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Fault Line Widens between KMT and CCP over the “1992 Consensus”

By: Russell Hsiao

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

Three months away from the chairmanship election of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT, 國民黨), Taiwan’s main opposition party, current leader Johnny Chiang (江啟臣, b. 1972) has placed his long anticipated personal stamp on the Party’s formula for cross-strait policy. Labeling the new formula as the “[1992 Consensus Plus](#)” (九二共識 Plus), the formulation appears to be an extension of the “1992 Consensus,” the KMT’s long-standing stance on the relationship between Taiwan and China based on the [tacit understanding](#) reached between the then-ruling Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1992. [1] Pouring cold water on the new formula, the spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) State Council, Zhu Fenglian (朱鳳蓮), reportedly [retorted](#): “the core of the ‘1992 Consensus’ that both sides of the strait belong to ‘one China’ and work together to seek national reunification [sic] cannot be blurred and changed.” “Any approach that highlights differences is not conducive to maintaining consensus,” Zhu [added](#).

At a [launch event](#) promoting his new book *Game Changer* (破浪啟程)—which signals his likely intent to run in Taiwan’s 2024 presidential election—the young KMT chairman put forward the idea of “[1992 Consensus Plus](#),” specifically stating that his “cross-strait policy is not just the ‘1992 Consensus’” and identified [four major components](#): 1) the sovereignty of the Republic of China; 2) peace and security across the Taiwan Strait; 3) freedom, democracy, and human rights; and 4) the strengthening of cross-strait co-prosperity. Chiang [emphasized](#) that “the ‘1992 Consensus’ based on the Constitution of the Republic of China” (ROC) (中華民國憲法) is the cross-strait discourse of the KMT.

At a separate event attended by several KMT heavyweights, and hosted by former KMT Chairwoman Hung Shiu-chu (洪秀柱)—who now heads the Chinese Cyan Geese Peace Education Foundation (中華青雁和平教育基金會)—Tso Chen-dong (左正東), director of

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Image: KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang speaking at a book launch event on March 29. Chiang has recently unveiled the concept of the “1992 Consensus Plus” as a new framework for cross-Straits dialogue between the KMT and China’s ruling CCP. (Image source: [NOW News](#))

the Kuomintang’s Mainland Affairs Department, [stated](#) that the KMT’s position on cross-Straits relations abided by the ROC Constitution, and that the ROC is the core value of the Kuomintang. In response to a question concerning TAO spokesperson comments about the KMT chairman’s policy proposal, the director [said](#) that the KMT firmly advocates for the “1992 Consensus” based on the ROC Constitution and encourages cross-Straits dialogue, exchanges, and consultation to solve problems. Tso [added](#) that the “1992 Consensus” had to keep pace with the times.

Following two consecutive defeats in the presidential elections of 2016 and 2020, the KMT is now undergoing a soul-searching process that could fundamentally redefine the Party’s relations with the PRC after the KMT’s flirtation with the hardline pro-unification factions of Hung Shiu-chu and Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜). As a result of the KMT’s most recent electoral defeat, the former establishment chairman, Wu Den-yih (吳敦義) (2017-2020), who was unable to steer the Party away from Han’s failed presidential bid, stepped down in January 2020, and Chiang took over the helm of the ailing Party in March 2020. Many analysts [attribute](#) the cause of the KMT’s defeat in 2020 due to the Party’s inability to justifiably respond to Beijing’s increasingly aggressive posture *vis-à-vis* Taiwan and a rising younger generation whose views were growing out of touch with the Party’s more conservative approach of seeking reconciliation with Beijing against the backdrop of its suppression of freedom in Hong Kong.

Indeed, Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) arguably won the 2016 and 2020

presidential elections by adopting the more pragmatic approach in light of circumstances. On the issue of the “1992 Consensus,” in her inauguration speech in 2016, Tsai [acknowledged](#) the historical fact that talks had occurred in 1992 while avoiding explicit rejection of the so-called “1992 Consensus.” Instead, Tsai stated that she would [abide by agreements](#) negotiated with Beijing and would base [her cross-Straits policy](#) on the ROC Constitution and the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area (臺灣地區與大陸地區人民關係條例). According to [David Brown](#), a visiting scholar at John Hopkins University and board member of the American Institute in Taiwan, “both [...] have a basis in the idea of ‘one China.’”

Following a policy review that lasted several months, in September 2020, the committee responsible for drafting the KMT’s proposed policy reforms, which included China policy, released the results of its internal deliberations. On China policy, the Party adopted [eight points](#)—three provisions of which are particularly noteworthy:

- Cross-Straits official consultations must be conducted in accordance with the constitutional order of the Republic of China, respect the fact that the Republic of China exists, and space for the Republic of China are core elements of cross-Straits official consultations and interactions.
- During the KMT’s rule, statements about the “[19]92 Consensus; one China, respective interpretations” were based on the Constitution of the

Republic of China, as well as the successful experience of seeking common ground while preserving differences between the two sides of the Strait. The “1992 Consensus,” which is based on the Constitution of the Republic of China, should be applied to maintain cross-Strait interactions and to seek ways of interaction to keep pace with the times.

- The mainland [should abandon](#) the use of force against Taiwan, and the two sides of the Strait should set an example in peacefully resolving differences and exercising mutual respect and non-exclusion in the international community. In order to maintain peace across the Taiwan Strait, the best strategy is to promote cross-Strait exchanges and Taiwan-US cooperation in parallel.

Asked by a reporter whether the “1992 Consensus Plus” meant that the KMT’s cross-Strait position was now becoming closer to the DPP, Tso, the KMT’s director for China policy, [stated](#) that if the DPP is willing to abide by the ROC Constitution that gave rise to democracy and freedom on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, he believes that the DPP could learn a lot from the KMT. To be sure, while differences remain between the DPP and KMT, their respective positions indeed appear to be converging and the latter’s position appears to be diverging with the CCP. As David Brown further noted in his article for the [Global Taiwan Brief](#):

“[...] there are still differences in the parties’ views. Party history and competitive electoral politics have and will continue to result in some differentiation. However, there is now more convergence of the views and policies of the two main parties toward Beijing than at any time in the past. [...] In the face of CCP repression, both the DPP and KMT are invested in defending Taiwan’s interests.”

A longstanding bone of contention between the DPP and KMT over the “1992 Consensus” has been that while the KMT maintains that the two sides agree that there is only “one China”—and that Taipei and Beijing may have their “respective interpretations” (各表)—Beijing has never publicly recognized this interpretation. When [reportedly](#) asked “How does Beijing view the ‘Republic of China’ now?” Zhu responded that “one” China means that both the mainland and Taiwan

belong to the same China. With the “1992 Consensus Plus” formulation, Chiang may be trying to distance the KMT’s position from the CCP by distinguishing it with qualifiers.

