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By: Russell Hsiao

Russell Hsiao is the executive director of the Global Taiwan Institute (GTI) and editor-in-chief of the Global Taiwan Brief.

The leaders of the United States and Japan—treaty allies with one another, and Taiwan’s two most important security partners—issued an unprecedented statement on April 16 expressing the two nations’ shared concern about Taiwan’s security. At the summit, which was also US President Joe Biden’s first in-person meeting with a foreign leader and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga’s (菅 義偉) first trip abroad, the two leaders issued a document entitled “[US–Japan Global Partnership for a New Era](#),” which included a significant declaration of shared concern over the increasingly aggressive actions taken by China against Taiwan.

As a whole, the [document](#) represents a bold and ambitious statement mapping out the two countries’ shared vision and concerns on global affairs. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of shared values in addressing global challenges, including COVID-19, climate change, and the threat of authoritarianism to the rules-based liberal world order. The paragraph focused on China—which is the only other country besides North Korea mentioned by name—included the following declaration: “We underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.”

To be sure, a potential reference to Taiwan was widely floated in the lead up to the summit, especially following the [2+2 meeting](#) in late March 2021, wherein senior officials responsible for the two countries’ defense and foreign affairs affirmed their commitments and underscored the “importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.” However, the leaders’ statement is unprecedented, as it represents the first high-level mention of Taiwan since the beginning of unofficial relations between both countries and the island in the 1970s.

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Editor-in-Chief

Russell Hsiao

Associate Editor

John Dotson

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Copy Editor

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Global Taiwan Institute
1836 Jefferson Place NW,
Washington DC 20036
contact@globaltaiwan.org
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In response to the leaders' joint statement, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) [tweeted](#): "Pleased to see US & Japan affirm the importance of peace & stability in the Taiwan Strait. Guided by our shared belief in democracy & human rights, Taiwan will continue to work alongside our partners to build a more peaceful & prosperous Indo-Pacific." In addition, the Republic of China (Taiwan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs [stated](#) that "The Taiwan government would like to express our most sincere welcome and gratitude. [...] We will continue to work closely with Japan, the United States and other like-minded countries to safeguard democracy, universal values and a rules-based international order to ensure peace, prosperity and stability in the region." According to *Kyodo News*, Presidential Office Spokesman Xavier Chang (張惇涵) [stated](#): "We look forward to seeing Beijing authorities act responsibly and make a positive contribution to peace and well-being across the Taiwan Strait and the region."

Indeed, the joint statement represents the first time since 1969 that the leaders of the United States and Japan included a mention of Taiwan in a joint leaders' statement—and the first time after the switch in diplomatic ties for Japan and the United States in 1972 and 1979, respectively. While [quiet discussions](#) between senior working level officials over such concerns have been ongoing for some time and picked up steam in recent years, the inclusion of Taiwan in the leaders' statement appears intended to send a strong [political signal](#) to Beijing in response to its increasingly aggressive actions against Taiwan and in the region.

The first time that there was an implied reference to Taiwan in a joint document signed between the United States and Japan was in the 1997 [US-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation](#), which underscored the "peace and stability in the Far East," a phrase that was widely interpreted to include the Taiwan Strait. Notably, the defense guidelines were issued in the aftermath of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995-1996. The next time Taiwan was referenced in a joint US-Japan statement was in a 2005 [declaration](#), which stated that "encouraging the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait" was one of the "common strategic objectives" of the US-Japan alliance, particularly as cross-Strait relations entered rocky territories during the first Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民

主進歩黨) administration. Most recently, during the March [US-Japan 2+2 summit](#), the two nations clearly acknowledged the threat presented by China, reaffirmed their commitments, and underscored the "importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."

In this context, the leaders' statement of shared concerns reflects a gradual but significant change in the [Japanese approach to Taiwan](#), which had generally been more constrained than that of the US. Tokyo now appears to be more forward leaning on Taiwan. This change has been as much about the agency of individual leaders as it is about the response to fundamental changes in the geopolitical order. In recent years, the pace, quality, and strategic direction of [China's military modernization](#) have been on clear display, a significant factor in shaping Tokyo's decision making. In addition, changes in agency were reflected clearly in the appointments of senior officials in Prime Minister Suga's administration. In September 2020, Nobuo Kishi (岸信夫), a former member of the House of Representatives in the Diet and the brother of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (安倍 晋三), was [announced](#) as the defense minister in Suga's Cabinet. Kishi, who had previously served as a senior vice foreign minister, is well-known for his support of stronger Japan-Taiwan ties. As a Diet member, he [visited Taiwan](#) numerous times as the unofficial but *de facto* envoy of the Abe Administration.

Moreover, Kishi's deputy, Yasuhide Nakayama (中山 泰秀), is also known to be Taiwan-friendly. Nakayama [ac-companied](#) former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (森 喜朗) during his visits to Taiwan to pay respects following the passing of former President Lee Teng-hui (李登輝). Nakayama [previously served](#) as state minister for foreign affairs in the Japanese cabinet and was appointed to be the chairman of the foreign affairs committee after the snap elections in October 2017. As state minister of defense, Nakayama gave an [interview](#) to *Reuters* in December 2020, in which the official made an unusually bold comment underscoring the Suga Administration's concerns about the security of Taiwan: "We are concerned China will expand its aggressive stance into areas other than Hong Kong. I think one of the next targets, or what everyone is worried about, is Taiwan." Continuing this line of discussion, he stated that "There's a red line in Asia—China and Taiwan.

[...] How will Joe Biden in the White House react in any case if China crosses this red line?” Nakayama emphatically concluded by declaring that “The United States is the leader of the democratic countries. I have a strong feeling to say: America, be strong!”

Only hours after the issuance of the US-Japan joint statement, Japanese Defense Minister Kishi [tweeted](#) an image of himself visiting Yonaguni Island (與那國島)—which is only 67 nautical miles from Taiwan—and commented how he was unable to see Taiwan due to the clouds. The tweet elicited a quick response from Taiwan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳釗燮), who [tweeted](#): “Thank you for looking out for #Taiwan, my dear friend @KishiNobuo. Cloud nor #COVID19 can get in the way of our friendship with #Japan. JW.”



