries in multiple areas, such as trade, infrastructure, and investment, as well as the creation of a [multilateral cooperation mechanism](#). Taiwan's MOFA subsequently released a statement saying that Taiwan will ["continue to boost the prosperity and development of Central America."](#)

Central America is a key strategic region for the Donald J. Trump administration's efforts to [end illegal immigration](#) into the United States, while the region constitutes a bastion of diplomatic support for Taiwan. [Washington](#) has provided assistance to improve governance and economic growth in Guatemala as part of its efforts to deter illegal immigration into the United States and to mitigate transnational criminal activity. Given Taiwan's close ties and foreign assistance to Guatemala and other Central American countries, Washington, Taipei, and other like-minded partners could jointly enhance collaboration on promoting regional development and cooperation. As Washington and Taipei extend the GCTF to Central America, both sides could not only work to improve the internal conditions within Central American countries, but also shore up Taiwan's diplomatic alliances to protect against Beijing's encroachment into the region.

The main point: Following the loss of Panama to Beijing, Guatemala has become the Republic of China's most enduring and consequential Central American diplomatic ally. Taiwan and the United States can utilize the GCTF to further enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation in Central America.

Propaganda Drives “Massive” PLA Exercises in the Taiwan Strait

By: J. Michael Cole

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On August 13, the Chinese military [announced](#) that it had conducted military exercises “near” Taiwan “to safeguard national sovereignty” in response to a [visit to Taiwan by US Health Secretary Alex Azar](#), the most senior ranking US official to visit Taiwan since 1979. [Referring](#) to efforts by “certain large countries” that are “incessantly making negative moves regarding the Taiwan issue and sending wrong signals to the ‘Taiwan independence’ forces,” Zhang Chunhui (張春暉), spokesman of the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) Eastern Theater Command (東部戰區), [said](#) the exercises occurred in the Taiwan Strait, as well as in areas north and south of Taiwan.

As is always the case when analyzing Chinese military drills “near” Taiwan, analysts and observers should be careful to distinguish between operations that are primarily exercises in psychological warfare and those which signal genuine preparedness for use of force against the island nation. Unfortunately, [international media](#) will often uncritically report Chinese statements—as well as reports in pro-Beijing outlets like the *Global Times* and *South China Morning Post*—as facts, which inadvertently amplifies the propagandistic elements of the Chinese maneuvers.

Just as often, these outlets will [quote](#) “unnamed military analysts” or retired PLA officers-turned-military-commentators, such as Phoenix TV’s Song Zhongping (宋忠平). These analysts have a [track record](#) of distorting the facts surrounding military exercises, while exacerbating, through their commentary, psychological pressure on the Taiwanese people. Hawkish commentators like Song or [Lü Cuncheng](#), a research fellow at the Institute of Taiwan Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS, 中國社會科學院), will frequently echo messaging by the State Council’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO, 國務院台灣事務辦公室) or “fill the blanks” if official remarks are not sufficiently threatening.

What is often ignored in such reporting is the credibil-

ity of the claims by Beijing and its propagandists that military exercises were undertaken in direct response to a specific “provocation” by either Taipei or “certain large countries.” Given the logistics involved in preparations for major military maneuvers, it is highly unlikely that large-scale exercises involving various services within the PLA could be mobilized quickly enough to respond purposefully to a visit by a US official that had been announced only weeks prior (in Azar’s case, the [announcement](#) was made on August 4, only five days prior to the visit). In such instances, two alternative—and likelier—scenarios present themselves: (1) if the drills were indeed in response to a specific recent development, then they almost certainly were small-scale and at the command post-level; (2) conversely, if the military exercises occurred on a larger scale, then they were inevitably planned months ahead of time and therefore could not have been prompted by a sudden external stimulus.

A similar series of events occurred in April 2018, when the usual set of actors—the TAO, *Global Times*, hawkish Chinese commentators, and foreign media—turned a relatively small and scheduled series of exercises in waters off Quanzhou, Fujian Province, into “the first live-fire exercise in the Strait” since the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis, undertaken “to check ‘Taiwan independence.’” (The *Global Times*’ subhead to its [article](#) read, “Provocations by Taiwan’s leaders, others result in mainland’s stern warning.”) Back then, the exercises were ostensibly timed to coincide with a visit to Swaziland by President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文).