The TAO spokesperson’s response is consistent with the assertive position laid out by CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping’s (習近平) remarks in his January 2019 speech marking the 40th anniversary of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan. In that speech, Xi [emphasized](#) that the “one country, two systems” framework remained the only formula for unification, and thereby tied it to the “1992 Consensus”—even as Beijing squashed dissent in Hong Kong. The [TAO spokesperson’s response](#) to the “1992 Consensus Plus” seems to indicate that the PRC’s position on the ROC, and whether there is a respective interpretation of “one China,” remains unchanged. President Tsai’s [repeated calls](#) for the PRC to recognize the existence of the ROC may be viewed within this political context. With [three months left](#) before the KMT chairmanship election in July, Chiang appears poised to win reelection with no significant real challenger in sight. In the process of attempting to reform the Party, the KMT chairman is trying to rebrand the “1992 Consensus” in large part due to Beijing’s restrictive reinterpretations. This is likely being done to distinguish the KMT’s position from that of the CCP, which due to the lack of clarity regarding the “1992 Consensus” has increasingly become a liability in Taiwan’s domestic politics. This highlights the widening fault line between the KMT and the CCP on the “1992 Consensus,” and portends choppy waters ahead in relations between the two parties.

The main point: As the KMT approaches the chairmanship election in July, the incumbent has put forward a formula for cross-Strait relations that appears to put more distance between the KMT and the CCP on the terms for cross-Strait relations. This is likely being done to distinguish the KMT’s position from that of the CCP, which has increasingly become a liability in Taiwan’s domestic politics.

[1] “[1992 Consensus](#)” is a term coined by KMT lawmaker Su Chi (蘇起) in 2000 that, according to the KMT, insists on the position that the two sides agreed that Taiwan and the Chinese mainland belonged to “one China” but with each side having their respective interpretation (一中各表). According to former President

Ma Ying-jeou, in 2008 Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) had [affirmed](#) in a private call with the United States that the “1992 Consensus” agreed to differ on the interpretation of “one China.” Yet, Beijing has [never publicly indicated](#) that it accepted respective interpretation. While the KMT continues to publicly maintain respective interpretation there has been no official public recognition of this clause by Beijing.

Escalating Clarity without Fighting: Countering “Gray Zone” Warfare Against Taiwan (Part 1)

By: Eric Chan

Eric Chan is an adjunct fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute and a senior airpower strategist for the US Air Force. This article is the first of a two-part series on potential responses to China’s “gray zone” warfare directed against Taiwan. The views in this article are the author’s own, and are not intended to represent those of his affiliate organizations.

The recent conclusion of the PRC’s annual “Two Sessions” (兩會) of the Chinese People’s Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中國人民政治協商會議) and the National People’s Congress (NPC, 全國人民代表大會) has resulted in some uncertainty on the part of Western China-watchers regarding People’s Republic of China (PRC) Taiwan policy intentions for the coming year. While [top-level leadership statements from the “Two Sessions”](#) seem to indicate that the focus over the next year will be the implementation of the Hong Kong “electoral reform,” [lower-level official commentary and media discussions](#) have also made clear that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rejects Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) [January 2021 olive branch](#) for the “joint promotion of meaningful dialogue.”

This uncertainty is magnified by the [PLA’s gray zone warfare against Taiwan](#), which has reached new highs of intensity. Meanwhile, the [budget of the People’s Liberation Army \(PLA\)](#) is scheduled to be increased yet again, this time by 6.8 percent. All of this follows the [somewhat mysterious October 2020](#) CCP highlight of a 2027 centennial milestone for the PLA. Media discussions on this latter point have speculated whether this

means that Xi Jinping (習近平) has [ordered the PLA to speed up its modernization plans](#). Indeed, the Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), Admiral Phil Davidson, was perhaps obliquely referring to this in his March 9 [Senate Armed Services committee testimony](#), in which he remarked that “Taiwan is clearly one of their [the CCP’s] ambitions before then. And I think the threat is manifest during this decade, in fact in the next six years.”

Regardless of the specific timeframe for forcible unification, these indications point to a dual challenge for US and Taiwan policymakers. The statements from the “Two Sessions,” combined with [Xi’s earlier pronouncements](#), indicate that the PRC gray zone warfare campaign against Taiwan will continue unabated, even as the PLA speeds up preparations for a future invasion contingency. Focusing on one while ignoring the other is a recipe for defeat. Fortunately, through *escalating clarity*, it is possible to develop a complementary approach. In this two-part article, I will look at methods of escalating clarity against PRC gray zone tactics in the air and on the sea.

Strategic Clarity Does Not Need to Be Binary

Discussions of the concept of strategic ambiguity versus strategic clarity tend to focus on binary risk. For instance, advocates of strategic ambiguity [emphasize the risks of clarity](#) in creating a situation that would “force” an armed PRC response. The CCP is well aware that US and Taiwan policymakers tend to be risk averse; thus, their response to recent proposals of a [security guarantee](#) or [permanent basing of heavy ground forces in Taiwan](#) has been to use [non-authoritative state media to “affirm” fears of risk escalation](#) by stating that these actions are a “red line.” Moreover, even such bold actions would largely be toothless against the type of [systems confrontation-style, gray zone warfare](#) that the CCP currently employs against Taiwan. Armor is wonderful for deterring an amphibious invasion, but would do little against [CCP political warfare](#). US Navy Taiwan Strait transits are designed to [demonstrate US commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific](#), but cannot stop [PRC sand-dredgers](#).

However, strategic clarity does not need to be binary in nature, and in fact, shouldn’t be. Unlike strategic ambiguity, which is meant to deter both the PRC and



Image: A Taiwan coast guard officer observes a Chinese dredging ship operating in the vicinity of Matsu Island on January 28, 2021. (Source: [Channel News Asia](#))

Taiwan, the purpose of strategic clarity is to deter the PRC while reassuring Taiwan. This can have escalating gradients, both as a method of risk—or escalation—management and as a method of deterring and shaping PRC gray zone warfare.

The appropriate response to [the PRC's end of strategic ambiguity towards Taiwan](#) and the start of PRC gray zone warfare should be the development and implementation of a partnered US-Taiwan gray zone response.

Fighting in the Gray Zone

The CCP's use of multimodal gray zone warfare against Taiwan is relatively new, and designed with the main objective of unification with Taiwan without provoking an *American* armed response. Underneath this main objective are two parallel lines of effort: exhausting Taiwan's national defense capability and subverting Taiwan's political system.

On the political front, Taiwan's recent bipartisan push-back against the CCP's [political](#) and [economic](#) pressure, as well as its [success in confronting disinformation](#), demonstrate that subversion is not succeeding. However, the effort to exhaust Taiwanese national defense is significantly harder for Taiwan to deal with alone; the ham-fisted, attritional style that [tends to backfire in diplomacy](#) can work militarily, given enough resources. In Part 1, I will examine PRC gray zone warfare in the air and possible US/Taiwan responses; Part 2 will focus on the sea.

Air

People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) [hit a record high](#) last year and are on pace to exceed that this year. Moreover, the incursions are increasing in [both size and complexity](#), featuring fighter escorts of nuclear-capable H-6 bombers as well as Y-8 reconnaissance aircraft. The Republic of China Air Force's (ROCAF) initial response to these incursions was to increase fighter intercepts, which resulted in [an additional 1000 hours of flight time](#), resulting in an increase of maintenance and fuel costs. After this proved too costly, the ROCAF shifted to the use of intercepts with C-130H and P-3C reconnaissance aircraft instead of fighters when the PLA used Y-8s. However, given the pace of the incursions, even this prioritization has proven to be insufficient, and the ROCAF has now shifted to [land-based missile tracking](#). While this strategy is far more economical, it effectively entails ceding direct airspace control.