Image: Taiwan Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu’s response to Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi’s tweet about Taiwan. (Source: [Twitter](#))

The Biden-Suga summit and its mention of Taiwan has also gained added significance due to its timing, following the announcement by the White House of the dispatch of a high-powered, albeit “unofficial,” [US delegation to Taiwan](#)—comprised of former Senator Chris Dodd, and former Deputy Secretaries of State Richard Armitage and Jim Steinberg—as a “personal signal” of President Biden’s assurances to Taiwan, at the same

time that US climate envoy and former Secretary of State John Kerry visited Shanghai. The US delegation to Taiwan was dispatched to celebrate the 42nd anniversary of the [Taiwan Relations Act](#) (TRA), the domestic law that governs unofficial relations between the United States and Taiwan. In his meeting with President Tsai, Senator Dodd made the following [statement](#): “The significance of the TRA becomes even more evident with each passing year and I can say with confidence that the United States partnership with Taiwan is stronger than ever (emphasis added). We share deep economic ties, a mutual commitment to democratic values, and a critically important security partnership.”

While some observers may have hoped for a more explicit and strongly worded statement from the leaders’ summit, it is worth keeping in mind that not everyone in the Japanese bureaucracy—which is atypically influential on policy matters—agrees with this approach. Indeed, some Japanese officials were [reportedly](#) divided over whether Prime Minister Suga should even comment on Taiwan. Even in 1969, the [communiqué](#) issued after the meeting between President Richard Nixon and Prime Minister Eisaku Sato (佐藤 栄作), which stated that “the maintenance of peace and security in the Taiwan area was also important for peace and security of Japan,” was not without difficulties. Nevertheless, this statement was [generally interpreted](#) as a pledge that US bases in Japan and Okinawa could be used for the defense of Taiwan. In this context, Tokyo’s willingness to issue another leaders’ statement reflects a gradual but significant change in Japan’s approach that—perhaps like in the United States—may represent a more fundamental change in its policy toward China. Indeed, as Japan-specialist Michael Green, who formerly served on the staff of the National Security Council (NSC), [noted](#): “[O]n the basic strategy towards China the US and Japan are quite well-aligned.”

The main point: The US-Japan leaders’ statement of shared concerns over the Taiwan Strait reflects a gradual but a significant change in the Japanese approach and greater alignment between Washington and Tokyo over China and Taiwan policy.

KMT Assets a Barrier to Party Reform and Electoral Success

By: Daniel Anaforian

Daniel Anaforian is an MA student at Johns Hopkins SAIS and a Spring 2021 GTI intern.

This year marks the 74th anniversary of the [228 Incident](#), which occurred during a dark chapter in Taiwan's authoritarian past. The anniversary commemoration was [filled with praise](#) by Kuomintang (KMT, 中國國民黨) politicians for how far their party has come since the island's democratization. However, the issue of the party's substantial, and ill-gotten financial and property assets continues to plague the KMT and hinders the ongoing transitional justice process. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) has [argued](#) that these assets undermine the country's democracy by creating an unfair electoral environment. Indeed, with the creation of the [Ill-Gotten Party Assets Settlement Committee](#) (CIPAS, 不當黨產處理委員會) in 2016 and the committee's subsequent rulings, the KMT is [fighting a losing battle](#) to hold onto these assets. Moreover, these assets may be hurting the KMT's electoral prospects and their ability to remain a competitive party—especially when [calls](#) for KMT reform are at their highest. The KMT should consider embracing CIPAS' rulings and finally resolve the ill-gotten assets issue.

Historical Legacy of the KMT's Party Assets

The years after World War II saw a period of authoritarian KMT rule in Taiwan known as the “White Terror” (白色恐怖). Upon its retreat to Taiwan in 1949, the KMT instituted martial law, making it [illegal](#) for anyone to defy the KMT government. The “White Terror” period saw [tens of thousands of people](#) reportedly arrested, and at least [1,200 executed](#) between 1949 and 1992. During this era, the KMT began stockpiling both property and financial assets. Shortly after its arrival in Taiwan, the party [occupied buildings](#) previously owned by the Japanese, forced businesses in Taiwan to provide “[donations](#)” to the KMT, and handed out plots of [land and funds](#) to politically connected groups who would start businesses. Crucially, the KMT retained all [profits](#) derived from these assets.

After the lifting of martial law in 1987, authoritarian

rule in Taiwan effectively ended. However, Taiwan's transition to democracy did not diminish the KMT's party assets. In fact, the KMT has continued to profit from these ill-acquired assets. By 2016, the KMT held over [USD \\$640 million](#) in assets, making it Taiwan's wealthiest political party by a sizable margin. The DPP, by contrast, possessed assets valued under [USD \\$25 million](#), which were acquired primarily through direct donations. The inequality in party financing and the historical legacy of the KMT's acquisition of these assets led the DPP-controlled Legislative Yuan to pass legislation to address this inequality and promote [social reconciliation](#). In 2016, the Legislative Yuan passed “[The Act Governing the Settlement of Ill-Gotten Properties by Political Parties and Their Affiliate Organizations](#)” (政黨及其附隨組織不當取得財產處理條例). This act created the [Ill-Gotten Party Assets Settlement Committee](#), which was granted power to “conduct the investigation, restitution, forfeiture of restoration of rights of ill-gotten assets acquired by the political parties, their affiliated organizations, and trustees.”

CIPAS Findings and KMT Reactions

The CIPAS committee's database has identified nearly [7,400 properties](#) connected to the KMT since 2016. In March 2018, the Taiwan's National Women's League (婦聯會)—founded by Soong Mei-ling (宋美齡), wife of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣中正)—was [pressed](#) to relinquish all of its assets due to its historical and continued ownership by the KMT. The organization is said to own assets worth [USD \\$1.3 billion](#) worldwide. Subsequently, Central Motion Picture Co. (中央電影事業股份有限公司), which had long been suspected of being wholly owned by the KMT, had its assets [frozen](#) in September 2018. Additionally, in September 2019, CIPAS determined that the Broadcasting Corporation of China (BCC, 中國廣播公司), a radio station, was an affiliate of the KMT and demanded the transfer of over [USD \\$273 million](#) in assets to the central government.

