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The 2021 KMT Chairmanship Election: The Resilience of the Unification Wing

By: Russell Hsiao

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On September 25, Taiwan's main opposition party, the Nationalist Party (KMT, 國民黨) held a closely watched election for its party chairmanship. The [candidates](#) vying for the top position of the 101 year-old party were the incumbent Johnny Chiang (江啟臣, b. 1972), Eric Chu (朱立倫, b. 1961), Chang Ya-chung (張亞中, b. 1954), and Cho Po-yuan (卓伯源, b. 1965). With a [50.71](#) percent turnout of eligible KMT voters (370,711), Eric Chu, a former chairman and the party's 2016 presidential candidate, was the victor, taking home [45.78](#) percent (85,163) of valid votes. The hotly contested election was closely watched by observers, who consider the results to be an indicator of the [direction](#) that a new chairman could take the party. While much ink has already been spilled about why Chu came out on top in the race, as well as his policy orientations, little attention has been paid to perhaps a telling indicator about the state of the party: the resilience of the [party's unification wing](#).

The Struggle with Internal Cohesion

It is no secret that the KMT has been struggling with maintaining internal political cohesion since its electoral defeats in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. One of the reasons for its ailment is likely because Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九, b. 1950) left a political vacuum at the top after serving two terms as president, and five years uncontested as chairman from 2009-2014—while failing to cultivate a new cohort of party leaders who could hold the various factions of the party together. The KMT has had eight interim and elected chairmen since Ma stepped down as head of the party in 2014.

Without a clear leader, the competing factions within the party have been vying for control—with serious implications for its relations with China. The division was on clear display

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in 2016 when Eric Chu was drafted in the 11th hour by KMT elders as a [last-ditch effort](#) to salvage the party's electoral prospects from the firebrand politics of the pro-unification Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱, b. 1948), who rightfully won the primary to serve as the Party's candidate. After Chu lost the 2016 presidential election to Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文, b. 1956), Hung was elected as the party chairwoman through a special by-election that signaled a swing away—albeit temporarily—from the establishment wing.

Control was wrested away from Hung by KMT stalwart Wu Den-yih (吳敦義, b. 1948) in 2017, a year that saw a transitory surge in party membership. However, even Wu was apparently [unable](#) to control the various party factions, leading to (amidst documented irregularities likely resulting from PRC interference) the [unexpected nomination](#) of Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜, b. 1957) as the party's candidate for president in 2020. Han's candidacy fell short of expectations, and Tsai Ing-wen was re-elected in a landslide in that year's election. The elevation of Johnny Chiang in the special by-election of March 2020 was a possible compromise between the factions that permitted, at least for a time being, younger members of the Party a chance to steer the hundred-year-old ship. Chiang, however, would not last despite a [slight growth](#) in [party identification](#) under his watch.

The Rise of Hung, Han, and Chang



Image: A still image from a TVBS program on the results of the September 2021 KMT chairmanship election. (Source: [YouTube](#))

After waiting until August 2021 (only two months before the election) to announce his candidacy to run as party chairman, Eric Chu has taken the helm of the

party for a second time, after emerging as the winner with a plurality of the vote. With an average turnout rate, the most notable feature of the 2021 race, however, was not Chu's victory but the strong showing of the candidate in second place. Chu's tepid win, coupled with the 60,631 (32.59 percent) who voted for runner-up Chang Ya-chung, seem to reflect lingering fissures and deeper angst within the party.

The respectable difference of 13 percent for a relatively obscure politician—one who faced off against the political machine of Chu, and even bested the incumbent chairman Chiang—belies the notion that Chang does not have sufficient political organization to be competitive. (Interestingly, this is a criticism that was similarly levied against Han before he rose up to become the party's 2020 presidential candidate.) While it is true that Chang does not appear to have a powerful patron within the party's leadership, he is clearly aligned with Hung and served as one of her primary advisors. [Chang boasts](#) of being the brainchild behind Hung's "One China, same interpretation" formulation for cross-Strait relations (一中同表) and for setting up her meeting with Xi Jinping when Hung briefly served as the party chairman. While there are notable differences between Chang and Han, those are mostly in terms of style, and the positions of Chang and Han are quite similar—to be sure, there were [media speculations](#) that Han may have been supporting Chang behind the scene.

The overarching similarity linking Chang, Hung, and Han are that these candidates are clearly anti-establishment, pro-unification politicians. The lessons of Wu Den-Yih with the rise of Han under his watch—who for a brief period of time appeared to have beaten back the unification wing—and the petering out of Johnny Chiang show that the power of the KMT chairman has grown increasingly limited over time. The Chang phenomenon—which can be viewed in part as an extension of the Han phenomenon—also shows that the anti-establishment and pro-unification wing cannot be ignored in the party's internal politics. In fact, their influence seems to be growing within the KMT.

How did seemingly fringe politicians representing the extreme wing of the party come to wield such influence in the party? It is perhaps worth remembering that it was only in 2001 that the hundred-year-old par-

ty held its first direct party leadership election. In 2005, card carrying members (numbering over 1 million at the time) were eligible to vote. But after that election, however, the party [limited voting rights](#) to the roughly 300,000 party members who paid their annual dues. The 300,000 members “[in good standing](#)” were mostly veterans (Huang Fu-hsin, 黃復興)—who make up more than 20 percent of all eligible voting KMT members—and the party’s die hard. [1]

Conclusion

While Eric Chu—and by extension the establishment wing of the party—scored a win in this recent election, he will still need to earn the mandate to lead. Long-time Taiwan observer David Brown [foresaw the problem](#) when he noted prior to the election: “With votes split three ways, it is uncertain that Chu will achieve 50 percent of the vote. As turnout is already likely to be low, not achieving a true majority would leave Chu with a weak mandate as the new leader of a still badly divided party.”

Falling short with just a little over 45 percent, Chu has his work cut out for him to consolidate his power—but there are perhaps some reasons to suggest that he might succeed. On top of his political experience, the fact of the matter is that there is not much daylight between Chu and Chiang. If one combines both Chu’s and Chiang’s votes (18.87 percent/35,093 votes), the establishment candidates received over 64 percent of the total votes. It is reasonable to infer that the majority of the party voters still prefer the establishment candidates despite the strong showing of Chang.

Yet, as earlier noted, it would be foolish for the new chairman to simply dismiss Chang, who could be seen as the latest manifestation of the Han phenomenon. The anti-establishment, pro-unification wing will remain a strong political force within the KMT. If the chairmanship election indicates anything, it is that Han’s political tide has not dissipated with his departure from the political scene, and appears to remain strong. This also means that the new chairman is stuck between a rock and a hard place—and this is not lost on Chu. This was reflected during the KMT chairman race debate, in which Chu made the point to criticize Chang for his pro-unification stance. According to [media reports](#), Chu stated that Chang is entitled to his

pro-unification views, but he has to take into consideration the mainstream of Taiwanese society if he wants to lead the KMT.

Indeed, the [latest poll](#) by the National Chengchi University’s Election Study Center (國立政治大學選舉研究中心) released on July 2021 showed that an overwhelming 87.4 percent of the respondents continue to support maintaining some form of the current status quo across the Taiwan Strait, with [only small fractions](#) of the population preferring to declare independence or unification as soon as possible (5.6 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively).