There are a number of methods that can be used as a counter, in order to escalate clarity:

1. *US assistance in ROCAF procurement of MQ-9 unmanned patrol aircraft for intercepts.*

Medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial systems (MALE UAS) are a far more sustainable method of conducting intercepts of hostile aircraft. Additionally, MALE UAS would also provide reconnaissance and early warning of any impending cross-Strait invasion. The

last sale of [four Sea Guardian MQ-9B maritime patrol aircraft](#) in November 2020 was an excellent start; however, four Sea Guardians are not sufficient to execute both intercept and reconnaissance missions. With US assistance under the proposed [US Pacific Deterrence Initiative and the US Pacific Reassurance Initiative](#), additional ROCAF procurement of these systems would be a relatively easy way to counter the intercepts and force the PLA to incur disproportionate costs for their aggression.

2. Increased US and Japanese participation in the annual Han Kuang exercise (漢光演習).

The United States has [traditionally sent observers](#) to Taiwan's annual *Han Kuang* anti-invasion exercise, while Japan last [sent observers to the cyber simulation portion](#) of *Han Kuang* in 2005 and 2006. The level of partner observation at *Han Kuang* is [carefully noted by the PRC](#). Thus, from an allies and partners perspective, participation in *Han Kuang* is a cost-effective, scalable method of signaling. The return of Japanese observers in all portions of the exercise would be the first such level of signaling—as well as practical, given the concerns that both Taiwan and Japan share about potential PLA island invasions, as well as gray zone tactics. The second level would be publicizing American and Japanese participation, similar to the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) [publicizing ROCAF air refueling at Luke Air Force Base](#) in the United States in 2020. The third level of clarity could be US involvement in *Han Kuang*, ranging from symbolic (a flyby that coincides with the conclusion of the exercise) to active participation (practicing air resupply under attack, etc.).

3. USAF exercises off the coast of Taiwan, with the potential for short-term landing on Taiwan.

The most aggressive form of signaling would be for the US Air Force (USAF) to conduct [Agile Combat Employment](#) (ACE) at frequent but operationally unpredictable periods close to Taiwan, in quiet partnership with the ROCAF—[similar to USAF cooperation with the Japan Air Self-Defense Forces/Koku-Jieitai](#). This would impose additional costs and choices on the PLA, as continued incursions into the Taiwan ADIZ would lower their ability to react to ACE in a timely fashion. ACE is scalable as well, as previous exercises have utilized everything from [joint fighter integration](#) to [partnered](#)

[rapid refueling of bombers](#). As a firm demonstration of USAF support and as practice for an invasion scenario, landings could also be conducted on short notice at ROCAF bases, as demonstrated when two USN F-18s [conducted an emergency landing at Tainan Air Base in 2015](#).

Conclusion

As COVID-19 fears subside, the CCP has rapidly re-started and escalated gray zone warfare against Taiwan. Current methods of deterrence and signaling do little to stop the gray zone threat, while discussions of strategic ambiguity versus strategic clarity only apply in the narrow scenario of a cross-Straits invasion. By utilizing *escalating clarity*, US and Taiwan policymakers can begin to establish deterrence and impose costs on the CCP in the gray zone without triggering open warfare. In my next installment, I will discuss how this concept can be used against PRC gray zone tactics at sea, and more broadly how Taiwan can signal resolve.

The main point: Despite the recent discussion regarding a Taiwan invasion by 2027, the CCP is far more likely to instead expand gray zone warfare against Taiwan. Through the use of *escalating clarity*, the US and Taiwan can exercise graduated options that can both incur costs on the CCP and PLA in the gray zone as well as provide greater deterrence against an outright invasion.

Can Taiwan-Pakistan Relations Finally Take Off?

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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

Last fall, an [Indian newspaper](#) suggested that China's steadfast ally Pakistan was secretly promoting trade ties with Taiwan. In a [Twitter post](#) from September 3, 2020, which has since been deleted, [Sidrah Haque](#), trade and investment attaché at the Embassy of Pakistan in Egypt, posted a picture taken with Michael Yeh (葉人誠), director of the [Taiwan Trade Center in Cairo](#) (開羅台灣貿易中心), an overseas office of the [Taiwan External Trade Development Council](#) (中華民國

國對外貿易發展協會, TAITRA). In an accompanying [tweet](#), Haque stated: “Met with Mr. Michael Yeh, a veteran commercial officer from Taiwan Trade Center. We spoke of Pakistan-Taiwan trade ties, our shared commercial experience in Cairo and major products of interest in the local market. Always feels good to connect with other trade wings and compare notes.” Although Taiwan’s [New Southbound Policy](#) (NSP, 新南向政策) aims to expand economic and people-to-people exchanges with 18 countries including those in the South Asian region, Taipei has long had difficulty building closer economic and trade relations with Pakistan due to structural market conditions and Chinese influence over its South Asian ally.



Image: A photo from a Twitter post made in September 2020, showing a meeting between Pakistan and Taiwan trade officials in Cairo. The post was subsequently deleted—likely due to Pakistan’s close relationship with the PRC, and resulting sensitivities regarding any contacts between Pakistan and Taiwan. (Source: [ANI](#))

Taiwan-South Asia Economic Relations

South Asian markets have become a focus of Taiwan’s external trade relations under President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) [New Southbound Policy](#) since 2016. The six South Asian countries identified in the [NSP](#) are Ban-

gladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka. Last year, Taiwan’s top trade partners in the region were India ([USD \\$4.8 billion](#) in bilateral trade), Bangladesh ([USD \\$939.6 million](#)), and Pakistan ([USD \\$524.5 million](#)). Meanwhile, Sri Lanka ([USD \\$369.8 million](#)), Nepal ([USD \\$10.5 million](#)), and Bhutan ([USD \\$124,299](#)) ranked among Taiwan’s smaller regional trade partners. Yet, due to cultural, trade, and foreign investment barriers, Taiwan’s overall economic engagement with South Asian countries remains at relatively low levels. Even Taiwan’s trade with its largest South Asian trade partner, [India](#), lags significantly behind its [trade levels](#) with smaller-sized Southeast Asian countries, suggesting that Taiwan-South Asia economic relations have yet to reach their full potential.

Indeed, Taiwan’s national advantage in [information and communication technologies](#) (ICT) is currently underutilized in South Asian markets. Taipei has sought to link its hardware production to India’s [software services industry](#) and other similar industries in South Asia. However, [South Asian economies](#) still lack strong connections to Taiwan’s ICT sector and thus largely sit outside [global supply chains](#) that the United States, Taiwan, and other countries are currently aiming to [shift away from China](#). Currently, the bulk of Taiwan-South Asia trade tends to consist of [low value-added goods](#), such as textiles, plastics, mineral fuels, and seafood. Thus, as long as Taiwan-South Asian trade remains mired in lower-end products and disconnected from Taiwan’s digital industries, the potential for future economic and trade growth will likely remain limited and unremarkable.

Even before Tsai’s announcement of her New Southbound Policy, Taiwanese businesses were interested in Pakistan’s [emerging market](#). The South Asian country has a [young population](#), [large middle class](#), and [growing consumer market](#). Indeed, the Pakistani market has high potential for development and is a main focus for expanding economic relations under the NSP, according to [TAITRA](#), which has also encouraged Taiwanese businesses to explore commercial opportunities in Pakistan.