The KMT has not willingly accepted the outcomes of these and many other cases involving its party assets. At nearly every turn, KMT members have fought back against what they perceive as [politically motivated attacks](#) on their party. In fact, former KMT Chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) called the transitional justice process a “[witch hunt](#).” In addition, the KMT has denounced the CIPAS after every committee announce-

ment regarding the assets issue. The KMT has also pushed the narrative that the DPP is leveraging the CIPAS to conduct a “[Green Terror](#),” likening this process to the authoritarian practices of the “White Terror.” Furthermore, the KMT has [launched court cases](#) to block the transfer of these party assets and has even gone so far as to [challenge the constitutionality](#) of the Act and the CIPAS. However, the Taipei High Administrative Court’s (臺北高等行政法院) May 2020 ruling found the Act to be [constitutional](#), causing KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang (江啟臣) to [denounce](#) the ruling once again, reiterating the argument that the DPP is “doing things that are unconstitutional.”



Image: A CIPAS press conference held on March 23 to discuss an investigation into the assets of the Chinese Association for Relief and Continuing Services (中華救助總會) (known formerly as the Free China Relief Association), a KMT-associated charitable foundation. (Image source: [CIPAS](#))

The Need for Reform

The KMT’s persistent efforts to lambast the DPP and CIPAS as politically motivated clearly did not [mobilize voters in 2020](#). Recent [editorials](#) in Taiwan have expressed frustration with the KMT’s inability to resolve the assets issue. Many more have [linked](#) solving the asset issue to the broader need for KMT reforms. A 2016 editorial in the blue-leaning *United Daily News* called the KMT’s party assets “[enormous political baggage](#),” which hinder KMT candidates’ chances at being elected. In an [interview](#) for *The News Lens International*, former KMT spokesperson Eric Huang (黃裕鈞) agreed that in terms of public perception, “[the assets issue] doesn’t look good for us.”

Ultimately, the next two years will be crucial for the KMT’s future. The party will be holding its [chairman-](#)

[ship elections](#) in July 2021, with various potential candidates already [positioning themselves](#) for the voters. In March 2020, the party elected Johnny Chiang as chairman following KMT presidential candidate Han Kuo-yu’s (韓國瑜) loss to Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) in the 2020 presidential election. Chiang came into the position hoping to [change the KMT](#) into a younger, united, reformed, and ultimately electable party. As of yet, however, those wishing to see the party change have been [disappointed](#). At the annual KMT National Congress in 2020, the party [decided](#) to continue its embrace of the so-called “1992 Consensus” (九二共識) and voted not to drop the word “Chinese” from the party’s name, [dashing the hopes of reformers](#). Chiang’s failure to bring about meaningful reforms within the KMT will likely [undermine his suitability](#) for office in the eyes of more reform-minded members. If Chiang wants to hold on to the chairmanship in 2021, he will need to implement greater changes in the KMT in order to appease these members.

Beyond the KMT chairmanship election scheduled for July 2021, Taiwan will also hold its local [nine-in-one elections](#) the following year. These elections determine the local leaders in Taiwan’s cities and generally serve as [referendums on the governing party’s policies](#). As of March 2020, popular support for the KMT stood at [12.5 percent](#), suggesting that the party is on the ropes. Aware of the party’s low general support and inability to win votes from younger, reform-minded citizens more broadly, the KMT wrote on Facebook that this was the party’s “[darkest hour](#).” The KMT’s failure to implement reforms could significantly impact its chances in the 2022 elections, especially as these reforms have a central place in the KMT’s own political rhetoric.

Recommendations

Although the need for reform is urgent, there are numerous changes that the KMT can make to resolve the assets issue and improve its electoral chances.

- *First, the KMT should accept the Taipei High Administrative Court’s ruling that the CIPAS’ actions are constitutional.* Disputing the constitutionality of the court’s decision undermines the transitional justice process as well as the legitimacy of the High Administrative Court. The KMT should embrace the process for all other findings by the CIPAS. By

willfully accepting the judgments of the CIPAS, the KMT and Johnny Chiang could signal to voters that the party is embracing reform.

- *Second, the KMT should encourage any organization with which it has ties to cooperate fully with the CIPAS.* By proactively disclosing its ties to these groups and urging them to comply with the CIPAS' rulings, the KMT can demonstrate its desire to settle this issue substantively.
- *Finally, the KMT should drop its usage of the term "Green Terror" to describe this process.* In his [report](#) on transitional justice in Taiwan, Thomas Shattuck explains that while this term can certainly mobilize some fringe voters, equating the CIPAS to the "White Terror" shows how "the KMT at a fundamental level still does not comprehend the damage it caused to Taiwan's citizens and political system during the White Terror and authoritarian period." This apparently willful ignorance hurts the KMT's image among a great many of Taiwan's citizens, and particularly among younger voters.

Challenges

Implementing these reforms will not come without challenges. Older, more conservative KMT members will undoubtedly push back against any attempt to embrace the CIPAS rulings. These members care far more about this issue than the younger generation. Historically, the KMT has been averse to any moves that would cause the party to "lose face." [1] Reforming in this way would undoubtedly hurt the image of those senior KMT members who benefit from these assets and would give a visible "win" to the DPP. To prevent these two outcomes, the more senior members will likely continue to fight tooth and nail to maintain these assets. [2]

These reforms are further challenged by the greater salience of other issues among younger KMT members. Politicians only have so much time and money to commit to their causes, and it appears little of either has been given to the asset issue. Instead, younger KMT members have ascribed much more importance to issues such as [US pork imports](#) and [national security](#). Without an increase in momentum around the ill-gotten asset problem, it is likely that progress will be limited and that the issue will not be resolved.