There is another important dimension to the viability of the party and the new chairman. In an [interview](#) that Chiang gave in 2020 during his campaign for KMT chairman, the 49-year old noted that if the country’s voting age is revised down to 18 years old, then current 16-year-olds will be able to vote in 2 years, adding about 800,000 first-time voters. These young voters could well decide the fate of the KMT in the 2022 local elections. With only roughly 9,000 members under the age of 40 in the party, Chiang [noted](#) the KMT will face greater challenges in the 2022 county and mayoral elections if it does not reform. Would Chu and the increasing political constraints posed by the pro-unification wing support or hold back the KMT’s electability in the 2022 elections, and the 2024 presidential election?

There will be a couple of immediate tests that Chu will need to face even before the local elections next year first. The first of these will be the [high-profile recall vote](#) for the pro-independence Taiwan Statebuilding Party (台灣基進) Legislator Chen Po-wei (陳柏惟, b. 1985) later this month; the second will be the [December referendums](#) that include controversial questions related to the import of US pork. Both issues will likely give the pro-unification wing of the party, perhaps emboldened by Chang’s performance, more fodder to push the party farther to take hardline positions that would be difficult to walk back from in a national race. While it is reasonable to infer that the majority of KMT voters still prefer the establishment candidates despite the strong showing of Chang, the resilience and strength of the party’s unification wing should not be discounted.

The main point: Eric Chu's victory in the 2021 KMT chairmanship election indicates that a majority of KMT voters prefer the party's establishment candidates, despite the strong showing of the pro-unification Chang Ya-chung. However, the resilience and strength of the party's unification wing should not be discounted.

[1] The [Huang Fu-hsin chapters](#) are known for their ability to mobilize members during elections, and boasted that they could mobilize a 60-70 percent turnout rate amongst their members in a previous election.

Poland: An Emerging Partner for Taiwan in Central and Eastern Europe

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Taipei donated [1 million surgical face masks, 5,000 protective suits, and 20,000 surgical gowns](#) to Poland. The Central European country returned the gesture in early September by shipping [400,000 doses](#) of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to Taiwan, making it the island's [third-largest vaccine donor](#) (after Japan and the United States) and the largest vaccine donor from the [European Union](#) (EU). On September 4, [Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) (MFA) posted on Twitter that "as a gesture of solidarity, Poland will hand over 400,000 AstraZeneca vaccine doses to Taiwan" with an emoji of Taiwan's flag. The Polish MFA tweet also [stated](#) that "international solidarity and mutual support are crucial in the global fight against the COVID-19 [virus]."

However, the MFA post was later [deleted](#), raising speculation that Warsaw may have come under Chinese pressure to retract its public statement of solidarity with Taiwan. Polish Foreign Minister [Zbigniew Rau](#) also deleted a similar [Twitter post](#) about the Polish vaccine donation to Taiwan and was quoted by Russia's [Sputnik News](#) as stating that "Taiwan is a part of China" on September 6. As [Central and Eastern Europe](#) (CEE) are emerging as new sources of sup-

port for Taiwan's international visibility, Taipei should



Image: Taiwan Health Minister Chen Shih-chung (陳時中) (second from right) and Bartosz Ryś, the head of the Polish representative office in Taiwan (center), welcome the arrival of 400,000 doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine at Taoyuan International Airport on September 5. (Image source: [Taiwan Central News Agency](#))

Central and Eastern European Dynamics towards China

Poland's friendly gesture of sending COVID-19 vaccines to Taiwan comes on the heels of earlier vaccine donations by [Lithuania](#), [Slovakia](#), and the [Czech Republic](#), and at a time when European countries are beginning to re-examine their relations with China. Disagreements over [economic and trade issues](#) and human rights in [Xinjiang](#) and [Hong Kong](#) have led to recent tensions between the European Union (EU) and China. Meanwhile, [Chinese donations](#) of defective medical equipment to EU countries to combat COVID-19 have increased European mistrust of Beijing. EU countries also are grappling with the [national security implications](#) of China's influence and rising profile in their respective countries and around the world. Yet, while the leading Western European democracies have voiced their concerns about China, smaller CEE countries are notably punching above their weight to directly challenge China's pressure campaign, as in the case of [Lithuania](#).

A Chinese initiative to bring 17 CEE countries into a sub-regional cooperation mechanism with China, known as the "17+1" platform, has [fallen short of expectations](#) and has hurt [China's image](#) in the region. First proposed by former Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) in Warsaw in 2012, the ["16+1" framework](#)

was initially comprised of 11 EU members and 5 non-EU countries, and later renamed the “17+1” bloc with the entry of [Greece](#) in 2019. In a move that signaled growing disillusionment with the Chinese initiative, [Lithuania](#) pulled out of the “17+1” mechanism in May 2021, urging other EU countries to also withdraw. “From our perspective, it is high time for the EU to move from a dividing 16+1 format to a more uniting and therefore much more efficient 27+1,” said Lithuania’s Foreign Minister [Gabrielius Landsbergis](#). “The EU is strongest when all 27 member states act together along with EU institutions.”

Poland was initially seen as a major partner for China within the “17+1” framework. Poland’s geographical location made it an important transit country for [railway transportation and cargo links](#) between China and Europe. A major objective of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, 一帶一路, also formerly known as “One Belt, One Road”) is the creation of [railway links](#) between Chinese and European cities, and the [railway connection](#) between the Polish city of Łódź and Chengdu in China’s Sichuan Province was a flagship project. Sino-Polish ties seemed to be warming up, particularly after Beijing and Warsaw signed a joint statement on the establishment of a [comprehensive, strategic partnership](#) during President Xi Jinping’s (習近平) visit to Poland in June 2016. Warsaw had [high hopes](#) about the BRI’s economic potential and embraced [Chinese commercial opportunities](#).

However, enhancing trade ties with China did not yield the expected economic benefits for Poland. In 2019, China-Poland bilateral trade reached [USD \\$27.8 billion](#), with more than 85 percent of two-way trade comprised of Chinese exports to Poland. Conversely, there was very little growth in [Polish exports](#) to China, which mostly consist of raw materials and low-valued products including [copper, machines, and chemical products](#). Bilateral cooperation over the past several years failed to overturn the huge Polish trade deficit with China. In addition, there has been little interest on the part of Polish businesses to [invest in China](#); while similarly, [Chinese investments](#) in Poland are relatively meager. Despite these structural trade imbalances with China, [Poland](#) thus far has chosen not to follow Lithuania in leaving the “17+1” framework, instead continuing to maintain its economic ties with

China.

EU and Polish Views on Taiwan Ties

Particularly in the COVID-19 era, several European countries are seeking further exchanges and enhancement of all-around ties with democratic Taiwan, which they see as a [key partner](#) in the international community. Over [Beijing’s repeated objections](#), the European Parliament’s Foreign Affairs committee passed a draft report on “[EU-Taiwan Political Relations and Cooperation](#)” on September 1, calling on the EU to “urgently begin an impact assessment, public consultation and scoping exercise on a Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA)” with Taiwan. The draft report also supported plans to open a [Taiwanese Representative office in Lithuania](#) and urged the EU to change the name of its representative office, the European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan (EETO, 歐洲經貿辦事處), to “[European Union Office in Taiwan](#)” (歐盟駐台灣辦事處) in response to broadening EU-Taiwan ties. According to a [Taiwanese commentator](#), although European mainstream thinking may view China as an important partner, many European countries are also seeing that Taiwan is a worthy friend as well.