Lack of Direct Channels

Despite this interest, there have been several barriers preventing the building of comprehensive economic

and financial ties. First, neither Taipei nor Islamabad have set up [representative offices](#) in each other's capitals. Instead, matters related to Pakistan are handled by the [Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia](#) (駐沙烏地阿拉伯王國台北經濟文化代表處). In fact, in all of South Asia, Taipei only has representative offices in India: two offices in [New Delhi](#) and [Chennai](#). It has no other South Asian missions, leaving a gaping hole in its diplomatic efforts towards the region. In 2009, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) closed its [representative office](#) in Bangladesh, citing Dhaka's "many restrictions" towards Taipei even after the office was opened in 2004.

In the absence of direct channels of communication, TAITRA has emerged as the main semi-official Taiwanese entity conducting regular outreach to Pakistani industry counterparts on commercial matters. TAITRA has signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with the [Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry](#) (FPCCI) and the [Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#) (LCCI) to strengthen economic and trade exchanges. The latter signing was meant to boost ties between Taiwan and [Lahore](#), which is the center of Pakistan's software industry and has a growing local computer assembly industry. However, another limitation is that TAITRA—which has established overseas offices in [Dhaka](#) (Bangladesh), [Kolkata](#) (India), and [Tehran](#) (Iran)—does not have an [office in Pakistan](#).

Visas and Other Hurdles

In addition to these barriers, the cumbersome visa process was a major hurdle to strengthening economic and financial cooperation between Taiwan and Pakistan over the past decades. [1] The challenge of providing expeditious consular services from both sides was compounded by the absence of representative offices in each other's territories. In the past, Pakistani businessmen interested in exploring commercial opportunities in the Taiwanese market would have to travel to a third country, such as [Saudi Arabia](#), to apply for a Taiwan visa.

Therefore, one of the earliest measures taken under the NSP was extending the [eVisa process](#) for businesspeople from Iran and six South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka)

in June 2017. The eVisa process removed the need for businessmen from these countries to apply for a [Taiwan visa](#) in person at one of the Republic of China's (ROC) overseas representative offices. As part of the eVisa application, businesspeople from these countries would need to be recommended by a local office of [TAITRA](#). Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic—which has forced Taipei to [impose restrictions](#) on foreign entry into its territory—Pakistani business personnel who had previously traveled to the island could apply for the Taiwan eVisa through [TAITRA's Tehran office](#). In addition to traveling to Taiwan to engage in commercial activities, [Pakistani citizens](#) can also apply for visas to receive short-term medical care or to participate in international conferences related to religious, sports, and cultural exchange activities under the NSP.

Meanwhile, Taiwanese businesses face a challenging environment in Pakistan. According to TAITRA Chairman [James Chih-Fang Huang](#) (黃志芳), the barriers for Taiwanese businessmen to enter Pakistan are higher than those of India. He cited Pakistan's poor public security, domestic political unrest, and terrorism as [factors](#) that keep Taiwanese businesses away. Pakistan's relationship with [China](#) has been another stumbling block, he said. Although some Pakistanis have bad impressions regarding the quality of Chinese products and view Taiwanese products more positively, the visa issue had prevented opportunities for commerce, tourism, and talent exchanges from taking shape, [he said](#), before Taipei moved to extend the eVisa program to Pakistani citizens.

The China Factor: "Ironclad Brothers"

As a result of their long [history](#) of close military and strategic cooperation against India during the Cold War, the relationship between China and Pakistan—often referred to as "[ironclad brothers](#)" (鐵桿兄弟)—is indeed very unique and virtually unseen in Beijing's other bilateral relationships, including with its traditional communist ally North Korea. Islamabad's political deference to and [policy coordination](#) with Beijing at the highest levels of government, its [military-to-military ties](#) with China, as well as the launch of the [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor](#) (CPEC, 中巴經濟走廊) in 2015, have all made it quite difficult for Taipei to make inroads into Pakistan.

Pakistan's official position is that [Taiwan](#) is an integral part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) based on its "[One-China Policy](#)." In a December 2020 meeting, Pakistani President [Arif Alvi](#) told Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister Wei Fenghe (魏鳳和) in Islamabad that his country would continue to support China's positions on Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and the South China Sea. Pakistan has also backed Chinese opposition to Taiwan's participation in international organizations, including the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO). In the past, Taiwan has cited Pakistan's "[unfriendly position in the international arena](#)" as an obstacle to the island's efforts to join international organizations.

In 2016, due to "[Chinese sensitivity towards issues relating to Taiwan](#)," Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a series of [policy guidelines](#) regarding Taiwan to its federal ministries and the four provincial authorities of Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These guidelines [stated](#) that Taiwan's official name, "Republic of China," could not be used; instead, the island could only be referred to as "Taiwan, China" or "Chinese Taipei." In addition, Taiwanese government-owned vessels or vessels flying Taiwan's flag were [forbidden](#) from entering Pakistan and its sea-ports. Although [trade with Taiwan](#) was not officially restricted, the guidelines mandated that [commercial activities](#) were to be conducted on an unofficial basis and through the private sector, and there were to be no direct contacts with the Taiwanese government. In addition, the [foreign ministry directive](#) stipulated that exchanges of Taiwanese and Pakistani government leaders or delegations were not permitted. It also warned of possible Taiwanese attempts to enter Pakistan to conduct "[anti-China activities](#)" and thus called for a careful examination of visa applications from Taiwan.

Humanitarian Assistance to Pakistan

Despite Pakistan's unfriendly attitudes towards Taiwan in the political arena, successive Taiwanese administrations have nonetheless offered [humanitarian assistance](#) to the South Asian nation. In the past, the delivery of Taiwanese relief aid to Pakistan in the wake of natural disasters was [hampered](#) by lack of direct communication channels. Moreover, Pakistan was reluctant to accept aid offered by Taiwan's government in response to a [7.6-magnitude earthquake](#) that struck an area northeast of Islamabad in October 2005.

More recently, Taiwan's MOFA has worked with [private sector organizations](#) to help distribute aid to disaster-stricken countries, including Pakistan. [Nonprofit organizations](#) in Taiwan collaborated with the government and Pakistani civil society partners to deliver 400 tons of white rice to 34 cities in southern Sindh province, which was devastated by massive flooding that struck Pakistan in 2010. Although the restrictions on official contacts prevent Taiwan from playing a more prominent role in the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, Taipei's collaboration with non-government groups are helping to forge friendly [people-to-people connections](#), particularly in times of urgent need.

Moving Forward

Given the close strategic and economic ties between China and Pakistan, the main area for growth in Taiwan-Pakistan relations lies in unofficial economic and trade relations. If Pakistan is to become a serious focal point of the New Southbound Policy, then Taipei and Islamabad must work together to facilitate economic and financial activity and reduce barriers to trade. China's influence over Pakistan, on the other hand, is more difficult to change. Taipei should also be mindful of the shifting geopolitical sands in South Asia, as the [new China-Iran deal](#) is likely to create a new economic and political alignment involving China, Iran, and Pakistan, which will, in turn, [diminish India's overall regional influence](#). Therefore, Taipei should not continue to solely focus on India, but also position itself to capitalize on new commercial opportunities with Pakistan, including a potential convergence of bilateral commercial interests in Egypt, as indicated by the outreach between the Pakistani and Taiwanese missions in Cairo. [2]

The main point: In order to make Pakistan a serious focal point of the New Southbound Policy, Taipei and Islamabad must take more steps to reduce barriers to economic exchange and trade growth and seize new commercial opportunities to further develop the relationship.