Finally, the [reemergence](#) of former KMT lawmaker and current media personality Jaw Shaw-kong (趙少康), and the [recent push](#) for Han Kuo-yu to enter the race for KMT leadership, could threaten to undermine reform before it has even begun. Both [Jaw](#) and [Han](#) have espoused pro-China and pro-unification views in the past, and both have expressed interest in the KMT chairmanship. [Growing support](#) for these two candidates suggests that some KMT members may want to disregard all calls for reform. Should Johnny Chiang and the pro-reform wing of the KMT wish to change its image before the 2022 elections, the party assets issue appears to be a highly visible and definitive way to do so.

Overcoming these challenges will require substantial—and likely painful—reform. By accepting the CIPAS, and embracing the constitutionality of the results, the KMT could reinvigorate support from voters who want to see the KMT change. While there will undoubtedly be challenges along the way, it will be incumbent upon the KMT and Johnny Chiang to showcase their ability to reform—and embracing the CIPAS is the best way to do so.

The main point: Taiwan's elections are fast approaching, and, as of yet, the KMT has failed to implement any substantial reforms. By embracing the CIPAS rulings and finally putting an end to the ill-gotten assets issue, both the KMT and Johnny Chiang can increase their chances at electoral success.

[1] Interview with [1] anonymous CIPAS member, February 13, 2021.

[2] Ibid.

Xinjiang Cotton Shines Spotlight on Uyghur Issue in Taiwan

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

I-wei Jennifer Chang is a research fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute.

In late March, several Taiwanese celebrities working in China came under fire from Taiwanese government officials and netizens for publicly joining the Chinese state-run “[I Support Xinjiang Cotton](#)” ([#我支持新疆棉花](#)) social media movement, initiated by the [People’s Daily](#) (人民日報), which emerged as a response to Western criticism of the use of [forced labor](#) products from the persecuted ethnic Uyghur minority group. [Taiwanese entertainment stars](#) who have hitched their careers to the huge Chinese market—notably Ouyang Nana (歐陽娜娜), Janine Chang (張鈞甯), Eddie Peng (彭于晏), and Greg Hsu (許光漢)—joined dozens of Chinese and Hong Kong actors and singers in calling for a [boycott](#) of Western fashion brands that rejected the use of Xinjiang cotton in their products.

Such statements drew [praise in Chinese media](#), but attracted criticism from many persons in [Taiwan](#). Taiwanese [Premier Su Tseng-chang](#) (蘇貞昌) commented on March 26 that the “pro-Xinjiang cotton” Taiwanese celebrities “have no sense of propriety,” and that “their actions were selfish and showed a lack of understanding for the importance of human rights.” Su also [called](#) on the Taiwanese public to “speak on behalf of human rights and to work toward advancing human rights in the world.” As the Uyghur issue has emerged as a major point of contention in US-China relations, Taipei is increasingly inclined to support Western countries in defending Uyghur human and labor rights.

Western Sanctions on China

A few days after the tense [US-China talks in Alaska](#), the [European Union](#) (EU) leveled sanctions against four Chinese officials over human rights abuses in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR, 新疆維吾爾自治區) on March 22, marking the first EU sanctions on China since the 1989 [Tiananmen Square Massacre](#). [The United Kingdom and Canada](#) also quickly implemented parallel sanctions against senior Chinese officials complicit in the mass internment of Uyghurs.



Image: A March 25 posting on the Weibo page of Taiwan musician and actress Ouyang Nana, which re-posted a People’s Daily graphic supporting the “I Support Xinjiang Cotton” social media campaign. (Image source: [Weibo](#))

In coordinated fashion, the Biden Administration [imposed sanctions](#) on March 22 against two Chinese government officials: Wang Junzheng (王君正), secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC, 新疆生產建設兵團), and Chen Mingguo (陳明國), director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (XPSB, 新疆公安局), with both officials also targeted by [EU sanctions](#). On March 23, [Australia and New Zealand](#) issued a joint statement expressing “grave concerns” about the reports of severe human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. In one of its earliest policy moves on China, the Biden Administration clearly rallied its Western democratic allies to take collective action on the Uyghur human rights issue.

In response, [China](#) immediately hit back with its own sanctions on 10 European Union officials and a scholar, as well as four institutions on March 22. The list of sanctioned [individuals and entities](#) includes members of the European Parliament, Dutch Parliament, and Belgian Federal Parliament, as well as the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the European Union, the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament, the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Germany, and the Alliance of Democracies Foundation in Denmark. The sanctioned individuals are [prohibited from](#) traveling to mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macao, or doing business with China.

The recent China-EU tensions over the Uyghur issue may also affect the implementation of the [China-EU investment pact](#) (formally known as the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, CAI), which was signed by both sides in December 2020 but is awaiting ratification by the [European Parliament](#). Some [EU parliamentarians](#) have stated that they will oppose the CAI due to human rights and labor rights abuses in China. Meanwhile, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman [Hua Chunying](#) (華春瑩) said that the EU “cannot talk about cooperation on one hand, and impose sanctions to harm China’s rights and benefits on another.”

Xinjiang Cotton Issue

The Xinjiang region produces more than [20 percent](#) of the world’s cotton and [84 percent](#) of China’s cotton. Reports indicate that [more than half a million](#) Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang have been forced to pick cotton in the region. In January, the United States began restricting the entry of [all cotton products and tomatoes](#) from Xinjiang, as well as products from other countries that use cotton and tomatoes from the region. [Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#) stated on April 11 that the international community needs to ensure that countries are not selling China products that can be used to repress Uyghurs, while also not importing Chinese goods that are derived from coerced labor.