While [Polish foreign policy](#) is pragmatic in its approach to China—particularly on economic issues—it also includes a tenet that is dedicated to “ethical ideas,” including the promotion of human rights and freedom in places such as Xinjiang, Tibet, [Hong Kong](#), and Taiwan. [Poland’s representative office in Taipei](#) welcomed Lithuania’s move to open a Taiwanese Representative Office, saying that this would enhance Taiwan’s status and visibility in Central and Eastern Europe. During a September visit to Lithuania, Polish Foreign Minister [Zbigniew Rau](#) criticized Chinese [trade sanctions](#) imposed on Lithuania over its Taiwan policy. [Rau](#) also commented that “it is natural for some European Union countries to develop economic cooperation with Taiwan.” However, [Rau](#) seemed to draw a contrast with Lithuania by stating, “Poland’s position is clear—we support a China policy. Taiwan is considered part of China, so the representation of Taiwan in Poland is not a diplomatic office but an economic office.”

Taiwan-Poland Relations

Poland’s transition from a former Soviet communist

satellite to a [democracy](#) in the 1990s helped pave the way for its contemporary relations with Taiwan. After Polish labor activist Lech Walesa became president in 1990, Polish-Taiwanese relations markedly improved. [1] In 1992, Taipei established a representative office in Warsaw, which is currently called the [Taipei Representative Office in Poland](#) (駐波蘭台北代表處). Three years later, Poland opened the [Warsaw Trade Office](#) (華沙貿易辦事處), which was later renamed the [Polish Taipei Office](#) (波蘭臺北辦事處) in 2018, a sign of broadening ties with Taiwan. That same year, the Polish Investment and Trade Bureau also opened a [Taipei office](#) (波蘭投資貿易臺北辦事處) aimed at promoting economic exchanges and investment.

Polish-Taiwanese economic and trade relations currently form the mainstay of bilateral cooperation. Poland is a [major trade partner](#) for Taiwan in Central Europe. Taiwan is Poland's [seventh largest](#) trade partner in Asia. Two-way trade reached [USD \\$1.23 billion](#) in 2020, with Taiwan enjoying a trade surplus. [Taiwanese exports](#) to Poland include semiconductors, electronics, metal products, and auto parts. [Polish exports](#) to Taiwan consist of [pharmaceutical products](#), [copper](#), electrical products, chemical products, and food. In line with its broader interest in securing [Asian capital](#) for investment projects, Warsaw has encouraged greater Taiwanese investment in Poland, which has been historically low: There are [31 Taiwanese businesses](#) with investments in Poland, and Taiwan's cumulative investment in Poland yielded only [USD \\$468 million](#) between 1952 and 2020.

Taiwanese companies seeking to transfer production lines or manufacturing operations to Europe should use Poland as their operations base, according to [Bartosz Ryś](#), acting chief of the Polish Office in Taipei. To emphasize this, [Ryś](#) pointed to his country's sound infrastructure, large domestic market, and skilled labor force. Poland, the largest supplier of lithium-ion car batteries in Europe, could also collaborate with Taiwan to develop the [electrical vehicle industry](#), he said. Furthermore, Taiwan can [strengthen cooperation](#) with Poland and Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Sea coastal countries in the areas of trade, infrastructure, and energy by participating in the "[Three Seas Initiative](#)" of the Central and Eastern European Economic Forum, he said.

Taipei recognizes that enhancing comprehensive relations with CEE countries could provide positive dividends for expanding its diplomatic outreach and international space. A [65-member Taiwanese delegation](#) of government officials and business leaders will visit Slovakia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic in late October, underscoring the growing economic and political significance of these smaller countries. As the largest economy in Central Europe, Poland should also be incorporated into Taipei's broader strategy towards the region. Taipei's first priority should be to strengthen investment and trade ties with Poland, particularly when Warsaw has expressed interest in deepening bilateral economic ties and Polish-Chinese economic and trade relations have been underwhelming.

The main point: As Central and Eastern European countries are emerging as new sources of support for Taiwan's international visibility, Taipei should seek to further strengthen cooperation with regional countries including Poland.

[1] "Taiwanese President May Visit Poland," *Agence France Presse*, November 25, 1996, retrieved from Nexis Uni.

The 2021 Han Kuang Exercise and New Developments in Taiwan's Defense Policy

By: John Dotson

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On September 13, the Republic of China (ROC) armed forces [commenced](#) the live-fire portion of the 37th iteration of the *Han Kuang* exercise (漢光37號演習)—Taiwan's largest annual military exercise, which is conducted to simulate responses to an attack against Taiwan by forces of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). (The simulated, "[tabletop exercise](#)" component of this year's *Han Kuang* had already been held over eight days in the last week of April.) This year's exercise consisted of a five-day series of drills involving all of the ROC military services, as well as participation in some areas by police and civil defense personnel. Although reportedly scaled-down in some aspects due

to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (and delayed from its original timetable of mid-July for the same reason), the exercise provided an opportunity to take stock of



Image: ROC Army troops deployed for a counter amphibious landing drill along the Tamsui River (Taipei area) as part of the annual Han Kuang military exercise, September 14. (Image source: [Taiwan Central News Agency](#))

Component Scenarios of Han Kuang-2021

The live-fire component of *Han Kuang-37* included a series of different scenario drills conducted at various points around Taiwan and its outlying islands. Highlights from this year's exercise reportedly included:

September 13: Dispersal drills were conducted for ROC Air Force (ROCAF) and ROC Navy (ROCN) units. ROCAF fighters, including F-16s and Mirage-2000s, were deployed from bases in western Taiwan to an air force base near the eastern city of Hualien. ROCAF maintenance personnel and equipment were also transported to locations in eastern Taiwan. Additionally, ROCN vessels sortied from port to locations at sea.

September 13: A biological warfare exercise was held near Tainan, in which troops repelled a mock assault made with bioweapons and conducted follow-on decontamination and medical treatment drills.

September 14: Drills were held to simulate defense against mock amphibious assaults and protection of critical infrastructure sites. In northern Taiwan, military police in Taipei were dispatched to defend telecommunications facilities in the Shilin District, while soldiers from the Sixth Army Corps deployed in armored vehicles at sites along the Tamsui River to repel an amphibious landing. In eastern Taiwan, ROC Army

troops conducted nighttime maneuvers with armored vehicles and set up defensive positions in the vicinity of Hualien Air Base.

September 15: Soldiers on the island of Kinmen conducted anti-landing drills.

September 15: Emergency landing and take-off drills were conducted to demonstrate the use of highways as alternate landing strips for military aircraft. Multiple airframes—including an Indigenous Defensive Fighter (IDF, 經國號戰機), an F-16V fighter, a Mirage 2000 fighter, and an E-2K airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft—conducted landings and take-offs in the early morning on Provincial Highway #1 in Pingtung County (southeast Taiwan). These drills were observed by President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正), and a crowd of civilian onlookers.

September 15: The annual *Wan-An* (萬安) air defense drill was conducted from 1:30 to 2 PM local time, in which air raid sirens were sounded throughout the island—although this year, due to COVID precautions against large indoor gatherings, citizens were not required to shelter in place as in past years.

September 16: Armor, artillery, and infantry units conducted anti-amphibious landing drills in coastal areas around Taiwan—including the Bali District in New Taipei, Taichung, Hualien, Taitung, Tainan, and Pingtung County.

September 17: ROCAF Indigenous Defense Fighters operating from an air base in Taichung conducted simulated strikes against enemy invasion forces.

