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Taiwan Contemplates Reforms to Its Military Reserve Forces

By: John Dotson

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The invasion of Ukraine has spurred renewed discussion regarding Taiwan's defense needs, as well as the preferred course of its future defense strategy. Inspired by the dogged resistance to Russian forces demonstrated not only by Ukraine's regular military, but also by the citizen-soldiers of Ukraine's Territorial Defense Force (TDF), many observers both in Taiwan and the broader international community have begun to ask whether such a trained and regulated militia force would bolster Taiwan's own defenses against a potential invasion by the People's Republic of China (PRC). Such discussions intersect with longstanding debates regarding the viability of Taiwan's existing military reserve and civil defense architectures, as well as the prospects for potential bureaucratic and legal changes to these systems.

Legacy Problems with Taiwan's Reserve Force

Taiwan's armed forces, whether active or reserve, have long been subject to criticism by both domestic and foreign observers who have identified problems with poor morale and inadequate levels of training. Harsher critics have gone so far as to call Taiwan's military a "hollow shell," allegedly so weakened by low morale and poor levels of readiness as to be combat ineffective. Others have cited "the risk of Americans fighting and dying for a nation that is unwilling to defend itself." This is further exacerbated by chronic undermanning in the ranks, a problem that follows the shift from a conscript to an all-volunteer active-duty force in the 2010s.

Young men in Taiwan are still required to undergo military training and a brief period of military service. At one time, this service period was two years, but was reduced to one year in the 2010s. This was further reduced in 2017 to four months of basic training, which some have derisively compared to attending a "summer camp" that lacks effective combat

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training. After this, discharged young men "will register with [their] local reserve command, where [they] will report for duty only once every two years for a mere five to seven days of refresher training." [1] Such a system hardly confers confidence that Taiwan's reservists will be prepared to smoothly assume military duties in a crisis—especially when compared to a more rigorous reserve system such as that found in the United States, where reservists typically perform at least 38 days a year on duty, irrespective of occasional longer periods of active duty.

Bureaucratic Changes for Administration of the Reserve System

In April 2021, the Ministry of National Defense (MND, 國防部) announced plans for major reforms to Taiwan's system for reserve administration, including the consolidation of existing agencies. This bureaucratic reorganization became official on January 1, 2022, when the MND's existing Reserve Force Command was placed underneath the All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency to create a consolidated "Armed Forces Reserve Command – All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency" (全民防衛動員署後備指揮部), whose "primary mission is to be planning for mobilization, management, service, civil defense, [and] building reserve capacity." The agency remains within the MND, under the supervision of the ROC premier. As of February 2022, the agency's commander is Lt. General Fu Cheng-cheng (傅正誠).

Image: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (front row, third from left), Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正) (front row, second from left), and other senior officials attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Taiwan's reorganized reserve force management agency, December 30, 2021. (Image source: Taiwan Central News Agency)

More Rigorous Training for the Reserve System – and Possible Extended Service Time

In tandem with these bureaucratic reforms, in November 2021 the MND also announced plans to make training for reservists more rigorous. Under a pilot program initiated in March 2022 and scheduled to extend through the first three quarters of the year, 15,000 reserve personnel will be subject to two weeks of refresher training in a series of facilities around the island, including weapons familiarization and basic combat training. In at least some cases, this will reportedly involve limited field exercises: state media reporting in early March described the "toughest ever" training for reservists, involving 400 reserve personnel mustered for a two-week scenario centered around the defense of a beach near the Linkou District (林口) in New Taipei City.

There are also indications that reserve forces may receive upgrades of equipment that would increase their combat striking power, albeit with second-line equipment. At the same time that the plans for enhanced reservist training were announced in November 2021, Major General Ma Chia-long (馬家龍), deputy director of the then-existent All-Out Defense Mobilization Office, announced that the ROC Army had plans to refit some of its older combat vehicles—including CM-11 "Brave Tiger" (勇虎) tanks and M-113 armored personnel carriers—and hand them over to reserve forces once the 108 M1A2T Abrams tanks purchased from the United States had been delivered.

Perhaps most controversially, senior defense officials and political figures have also begun to talk publicly about extending the period of conscripted military service for young men—from four months back to one year. In mid-March, Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正) was quoted as telling legislators that "If a war broke out in Taiwan, the four-month military training we currently have is not enough," and indicated that a task force was reviewing the issue. The same week, Xavier Chang (張惇涵), a spokesperson for President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), indicated that such a measure was under discussion, and Interior Minister Hsu Kuo-yung (徐國勇) commented on the extension of obligated military service time by saying that "If it would benefit the safe and sustainable development of our country, then several months or a year more shouldn't be a problem."

Image: Republic of China (ROC) Army reservists take part in small arms training at a base near Taoyuan, Taiwan on March 13. (Image source: Taipei Times)

What Should Taiwan's Reserve Forces Look Like?