[1] "Pakistan and Taiwan: Expeditious Issuance of Visa to Businessmen Urged," *Business Recorder*, April 16, 2014, Retrieved from Nexis Uni.

[2] "Pak-Egypt Relations Enter New Phase," *The States-*

man (Pakistan), February 24, 2021, Retrieved from Nexus Uni.

US INDOPACOM Commanders Express Concerns for the Defense of Taiwan

By: John Dotson

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

Since assuming office in January, the Biden Administration has signaled signs of support for Taiwan that have surprised some observers who expected a more dramatic shift in US-Taiwan policy relative to the Trump Administration (see “Sino-American War of Words Heats Up Over Taiwan” in our [March 24 issue](#)). Indications of general political support from the new administration aside, some of the most provocative commentary recently offered by US officials about US-Taiwan-China relations has come from senior US military officers speaking before the US Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC). In March, retired US Army Lieutenant General and former National Security Advisor [H.R. McMaster](#), as well as the outgoing and incoming commanders of the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM)—[Admiral Philip Davidson](#) and [Admiral John Aquilino](#), respectively—all presented testimony before SASC that included unusually strong statements regarding the increasing threat to Taiwan posed by the armed forces of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Taken together, such statements signal an increasing willingness by senior US defense officials to go public with concerns about the military build-up conducted by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), as well as the increasingly aggressive posture—both political and military—directed against Taiwan by the PRC.

US INDOPACOM Commanders Voice their Concerns Regarding China and Threats to Taiwan

In testimony presented to SASC on March 3, Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster (US Army, ret.) offered a [written statement](#) to SASC that described recent PRC actions—including “subversion of the WHO as it excluded Taiwan from that organization and stifled Taiwan’s instructive example of how to contain the [corona]vi-

rus,” and its “menac[ing] Taiwan with its aircraft and naval vessels”—as part of a larger pattern of aggression proceeding from the intrinsic nature of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). McMaster [further expressed support](#) for an increased presence of US naval and unmanned platforms in the Pacific, as well as continued arms sales and defense cooperation with Taiwan “to make it indigestible” in the event of a PRC attack.



Image: US Navy Admiral Philip Davidson, the current commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 9. Admiral Davidson stated that the PRC military threat to Taiwan “is manifest during this decade, in fact in the next six years.” (Image source: [Youtube](#))

The [written testimony](#) presented to SASC on March 9 by US Navy Admiral Philip Davidson—the current INDOPACOM commander—repeated standard US Government language regarding the “substantive relationship” between the United States and Taiwan “consistent with the One China Policy, based on the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), three US-China Joint Communiqués, and the Six Assurances” (thereby echoing earlier White House statements in a way that suggests an effort to project continuity in US policy).

The written statement further offered praise for the shared democratic values between the United States and Taiwan, while also expressing support for providing Taiwan with “defense articles and services in such quantity to allow Taiwan to maintain sufficient self-defense capabilities [...] in a manner commensurate with the threat that Taiwan faces.”

Moving beyond such boilerplate text, the written statement was more interesting in its [description](#) of

“PRC Threats in the Region,” which focused on military coercion directed against Taiwan:

“The PRC has adopted an increasingly assertive military posture to exert pressure and expand its influence across the region. This is particularly stark concerning Taiwan. Over the past year, Beijing has pursued a coordinated campaign of diplomatic, informational, economic, and—increasingly—military tools to isolate Taipei from the international community and if necessary, compel unification with the PRC. Throughout 2020 the PLA has amplified its force posturing near and around Taiwan, to include using H-6 bombers to circumnavigate the island and conduct Taiwan Strait centerline crossings and flying military aircraft into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ) at the highest rate in nearly 25 years. Over the past two years, the PRC has incorporated highly-publicized amphibious assault training into national-level exercises, almost certainly to exert pressure and signal resolve. Beijing’s authoritative messaging has also grown increasingly confrontational and has linked the PLA’s military activities near the Taiwan Strait to “separatist” activities in Taiwan. [...] Such consistent employment of pressure tactics undermines the [CCP’s] claims that it desires a peaceful unification with Taiwan.”

Admiral Davidson’s [verbal statements](#) in response to senators’ questions were also noteworthy for the near-term timeframe they assigned to the PRC’s ambitions directed against Taiwan, stating that: “I think our concerns are manifest here during this decade, not only on the development [...] [of] ships, aircraft, rockets, etc. that they’ve put in the field [but also] the way they’re advancing those capabilities [...] Taiwan is clearly one of their ambitions [...] [and] I think the threat is manifest during this decade, in fact in the next six years.” Of note, at a [March 16 press conference](#) (see further details below) US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin was asked by a reporter whether or not he agreed with Admiral Davidson’s expressed concern regarding an attack on Taiwan within six years. Austin gave a non-committal answer, [saying](#) only that he had stopped *en route* for a meeting with the INDOPACOM commander, and “had a great conversation.”

Subsequent testimony presented to SASC on March

23 by Admiral John Aquilino—the current commander of the US Pacific Fleet, who has been nominated to become the next INDOPACOM commander—echoed these concerns, and arguably went even further in raising the alarm about the potential for near-term PRC aggression. Admiral Aquilino [stated](#) that, in the region, “The most dangerous concern is that of military force against Taiwan. To combat that, [...] forces [must be] positioned to be able to respond quickly, and not just our forces [...] [but also those of] our allies and partners.” When asked about Admiral Davidson’s prediction of a potential threat within six years, Admiral Aquilino [responded](#) that “My opinion is that this problem is much closer to us than most think,” stressing that imposing unification on Taiwan is Beijing’s number one priority, with the legitimacy of the ruling CCP dependent on the outcome.

The comments by the outgoing and presumptive incoming INDOPACOM commanders come in the context of ongoing [debate over budgeting](#) for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, a multi-year program intended to bolster US military capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region. INDOPACOM is seeking USD \$4.68 billion in additional funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022—as well as USD \$22.69 billion for FY 2023–2027—with the primary focus identified as reinforcing the command’s [deterrence posture vis-à-vis the PRC](#).

Concerns Expressed by Japanese Officials Regarding “Peace and Stability” in the Taiwan Strait

Concerns for the defense of Taiwan also reportedly featured in discussions held in mid-March between senior US and Japanese officials. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [traveled to Japan](#) from 15–17 March for discussions with Japanese officials, marking the first overseas trip by cabinet members of the new Biden Administration (and immediately preceding the [contentious meeting](#) of Secretary Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan with PRC State Councilor Yang Jiechi [楊潔篪] and Foreign Minister Wang Yi [王毅] in Anchorage, Alaska on March 19.)