Touting New Defense Capabilities

In recent years, Taiwan officials have touted the annual exercise as a means to demonstrate new capabilities within the ROC armed forces. Speaking in October 2020, President Tsai [stated](#): “[D]uring the annual *Han Kuang* exercises in July, we introduced our new joint battalions, which have greater capacity to conduct independent operations [...] For the first time during the *Han Kuang* exercises, our reserves also participated in live-fire scenarios, showcasing their capacity to support and complement our regular forces.”

Following this year's exercise, *Voice of America* [cited](#)

Su Tzu-yun (蘇紫雲)—director of the [National Defense Strategy and Resources Institute](#) (國防戰略與資源研究所) within the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (財團法人國防安全研究院), a Ministry of Defense-affiliated think tank—in emphasizing that this year’s exercise included “asymmetric operations” (不對稱作戰). Specifically, he highlighted the use of highways as improvised aircraft landing strips, and the deployment along coastal areas of vehicle-borne HF-2 and HF-3 anti-ship missiles associated with a unit in Taichung.

The PRC Reaction to Han Kuang-37

People’s Republic of China (PRC) state media sources have traditionally directed scorn at Han Kuang: for example, [deriding](#) the 2020 exercise as “an old trick in the book of Taiwan authorities to resist national reunification [sic],” and [mocking](#) it as a “hollow show” riddled with fatal accidents, revealing a Taiwan military completely unprepared to resist a PLA assault. This year, the nationalist *Global Times* [stated](#) that “The DPP is once again hyping the ‘China threat’” (民進黨又開始炒作“大陸威脅”) to justify the exercise, while citing maintenance and accident problems faced by Taiwan’s air force. Commenting on *Han Kuang*, the PRC Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO, 國務院台灣事務辦公室) [asserted](#) that “[in regards to] the situation in the Taiwan Strait, the source of tension and unrest lies in the DPP authorities linking up with foreign forces to scheme for ‘independence,’ [thereby] manufacturing cross-Strait antagonism.”

Announced Increases to the Military Budget

In the midst of the exercise, on September 16 the Tsai Administration announced plans to seek an NTD \$240 billion (USD \$8.66 billion) [special defense budget augmentation](#) for the next five years. This increase would be in addition to the NTD \$471.7 billion (USD \$17 billion) [defense budget for 2022](#)—a four percent increase over the 2021 budget—that was announced in August. Defense officials indicated that the special budget would be directed towards further acquisitions of indigenously-built missile systems: the mobile, truck-mounted *Antelope* air defense missile system (捷羚防空飛彈系統); the *Tien Kong III* (天弓-3) surface-to-air missile, designed for both anti-aircraft and anti-ballistic missile roles; the *Wan Chien* (萬劍)

air-to-surface cruise missile; the *Hsiung Feng IIE* (雄風-2E) anti-ship missile; and an unnamed drone system. Part of the budget allocation is also reportedly intended for systems upgrades on coast guard vessels, as well as support for unnamed aspects of the MND’s indigenous shipbuilding program.

In testimony before the legislature’s Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee (立法院外交及國防委員會) on September 27, Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng [indicated](#) that the additional allocation was necessary in the face of the “severe threat” from China, and that the missile systems “must be long-range, precise and mobile, so that the enemy can sense that we are prepared as soon as they dispatch their troops.”

Admiral Lee Hsi-Ming and the Continuing Debate on Defense Strategy

At the conclusion of this year’s *Han Kuang* exercise, former Chief of the ROC General Staff Admiral Lee Hsi-ming (李喜明) returned to the public stage to offer comment on the direction of Taiwan’s defense policy. Lee is closely identified with the “[Overall Defense Concept](#)” (ODC, 整體防衛構想) promoted during his tenure (2017-2019), which placed greater [emphasis](#) on warfare in the littoral region around Taiwan, as well as force preservation and asymmetric capabilities intended to compensate for the ROC military’s dramatic resource disadvantages in comparison to the PLA. In a [speech](#) in October 2020, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen stated “I am committed to accelerating the development of asymmetric capabilities under the Overall Defense Concept [...] this will be our number one priority.” However, mention of the ODC has since been omitted from the 2021 [Quadrennial Defense Review](#) (QDR, 四年期國防總檢討) and other official MND documents, leading to speculation that the [ODC has fallen out of official favor](#) within the MND.

Speaking at a September 17 online forum sponsored by the Academia Sinica (中央研究院), Admiral Lee [opined](#) that CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平) could not lay claim to achieving the “Chinese Dream” (中國夢) and the rejuvenation of China without achieving unification with Taiwan. Admiral Lee also [predicted](#) that China’s long-range missile forces would destroy much of Taiwan’s inventory of larger weap-

ons platforms at the outset of any conflict. He stated that Taiwan should therefore reform its reserve forces and engage civilian resources, for an “all-of-society defense” (全民防衛) effort, in which civil defense institutions—such as firefighters and the coast guard—could participate in exercises alongside military reserve forces. By thus making Taiwan better prepared to resist a PRC attack, the ultimate intent of this effort would be to implement “resistance deterrence” (拒止式嚇阻) that might dissuade the PRC leadership from attacking in the first place.

Conclusions

This year’s live-fire component of *Han Kuang* featured responses to some of the operations one would most likely expect to see in the event of either a cross-Strait invasion or a major coercive military campaign. These included sorties and redeployment of naval and aviation platforms to avoid missile strikes; the protection of critical infrastructure; and defense against amphibious landings made by hostile invasion forces. Such scenarios help to familiarize military units with the basic logistical and organizational measures necessary to operate in the field in wartime. However, based on the limited data available (and with the understanding that further preparations may have been tested out of public view), the limited scope and timeframe of the *Han Kuang* exercise, as well as its scripted and piecemeal nature, likely renders it inadequate to truly prepare military personnel for the stress and chaotic environment certain to ensue in an actual conflict with the PLA.

Many of the reported aspects of the exercise—for example, the redeployment of aircraft and logistical support resources away from primary airfields to dispersal locations, and the use of improvised landing strips—are no doubt valuable for building up institutional experience that could be leveraged in wartime. However, the limited number of pilots and airframes involved in the highway landing exercises makes that particular drill of limited value to the ROCAF as a whole. In light of their limited scope, the greatest value of such drills may lie in providing a building block for future training, and in providing positive publicity to build up the military’s image among Taiwan’s population as a whole. Additionally, the inclusion, albeit limited, of civil defense scenarios in this year’s

Han Kuang is a positive step that recognizes the need to better integrate military and civilian resources in order to improve Taiwan’s resiliency.

In the face of an ever-growing threat from the PRC, further actions in these areas—whether in the form of formal exercises like *Han Kuang*, or in quotidian training throughout the year—are imperative.

The main point: The live-fire component of *Han Kuang*, Taiwan’s largest annual military exercise, was conducted over a five-day period in mid-September. The exercise simulated responses to a number of scenarios that might be expected in the event of an attack from the PRC, but further and more vigorous training will be necessary to prepare Taiwan’s armed forces to resist the growing strength of the PLA.

The Logic of Japan’s Vaccine Diplomacy to Taiwan

By: Huynh Tam Sang

Huynh Tam Sang is an international relations lecturer and research fellow at Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities’ Center for International Studies, and a junior researcher at the Taiwan NextGen Foundation. His main fields of research include East Asian international relations, Vietnam’s foreign policy, and middle-power diplomacy.