Alongside these reforms, a further debate is brewing in regards to what form Taiwan's reserve system should take. One of the more fundamental questions is whether it should be an operational reserve system intended to directly bolster the active-duty force (the model upon which US military Reserve and National Guard forces are largely constituted); or whether it should be a citizen militia acting alongside, but separate from, the active-duty armed forces (the model of the Ukrainian TDF).

In a commentary published in March by Dr. Michael Hunzecker and Admiral Lee Hsi-min (李喜明)—a former ROC chief of general staff, and the figure in Taiwan defense circles most closely associated with the "Overall Defense Concept" (ODC, 整體防禦概念)—the two authors advocated for "the creation of a standing, all-volunteer, Taiwanese territorial defense force." Inspired in part by the success displayed by the Ukrainian TDF in resisting the Russian invasion, the authors call for an entirely new service branch—manned by civilian volunteers and distinct from an operational reserve force—that would be positioned to attack the logistics and rear-echelon elements of an occupation force, and to provide the nucleus of an insurgent resistance. The authors state that "popular resistance has merit and might be the difference between Taiwan surviving an assault from the mainland and succumbing," and that "a bottom-up force credibly organized, trained, and equipped to reshape Beijing's calculus" could provide a key pillar of deterrence.

Potential New Models for Civil Defense Mobilization

Such arguments stand alongside the efforts of individuals such as Enoch Wu (吳怡農), a former soldier and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) politician, to further involve Taiwan's general population in civil defense and disaster relief. Wu is the founder of Forward Alliance (壯闊台灣聯盟), which advocates for enhanced civil defense preparation on the part of the general public. Wu has commented that "The threat [from the Chinese military] is quite serious, in my view," and further stated that "The best way to deter military conflict is to demonstrate a credible national will to resist, by combining military readiness with civil preparedness."

Senior Taiwan officials have also discussed changes to civil defense mobilization outside of military channels. In testimony before the Legislative Yuan's Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee (立法院外交及國防委員會) in April 2021, Defense Minister Chiu indicated plans to amend the Civil Defense Act (民防法) in order to allow defense officials to mobilize groups of disaster relief workers from religious institutions—a so-called "temple militia" (寺廟民兵). This proposed move would not only allow the organization of additional logistical and emergency aid personnel, but would also allow for further government oversight of Buddhist and Taoist temples that have been heavily targeted for united front recruitment.

Conclusion

The arguments for creating a citizen militia force appear unlikely to gather much support inside the ROC MND, which has historically kept counter-invasion contingency planning firmly within conventional military and political channels. Furthermore, Taiwan society as a whole lacks a widespread tradition of firearms ownership and handling, and it is unclear how a theoretical militia modeled on the Ukrainian TDF would store weapons or conduct training, or how it might be administered by a likely skeptical national defense establishment. Instead, it is likely that reserve reforms will continue to be directed on the operational reserve model, with perhaps increasing public engagement in the field of civil defense preparation.

Whatever direction these reforms take, however, the very fact that there is now serious debate over topics once considered politically impossible—including extended conscripted service time, and increased reserve duty training requirements—demonstrates just how far the war in Ukraine is shaking up attitudes in Taiwan. There's a long way to go in reforming Taiwan's currently ineffective military reserve system, but the reforms either underway or under discussion represent significant steps in the right direction.

The main point: Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense and senior political figures are currently engaged in either debating, or actually implementing, a series of major reforms to the way that military reservists are trained and administered. These reforms, if followed through, could significantly bolster the capacity of Taiwan's active-duty armed forces to respond to a PRC military attack.

[1] Easton, Stokes, Cooper, and Chan, *Transformation of Taiwan's Reserve Force* (RAND Corp., 2017), p. 6.

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Taiwan Expands Its Cross-Border E-Commerce and Digital Trade

By: Kristian McGuire

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Since the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)—the Asia-Pacific's largest free trade agreement (FTA)—in November 2020, Beijing has repeatedly expressed its determination to play a gatekeeper role in deciding whether Taiwan is admitted. Chinese officials have stated explicitly that Taiwan's acceptance of Beijing's "One-China Principle" (一個中國原則) is a prerequisite for its participation in regional economic cooperation. Informed observers suspect that Beijing will also require Taipei to make political concessions or move forward with expanding cross-Strait economic ties under the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA, 兩岸經濟合作架構協議) before it will acquiesce to Taiwan joining RCEP or the Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the Asia-Pacific's second largest FTA. [1]

As a member of RCEP, China has the power to block Taiwan's admission to that regional trade agreement. However, it does not have the same direct influence over CPTPP because it, like Taiwan, remains outside the pact while awaiting consideration of its membership application. But Beijing need only persuade one current CPTPP member country to vote against Taiwan's accession in order to deny it the benefits of participating in the Asia-Pacific's other major trade bloc.

In contrast to Beijing's ability and determination to keep Taiwan out of RCEP and the CPTPP, it has not prevented Taiwan from pursuing other means of deepening its economic ties with other countries.