Following the wave of Western sanctions against China, the Chinese Communist Party’s Youth League (中國共產主義青年團) posted Swedish clothing store [H&M’s 2020 statement](#) expressing concern over reports of forced labor in Xinjiang on its [Weibo account](#). The Youth League’s [March 24 post](#) read: “Spreading rumors to boycott Xinjiang cotton, while also wanting to make money in China? Wishful thinking!” The backlash from China’s state media and Chinese netizens was swift and stridently nationalistic in tone. [H&M](#), whose [fourth-largest market](#) is in China, literally disappeared overnight from Chinese maps, apps, and online marketplaces. China’s calls for [boycotting H&M](#) also expanded to other mostly [Western retailers](#) that objected to Xinjiang cotton, including [Nike](#), Adidas, Converse, Calvin Klein, Zara, and [Burberry](#). *Global Times* Editor-in-Chief [Hu Xijin](#) (胡錫進) argued that Western companies operating in the Chinese market “must act with respect to China.” [Hu](#) pointed out that “H&M, Nike, and oth-

ers are now suffering heavy losses to their reputations in the Chinese market.” Beijing utilized the high tide of Chinese nationalism to punish Western companies that sought to chastise the Chinese government over human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

Taiwan’s Shifting Attention on the Uyghurs

While Taiwan’s interest in Uyghur issues had been experiencing a general decline over the past several decades, it has risen again in recent years. After the Republic of China (ROC) retreated to Taiwan in 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) government provided assistance to Muslim refugees from Northwest China, including Hui, Uyghur, and Kazakh ethnic groups, who fled Chinese communist rule for Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Turkey. [1] As the [ROC Constitution](#) placed a heavy emphasis on China’s territorial integrity, the ROC before and after 1949 sought to maintain [sovereignty](#) over all regions of China and nominally opposed Uyghur (East Turkestan) and Tibetan separatism. [2] Taipei’s attention to overseas Uyghur communities was initially influenced by the KMT’s desire to reclaim mainland China. However, this focus later shifted as successive Taiwanese administrations relinquished visions of taking back far-flung territories that were clearly outside the ROC’s administrative control.

This process of de-sinicization was launched under Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), who sought to abolish the Cabinet-level [Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission](#) (MTAC, 蒙藏委員會). Despite its name, the commission—which was established in China in [1928](#)—was not just focused on administration of Mongolia and Tibet; rather, it was inclusive of Xinjiang and Muslim ethnic minority groups. [3] Today, its successor is the Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Center (蒙藏文化中心), a unit under Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture (MOC, 文化部). Taipei [recognized](#) Mongolia as an independent country in 2002, though sovereignty claims to Mongolia remain unchanged in the ROC Constitution. As the Chen Administration started to move away from historical sovereignty claims and focus more on territories under Taiwan’s current control, there was also an accompanying national indifference towards developments in China, including the state of Uyghur affairs.

Arguably, over the past several decades, Uyghur affairs have not been a prominent issue in Taiwan's political and social consciousness. This trend can be explained by several factors, including Taipei's overwhelming focus on the island's own precarious security situation, the dearth of social or economic ties between Taiwan and Xinjiang, and the lack of ethnic or cultural affinity between Han Taiwanese and Uyghurs. Despite its solidarity with pro-democracy activists in [Hong Kong](#), the Taiwanese government has been reluctant to publicly advocate on behalf of human rights for Tibetans and Uyghurs for fear of irritating Beijing. For example, [Dolkun Isa](#), president of the Germany-based World Uyghur Congress, was denied visas to attend religious freedom forums in Taiwan by both the Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) Administrations. The [Tsai Administration](#) also reportedly prevented the Dalai Lama and Uyghur leader Rebiya Kadeer from attending the Taiwan International Religious Freedom Forum in May 2019. These decisions by Taipei could be the result of a calculation that there were no visible benefits from confronting Beijing over its treatment of its ethnic minority groups.

The Rising Profile of Uyghur Issues in Taiwan

However, Taipei's calculations on the Uyghur issue may be changing as a result of Xi Jinping's (習近平) strong-arm tactics towards wayward regions, as well as new developments in US-China relations. Following the Chinese government's efforts to subjugate [Xinjiang](#) and [Hong Kong](#) in recent years, [Taiwan](#) has quickly become Beijing's next target. Xinjiang has become a testing ground for China's [ideological re-education](#) and [mass surveillance](#) tactics, which have provided lessons for Beijing's suppression of Hong Kong. Therefore, it would behoove Taipei to understand the interlinkages between developments in Xinjiang and Hong Kong and their [implications](#) for the island. More importantly, China's [mass internment of Uyghurs](#) has not only garnered unprecedented international attention, but has also become a major point of friction in the growing major-power competition between [China and the West](#), as well as an important test case for the Biden Administration's values-based [approach towards China](#).

Taipei seems to understand the importance of supporting the United States and European Union in raising

the banner of Uyghur human and labor rights. In light of Taiwanese celebrities supporting the Xinjiang cotton movement, President Tsai wrote in a [Facebook post](#) on March 26 that "human rights are a universal value" and urged the Chinese government to stop oppressing the Uyghurs. This view was echoed by KMT Chairman [Johnny Chiang](#) (江啟臣), who said that the religious and labor rights of all people in Xinjiang should be guaranteed and respected. There is also ongoing discussion about whether Taiwan will ban [imports of Xinjiang cotton](#). Premier [Su Tseng-chang](#) stated that while there are currently no plans to do so, Taiwan should not be left outside of the efforts of major democracies that are sanctioning Beijing on the Uyghur issue. Taiwan's Minister of Economic Affairs [Wang Meihua](#) (王美花) said that the government will follow the lead of international organizations on the cotton issue, and that Taiwan's industry will also comply with the requirements set forth by foreign companies that ban Xinjiang cotton.

In sum, it is imperative for Taipei to support Western-led efforts on the Uyghur human rights issue, which is indirectly tied to its own desire to gain broader regional and international support amid growing [security threats](#) from China. If Taiwan takes on the issue of forced labor products, it would need to conduct an in-depth examination of Taiwanese imports from China and other countries that have origins in Xinjiang, including not only cotton, but also [textiles](#), [electronics](#), and agricultural goods such as [tomatoes](#). In the current struggle between Western liberal values and Chinese authoritarian values, Taipei has only one path, which is to shed its previous political indifference and actively promote Uyghur human rights.

The main point: The Xinjiang cotton issue has raised the profile of Uyghur human and labor rights in Taiwan. Accordingly, Taipei should support Western-led efforts to oppose Chinese oppression in Xinjiang.