On cue, the aforementioned Song Zhongping, quoted in a dispatch by *Agence France-Presse*, [warned](#) that “The drill comes as the Taiwan authority has been obstinately promoting ‘Taiwan independence,’ especially considering that Taiwan leader [President] Tsai Ing-wen and the island’s [Taiwan] administrative head [then-premier] Lai Ching-te [賴清德] keep spreading the idea.” “The mainland [China],” he continued, “needs this targeted drill to punish the two; [...] the focus of the upcoming drill will be long-distance attacks and amphibious landing operations, which worries Taiwan the most.” Left unsaid in the reports was the fact that the small-scale drills did not, as Song claimed, involve “long-distance attacks and amphibious landing operations.” Additionally, despite the allegedly unprec-

edented nature of the exercises, such military maneuvers actually occur on an annual basis. In most cases, such local exercises involve artillery firing as well as computerized simulations. During that same incident, Song also succeeded in putting China's aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, at two different locations simultaneously—in [the South China Sea](#) and in the Taiwan Strait.

One good way to assess the veracity of claims by state-run Chinese media and propagandists is to peruse official PLA publications, which regularly release imagery of recent military maneuvers. Sure enough, Song's claims of exercises simulating "long-distance attacks and amphibious landing operations" in April 2018 were not supported by imagery on the [official PLA website](#). At this writing, no imagery stemming from the August 2020 exercises has surfaced. Certainly, no evidence has emerged that supports the notion that the operations were "unprecedented" "massive military drills in the Taiwan Straits" that—as unnamed military analysts stated in the *Global Times* said—"must be of a large scale and *could* have involved warplanes, warships, amphibious troops, artillery, and missiles." [italics added.] Nothing demonstrating, as the *Global Times* claimed, "that the PLA is capable of launching a general offensive from all directions in the Taiwan Straits, and seize the island in hours."

We must nevertheless acknowledge that this type of messaging has the imprimatur of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which must give approval before anything is printed in the *Global Times*, and with whom propagandists like Song must most assuredly coordinate their commentary. Furthermore, the signaling has undoubtedly become harsher, with commentary in the [same report](#) indicating that "The PLA has more options to impose military pressure, including fighter jets flying around the island, passing the 'middle line' of the Straits and even flying over Taiwan Island, testing ballistic missiles over the Taiwan Island, and carrying out military exercises in the eastern waters of Taiwan."

More responsible journalism on the part of international outlets would arguably reduce the incentive for Beijing to resort to such threatening propaganda and help limit its potential coercive effect on the population of Taiwan. Reducing foreign coverage of such propaganda by practicing more skeptical reporting would also curtail Beijing's ability to guide the narrative on

Taiwan by depicting US efforts to defend the embattled democracy as both unnecessarily inflammatory and ultimately fruitless given the scale of the threat against the island-nation. We should add, as well, that Beijing's propaganda also maintains that it remains committed to "peaceful unification," and that any use of force would therefore only be "defensive" and resulting from provocation.

In another [editorial](#) published on August 16 in response to a recent [report](#) by former Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Michael Morell and retired US Admiral James Winnefeld for the US Naval Institute (USNI), the *Global Times* stated that "If there is any serious tension or even a military clash in the Taiwan Straits, it could only be triggered by the separatist authority on the island and the US. The mainland will not unilaterally create tensions over the Taiwan question, which would be a distraction from its own development." Thus, the propaganda aimed at the United States and other allies vis-à-vis Taiwan contends that the PLA is ready and willing to use force against Taiwan, but nevertheless remains committed to finding a "peaceful" option—unlike what people like Morell and Winnefeld might claim. Only "unacceptable" US meddling and support to "secessionists" would compel the PLA to act on its threat. The US, therefore, had better stay out. Propagandistic reports on large-scale PLA maneuvers in the Taiwan Strait serve as a reminder of this.

A first step toward countering these narratives would entail recognizing that the more the CCP and its usual propagandists, like Song, seek to portray a military exercise as "unprecedented" and directly linked to a specific "provocation" by "Taiwan secessionists" and their foreign allies, the less credibility international media outlets should give to initial reports and official statements coming out of the TAO and PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Highly publicized military drills are propaganda and should be treated as such. More often than not, the truly threatening actions on the part of the PLA, such as intrusions into Taiwan's ADIZ or across the median line in the Taiwan Strait, are much less publicized by Beijing. However, it is precisely such activity that should be receiving greater attention within international media.

Since the election of Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, the military component of Beijing's strategy toward Taiwan has

become more prevalent as its “soft power” initiatives have largely failed. This latest militarization of Beijing’s posture comprises two main vectors—increased PLA activity and preparedness in the vicinity of Taiwan, combined with a sustained campaign of psychological warfare against the Taiwanese government and public. Although the threat of possible use of force against Taiwan should not be taken lightly—and appropriate measures should be taken accordingly by both Taipei and its allies—we must be careful to distinguish between the real and the illusory, if only to ensure that responses to the Chinese threat are commensurate and focused on the right set of variables.