Cross-Border E-commerce and Digital Trade

Developing Taiwan's cross-border e-commerce and digital trade are key objectives of Taipei's New Southbound Policy (NSP, 新南向政策), which aims to diversify Taiwan's economic relations and "Minimize overdependence on any single market." Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs has set targets for: 1) helping domestic businesses utilize Taiwan's national business-to-business (B2B) platform *Taiwantrade.com* to increase the presence of Taiwanese products in overseas markets; 2) cultivating e-commerce talents; and 3) building e-commerce shipping warehouses in partner countries.

In line with the NSP and the rapid growth of e-commerce globally, Taiwanese companies have greatly expanded their cross-border e-commerce business in recent years. PChome, one of Taiwan's largest business-to-consumer (B2C) and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) e-commerce companies, formed a joint venture with US e-commerce giant eBay as early as 2006. The company renewed its focus on overseas alliances nearly a decade later, establishing PChome Thai, "the largest Taiwanese product website in Thailand," with Thai company Cal-Comp Electronics in 2015. After this foray into Southeast Asia, PChome turned to Northeast Asia, forging strategic alliances with leading Japanese and South Korean e-commerce companies in 2019. Continuing its expansion throughout Asia, PChome announced yet another major cross-border project in

September 2020: the PChomeSEA cross-border e-commerce service for Southeast Asian (SEA) markets, which it formed through its existing operations in Thailand and through new alliances with local e-commerce platforms in Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

According to PChome's 2020 annual report, PChomeSEA benefits the company and its partners through various synergies in sales, marketing, payments, and logistics. And, it claims, the new alliance will assist "nearly one million SMEs [small and medium enterprises] in Taiwan in going overseas [and] enhancing the international visibility of Taiwanese products," and will create "a new niche for cross-border sales, and [build] a mutually beneficial and win-win Southeast Asian cross-border e-commerce sales ecology."

Taiwan's second-largest telecommunications company, Taiwan Mobile, and its subsidiary Momo—an online retailing brand consisting of internet, television, and catalog shopping channels—are also looking for opportunities to expand their business in Asia. In August 2021, Taiwan Mobile invested USD $20 million in Vietnam's largest e-commerce company, Tiki Corporation. Indicating that the small investment was a sign of greater things to come, Taiwan Mobile President Jamie Lin (林之晨) proclaimed that the alliance will "allow Taiwan Mobile and its subsidiary Momo to discover potential partners, break into the Southeast Asia market and create a new growth engine for Taiwan Mobile in the search for new development opportunities outside Taiwan, propelling it to move toward its goal of becoming a GSEA [Greater Southeast Asia] internet company."

With e-commerce sales in the Asia-Pacific expected to nearly double between 2021 and 2025 to USD $2 trillion, [2] Taiwan-based companies are constructing major logistics facilities to accommodate the movement of goods at home and around the region. In accordance with Taipei's mission to build e-commerce shipping warehouses in NSP countries, Ally Logistics Property (ALP), Taiwan's largest logistics property developer, announced in November 2021 that it will invest a total of USD $1 billion in Malaysia to build smart warehousing solutions. It has already started work on a USD $180 million logistics park with a smart warehousing facility in Bukit Raja, in the state of Selangor. In January, ALP's co-founder and CEO Charlie Chang told Asian tech media outlet *KrAsia* that his company plans to invest in Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines in coming years. Additionally, he stated that ALP intends to announce its Vietnam expansion plans later this year.

Public-Private Alignment

The Taiwan private sector's e-commerce alliances and logistics investments appear to be driven by business calculations that happen to align with Taipei's NSP. For example, ALP was founded in 2014 and was already involved in developing major e-commerce logistics facilities years before the introduction of the NSP. However, Taipei has taken a number of steps to foster the growth of Taiwan's cross-border e-commerce; and, in some cases, it has enlisted the help of local e-commerce companies in its promotional and diplomatic initiatives.

In July 2016, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) appointed PChome Online Founder and Chairman Jan Hung-tze (詹宏志) as one of Taiwan's delegates to the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC). President Tsai reappointed the business leader to the ABAC as an ambassador-at-large in 2018 due to his successful work in promoting Taiwan's vision of expanding e-commerce and digital trade among Southeast Asian countries.

PChome has also responded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' call last year for the Taiwan public and business community to support Lithuanian products amidst Lithuania's high-profile dispute with China. During an October 2021 business conference focusing on the promotion of cooperation between Taiwan and Lithuanian businesses, Jan Hung-tze announced that his company would launch a special gallery on its website for the promotion of Lithuanian products. A nonprofit marketing agency run by Lithuania's Ministry of Economy and Innovation later introduced an initiative to help Lithuanian businesses sell their products in Taiwan through the PChome platform. This effort to provide Lithuania with economic assistance via e-commerce comes as China exerts diplomatic and economic pressure on the Baltic state for its support of Taiwan.