[1] 平山光將 (Masamitsu Hirayama), "邊政或僑務? 中華民國政府遷臺後對中東地區西北穆斯林難民的政策" ("Border Policy or Overseas Chinese Affairs? The ROC Government's Policy towards Northwest Muslim Refugees in the Middle East after Retreating to Taiwan"), conference paper presented at Academia Sinica's Institute of Modern History, July 2014.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Mei-hua Lan, “From Lifanyuan to the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission,” *Managing Frontiers in Qing China: the Lifanyuan and Libu Revisited*, edited by Dittmar Schorkowitz and Ning Chia, Vol. 35, November 2016, p.343.

The War Threat Against Taiwan: Preparing for All Contingencies

By: J. Michael Cole

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

A recent uptick in military activity by Russia along its border with Ukraine and by the Chinese armed forces around Taiwan has caused alarm in some circles who warn that Moscow and Beijing may be coordinating their actions to test the Biden Administration’s “red lines.” Others, meanwhile, have speculated that the two revisionist powers, having convinced themselves that the United States is in decline or is not serious about committing national treasure to defend Ukraine and Taiwan, may have concluded that now is the time to strike simultaneously to accomplish long-desired outcomes on the ground.

Such analyses are countered by the view that the recent military activity—the deployment of heavy armor along the border with Ukraine and more frequent clashes between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian militias since January, daily intrusions by People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and Navy (PLAN) aircraft into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), and enveloping maneuvers and naval exercises involving a Chinese aircraft carrier near Taiwan—is merely a test. From such a perspective, reading these operations as signs of preparation for major military action (i.e., an invasion) overstates that matter and, moreover, only helps the belligerent states by “hyping” the psychological pressure on the targeted populations.

The latter opinion fundamentally assumes that for all their posturing, decision makers in Beijing and Moscow nevertheless continue to be governed by the rules of “rational” decision making. In other words, the risks

of a US and/or NATO intervention—as well as potentially extreme economic and human costs associated with such an operation—are still too high for Moscow and Beijing to initiate major military action. The potential costs, therefore, outweigh the likely benefits. China and Russia, one argument goes, would not risk their economies for the sake of acquiring Ukrainian or Taiwanese territory. This assumption underpins international relations theory, and as a general rule, it provides a reasonably accurate picture of how governments weigh the costs and benefits of their actions.

The Rational versus Irrational Model

Although this argument may be comforting, history also offers various examples of regimes that, facing extraordinary odds against them, nevertheless chose a course of action that, in hindsight, could only bring disaster. Japan’s decision to attack the United States in 1941 when it was clear that it did not have the national capacity to fight a sustained war against its much wealthier opponent is just one example. In fact, the rulers in Tokyo ignored several warnings and war games by the Imperial Army, which demonstrated that such a war would be calamitous for Japan. [1] Instead, the Japanese believed that a bolt from the blue, in the form of a debilitating first strike at Pearl Harbor, would break the back of the United States and compel it to make concessions. Recent research into “cognitive biases” and how, in certain scenarios, those helped rather than undermined decision makers, also points to the dangers of adopting the rational actor model (RAM) for the analysis of all behavior among states. [2][3]

“Cognitive biases” can be added to the possibility that great powers will “stumble into war,” which occurred in Europe in the lead-up to the World War I. [4] Rather than a calculated decision, major armed conflict can instead become a descent, an accumulation of multiple decisions that, in the aggregate, can take on a life of their own and lead otherwise “rational” actors to engage in “irrational” decision making. Under such a scenario, a series of small, limited crises may propel belligerents down a ramp to a major conflict. For instance, this could potentially result from Taiwan acting on its threat to shoot down Chinese drones if they intrude in the Pratas Islands (Dongsha Islands, 東沙群島) in the contested South China Sea.

And to this, finally, we can add another variable, which applies particularly to decision making within authoritarian regimes. Besides the megalomania of the leaders themselves, the very structure of authoritarian systems militates against any recommendation or piece of information that does not fit the leadership's grand vision. Consequently, there is a high likelihood that the individual at the top, or the small circle of advisers who make decisions on matters of war and peace, are not being fed all the information that they need to make enlightened policy decisions—in other words, to make “rational” decisions. The tremendous concentration of power that characterizes the regimes of leaders like Xi Jinping (習近平) and Vladimir Putin only exacerbates this phenomenon, turning a handful of advisers into mere yes-men who fear contradicting their superior(s). The dearth of information about developments within China further complicates matters, as it makes it more difficult for outside observers to assess the domestic dynamics (e.g., a severe economic downturn) that could compel the leadership to create an external crisis so as to distract potential opponents, if not the general public.

All this isn't to say that major armed conflict is imminent. However, for small states like Taiwan that face an existential threat, the ability to prepare for worst-case scenarios can mean the difference between survival and extinction. Analysts who counsel calm and warn against overreaction (in other words, who believe that the RAM still applies) may be 80 percent right. But what happens if they get it wrong? The key, therefore, is to prepare against that remaining 20 percent by telegraphing all assurances that such adventurism would be catastrophic for one's opponent. That means bolstering full-spectrum deterrence—military, economic, and political—and doing so in conjunction with major allies and partners. For the United States, this entails going beyond “red lines” and warnings of “dire consequences.” Instead, Washington should clearly demonstrate the costs that would be imposed if Beijing and Moscow were to act on their threats. In the current state of affairs, ambiguity risks inviting *miscalculation*. More than ever, the international community must make it clear to the Chinese and Russian leaderships that they must continue to calculate “rationally.”

The Ignored Threat

Assuming that the RAM prevails, various scenarios other than war remain as alternatives for regimes which intend to undermine their opponents. In Russia's conflict with Ukraine, the use of “gray zone” operations or “hybrid warfare” constitute a below-the-radar means by which to wage war by eroding an opponent's ability to function while simultaneously weakening alliance systems that could provide aid in major armed scenarios. [5] While several books, papers, and academic treatises have been written on Russia's reliance on such tactics, surprisingly little work has been done studying China's ability to use “gray zone” operations against countries like Taiwan. This is a major blind spot, given that in both RAM *and* the “cognitive bias” or “irrational” models, the Chinese would likely rely upon such instruments, albeit for different reasons.