Propaganda is both meant to confuse and to create a sense of embattlement and inevitability. The more we understand the rationales, channels, and targets of this propaganda, the better equipped we will be to see through the fog and defend ourselves if and when a real blow is imminent and aimed at us.

The main point: Highly publicized claims of large-scale military exercises by the PLA in response to specific “provocations” by Taipei and its allies should be recognized for what they are: exercises in propaganda aiming to confuse, deter, and isolate the Taiwanese public.

Knock-on Effects of Accelerating Demographic Changes in Taiwan

By: Michael Mazza

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Taiwan’s population will start [shrinking](#) this year. That contraction coincides with the population’s continued aging, as reported by [Focus Taiwan](#), citing official data from the country’s National Development Council: “Taiwan will become a super-aged society by 2025, meaning that one in five citizens will be aged over 65, due mainly to a falling birth rate and a fast-aging population.” This news, coming amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and intensified [concerns](#) about China’s near-

term designs on the country, is unlikely to calm nerves on the island. Such demographic trends have negative [implications](#) for Taiwan’s continuing ability to defend itself and maintain its economic growth. A shrinking population also raises questions about Taiwanese society’s (very) long-term viability and its ability to adapt to changing demographic conditions. Yet even as Taiwan looks for ways to adapt to this new demographic reality, it might discover that there are silver linings to the NDC’s new statistical forecast.

China’s Reaction

Speaking to reporters last month, Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) [fretted](#), “if we look at the contested issues around China’s periphery, we see that for China, Taiwan would be an extremely convenient sacrificial lamb.” Although there are good reasons to worry that the Chinese threat to Taiwan may have grown more [imminent](#), Xi Jinping (習近平) may not yet be eager to resort to aggression across the Taiwan Strait. If that is the case, the new reminder of Taiwan’s demographic decline may encourage greater patience from the Chinese leader.

A shrinking, aging population is a significant challenge for the Republic of China (Taiwan) Armed Forces, especially as Taiwan has shifted to an all-volunteer force. Taiwan already faces a [labor shortage](#). The deepening of that shortage spells trouble.

Taiwan’s population aged 15-64 has been [shrinking](#) since 2015, while its share of the overall population has been shrinking since 2012, when it [peaked](#) at 74.22 percent. Competition for labor is likely to increase as both numbers continue their downward trends and as the elder care burden that falls on that age bracket increases. Fewer job applicants will demand better pay and perks, and military recruitment and retention will suffer for it. The result may well be a military that is undermanned and that does not include among its ranks Taiwan’s best and brightest.

If that is the future that leaders in Beijing are projecting for Taiwan, they have good reason to continue delaying any move towards forceful unification. What would likely be a very tough fight for the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) today might be a slightly easier one years down the road.

Adaptation and Follow-on Effects: The Economy

Of course, Taiwan is unlikely to stand pat in the face of these demographic challenges. Indeed, adapting to demographic decline, if not arresting it, could have follow-on effects, leading to a stronger, more secure Taiwan.

Perhaps the easiest way for Taiwan to address its demographic changes is to permit and encourage greater immigration. In her [second inaugural address](#), President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) suggested she would take a step in this direction, promising to “bring in the world’s top technical, R&D, and management talents to help globalize Taiwan’s workforce, widen our industries’ horizons, and give them the ability to compete in the international arena.” Indeed, the New Economic Immigration Act (新經濟移民法), debated in the Legislative Yuan earlier this year, would seek to do [just that](#).

Taiwan should consider going further by opening the doors to a larger influx of immigrants. The domestic resistance to such a move may be less fierce than in places like Japan and South Korea, where opposition to accepting more immigrants appears to be rooted, at least in part, in strong national identities based on a shared ethnicity. This is less true for Taiwan, as Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Aram Hur [argued](#) recently for *Foreign Policy*. They describe a “civic basis” for Taiwanese identity: “rather than taking an ethnic or pan-Chinese approach, as it once did, Taiwan sees itself as a democratic nation, first and foremost.” In theory, such a civic identity should make it easier for current citizens to embrace would-be nationals as long as the latter embrace Taiwan’s democracy.

Greater immigration to Taiwan would, in turn, have positive economic effects. Most obviously, more substantial immigration could solve Taiwan’s labor shortage problem. Without mitigation, Taiwan will forego opportunities for economic growth (on a global scale, the Boston Consulting Group has [assessed](#) that projected labor shortages over the next 20 years will result in USD \$10 trillion of “GDP not created”). As a report from The Conference Board on US labor shortages [described](#), higher wages put downward pressure on company profits:

“Lower profits make companies more reluctant to spend, a trend that may slow down econom-

ic growth. [...] In addition, the drop in corporate profits and growing labor costs may force more industries to raise prices and lead to a higher overall inflation rate.”