Cross-border e-commerce and digital trade have become important agenda items for Taipei and its partners. After coming to power, the Tsai Administration continued to convene the Taiwan-US Digital Economy Forum, which was launched in December 2015 and was co-organized by Taiwan's National Development Council and the American Institute in Taiwan. More recently, Taiwan and the US have made "promoting the digital economy" a key topic of discussion during their annual US-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue (EPPD), the first meeting of which was convened in November 2020. The Tsai Administration has pursued a similar dialogue related to digital trade with the European Union, and has engaged private sector partners in countries such as Japan and Kenya to promote e-commerce and digital trade with Taiwan.

Thus far, however, Taipei's most expansive international project to advance Taiwan's e-commerce interests has been to join dozens of other governments in pushing for the World Trade Organization to start negotiations on e-commerce-related trade.

Both Taiwan's government and private sector are actively involved in training programs to help local companies take advantage of e-commerce opportunities. In January 2020, the Importers and Exporters Association of Taipei (台北市進出口商業同業公會) opened Taiwan's first international e-commerce incubation center in Taipei for the purpose of bringing qualified teachers and e-commerce business talent together. Over the last few years, Taipei has offered numerous training courses to local e-commerce professionals as well as overseas professionals, primarily in NSP countries.

Conclusion

The importance of cross-border e-commerce and digital trade to Taiwan's economy should not be overstated. Other industries like the country's semiconductor industry remain far more significant. Moreover, even if Taiwan is able to take advantage of e-commerce trends in coming years, it alone will not ensure the island-nation's successful integration into Asia-Pacific or global economies. Taipei and outside analysts generally agree that Taiwan needs to do far more to become more innovative. Additionally, many experts believe that if Taiwan fails to join a major existing or future trade bloc, it will eventually become uncompetitive in the global economy.

Nevertheless, cross-border e-commerce and digital trade represent avenues to economic growth and deeper trade ties for Taiwan that Beijing cannot prohibit. In January, PChomeSEA reported that its 2021 sales were approximately five times higher than in 2020, evidence that market diversification is already paying dividends for one of Taiwan's largest e-commerce companies.

At present, Beijing is determined to prevent Taiwan from joining new FTAs. Chinese officials claim that they object to any country allowing Taiwan to participate in a new FTA, as such an action would represent a violation of Beijing's "One-China Principle." However, China tolerated Taiwan's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2002. More recently, when cross-Strait economic ties were deepening significantly under the Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) Administration, Beijing turned a blind eye as Taiwan signed economic cooperation agreements with New Zealand and Singapore. In fact, China now objects to Taiwan joining new FTAs because it wants to force Taipei to choose "cross-Strait integrated development" (兩岸融合發展) as its path to economic integration with the Asia-Pacific and the world at large.

China is also sensitive to any perceived attempt to restrict cross-Strait economic ties. In 2020, Beijing accused Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party-led government of pursuing cross-Strait "decoupling" (脫鉤) after Taiwanese regulators moved to block Chinese over-the-top service provider iQiyi from operating in the Taiwan. Beijing lodged similar complaints after Taiwanese regulators ordered Alibaba's subsidiary e-commerce site Taobao Taiwan to either register as a Chinese company or leave.

Historically, Beijing has accepted that other countries will maintain unofficial economic and cultural relations with Taiwan. Even as it has sought to preempt efforts to include Taiwan in new FTAs, Beijing has not concerned itself with policing every business alliance, trade promotion activity, or overseas logistics facility in which a Taiwanese company is involved. To do so would be impractical, and such a heavy-handed approach could cause harm to China's image at a time when many countries are already reexamining the costs and benefits of their economic ties with China.

The main point: The expansion of Taiwan's cross-border e-commerce and digital trade in recent years is encouraging. It could potentially serve as a model for how Taiwan can use low-profile initiatives that align government priorities and private business interests to diversify the country's economic ties as it searches for a viable path to regional and global economic integration.

[1] For insights into Beijing's desire for political concessions see: Richard C. Bush, *Difficult Choices: Taiwan's Quest for Security and the Good Life* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2021), 64.

[2] In Southeast Asia alone, the internet economy is expected to grow from approximately USD $170 billion in gross merchandise volume (GMV) in 2021 to USD $360 billion by 2025, eventually reaching USD $1 trillion in GMV by 2030, according to a recent report by Google, Singapore state investor Temasek Holdings, and global business consultants Bain & Company, https://www.bain.com/insights/e-conomy-sea-2021/.

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Taiwan's "Third Force" Political Parties and the Legacy of the Sunflower Movement

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If policymakers and analysts want to understand how Taiwan's political landscape functions today, it is imperative to understand the Sunflower Movement and the watershed moment it created for electoral politics in Taiwan. Eight years have passed since the 2014 movement. Ever since this critical juncture in Taiwanese politics, the world of electoral politics in the island-democracy has changed. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) went from struggling electorally to dominating national elections, while the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) continues to struggle to keep up with the DPP's presidential success. One of the most important outcomes of the Sunflower Movement is the rise of new politicians and political parties that emerged out of this mass social movement. Although these new political parties are small, they continue to have a large imprint on Taiwan's electoral scene and its increasingly Taiwan-focused domestic political agenda.