Under the RAM, and with the implicit understanding that China is not on the cusp of launching major military operations against Taiwan proper, “gray zone” operations would nevertheless provide a necessary instrument to cause social unrest through modulated, and escalatory, tactics. This would involve collaborating with substate actors within Taiwan who embrace Beijing's ideology and that have access to firearms or other means to launch sabotage operations, assassinations, guerrilla warfare, or terrorism. The symbiotic relationship that exists between pro-Beijing groups—such as the China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP, 中華統一促進黨) and major crime syndicates like the Bamboo Union (竹聯幫)—and the potential for escalatory violence by such organizations is an issue that warrants much greater scrutiny. The use of such substate actors, moreover, could provide deniability for Beijing, allowing China to “wage war”—and quite rationally so, one might add—without engaging in open hostilities using the PLA. If the regime in Beijing feels compelled to escalate and to punish Taiwan for its refusal to give in to its demands, such tactics constitute, in this author's assessment, the next likeliest step. Already in recent years, there have been a number of incidents involving pro-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) organized crime—including an assassination attempt ostensibly funded by the Chinese side—targeting people in Taiwan.

Conversely, in a “cognitive bias” or “irrational” scenario, the same substate actors could be prompted into action in the initial phase of a major conflict so as to weaken (again through sabotage, assassination, and guerrilla warfare) the state apparatus and sow chaos within society *before* a major assault by the PLA. One can also expect that similar tactics, also relying on organized crime or other agents in place, could precede major hostilities in the Taiwan Strait by targeting US military bases in places like Okinawa.

Too much focus on the *conventional* threat posed by China may have blinded the Taiwan government, analysts, and partners worldwide to the high likelihood that Beijing will rely on *nontraditional* and yet still violent means by which to wage war against Taiwan. There is, as of this writing, little indication that Taiwan’s national defense, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies are fully cognizant of the threat posed by such tactics—let alone that they are prepared to respond to such a crisis.

The main point: As the debate rages over whether Beijing is ready to launch an “irrational” invasion of Taiwan, the more immediate—and perhaps likelier—threat of violent action by pro-China substate actors continues to be ignored.

[1] Toll, Ian W. *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2012.

[2] Johnson, Dominic D.P. *Strategic Instincts: The Adaptive Advantages of Cognitive Biases in International Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020.

[3] Allison, Graham T., and Philip Zelikow. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, Second Edition*. New York: Longman, 1999.

[4] Clark, Christopher M. *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2014.

[5] Orenstein, Mitchell Alexander. *The Lands in Between: Russia vs. the West and the New Politics of Hybrid War*. New York: Oxford University press, 2019.

Beijing Touts Naval Activity in its Pressure Campaign Against Taiwan

By: John Dotson

John Dotson is the deputy director of the Global Taiwan Institute and associate editor of the Global Taiwan Brief.

Beginning in the [early months of 2020](#), continuing through the rest of the year, and then increasing in tempo in the [first quarter of 2021](#), People’s Liberation Army (PLA) aviation activity has seen a dramatic increase in the vicinity of Taiwan. The [largest incursion of the year](#) to date occurred on April 12, when 25 PLA aircraft—including a provocative collection of four J-10 fighters, fourteen J-16 fighters, and four H-6K bombers—entered the southwestern quadrant of Taiwan’s ADIZ. Amid this dramatically increased aviation activity, less attention has been given to parallel PLA Navy (PLAN) patrols and exercise activities—as well as nominally private but state-directed [“gray zone” maritime activity](#)—in the waters surrounding Taiwan. This has been further accompanied by reporting in PRC state media (see below) intended to publicize amphibious and other exercise activity by PLA ground forces whose primary missions are oriented against Taiwan. Taken together, these military operations are a part of a multi-pronged effort by the leadership of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to apply psychological pressure against Taiwan, as well as to signal Beijing’s resolve to employ military force to compel Taiwan’s unification with the PRC.



Image: PLA Navy vessels Luyang III (Type 052D) DDG Taiyuan, Sovremenny-class DDG Ningbo, and Jiangkai II (Type 054A) FFG Nantong underway for operations in

the East China Sea in late January 2021. PRC media has recently sought to publicize PLA Navy activity as part of a larger effort to use military operations to place psychological pressure on Taiwan. (Image source: [PRC Ministry of Defense](#))

Recent PLA Naval Patrols and Exercises in the Vicinity of Taiwan

In approximately the second and third weeks of March, a task force subordinate to the PLA Eastern Theater Command (東部戰區) consisting of at least two identified ships—the Luyang II (Type 052-C) class guided missile destroyer *Jinan* and the Jiangkai II (Type 054A) class frigate *Changzhou*—conducted operations in unspecified areas of the East China Sea. Per brief [commentary in official state media](#), these ships conducted training exercises, including “joint firepower attack” (聯合火力打擊) and “ship-submarine-aircraft free confrontation” (艦潛機自由對抗) operations.

On April 3, a PLAN task force consisting of the aircraft carrier *Liaoning*, a Renhai-class guided missile destroyer, two Luyang III-class guided missile destroyers, a Jiangkai II frigate, and a Fuyu-class support ship was reportedly located [transiting the Miyako Strait](#) in the Ryukyu Islands, on a track to sail into the open Pacific to the east of Taiwan. (The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force reportedly dispatched the destroyer *Suzutsuki* and maritime patrol aircraft to track the task force.) On April 6, [PRC state media coverage](#) stressed that the *Liaoning* task force had been conducting operations in the vicinity of Taiwan, as part of “a routine training exercise organized according to the annual work plan to test the troops’ training effectiveness and beef up their capability to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests.” The commentary further [stated](#) that “In the future, the PLA Navy will continue to carry out such exercise and training activities on a regular basis.”

PRC state press has also devoted recent coverage to extolling upgrades to some of its larger surface combatants: per [state media commentary](#) in March, the PLAN’s Sovremenny-class guided missile destroyers (DDG) purchased from Russia had been enhanced “with China’s domestically developed advanced weapons and equipment [that] significantly enhances the ship’s combat capability, as China’s related technol-

ogies nowadays have far surpassed that of Russia’s when the ships were delivered.”