Put simply, it is important to fill empty jobs, and immigration is an effective way to do so.

But beyond addressing the labor shortage, more immigration could give the Taiwanese economy a helpful jolt. In “[Assuring Taiwan’s Innovation Future](#),” a Carnegie Endowment report, Evan A. Feigenbaum addresses challenges to Taiwan’s “innovation ecosystem.” One problem?

“Bluntly put, a new generation of Taiwan-based technology startups has yet to emerge. Indeed, while Taiwan now has a vibrant and flourishing startup scene, few of these firms have agglomerated around new or fast-growing areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).”

One potential reason for this deficiency is that Taiwan’s aspiring entrepreneurs are more isolated than in past decades. As Feigenbaum explains:

“With the United States, meanwhile, Taiwan saw diminished connections to Silicon Valley in the 2000s for two reasons: first, with more opportunities at home, fewer students from Taiwan came to the United States to study; second, Silicon Valley firms like Apple increasingly partnered with lower cost Chinese, not Taiwan, firms for their manufacturing needs.”

Immigration may provide one solution to this deficiency. Peter Vandor and Nikolaus Franke of the Vienna University of Economics and Business, in seeking to explain why immigrants often account for an outsized share of entrepreneurial activity, found [evidence](#) that “cross-cultural experiences may increase individuals’ capabilities to identify promising business ideas” and that such experiences “may also stimulate creativity.”

Recognizing that Taiwan would benefit from more foreign entrepreneurs, the country instituted the [Taiwan Entrepreneur Visa](#) in 2015. The qualifications for the program, however, are narrow and the visa requires that grantees hit the ground running. Taiwan’s immigration policy should ensure immigrants have the op-

portunity to become entrepreneurs, rather than solely seek to import established ones.

Taiwan's high-tech ecosystem is not evolving on its own. But immigrants permitted entry due to growing labor shortages could end up giving that critical ecosystem—and the economy writ large—the boost it sorely needs.

Adaptation and Knock-on Effects: National Security

Shrinking populations in Taiwan and Japan (the latter's [population decline](#) began in 2010) should provide added impetus for the two to cooperate more closely in the national security realm. Tokyo has long had a deep and abiding interest in Taiwan's continuing *de facto* independence, but it has also tended to hold Taipei at arm's length for fear of upsetting its ties with Beijing. With demographic trends placing similar constraints on both countries, over time squeezing both human and material resources and thus compounding the threat both face from China, a less cautious embrace may now be in order.

Jennifer Dabbs Sciubba, in her book *The Future Faces of War: Population and National Security*, identifies three ways in which countries might compensate for military manpower shortages: by pursuing technological superiority (“technology can, to some degree, replace lost manpower”), alliances (“as part of strong alliances, states have strength in numbers, even if they are individually weakened by aging”), and military efficiency (“aging EU members states have been working to combine their military resources and reduce redundancy to improve efficiency,” which “can reduce reliance on military manpower and relieve pressure on budgets”). [1] In all three pursuits, Taipei and Tokyo may find reason to work together.

Given the ROC military's impending challenges with recruitment and retention, it is likely to look to technological solutions to overcome manpower shortfalls. Japan, with its expertise in robotics and automation, may have some answers and, given concerns regarding Taiwan's ability to defend itself going forward, may be willing to share them.

Beyond tech cooperation, Japan may be more willing in the future to pursue the type of security cooperation that has thus far made it nervous: robust intelligence

sharing, track 1 security dialogues, combined military exercises, and even coordinated military operations. A formal alliance, per Sciubba, may remain a bridge too far for both countries, but burden sharing (in the pursuit of efficiency) in patrolling and monitoring littoral waters and skies may not be. Importantly, if Tokyo follows such a course, it may make it easier for other interested US treaty allies and security partners to do so in the future.

Contrary to expectations, then, Taiwan's demography-induced security challenges could lead to a more secure Taiwan—one with stronger international security partnerships that contribute to deterring Beijing.

Taiwan's demographic trends do not amount to a blessing in disguise. The country would be better served by a healthy demographic profile marked by a younger, growing population. But if Taipei meets the challenge head on, it can still ensure itself a bright future—one in which it maintains its independent, democratic, and prosperous existence.

The main point: As Taiwan looks for ways to adapt to its shrinking and aging population, it might discover that there are silver linings to its new demographic reality.

[1] Jennifer Dabbs Sciubba, *The Future Faces of War: Population and National Security* (Denver, CO: Praeger, 2011), 46-50.