What Was the Sunflower Movement?

The catalyst for the Sunflower Movement was the 2014 "Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement" (CSSTA, 海峽兩岸服務貿易協議), a treaty intended to facilitate trade between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The CSSTA was controversial for two main reasons. First, activists perceived that the contents of the bill disproportionately favored China, giving it exclusive access to much of Taiwan's service sector—which made up nearly 70 percent of Taiwan's GDP at the time. The second main controversy was the nature of negotiations: the specifics of the bill were negotiated behind closed doors in Shanghai by representatives of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) and the KMT. Once written and ready to go to Taiwan's Legislative Yuan (LY, 立法院), the bill was passed by the KMT without proper legislative review, and was formally discussed for only 30 seconds, a moment that became known as the "30 Second Incident." In the wake of these controversial events, people began paying attention to the agreement's contents and the context under which it was negotiated. Outrage ensued over the economic "black box" the bill put Taiwan into, as well as the KMT's seemingly anti-democratic and questionable method of passing the bill. Organizers began to call for activists to gather in Taipei, and on March 18th, the Sunflower Movement officially began.

The main site of protest centered around the Legislative Yuan. Activists broke into the LY and occupied it for the duration of the three-week-long protest. Outside the LY, activists set up areas to sleep, eat, shower, and engage with other protesters and organizers. When the demonstrations started, commentators primarily framed it as a student movement, but it quickly expanded to include more than just college-aged protesters. Hundreds of thousands of citizens soon joined in, either briefly or as full-time occupants inside the LY. Social science professors were even known to bring their classes to Sunflower protests to show real-life examples of civil disobedience and social protest. Tensions between protesters and police remained high throughout the occupation. At one point, protesters attempted to expand the occupation to the Executive Yuan building, leading to a brief but harsh crackdown by police, who deployed water cannons and beat protesters. Nevertheless, organizers and politicians tried their best to keep the peace for the remainder of the protest.

After almost a month of protest, the government shelved the CSSTA, handing the KMT a bitter defeat and making the Sunflower Movement one of the most successful protest movements in Taiwan's history. Following their victory, activists withdrew from the LY and student leaders turned themselves in to the authorities for having violated the law during the previous months. The Sunflower Movement's success mobilized a generation of Taiwanese youth into political participation. The movement was also critical in building momentum for Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) first presidential victory in 2016. For the next several years, dozens of Sunflower activists entered formal politics—with some joining the DPP, some remaining independent, and some joining what became known as "Third Force" (第三勢力) parties.

Image: Sunflower Movement protestors occupying the Legislative Yuan in spring 2014. (Image source: Commonwealth Magazine)

From the Sunflower Movement to Political Parties

The initial wave of Third Force parties to emanate out of the Sunflower Movement—including the New Power Party (NPP, 時代力量) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP, 社會民主黨)—shared similar politics. These parties were pro-independence, progressive, and adamantly opposed to the KMT, but were also highly critical of the DPP. In the 2016 election, the DPP struck an alliance with the NPP, the most popular of the new political parties to emerge. President Tsai endorsed several NPP politicians, including the then-new-to-politics rockstar Freddy Lim (林昶佐) and Sunflower Movement leader Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌). The friendship was tricky, however. From the DPP's perspective, the established green party "let" the NPP run against the KMT in certain districts. From the NPP's perspective, the DPP was giving them districts in which the DPP itself struggled to win, making it a low-cost move by the DPP. Only in one district did the NPP, DPP, and KMT all compete against each other, resulting in a DPP victory. To the surprise of many, the NPP still managed to win three district elections and received 6.1 percent of the party vote. [1]

After the initial success of the NPP in 2016, additional Third Force parties began to join Taiwan's political scene, including the Taiwan Statebuilding Party (TSP, 台灣基進) and Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je's (柯文哲) Taiwan People's Party (TPP, 台灣民眾黨). The TSP originally started as a political organization back in 2012, but only registered as a political party in 2016; and did not run any candidates until the 2018 local election. The party's first political victory came in 2020 with the surprise win of Chen Po-wei (陳柏惟) in Taichung. The TSP was unable to win enough party votes for any additional seats, but Chen's victory was enough to show the TSP's potential appeal. (Chen was later recalled in 2021, and subsequently replaced with DPP legislator Lin Ching-yi [林靜儀].)

Ko Wen-je is perhaps the most controversial figure to emerge out of Taiwan's Sunflower Movement. Originally lauded by most Sunflower Movement activists for his quirky, unabashed rhetoric, Ko's position as a registered independent was in line with many Sunflower activist's desire for non-DPP and non-KMT aligned politicians. In 2014, however, many saw Ko as at least somewhat pan-green leaning. In the years following 2016, Ko's politics became "bluer," as demonstrated by his commitment to Taipei-Shanghai relations and his infamous "Two Sides of the Strait, One Family" (兩岸一家親) platform. When Ko finally founded his own political party—the TPP—in 2019, it became clear that his platform was more light-blue than light-green. Just as parties like the NPP and TSP provide an alternative for pan-green voters, the TPP increasingly appeals to pan-blue voters as a non-KMT alternative.