In the first public meeting between these US cabinet officials and their Japanese counterparts, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, Motegi [made apparent oblique references](#) to Tai-



Image: A joint press conference in Tokyo on March 16, involving (from left to right): US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, US Secretary of State Tony Blinken, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, and Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi. The Japanese representatives both expressed concern for “peace and stability” in the Taiwan Strait region. (Image source: [Taiwan Central News Agency](#))

wan and to the growth of PRC military power. Specifically, he stated that “The strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific [...] [has seen] a change in the power balance as not only military strength but also economic development and high-tech advancements have exerted an influence on the power situation. The free and open international order is faced with major challenges, such as unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and the expansion of authoritarianism.”

In a [joint press conference](#) held on March 16, Foreign Minister Motegi and Defense Minister Kishi made politically significant but measured comments in relation to Taiwan, offering general statements of concern that avoided either firm commitments or directly provocative statements towards the PRC. Motegi asserted the “importance of peace and stability of the Taiwan Straits,” while Kishi stated that “I am of the determination to protect Japanese territory by use of all means, and I also asserted [in our meetings] the importance of peace and stability over the Taiwan Straits.” Taiwan’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Joanne Ou (歐江安) offered an [expression of appreciation](#) for these sentiments in a statement on March 17.

Subsequent [press reporting](#) indicated that meetings between Kishi and Austin had included discussions of the recent increase in PRC military aircraft conducting flights in the vicinity of Taiwan, as well as possible measures for the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF)

to assist US forces in the event of another Taiwan Strait crisis—including the possible deployment of JSDF platforms and personnel to protect US assets defending Taiwan. However, neither official statements nor press reporting indicated firm commitments on any such measures.

Conclusions

Since entering office, the new Biden Administration has communicated a measured but consistent message of support for Taiwan—one based both on a continuity of past US pledges, as well as regard for Taiwan as a fellow democracy. However, the testimony offered to the Senate in March by senior US military officers went much further, revealing the concerns held by the US national security establishment not only for the growth of Chinese military power, but also for the PRC’s increasingly aggressive posture towards Taiwan. It would be a mistake to cynically dismiss such concerns as representative of bureaucratic maneuvering in the pursuit of further resources. Indeed, the senior US military commanders in the Pacific—accompanied in more subtle, indirect terms by senior Japanese officials—have provided a stark warning about PRC ambitions and capabilities that we would be well advised to heed.

The main point: In March, senior US military officers—both active and retired—used the opportunity of pub-

lic testimony before the Senate to raise warnings about the increasing PRC military threat to Taiwan. In more subdued and indirect language, Japanese cabinet officials also expressed their own concerns for “peace and stability” in the Taiwan Strait region.

The Biden Administration’s Diplomatic Moves Signal Strong Support for Taiwan

By: Michael Mazza

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The Biden Administration revealed quite a bit about its concerns regarding and approach to the Taiwan Strait during the month of March. Although significant apprehensions with respect to peace and stability in the region are evident in Washington, panic is not. In addressing those apprehensions, the Biden team has thus far opted for a mix of high-level diplomacy and pragmatic initiatives.

When US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan hosted Yang Jiechi (楊潔篪)—the senior-most Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member responsible for foreign affairs—and Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) in Alaska last month, Blinken specifically [mentioned](#) Chinese actions in Taiwan as one of Washington’s “deep concerns.” This accorded with President Joe Biden’s own message to CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平): according to the White House [readout](#), when the two leaders spoke in February the new American president conveyed his “fundamental concerns about Beijing’s [...] increasingly assertive actions in the region, including toward Taiwan.”

In early March, the White House released its [Interim National Security Strategic Guidance](#), which presented an agenda designed to “allow us to prevail in strategic competition with China or any other nation.” Taiwan featured in that agenda: “We will support Taiwan, a leading democracy and a critical economic and security partner, in line with longstanding American commitments.” The past few weeks have provided a peek at

what that support will look like.

The Paraguay Call

Before the Anchorage meeting, Blinken and US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin were busy engaging with diplomatic partners regarding stability in the Taiwan Strait. During a March 14 [call](#) with Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benítez—the leader of one of Taiwan’s 15 remaining diplomatic allies—Blinken “stressed the importance of continuing to work with democratic regional and global partners, including Taiwan, to overcome this global pandemic, combat corruption, and increase transparency and accountability.” The Paraguayan Foreign Ministry later [revealed](#) that unidentified “intermediaries” had offered COVID-19 vaccinations to Paraguay in exchange for Asunción severing relations with Taipei (Beijing has [denied](#) the charge).

It is worth noting that the State Department’s readout of the Blinken-Benítez call is only four sentences. Taiwan, then, seems to have featured prominently in the discussion. This is perhaps evidence that the new administration is taking seriously the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019. The [TAIPEI Act](#), which became law just over a year ago, urges the US government to “support Taiwan in strengthening its official diplomatic relationships as well as other partnerships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world.”

“Peace and Stability in the Taiwan Strait”

Two days after the Paraguay call, Blinken and Austin were in Tokyo for meetings with their counterparts, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi. The [joint statement](#) released by the two sides featured a lengthy paragraph on countering problematic Chinese behaviors, which included an explicit mention of the Taiwan Strait: “The Ministers underscored the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.” *Kyodo News* later [reported](#) that Austin and Japanese Minister of Defense Nobuo Kishi “agreed [...] to closely cooperate in the event of a military clash between China and Taiwan.” Then, last week, *Nikkei Asia* broke the news that President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga are [expected](#) to “affirm the importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait” when they meet in Washington this month. According to *Nikkei*, the last time the US

and Japanese leaders made such a public statement on Taiwan was in 1969. Tokyo's security interests in the Taiwan Strait are well-known, but official Japanese statements have often referred to Taiwan only obliquely.

It was somewhat unexpected to see Taiwan appear as a major topic of discussion between the US and Paraguayan foreign ministers. And it is remarkable to see how far Japan is willing to go in publicly discussing Taiwan at the highest levels of government. Both suggest that the United States will be intent on putting Taiwan on the agenda for bilateral talks with other countries going forward.

Even as it does so, the Biden Administration appears committed to easing its own bilateral diplomacy with Taiwan as well. Just before his time as secretary of state ended in January, Mike Pompeo [declared](#) "all 'contact guidelines' regarding relations with Taiwan [...] null and void." How incoming Biden officials perceived this decision has been unclear, but they have apparently ruled out reverting to the *status quo ante*. [New guidelines](#) are coming, according to the *Financial Times*, but those guidelines will "focus on encouraging US officials to meet Taiwanese counterparts rather than imposing limits on contact." Per one source, "most of the restrictions on interactions 'between US and Taiwanese diplomats [...] will disappear.'"

Taiwan Visit by the US Ambassador to Palau

In one prominent instance of such engagement last month, the American ambassador to Palau [accompanied](#) the Palauan president to Taipei to inaugurate a Taiwan-Palau travel bubble. During his 2019 [confirmation hearing](#), Ambassador John Hennessey-Niland stated that the TAIPEI Act, should it become law, "would be a very important contribution to supporting allies [such] as Palau." Hennessey-Niland further described Taiwan as "an important partner [...] an under-utilized ally in the Pacific." The Biden Administration has provided Hennessey-Niland with an opportunity to act on those observations. In his public remarks in Taipei, he [highlighted](#) the potential for trilateral cooperation beyond grappling with COVID-19. If Hennessey-Niland's trip marks the beginning of more robust multilateral diplomatic efforts involving Taiwan in the Pacific Islands, Taiwan's own diplomatic engagement in the re-

gion may become more effective, while China finds a less welcoming environment for efforts to extend its influence there.