The growing momentum in Japan-Taiwan ties has clearly manifested itself in the form of Japan’s donations to Taiwan so far of 3.9 million sorely needed COVID-19 vaccines. These instances of vaccine diplomacy have showcased how the two East Asian partners can address health security in the face of mounting geopolitical challenges posed by Beijing’s increasingly coercive diplomacy. Indeed, Tokyo’s vaccination assistance came at a time of ramped up harassment by China that [intentionally obstructed Taiwan’s access to COVID-19 vaccines](#). By providing vaccine donations, Japan—along with a handful of other nations—prioritized non-traditional security cooperation with Taiwan by responding to the island’s health security threats, and sought ways to navigate

Japan's uneasy relations with China effectively. [1]

Japan-Taiwan Friendship: Sharing is Caring

As Taiwan scrambled to combat the new wave of COVID-19 in mid-May, Japan promptly lent a helping hand by donating COVID-19 doses to the nation, with [1.24 million](#) doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine dispatched on June 4, followed by [1.13 million](#) more doses delivered on July 8, another [970,000](#) doses on July 15, and [64,000](#) doses on September 7. On September 25, Taiwan received the fifth batch of [500,000](#) AstraZeneca doses from Japan, raising the cumulative number of COVID-19 jabs received from Japan to 3.9 million doses. Japan's support clearly evinced closer ties between the two neighbors. Even the [Kuomintang](#) (KMT, 國民黨), the more China-friendly opposition party to the [pro-status quo](#) Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨), was believed to feel "[quiet appreciation](#)" for Tokyo.

Earlier in June, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi (茂木敏充) [said](#) that the donation was "based on [Japan's] important partnership and friendship with Taiwan." Motegi highlighted the Japanese people's gratitude for Taiwan's 2011 [assistance](#) to the country when Japan suffered from a devastating earthquake and tsunami—effectively showing a reciprocal relationship in a time of need. The donations did not go unnoticed in Washington, as former US Defense Department official [Drew Thompson](#) opined that "Japan is really doing this because it's in their interest to keep the population of Taiwan healthy."

Japan's vaccine donation to Taiwan was timely, given the global vaccine shortage and Taiwan's worst coronavirus outbreak to date. Although Taiwan has sought to procure shots, China reportedly intervened to [derail the democratic nation's purchase of vaccines](#) and to [block a deal with Germany's BioNTech](#) for COVID-19 shots. However, the deal finally went through, albeit via detours, thanks to non-governmental actors' astute [engagement](#) to help Taiwan procure the BioNTech vaccine. Foxconn and TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company), both Taiwan-based firms, [proclaimed](#) in July that they had reached deals to buy 10 million of BioNTech's COVID-19 jabs, which would "[boost the lagging vaccine effort in Taiwan](#)." At the same time, China's government pressed Taiwan to

receive the two [Chinese-made vaccines](#), which Beijing claims are "highly effective." In a move to spread misinformation, China even [accused](#) Taiwan's ruling party of impeding Beijing's efforts to send vaccines to Taiwan.

Taiwanese leaders could hardly put their trust in China's coronavirus vaccines given China's [lack of transparency](#) during its clinical trials. To make the lack of confidence in Chinese vaccines even worse, [Gao Fu](#) (高福), director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, admitted at a conference in April 2021 that Chinese vaccines "don't have very high protection rates." Moreover, accepting Chinese-made vaccines could be read as yielding to Beijing's pressure or recognizing its superiority over Taiwan. On top of all this, under the current legal framework, the importation of Chinese-manufactured vaccines is not allowed in Taiwan. (This follows the Mainland Affairs Council's interpretation of Article 7, Paragraph 1 of the 2008 "[Regulations Governing Permission of Trade Between Taiwan Area and Mainland Area](#).") The Tsai Administration is likely unwilling to accept Chinese-made vaccines due to concerns related to violating current regulations on cross-strait exchanges; however, setting political factors aside, the main reason for Taiwan's cautious posture seems to be the lingering [concerns](#) over the efficacy and transparency of Chinese-developed vaccines.



Image: Containers carrying doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine donated by Japan are loaded on board a plane at Tokyo's Narita Airport prior to delivery to Taiwan on June 4, 2021. (Image source: [Yahoo News](#))

Japan's outreach to Taiwan deserves much credit, as Tokyo's actions invited criticism from authorities in Beijing. In June, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin (汪文斌) [urged](#) Japan not to offer vaccines to Taiwan, calling the donation "a tool for

selfish political gains.” Lambasted by China, Japanese leaders nevertheless proceeded to dismiss Beijing’s warnings and provide support to Taiwan. Following this episode, we can expect sustained cooperation in terms of vaccine diplomacy and public health cooperation between Taiwan and Japan in the future.

Japan’s Taiwan Vaccine Donation Shows Two Drivers

Japan’s consequential boost to Taiwan’s vaccination efforts is a complex story, and the donation may in fact have far-reaching implications not only for Japan-Taiwan relations, but also for the future trajectory of regional security. Sharing both democratic values and a commitment to uphold a strong and prosperous Indo-Pacific, Japan and Taiwan are seeing eye-to-eye on regional challenges. Among these concerns, the maritime rise of China is particularly pertinent. In February 2019, President Tsai hailed the importance of the Taiwan-Japan relationship in the region and [stressed](#) that “Taiwan and Japan are confronted with the same threats in the East Asian region.”

Consequently, Taiwan continues to grow increasingly important in the eyes of Japanese leaders. Recognizing Taiwan’s health security challenge, Japan has demonstrated that Tokyo is ready to commit to working closely with Taipei in navigating common challenges. Japan’s vaccine assistance towards Taiwan manifests a shift in Tokyo’s position on Taiwan: specifically, Japan abandoned its traditionally reticent posture in favor of a more confident stance, although Tokyo still seeks to avoid aggravating China directly. Strategically, Japan’s vaccine donation in support of Taiwan has showcased the country’s interest in a *de facto* independent Taiwan, and a firmer relationship between Tokyo and Taipei.

Taiwan and Japan now find themselves facing unequal treatment under Beijing’s growing weight. Taipei and Tokyo have both faced China’s intimidation tactics. China has escalated its belligerent behavior by deploying aerial forces into Taiwan’s southwest Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), ramping up diplomatic and political [pressure](#) on Taiwan. Japan’s relationship with China has deteriorated over time as China has become more assertive in challenging Japan’s [sovereignty](#) over the Senkaku Islands (known to China as the Diaoyu Islands, 釣魚台). Coast guard ships from

both countries have [patrolled](#) around these uninhabited islands to assert their jurisdiction, thereby raising Sino-Japanese tensions. Japan’s Air Self-Defense Force frequently [scrambles](#) fighter jets in response to Chinese aircraft encroachments, and China’s maritime assertiveness continues to be a source of concern for Japan.

Sino-Japanese relations have continued to turn sour, especially after then Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga (菅義偉), in his speech during a National Diet meeting in June, [used](#) the word “country” to refer to Taiwan. Japanese State Minister of Defense Yasuhide Nakayama (中山泰秀) even raised the issue of protecting Taiwan, which he [referred](#) to as “a democratic country.” Nakayama’s comments unsurprisingly [outraged](#) Beijing, which called his remarks “highly sinister, dangerous, and irresponsible.”