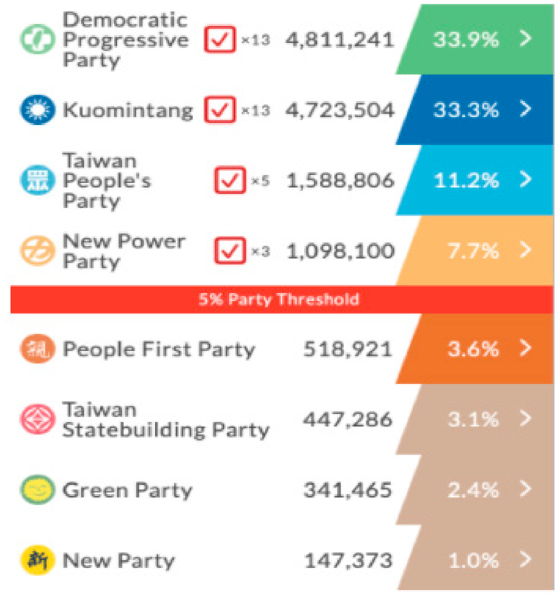
Not all Sunflower Movement activists joined a Third Force party. Some joined the DPP and have since become influential in their own right. Perhaps the most prominent example is Lai Pin-yu (賴品妤), the cosplaying activist-turned-politician. Her decision to run in 2020 was largely due to the choice by the NPP's Huang Kuo-Chang (黃國昌) not to run in their shared district. Out of fear of letting the KMT win the district back, Lai, whose father is also a former DPP legislator, decided to run. Her success has made her an icon for young politicians seeking to enter formal politics.

The Electoral Success of Sunflower Parties and Politicians

The 2020 election in particular demonstrates how strong third parties have become in Taiwan. Besides the TSP, no other Third Force party won a district election, but they had continued success in the party votes. The NPP received 7.7 percent of the proportional representation vote, enough for three legislators. Meanwhile, Ko's TPP won 11.2 percent of the vote, giving the party five legislators. Other activist-turned-politicians also saw success, including Freddy Lim and Lai Pin-yu, both of whom were re-elected and elected, respectively, in 2020.

When compared to the KMT or DPP presence in the Legislative Yuan, it is easy to look past the electoral success of third parties. However, their popularity and appeal should not be understated. Although the 2020 election was a sweeping success for Tsai and the DPP in district elections, the party vote tells a more complex story about which parties Taiwanese people support. When forced to choose between the DPP and KMT in most district elections, the DPP wins more often than not. But, the party vote provides an opportunity to see how Taiwanese voters genuinely feel about which party they support the most.

In the 2020 election, the DPP and KMT almost tied, with each receiving roughly one third of the party vote. Combined, third parties accounted for the last third of the party vote. This paints a much different picture of party support in Taiwan than a simple binary between the DPP and KMT. Instead, we see that there is real demand for other options beyond the big two parties. In fact, roughly one third of Taiwanese voters will support a third party if given the opportunity to do so.



Graphic: The results of the 2020 election party vote (Graphic source: The News Lens)

Why Do These Sunflower-Based Parties and Politicians Matter?

Not only have these parties enjoyed electoral success, but they have historically tended to push Taiwan's domestic political agenda in a more pro-independence direction. Parties such as the NPP or TSP are often more outspoken on pro-independence policies than the DPP. Perhaps the best examples of their policy agendas in action are the new Taiwan passport cover, or the push for the government to change the official name of "China Airlines." Originally proposed by the TSP and NPP, these two policy proposals show how pro-independence parties in Taiwan are pushing the agenda in a more pro-Taiwan, and less Republic of China (ROC)-focused direction. The TSP and NPP's original hope with the passport change was to completely remove any sort of ROC symbology and only have "Taiwan" appear on the passport, a move viewed by many as a step towards *de jure* independence. The DPP, as the pragmatic and moderate pro-Taiwan party, managed to compromise with them: the word "Taiwan" is now larger in English, while the name "Republic of China" (中華民國) in Mandarin remains unchanged.

Without the NPP or TSP, a passport cover change would likely have never happened. But combined with the DPP, this became a celebrated success for all pan-Green parties. Although these pan-Green parties are not always allied with each other, they have nevertheless demonstrated the ability to pull the DPP in a more pro-independence direction.

Given the electoral success of Sunflower parties, policymakers and those committed to expanding the US-Taiwan relationship should be aware of the extent to which support for political parties in Taiwan varies. Although the DPP and KMT are often depicted as the only two parties in town, third parties are not only electorally popular, but also play a growing role in domestic politics. While surveys continuously show that Taiwanese citizens are increasingly likely to identify as exclusively Taiwanese, this by no means translates neatly into clear support (or lack of support) for a particular political party or political agenda. The more nuanced observers can become at understanding the complexity behind Taiwanese political identities, the better that US-Taiwan relations can develop.