Image: ROC Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳釗燮), American Institute in Taiwan Director Brent Christensen, and Taiwan Coast Guard Administration Director-General Chou Mei-wu (周美伍) at the signing ceremony for a bilateral memorandum of understanding on coast guard-related issues, March 26. (Source: [Taiwan Central News Agency](#))

The Coast Guard Working Group

A focus on pragmatic US-Taiwan diplomatic cooperation with tangible outcomes was also evident in March. Most notably, on March 26, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish a Coast Guard Working Group. The AIT [press release](#) described the working group:

"This new forum will improve communications, build cooperation, and share information between AIT and TECRO through their respective Designated Representatives, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and Taiwan Coast Guard. Additionally, this MOU affirms a relationship with the common objectives of preserving maritime resources; reducing illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; and participating in joint maritime search and rescue as well as maritime environmental response events."

TECRO's [announcement](#) also highlighted extant bilateral coast guard cooperation, particularly regarding search and rescue and fisheries enforcement. Both Tai-

wan and the United States stand to benefit if the new working group meaningfully deepens that cooperation. As the US Coast Guard [enhances](#) its [presence](#) in the West Pacific with both cutters and attachés, there is surely much it can learn from local maritime law enforcement bodies. Engaging with the Taiwan Coast Guard (and with other coast guards across the region) can better enable the US Coast Guard to carry out assigned missions in the Indo-Pacific area of operations.

China's new [coast guard law](#), which explicitly permits its coast guard to use force against foreign vessels, has raised concerns across the region, including in Taiwan. Taipei may hope that enmeshing the US Coast Guard more deeply in the region will help deter such PRC assertiveness. Indeed, Taiwan's coast guard increasingly finds itself on the [front line](#) of Taipei's confrontation with Beijing. Chinese sand dredgers operating illegally in Taiwanese waters have become a newly persistent feature of cross-strait relations. Taiwan's coast guard captains may hope that, in putting their heads together with American counterparts, they can devise innovative ways to chase off ships significantly larger than their own vessels. They may likewise hope that cooperation may move from a working group conference table to the waters around Taiwan, with US and Taiwan coast guard vessels exchanging sailors or even sailing side-by-side and conducting joint patrols.

Finally, in a little noticed yet interesting development, on March 10 AIT [announced](#) a new funding opportunity. AIT is soliciting applications from individuals and organizations "to create and implement programs to support and increase Taiwan's capacity for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) [...] These programs must be aimed at improving the resilience of the people of Taiwan to respond to disasters, natural or civil." This is not a large initiative—a total of USD \$20,000 in support of one or two projects—but it has the potential to have a direct impact on Taiwan's preparedness for worst-case scenarios, including those of the manmade variety. The program is a great example of an initiative that is unlikely to attract much attention from Beijing, but could ultimately bear fruit that complicates Chinese designs on Taiwan.

Indeed, all of the steps that the Biden Administration took in March were designed to deny China a free hand in the Taiwan Strait. Publicizing allied concern

for Taiwan's security, reinforcing Taiwan's formal diplomatic relationships, deepening America's engagement with Taiwan, and supporting Taiwan's own efforts to enhance its security—all make it more difficult for Beijing to isolate and effectively intimidate Taipei. Thus far, the Biden Administration appears to be taking its *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* quite seriously.

The main point: Significant apprehensions with respect to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait are evident in Washington, but panic is not. In addressing those apprehensions, the Biden team has thus far opted for a mix of high-level diplomacy and pragmatic initiatives.

Assessing the Patterns of PLA Air Incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ

By: Thomas J. Shattuck

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Note: Analysis of air incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) is current as of March 30, 2021.

In recent months, Chinese government state media outlets have frequently issued warnings to so-called "[secessionist forces](#)" allegedly stirring up trouble in Taipei, or to officials in Washington not to overstep Chinese government "[red lines](#)" when it comes to Taiwan. On March 8, at the 13th National People's Congress, [Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi](#) (王毅) promised, "The two sides of the Taiwan Strait must be and will surely be reunified [...] We have the capability to thwart separatist attempts for 'Taiwan independence' in whatever form." Indeed, recent history has shown that whenever Washington acts to increase cooperation or support for Taiwan, Beijing shifts the cost onto Taipei—whether through economic pressure and boycotts or military threats and incursions. The pattern has become predictable, and for Taiwan, costly in a financial sense, especially in regard to the significant uptick in military incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ).

In September 2020, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND, 中華民國國防部) began [issuing](#) public notices on incursions into the airspace around Taiwan by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The decision was likely made in response to a rapid increase in PLA military incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ. By October 2020, Taiwan's then-Minister of National Defense Yen Teh-fa (嚴德發) stated that the PLA had conducted over [1,700 sorties](#) into the ADIZ. The Taiwanese military response cost [USD \\$1.09 billion](#) (nearly 9 percent of the defense budget). In light of this, it is no wonder that the MND began to publicize these incursions: They serve as an effective demonstration of the consistent military threat that Taiwan must address daily.

The MND reports list the types and number of aircraft used in the operations, the area(s) of incursion, and the MND's response. They also provide a map showing the flight paths, as well as photos of the PLA aircraft (see examples in the accompanying images). Between September 16, 2020 and March 30, 2021, the MND reported 135 incursions. The incursions occurred primarily in Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ, near Pratas/Dongsha Island (東沙島), a contested island in the South China Sea that is occupied by the Taiwanese military. Only two incursions took place in the Taiwan Strait proper, on [September 18](#) and [19](#), since the MND began releasing reports.

What's in a Sortie?

After reviewing all 135 [reported incursions](#), which included 329 total aircraft, patterns begin to emerge. The PLA deployed 14 types of aircraft: Y-8 reconnais-

sance (RECCE), Y-8 anti-submarine (ASW), Y-8 electronic warfare (EW), Y-9 EW, KJ-500 airborne early warning & control (AEW&C), Y-8 electronic intelligence (ELINT), H-6K, J-16, SU-30, J-10, J-11, Y-9, Y-8, and JH-7.

First, the operations seem to be primarily intended for surveillance purposes. Of the 71 reported incursions in 2020, the Y-8 ASW was used in 76 percent of them, followed by the Y-8 RECCE (roughly 24 percent) and Y-8 EW (roughly 22 percent). In the 64 reported incursions in 2021, the Y-8 ASW was used in 64 percent, followed by the Y-8 RECCE (roughly 36 percent), J-10 (18 percent), and Y-8 EW (14 percent). The increased use of the J-10 is something to look out for as incursions continue in 2021 since it is an offensive fighter jet, not a surveillance aircraft.

The PLA is aware that the Taiwanese military will respond to each incursion. Forcing jets to intercept an aircraft nearly every day will increase the operational costs and wear-and-tear on Taiwan's military aircraft. For the PLA, the opportunity cost of sending one or two Y-8s into Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ is minimal in comparison to the costs imposed on Taiwan for responding. Taiwan's military has a far smaller budget and fewer resources available in comparison with China.