Recent developments in the Japan-Taiwan relationship also have nuanced implications for regional peace and security. Japan seems to project a role of quiet but effective leadership in the Indo-Pacific, providing necessary support to countries in dire need of COVID-19 vaccines. Japan’s generous assistance has been in stark contrast to that of China—though both Asian powers have used vaccine diplomacy to bolster their regional and international standing. China has aimed to employ its charm offensive to trick countries receiving Beijing’s vaccine doses into subjugation under Beijing’s hierarchy. While touting its “no strings attached” approach on vaccine donation, China has stepped up its efforts to [bolster engagement](#) with Southeast Asian countries as well as Latin American and Caribbean nations. Some relatively weaker countries, like the Philippines, Cambodia, and Pakistan, even expressed their “high appreciation” for Chinese leaders and hailed the giant for its generosity and “altruism.” Tokyo’s vaccination assistance is likely to communicate that a middle power like Japan can also use “vaccine diplomacy.” By deploying COVID-19 vaccines to Taiwan and Southeast Asian nations, Japan is revitalizing its political commitment and credibility within the region, while at the same time successfully differentiating itself from Beijing and its declining image since the pandemic outbreak.

By donating coronavirus vaccine doses to regional countries, including Taiwan, Japan has aimed to un-

derline its status as a regional responsible stakeholder, enhance its political profile, and make use of its status in a flexible response to China's vaccine diplomacy. Japan's behavior can be considered as a tactic of changing tack when confronting China's diplomatic pressure. Japan's [defense white paper](#), released in July, for the first time mentioned security in the Taiwan Strait by stating that "Stabilizing the situation surrounding Taiwan is important for Japan's security and the stability of the international community."

Japan is working in line with the United States in supporting Taiwan, including signaling the possibility of teaming up to [oppose](#) any potential aggression made by Beijing against Taiwan. Tokyo's support for Taiwan is consistent with its commitment to work hand-in-hand with Washington towards "peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," as mentioned in an April [joint statement](#) between the two top leaders of Washington and Tokyo. At the press conference, President Suga [stressed](#) "an agreed recognition over the importance of peace and stability of the Taiwan Straits" between the two allies.

Japan's vaccine assistance to Taiwan has been consistent with its efforts to play a constructive role in the Indo-Pacific. Japan has been working closely with the United States and [Australia](#) to provide COVID-19 vaccines to Indo-Pacific countries. While Japan prioritizes vaccination support to Asian nations, Australia focuses on supporting Pacific Island countries. It is likely that as the role of Japan in the region continues to grow, Taiwan will continue to remain an essential partner of Japan. Tokyo's donation of COVID-19 vaccines to Taipei suggests that an East Asian democratic alignment is in the making.

The main point: Japan's recent donations of COVID-19 vaccine doses to Taiwan are part of a larger effort to forge closer ties between Tokyo and Taipei, and demonstrate Japan's greater willingness to engage in diplomatic and security initiatives with Taiwan over the objections of Beijing.

[1] As of October 3, the countries that have donated COVID-19 vaccines to Taiwan are: Japan (3,904,000 doses), the United States (2,500,000 doses), the Czech Republic (30,000 doses), Lithuania (20,000 doses), Slovakia (160,000 doses), and Poland (400,000 doses).

The AUKUS Agreement and Its Significance for the Defense of Taiwan

By: Michael Mazza

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On September 15, 2021, the leaders of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States [announced](#) the establishment of AUKUS, "an enhanced trilateral security partnership." The historic agreement, which Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison referred to as a "forever partnership," will allow for far greater cooperation in the realms of security, defense, technology, and industry. The headline initiative for AUKUS is joint development of a new nuclear-powered attack submarine for Australia. The implications for Taiwan are potentially significant.



Image: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, flanked by televised images of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson (left) and US President Joseph Biden (right), at a joint press conference held on September 15 to announce the "AUKUS" agreement between the three countries. (Image source: [The Guardian](#))

Australian Concerns about the Taiwan Strait

In July 2020, in the [joint statement](#) on the annual Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN), "the Secretaries and Ministers re-affirmed Taiwan's important role in the Indo-Pacific region" and "reiterated that any resolution of cross-Strait differences should be peaceful and according to the will of the people on both sides, without resorting to threats or coercion."

This was the first time that an AUSMIN joint statement directly addressed issues pertaining to Taiwan.

The 2021 AUSMIN [joint statement](#) used even stronger language. Dropping references to “unofficial” relations, the secretaries and ministers “stated their intent to strengthen ties with Taiwan, which is a leading democracy and a critical partner for both countries.” To the extent that there is daylight between Canberra’s and Washington’s approaches to Taipei, that daylight is diminishing.

Three months before this year’s AUSMIN, Australia and Japan held their ninth round of the “2+2 Foreign and Defense Ministerial Consultations.” In a [joint statement](#), the ministers said that they “underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.” This was the first time the Australia-Japan 2+2 publicly alluded to concerns about the Taiwan Strait. In August, the ministers participating in the first-ever [Australia-France 2+2](#) similarly called for peace and stability in the Strait.

Australia, which had long been cautious in its approach to the Taiwan Strait, is shedding its wariness. As Brendan Taylor described in a Lowy Institute [policy brief](#) last year, “the potential for a regional security crisis is becoming less remote” and “the stakes for Canberra are high.” In a previous issue of the Global Taiwan Brief, I described the potential [strategic consequences](#) of Chinese success in an effort to force unification with Taiwan:

“In such a scenario, the United States would have either sat out the conflict, proving itself a paper tiger, or would have seen its military defeated in conflict with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Either set of circumstances would significantly undermine the US alliance system in Asia and embolden China to act even more assertively vis-à-vis its neighbors, including Australia, in the future.

Second, and related, Chinese annexation of Taiwan would give the PLA easy access to the Pacific Ocean, enabling it to more readily threaten Guam, Hawaii, Alaska, and the Continental United States. Additionally, Chinese control of Taiwan would make Japan far more

difficult to defend in the event of a Sino-Japanese conflict and would facilitate Chinese control of the South China Sea. These are all adverse outcomes for Australia, given its approach to national defense that places the US alliance front and center.”

It seems likely that growing concerns about the Taiwan Strait—where the PRC has carried out a concerted pressure campaign on Taiwan for five years and counting—interacted with similar concerns about the South China Sea and the Sino-Indian border, and with Australia’s own experiences dealing with Beijing over the last year, to create a policy environment conducive to AUKUS.

British Concerns about the Taiwan Strait

The United Kingdom has been less outspoken when it comes to Taiwan, but it, too, has begun to “lean in.” On June 13, it signed on to a Group of Seven [communiqué](#), in which the G7 leaders “underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait” and express opposition to “any unilateral attempts to change the status quo and increase tensions” in the East and South China Seas. The [NATO communiqué](#), released the next day, did not mention Taiwan, but explicitly raised a number of concerns with respect to China, including its “stated ambitions and assertive behavior.”

London announced its “Indo-Pacific tilt” last spring as part of its [“Global Britain”](#) vision. That tilt envisions deeper engagement across the region, including in the security realm. The UK has followed that commitment with action. In early September, two Royal Navy patrol vessels [embarked](#) on a five-year deployment to the region. There they joined the [HMS Queen Elizabeth](#) carrier strike group, which is spending half of the year in the Indo-Pacific conducting a variety of engagements. On September 27, the *HMS Richmond*, a member of the strike group, [sailed](#) south through the Taiwan Strait.