The main point: Taiwan's Sunflower Movement was a watershed moment for Taiwanese politics. Understanding how these parties formed out of the Sunflower Movement, and how they affect domestic Taiwan politics, is critical for politicians and policy makers in both Taiwan and the United States.

[1] For those unfamiliar with Taiwan's electoral system, Taiwan uses a mixed system of both "first-past-the-post" and proportional representation voting. When citizens go to the polls on national election days, they cast three ballots: first for the president, then for their district representative, and finally for which party they support the most. The first two votes are first-past-the-post, meaning the victor is whoever receives the most votes. The party vote, however, gives certain parties a number of seats based on the proportion of votes they receive. For example, the NPP in 2016 received 7 percent of the proportional representation votes, giving them an additional two seats in the Legislative Yuan.

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Examining the Roles of the UN, Europe, and the US if China Invades Taiwan

By: Jagannath Panda

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In her inaugural address in 2020, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) reiterated her support for "peace, parity, democracy, and dialogue," while strongly rejecting China's "One Country, Two Systems" (一國兩制) policy as a tool to "downgrade" Taiwan and "undermine the cross-Strait status quo." China's recent military aggressiveness toward Taiwan suggests that Beijing has abandoned any adherence to the "status quo." In 2021, Taiwan reported about 1,000 People's Liberation Army (PLA) incursions into its air defense identification zone (ADIZ), nearly thrice the number (380) seen in 2020. According to Chinese state media, the PLA has increased its "warplane activity" and "routine" military drills to enhance "combat readiness," as well as to deter Taiwanese "secessionists" and US-led "foreign interference."

Concurrently, since 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) has been reiterating that China "must and will be reunified," and has reserved "the option of taking all necessary measures," including the use of force. Like Russian President Vladimir Putin, Xi has invoked history to justify "reunification," "drawn from the evolution of cross-Straits relations over the past seven decades." During the Ukraine crisis, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also repeatedly emphasized Taiwan's status as an "inalienable part of China." Understandably, Taiwan—which has always been concerned about China attacking the island when the world is distracted—has been immeasurably impacted by the war unfolding in Ukraine, especially in light of the China-Russia "no limits" friendship commitment and Russia's total opposition to Taiwan's independence in any form.

Although a Taiwan Ministry of National Defense 2020 report indicated that the PLA did not have the military capability to launch a full assault on Taiwan yet, the Chinese military has increased its posturing through "gray-zone" operations—infiltrative warfare tactics combined with aggressive rhetoric from Beijing. Further, the 2021 US Department of Defense annual report *Military and Security Developments Involving the*

People's Republic of China warned of the PLA's capabilities to launch "various amphibious operations short of a full-scale invasion of Taiwan," and that the PLA is building up its full-scale invasion capacity.

As a result, Taiwan has intensified its defense efforts—including increasing its asymmetric capabilities—to contain any contingency and frustrate China's goal of achieving a "quick end game." Tsai has been pursuing a military modernization program based on the strategy of "resolute defense and multi-domain deterrence" in order to develop a "maneuverable, compact, and integrated" defense force across domains. Additionally, the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense will likely be allocated a "special budget for new fighter acquisition" of about NTD $247.2 billion (USD $8.7 billion) during financial years 2020-2026. This emphasis on self-reliance has become significant under the shadow of the war in Ukraine.

Against this backdrop of volatility—in concert with the all-out push to avoid unnecessary war in Asia—today's exigent circumstances call for an immediate and urgent debate on the imminent Taiwan contingency. How can and should the international community respond in the event of China's forceful occupation of Taiwan? What is the relative viability of each option? To what extent has the Ukraine crisis spurred a united global response to blatant acts of aggression? Would the defense of Taiwan ultimately be a lone mission with scattered, self-interested international support? Or will the United States be able to galvanize its Indo-Pacific partnerships and coalitions to unambiguously support Taiwan?

Coordinating an Effective UN Response?

China has repeatedly blocked Taiwan from rejoining the United Nations (UN) based on the 1971 UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 (XXVI), which recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the sole legitimate government of China. The resolution has now become the PRC's primary tool to legitimize its claims on Taiwan. Due to its growing clout, Beijing has also been successful in blocking Taiwan's entry into UN-affiliated organizations like the World Health Organization. Additionally, the PRC has been successful in reducing the number of Taipei's diplomatic allies to 14. Thus, considering the UN's lack of support for Taiwan's membership as well as China's veto power, a meaningful UN action in the event of Beijing's forceful occupation will be no easy feat—particularly when Taipei lacks a voice within the forum. The UN's toothless responses to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and invasion of Ukraine in 2022 do not offer much hope either.

The Crimean annexation was a clear violation of international law as set under the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum of Security Assurances for Ukraine, and the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and Russia. Yet, the UN's actions remained constrained to General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions condemning the occupation and urging a withdrawal, alongside expressions of concern over the militarization of Crimea and calls to uphold the treaties in place. Similar apathy and helplessness were evident in the wake of the 2022 Ukraine invasion, despite emergency sessions condemning Russia for violations and urging member states to "take sides."