Second, the use of offensive aircraft has a fairly predictable pattern. In 2020, offensive aircraft were only part of three incursions: on [September 18](#) and [19](#), and [November 2](#). Out of all of the incursions reported, the two in September were perhaps the most dangerous, as J-16, J-11, and J-10 fighters all flew beyond the mid-



Image: A file photo of a PLA Y-8 Anti-Submarine (ASW) variant aircraft. The Y-8 is one of the types of PLA aircraft employed most frequently for sorties in the vicinity of Taiwan. (Source: [ROC Ministry of Defense](#))

point of the Taiwan Strait to Taiwan's northwest. These sorties were a part of a drill conducted in response to an official visit by then-US Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment [Keith Krach](#). Krach visited Taiwan to represent the US government at a memorial service for the recently deceased Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), the first democratically elected president of Taiwan. [Similar drills](#) took place in response to a visit by then-US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar in August 2020, but that drill occurred before the MND began publicly reporting PLA incursions. These incursions set a standard response for high-level American visits to Taiwan, which continued after the US Ambassador to Palau visited Taiwan in March 2021.

The crossing of the “median line” in the Taiwan Strait represented a dangerous new development. Before 2020, Chinese aircraft crossed the median line once in 2019, but [never in the 20 years before](#). Historically, this was because the [aviation balance favored Taiwan](#), which could use its might to enforce the tacit understanding that each side would stay on its side of the line. [1] However, in September 2020, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced its assertion that [there is no median line](#) in the Taiwan Strait.

PLA incursions have escalated in 2021 in terms of frequency in the use of offensive aircraft. To date, 16 incursions have included offensive aircraft. Seven of them occurred in the first two weeks of the Biden Administration. Two additional large-scale incursions with offensive aircraft occurred after President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) announced changes to her cabinet.

On [March 26](#), the PLA conducted its largest drill of the year by sending 20 aircraft into Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ. Four H-6Ks, ten J-16s, and two J-10s took part in the incursion, with one H-6K and one Y-8 ASW flying into the Bashi Channel to Taiwan's southeast before turning back. [Another large incursion occurred on March 29](#), with 10 aircraft breaching the ADIZ, some of which flew even deeper into the Bashi Channel. The [Global Times](#) published a piece bragging that the PLA also conducted a drill through the Miyako Strait to Taiwan's east, thus surrounding Taiwan with military aircraft from both sides.

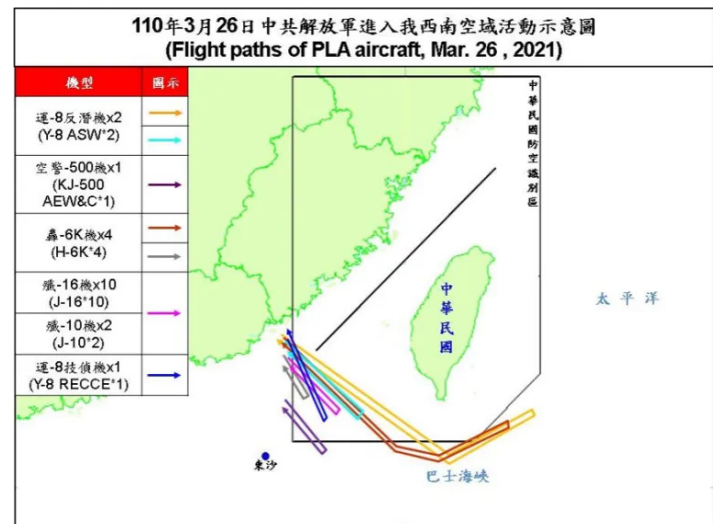


Image: The flight paths of PRC aircraft that entered Taiwan's ADIZ on March 26. The incursion on March 26 was one of the largest and most provocative yet conducted by PLA in the airspace around Taiwan, involving twenty aircraft. (Source: [ROC Ministry of Defense](#))

The largest incursions occurred in response to important developments in the United States and Taiwan. Responding to high-profile visits, cabinet changes, or defense plans by launching large-scale incursions, the PLA has shown that it has the military capacity to hurt Taiwan. While the PLA may not have the capability to launch a successful invasion of Taiwan yet, it does have the resources to strike any city on the island with its aircraft. The pattern of launching an operation after an important visit or event allows the PLA and Beijing to argue that Taipei or Washington “made” them do it and that if everyone acted appropriately, the incursions would not be necessary.

Looking Beyond the Incursions

The major incursions receive most of the attention from major media and foreign governments as these operations include fighter jets capable of inflicting significant damage. However, the larger drills are but a fraction of the total number of surveillance and reconnaissance missions. Responding to each and every sortie exacts a significant cost on Taiwan's military.

If Beijing desired, it could easily outspend Taipei and complicate Taiwan's defense budget by increasing the scope of these near-daily sorties. One way for Beijing to push Taiwan's military to its limits would be to expand the map and become more aggressive in the

Taiwan Strait, or send a starker message and conduct more frequent incursions to Taiwan's east. Accounting for daily incursions in one predictable part of the map is easy to prepare for. However, if incursions and drills begin to occur simultaneously in Taiwan's northwest, southwest, and southeast, then Taipei would likely be unable to afford the fuel costs or dedicate the manpower and aircraft necessary to respond to all of them.

The vast majority of the breaches thus far have occurred in the vicinity of Taiwan-occupied Dongsha Island, which is 200 miles from Hong Kong and 275 miles from Kaohsiung. It is more vulnerable to military escalation than Taiwan proper (and even Taiwan's outlying islands off China's coast) due to its isolation. In October 2020, [Hong Kong air traffic controllers](#) prevented a [Taiwanese civilian aircraft](#) full of military personnel from [flying to the island](#) and forced it to turn back due to "dangerous activities" occurring in the area. According to the [flight transcript](#), no notice of Chinese military activity was given to Hong Kong as is customary when the PLA conducts a drill. Critically, the flight route for Taiwanese aircraft traveling to Dongsha falls under the authority of Hong Kong due to its proximity. The issue for the future is whether or not Beijing will one day decide to take Dongsha by force and use the Hong Kong air traffic controllers as a mechanism to try to stop Taiwan from sending additional troops there.

The question of *if* or *when* a Chinese military invasion of Taiwan will occur often disregards the more likely scenarios in the South China Sea. Given the number of breaches in Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ near Dongsha, the area appears to be a much more likely target for military escalation than Taiwan proper. As the Biden Administration begins to formulate its strategy for countering China in the region, planning for responses and contingencies over Dongsha and other islands should be high on the list. Increasing cooperation with Tokyo for Taiwan's northeast should be a topic for discussion. Such a strategy should also include responses to the continued incursions in the southwestern ADIZ, how best to assist Taiwan in responding to the sorties, and what to do in the event that the incursions expand beyond this particular spot.

The main point: By publishing reports of People's Liberation Army air incursions in its air defense identification zone, Taiwan's Ministry of Defense is shed-

ding light on a growing problem for Taiwan's military responses against Beijing. The true danger of these near-daily incursions is what could happen if the PLA expands its operations beyond Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ and conducts drills on all sides of Taiwan.

[1] For more on the historic power balance in the Taiwan Strait, see, "Chapter 4 – Taiwan" in the *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, December 2020, p. 457, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Chapter_4-Taiwan.pdf.