Allied Submarines and the Defense of Taiwan

Although the submarine announcement caught observers by surprise, the idea is not new. “From a strategic perspective,” wrote Zack Cooper, Iskander Rehman, and Jim Thomas in a 2013 [report](#), “the case

for an Australian nuclear-powered submarine force is compelling, given their endurance, stealth at high speeds, and greater payloads.” They highlight, in particular, the question of endurance:

“[W]hile diesel-electric submarines may prove more stealthy in shallow waters, they would take considerably longer to arrive on station, and remain on station for a far shorter amount of time. These limitations would grow along with the distance at which they are deployed, rendering it extremely challenging for Australian submarines to play any meaningful operational role in the northern Indian Ocean or South China Sea.”

A figure included in the report, published by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, indicates that diesel electric submarines departing from HMAS Stirling—Australia’s one and only submarine base—would be able to remain on station in the South China Sea for less than two weeks and have no ability to remain on station in the East China Sea. On the other hand, nuclear-powered submarines would be able to remain on station for well over two months in each location. Those submarines would have the potential to shape the security environment in ways conducive to the allies and to Taiwan.

In peacetime, regular Australian submarine operations in the China seas could force the PLA to spread thin its anti-submarine warfare (ASW) assets or lead Beijing to invest limited resources in ASW at the expense of other needed capabilities. The knowledge that additional submarines are lurking in contested waters, moreover, could encourage greater restraint in China’s approach to smaller neighbors. In wartime, Australian nuclear submarines could contribute to allied blockade operations, interdict naval forces in the South China Sea seeking to support an assault on Taiwan, and carry out strikes on the Chinese mainland. If Australian submarines are operating in coalition with the United States, they might also free up more American subs to stalk Chinese ballistic missile boats.

What is more, American and Australian submarines may have company in performing these tasks. Days after the AUKUS announcement, *The Times* [reported](#) on discussions about the potential for British SSNs to

operate out of Australia. “Senior government sources” see AUKUS as potentially paving the way toward British *Astute*-class submarines “undergoing deep maintenance in the region so that they can stay deployed for longer rather than returning to the Faslane naval base in Scotland.” (Of note: the AUSMIN 2021 also raised the prospect of a new access arrangement for US SSNs, with the joint statement endorsing “enhanced maritime cooperation by increasing logistics and sustainment capabilities of US surface and sub-surface vessels in Australia.”)

It will be a decade or more before Australia fields its own nuclear attack subs and Royal Navy submarines sail from HMAS Stirling, should such access ever be arranged. But if that future comes to pass, Taiwan will benefit. In contemplating any use of force against Taiwan, China will have to grapple with the prospect of an allied intervention beneath the waves—one which could harass Chinese shipping and PLA Navy surface vessels, threaten the Chinese coastline on multiple fronts, soak up PLA resources perhaps better deployed closer to the Taiwan Strait, and undermine China’s sea-based nuclear deterrent.

To be sure, an Australian SSN fleet is not a silver bullet in responding to China’s military advancements, nor is it intended to be. Beyond submarines, the AUKUS joint statement did not go into details about how the three countries “will foster deeper integration of security and defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains,” but there are a number of areas for potential collaboration. As three of the “Five Eyes,” Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States participate in an existing intelligence-sharing apparatus; cooperation to enhance intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and operations in the Indo-Pacific should be a natural next step for AUKUS.

The United States and Australia, meanwhile, are already working together on hypersonic technology, so trilateral missile cooperation may be in the cards as well—indeed, the AUSMIN statement took note of Australia’s intention to establish a “Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise” and, on the day of AUSMIN, the Australian government announced [plans](#) to acquire from the United States Tomahawk cruise missiles (for its *Hobart* destroyers), Joint

Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (Extended Range), Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles (Extended Range), and precision guided missiles for its land forces. Going forward, it would not be surprising to see air-to-air and anti-ship missile programs rolled into broader air defense and anti-surface warfare initiatives within AUKUS as PLA aviation and surface warfare capabilities continue to advance. Put simply, if AUKUS fulfills its promise, it will serve as a platform through which the participating countries will counter existing and emerging PLA advantages.

Of course, neither the United States nor Australia nor the United Kingdom is bound to intervene in a Taiwan Strait conflict. Nor is AUKUS a new trilateral alliance—the three states will remain free to pursue independent responses to Chinese aggression against Taiwan. But AUKUS is arguably an alliance-in-being. There is a reason the partners will develop a new submarine for Australia “with a focus on interoperability, commonality, and mutual stability,” as the joint statement put it. They want to be able to fight together, hoping that ability will help ensure they never have to.

The main point: AUKUS, and in particular its joint submarine program, will enhance Taiwan’s security by complicating China’s ability to successfully use force to compel unification.

Taiwan’s Long Road to CPTPP Membership

By: Riley Walters

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The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) was back in the news recently, as both China and Taiwan formally submitted applications (see [here](#) and [here](#)) to join the trade agreement. While they are not the first countries to seek membership in the CPTPP, their applications have certainly caught the attention of trade and geopolitical analysts around the world. Now it will be up to CPTPP members to weigh each applicant’s request. The road to joining CPTPP won’t be easy for

either China or Taiwan: the process could take years before any substantial progress is made, as political considerations will weigh heavy on each CPTPP member’s decision-making.

What is the CPTPP?

Besides having a terribly long name, the CPTPP is a trade agreement between Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. The agreement [covers a wide range of topics](#) including, but not limited to, trade, investment, government procurement, electronic commerce and data storage, and environment and sanitary measures. The combined economies of these 11 members represent [13 percent of global GDP](#) and [14 percent of global exports in goods and services](#).

The United States was a party to the trade agreement’s original negotiations, but President Donald Trump officially [withdrew](#) the United States shortly after taking office in 2017. The agreement went into force nearly two years after that in December 2018. While the agreement is in force, not all CPTPP members have actually ratified the agreement within their own domestic legal frameworks: Brunei, Chile, and Malaysia, while members of the CPTPP, are not technically a party to the agreement until they ratify it. This is an important point, as only parties to the CPTPP can vote on whether to accept new members.

China and Taiwan Both Want to Join

On September 16, China formally [submitted](#) its application to join the CPTPP; six days later, Taiwan also [submitted](#) its own application. The timing of the two submissions is more than coincidence. Taiwan officials have been [talking](#) about their desire to join the trade agreement for years, but only since late last year has Beijing shown any interest in joining. At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, Xi Jinping (习近平) said China would [consider](#) joining the CPTPP—which came as a surprise to many given that China had just recently finished negotiations for another large Asian trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The timing of the two countries’ submissions to join the CPTPP is reminiscent of their joining of the World Trade Organization (WTO) around the same time in the early

2000s. Eventually, both joined the WTO as separate members.

A Complicated Relationship

China's request to join the CPTPP makes things complicated for CPTPP members. The agreement, while not always explicit, was generally understood to be a counter to China's growing economic presence in the Asia-Pacific. This concern has grown as countries talk more about diversifying supply chains and building economic resiliency. For most CPTPP members, China is already either their first- or second-[largest](#) trading partner. At the same time, it is natural for countries with large existing trade flows to want to solidify the relationship through trade deals—think of the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (formally known as the North America Free Trade Agreement). But while it is sometimes assumed that more trade and better diplomatic relations go hand-in-hand, Beijing's increasing military presence and belligerence in the region has started to turn opinions against China. In countries like Japan and Canada, [negative](#) public sentiment towards China is at an all-time high. For members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), while China is seen as the most influential economic power in the region, nearly three-quarter of members say this is [worrying](#). Nearly two-thirds of ASEAN members have no or little confidence China will do the right thing when it comes to global peace, security, prosperity, and governance.