Ultimately, any UN response is dependent on the political and security will of member states. Considering Taiwan's non-state status, however, devising any UN action to protect the island's sovereignty under a legal framework will be exceedingly complex. With China and Russia likely to veto any such move, a resolution condemning Beijing's potential forceful occupation would be contingent on a majority vote in the UNGA. Further, a military response—even if only limited to forming a peacekeeping operation—is unlikely. The UNGA's success in garnering majority support for Taiwan could potentially translate into approving harsh economic sanctions. However, due to China's immense global influence, great power status, and deep economic integration with the global economy, such sanctions would be highly influenced by political dynamics and would therefore be difficult to impose. Thus, a viable UN response would likely be contingent on long-overdue UNSC reforms that "reflect 21st century realities."

Projecting a European Response

Notably, the European Union (EU) is gradually recognizing the direct importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait for European security and economic prosperity. Since 2016, the EU has committed to developing its relations with Taiwan on the basis of shared values of democracy and rule of law, while promoting "practical solutions regarding Taiwan's participation in international frameworks," but only if these efforts are consistent with the "One-China Policy" that the EU supports. A US-China conflict over the Taiwan Strait would bring about massive economic repercussions for Europe, which is deeply intertwined with China's supply chains and reliant on the Chinese economy as its largest trade partner.

Further, it is unlikely that the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) will be a part of a US-led military response to Taiwan. Even with the invasion in Ukraine, which is not a NATO member but a "distinctive" partner, NATO has refused to intervene militarily, limiting itself to condemnation and backing qualified sanctions. In particular, France and Germany, which have strong military presences and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific, are pushing for autonomy (the "Third Way") and would be unlikely to join the US cause, particularly in a military capacity.

Hence, although the EU has resolved to use "every available channel" to promote "dialogue, cooperation, and confidence-building between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait," the expectation of a unified European response—especially militarily—beyond a conflict resolution engagement seems overly ambitious.

The US Security Umbrella: A Joint Strategy in the Indo-Pacific?

In 2021, a US think tank ranked the Taiwan flashpoint for the first time as a "tier I risk," defined as an event with a moderate likelihood of occurrence but with a high impact on US interests. The United States, which has treaty alliances with Japan and South Korea, has a considerable military presence in East Asia and the Taiwan Strait, making it the region's biggest security provider. Therefore, any discussion on defending Taiwan against a potential forceful occupation by China would naturally revolve around US military activism and political will.

For decades, the United States has employed a policy of "strategic ambiguity" toward Taiwan. That is, it supports Taiwan's self-defense capabilities, including arms sales, in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances. Similarly, the United States included Taiwan as a regional partner in its latest Indo-Pacific strategy, but does not support Taiwan's independence, and continues to adhere to the "One-China Policy." So far, this approach has effectively deterred Beijing. Yet, in the event of an invasion by China, the United States will have to voice a clearer stance, as the bluff would have been called.

Fortunately, the on-ground realities are not so ambiguous. The United States has not only been reinforcing its military support to Taiwan in terms of training exercises and patrols, but has also been strengthening its alliance system in the Indo-Pacific, especially since the Biden Administration took office. In the event of an attack, the United States could marshal support from a variety of multilateral arrangements. These include the US-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with Australia, Japan, and India, which has so far not dealt with the Taiwan question; the (controversial) AUKUS (Australia-US-UK) security pact, which has allowed Australia to move away from its hedging strategy; and the "Five Eyes" Anglosphere intelligence-sharing network. For Japan and Australia, who share bilateral security treaty alliances with the United States, any response to Taiwan's forceful occupation would likely be well-coordinated with the United States.

At the same time, the domestic imperatives of the Quad partners such as Japan and India could pose a hindrance to coordinating a consolidated military response. Tokyo's strong economic ties with Beijing, and Delhi's continuous cautious approach on China as a neighbor, will act as barriers. This is not unlike what is happening in Eastern Europe, where Ukraine's self-reliance on asymmetric war tactics has allowed it to hold its own thus far despite limited support from European neighbors.

Taiwan is not Ukraine, neither strategically nor geographically. Unlike Ukraine, Taiwan is "a mountainous smattering of islands" separated by a 100-mile-wide sea, whose security is closely connected with US credibility and its democratic values-based system—not to mention the "existential threat" a takeover of Taiwan would pose to other countries in the region. As such, a Ukraine-like scenario in the Taiwan Strait is unlikely. Even so, this does not preclude the fear that US alliances will turn out to be little more than normative mechanisms, in the event that Chinese aggression against

Taiwan goes unchecked.

The main point: A Taiwan contingency plan is not an easy endeavor. The United States needs to have strategic clarity as much as its Indo-Pacific partners. The Ukraine crisis, though different, must encourage the Indo-Pacific partners to chart out strategic clarity on Taiwan.