The PRC also publicized [plans for live-fire drills](#) in the Taiwan Strait on April 18—likely intended in part to express Beijing’s displeasure over the [visit](#) of a high-level, albeit unofficial, US delegation to Taiwan from April 14-16.

Reported Exercises in March by PLA Amphibious Forces

PLA media outlets have also acted in recent weeks to publicize exercise activity reportedly conducted by PLA personnel and assets oriented towards amphibious warfare. For example, on April 10 the [PLA Daily reported](#) on amphibious landing training conducted at an unnamed location in the Southern Theater Command (南部戰區) on March 24. Commentary and photos indicated at least three landing craft, air cushion (LCAC) vehicles and an unidentified amphibious landing dock “attached to a naval landing ship flotilla” conducting a beach landing training exercise, which included “in and out of the mother-ship [movement] under complex sea conditions, fast and accurate ferry of troops, and simulated seizure and control of islands.” Such reporting, however—relating to apparent basic proficiency training conducted by unladen LCACs, and reported two weeks after the fact—suggests a desire to publicize amphibious training, rather than a notable increase in the tempo of such training.

PRC state media has also sought to publicize recent exercises conducted by the PLA Ground Force 73rd Group Army based in Fujian. The 73rd Group Army maintains a [primary role for amphibious warfare](#), and has been [described in PRC press](#) as one of “the main forces which would be used in a potential landing mission on the island of Taiwan.” In late March, [PLA online media](#) publicized a reported force-on-force exercise involving armored elements of the 73rd Group Army. On April 8, the [Global Times stated](#) that an unnamed “combined arms battalion affiliated with the PLA 73rd Group Army has been holding a series of amphibious landing exercises in recent days in waters off the southern part of East China’s Fujian Province, with several types of amphibious armored vehicles participating in beach assault drills.”



Image: A still image from PLA media coverage of a training exercise by the PLA 73rd Group Army in late March. (Image source: [Zhongguo Jun Wang](#))

The Intended Psychological Impacts of PLA Exercise Activity

PRC spokespersons and state media outlets have taken pains to characterize recent PLA exercise activity as a response to provocative moves by the United States and “Taiwan secessionists.” Against the backdrop of a [Taiwan Strait transit](#) conducted on April 7 by the US Navy destroyer *USS John McCain*, as well as [operations in the South China Sea](#) during the same period involving the *USS Theodore Roosevelt* aircraft carrier battle group and the *USS Makin Island* amphibious ready group, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian (趙立堅) stated in an [April 8 press conference](#) that “Lately US warships have frequently sailed to the Taiwan Strait to flex muscles, provoke and stir up trouble, sending gravely wrong signals to ‘Taiwan-independence’ forces and threatening peace and stability across the region.”

In reference to the *Liaoning* task force’s operations in waters to the east of Taiwan in early March, the nationalist [Global Times opined](#) that such a deployment demonstrated the PLA’s ability to “isolate the island’s forces from foreign intervention and break Taiwan secessionists’ illusion that US or Japanese forces could come to their aid,” and that “regular exercises by warplanes and warships are deterrents and warnings against Taiwan secessionists and foreign forces that

are attempting to interfere in China’s internal affairs.” Ma Xiaoguang (馬曉光), a spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the PRC State Council (國務院台灣事務辦公室), [stated on April 13](#) that “The signal given by the military drills is that we are determined to stop Taiwan independence, and stop Taiwan from working with the US [...] We do not promise to abandon the use of force, and retain the option of taking all necessary measures. We are aimed at the interference of external forces and the very small number of separatists and their separatist activities.”

For their part, Taiwanese officials have attempted to signal resolve in the face of PRC pressure. Responding to the PRC’s pressure campaign, ROC Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) [stated on April 7](#) that “We are willing to defend ourselves [...] We will fight a war if we need to fight a war, and if we need to defend ourselves to the very last day, then we will defend ourselves to the very last day.” Taiwan officials have also taken steps to publicize their own military efforts in the maritime domain: Taiwan’s coast guard has [announced](#) that live fire drills will be held in the Pratas Islands (Dongsha Islands, 東沙島) area on April 25 and May 5, and President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正) attended an [April 13 ceremony in Kaohsiung](#) for the commissioning of the *Yushan* (玉山), an indigenously built, 10,600 ton, multi-mission amphibious ship intended for service with the ROC Navy.

What’s a Real Threat, and What Is Being Hyped for Effect?

Beijing is clearly attempting to send a message with its recent military activity in the air and sea spaces around Taiwan. The steadily increasing numbers of PLA aviation flights in the vicinity of Taiwan, and into Taiwan’s declared ADIZ, represent a real escalation—both in terms of numbers of sorties, as well as the level of provocation directed against the ROC armed forces and Taiwan public opinion. Furthermore, certain PLAN operations—most notably, the deployment of the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier task force to the waters of the open Pacific, east of Taiwan—also reveal a gradually growing expansion in the PLAN’s operating proficiencies and areas of routine patrol. However, judging from the limited evidence of available media coverage, the state media apparatus appears to also be hyping otherwise routine naval and ground force amphibious ex-

ercises for propaganda purposes.

Beijing's current round of saber-rattling is being conducted as much in the media domain as it is in the realm of actual military operations. This does not mean that these messages should not be taken seriously; indeed, Beijing's statements likely indicate a genuinely held sense of indignation and alarm at the perceived growing strength of "Taiwan independence" forces, as well as the Biden Administration's unexpectedly strong displays of support for Taiwan. As political and diplomatic tensions continue to rise, Beijing can be expected to continue—and increase—its efforts to employ the PLA as a political tool directed against audiences in both Taiwan and the United States.

The main point: Beijing is actively publicizing its military operations as a component of a broader psychological pressure campaign directed against Taiwan. However, while PLA aviation activity near Taiwan has continued to increase, Beijing appears to be hyping some routine naval activity in order to promote a narrative of its readiness to employ force against Taiwan.