China's and Taiwan's respective political relationships with each CPTPP member make the possibility of joining the CPTPP more complicated. While both countries have existing trade agreements with various CPTPP members—[Taiwan](#) has free trade agreements with Singapore and New Zealand, and [China](#) has trade agreements with every CPTPP member except Canada and Mexico—this won't necessarily make their accession processes any easier. CPTPP members have had mixed reactions to both China's and Taiwan's submissions: for example, Japan has been the most vocal about welcoming [Taiwan](#) to join the CPTPP, while Malaysia has welcomed [China's](#) membership.

The Accession Process

To join the CPTPP both China and Taiwan first have to clear a [few steps](#). Before even submitting their appli-

cations, both countries should have engaged with all 11 CPTPP members regarding their interest in joining. However, now that both have formally submitted their application to join, it will be up to the CPTPP Commission to [decide](#) within a “reasonable period of time” whether to accept either country's application. Given that China submitted its application before Taiwan, it's fair to assume they may review China's first. But a “reasonable period of time” is not a deadline and could take some time. As a point of [reference](#), it took roughly four months between the time the United Kingdom submitted its application to join and when the Commission decided to commence accession negotiations.

After accepting a request, the Commission will then set up Accession Working Groups for both China and Taiwan. The Accession Working Group is meant to work with the aspiring economy on their compliance with the existing CPTPP agreement. Eventually, the Commission will decide on whether to accept the aspiring economy. The Peterson Institute for International Economics has produced a good chart mapping the accession process, as shown in the image below.

All decisions made by either the Commission or Accession Working Group are made by consensus agreement among the eight parties to the CPTPP. However, throughout this entire process CPTPP members are [intended to](#) “reaffirm the importance of maintaining solidarity among CPTPP Signatories” and “[include] all CPTPP Signatories in the decision making process... Decisions on issues relating to accessions will be made by the Parties taking fully into account the views expressed by those Signatories.” This essentially means that while Brunei, Chile, and Malaysia won't have an explicit say in whether China or Taiwan can join the CPTPP or not, their opinions are still likely to be taken into consideration.

China's Accession

Both China and Taiwan need to adhere to the agreement already negotiated by CPTPP members. Members like Japan have said they are [unwilling](#) to ease rules for China accession—meaning while some CPTPP members may have received exemption from certain parts of the CPTPP when it was first being negotiated, China will not be so lucky. And it is question-

able whether China can make the necessary changes to get into the CPTPP now: for example, while the CPTPP agreement recognizes that state-owned-enterprises may play an important role for some of its members, the heavy interventions into China's markets by both the central and local governments go beyond what is acceptable under CPTPP rules. Beijing will have trouble adhering to more liberal provisions in the CPTPP, such as those related to opening electronic commerce and data storage. There are also concerns about China's labor and environmental commitments.

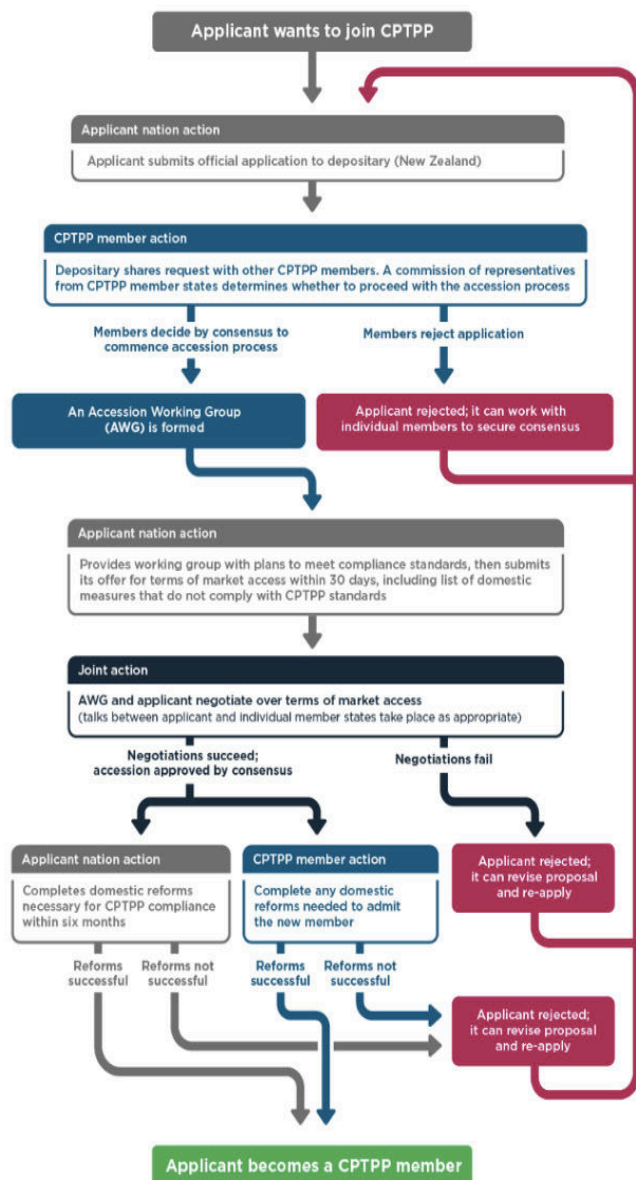


Image: The bureaucratic process for applying for membership in the CPTPP. (Source: [Peterson Institute for International Economics](#))

Taiwan's Accession

Taiwan's membership in the CPTPP would be significant. National Development Council Minister Kung Ming-hsin (龔明鑫) [said](#) he expects Taiwan's economy to grow by 2 percent if it joins CPTPP, but that it would lose half a percent if it does not. While Taiwan is a more open economy than China, meaning that not as many changes would need to take place in order for Taiwan to abide by the CPTPP agreement, there are still a few outstanding issues that need to be resolved. For Japan, Taiwan's biggest supporter for getting into CPTPP, it will be resolving the issue of importing food from Japan's Fukushima region. (The United States just [recently lifted](#) all restrictions on imports from this region in Japan.) Aside from this, Taiwan's accession would be relatively easier than that of China.

Conclusion

The submissions by China and Taiwan to join the CPTPP could drive a wedge between its members as they debate who should join. But members should not forget the spirit of the agreement laid out in its [preamble](#). CPTPP members are striving to establish a free trade agreement that strengthens their bonds and cooperation. The agreement is meant to build on the rights established at the WTO, while recognizing the cultural differences and diversity between its members. Finally, its members strive to expand the agreement by encouraging other economies to join.

Taiwan continues to be a beacon for democratic values and economic freedom in the region, but at the news of Taiwan's submission to join the CPTPP, China's [Foreign Ministry](#) came out in strong opposition. If China becomes a party to the CPTPP before Taiwan does, it will surely block Taiwan's membership. This goes against the spirit of the CPTPP and should preempt China's membership.

The main point: Neither China's nor Taiwan's membership in the CPTPP is guaranteed. The process could take years, as it will be plagued by political considerations and technical negotiations. But given the spirit of the free trade deal, and relative ease by which Taiwan could join, its application should be given priority over that of China.