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By: Russell Hsiao

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Recent Espionage Cases Highlight Taiwan’s Counterintelligence Woes

In a quiet escalation of tensions in the Taiwan Strait over recent months, Taiwanese authorities in late October brought in [three former officers](#) from Taiwan’s Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB, 軍情局)—the equivalent of the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)—for questioning. Investigators there believe that the three retired intelligence professionals have been engaged in [espionage activities](#) on behalf of China’s security services. These allegations by Taiwanese officials responsible for counterintelligence represent the latest in a string of cases—mostly involving junior officers over the past decade afflicting the MIB—that seem to underscore the growing woes of Taiwanese efforts to counter China’s incessant espionage operations and attempts to penetrate the island’s security apparatuses. The recent case involving the three retired officers from the island’s reclusive military intelligence agency sent a shockwave through the [Taiwanese security community](#), as investigators [alleged](#) that the retired senior operators and analysts may have passed confidential information to China’s security services.

In the span of several days in late October, Taiwanese investigators brought in Major General (ret.) Yueh Chih-chung (岳志忠), Colonel (ret.) Chang Chao-jan (張超然), and Colonel (ret.) Chou Tien-tzu (周天慈), who were [suspected](#) of spying on behalf of the PRC. The three officers—who are all now in their 70s—were all formerly members of the MIB’s Fifth Division (軍情局第五處). This division is responsible for scientific and technological intelligence, covert intelligence, and intelligence briefings that are provided to senior government officials to assist with making national security decisions. In addition to providing intelligence to the Ministry of National Defense, the MIB occasionally provides intelligence analysis reports to other government agencies—ostensibly making the chance for leaks

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less given the fewer number of clients and thus making MIB a [prime infiltration target](#) for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Among the three retired MIB officers, the most senior-ranking is Yueh, who was formerly a director of the Fifth Division and was [reportedly](#) among the first batch of covert operatives dispatched to Beijing following the opening of cross-strait exchanges. He also served as [station chief](#) in Hong Kong for the MIB. After retirement, Yueh has served as a vice chairman of the ROC Loyal Comrade Association (中華民國忠義同志會)—a civic association founded and largely comprised of former officers from the MIB. Among the three, the most serious case seems to be Chang, who was denied bail by the judge upon the prosecutors' request due to concerns that he could be a flight risk. Taiwanese investigators [alleged](#) that Chang had participated in monthly gatherings with retired MIB officers in an effort to identify and recruit others to spy on behalf of the PRC. Prosecutors also claimed that Chang and Chou have been making trips to China since 2013. Further, they are alleged to have [lured Yueh](#) with trips to China between 2016-18, where he purportedly met with members of China's security services and may have leaked confidential information at the behest of Chang.

Given the role of the MIB and its precursors as the intelligence arm of the military during the civil war, the MIB has long been a prime Chinese intelligence target. As Captain (ret.) Bernard D. Cole noted in his seminal book on Taiwan's security apparatuses, *"Taiwan's Security: History and Prospects (Asian Security Studies)"*:

"The Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB) comes with a very checkered historical background, descending from units organized during the earliest days of the revolution, heavily politicized, and completely controlled by the KMT. Today's MIB is responsible for signals intelligence, reportedly cooperating with US intelligence agencies. The Bureau also conducts human intelligence-gathering and is an organ of Taiwan's national intelligence structure. It can no longer depend on a powerful political officer system, embedded in an officer corps belonging to the KMT, but almost certainly retains a strong KMT coloration." [1]

Prior to Yueh, Chang, and Chou, the most recent and perhaps serious of known instances of an MIB officer

having been recruited by China to conduct espionage was the case of [Major Wang Tsung-wu](#) (王宗武) in 2016. Wang, who was still in active service when he was [recruited](#), had been sent undercover to China reportedly on four separate occasions over the years 1992-1994. However, it was later revealed that he had been recruited by China's security services and became a double agent, subsequently spying for the PRC for more than 10 years. During this period, Wang was suspected of having received around USD \$100,000 in payments from China's security services, in addition to other in-kind favors. Wang allegedly recruited another former intelligence officer at the MIB and transferred sensitive intelligence to the other side.

While the potential recruitment of intelligence professionals, serving or retired, are serious matters that merit their own categories of concerns, these cases also serve to highlight the broader counterintelligence woes of Taiwan. In 2018, [Taipei revealed that it had uncovered](#) 52 Chinese espionage cases involving 174 individuals in that year alone. According to the country's [Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau](#) (MJIB, 法務部調查局)—one of three main intelligence services in Taiwan—Chinese spies are using exchange activities as a cover to collect intelligence, infiltrate, and recruit members to develop spy rings on the island. To put the recent figure into [perspective](#), "between 2002 and 2016, 56 individuals have been charged in Taiwan as clandestine agents of the MSS or PLA."

While it is reasonable to presume that the number of identified cases could reflect in part Taiwan's increased capability to detect potential cases of intelligence breaches, it is still troubling to see the growing number of intelligence professionals—retired or otherwise—who are being lured by China to spy on its behalf, presumably for financial and other reasons. Taiwan is not alone in having to deal with these threats. In fact, these cases in Taiwan also dovetail with a number of [high-profile cases](#) involving retired [US intelligence professionals](#) who have been apprehended for stealing secrets on behalf of the PRC.

The disclosure from Taiwan follows three consecutive days of a high-profile feature on Chinese state-run television, wherein authorities there broadcasted the confessions by alleged Taiwanese spies accused of spying by China in a campaign dubbed [Xunlei-2020](#) (迅

雷-2020). While claims of espionage are nothing new in cross-strait relations, these cases have shone an undesired but perhaps necessary spotlight on the MIB. Furthermore, these cases are appearing as tensions between the Taiwan and China are ratcheting up, with observers [arguing](#) that military tensions are at perhaps their highest point since the 1995-96 missile crisis.

In reference to the case involving the three senior intelligence officers, Gu Kung-chien (顧功鍵), a reserve colonel and formerly a director at an intelligence college run by the MIB, told the [local media](#): “Our [Taiwan’s] intelligence collection budget is limited; on the other hand, the mainland’s intelligence collection budget is relatively abundant, making it more difficult for operations.”

The main point: Recent cases involving China’s recruitment of retired intelligence officers in Taiwan have sent shockwaves throughout the island’s security community, underscoring the need for reform and additional resources.

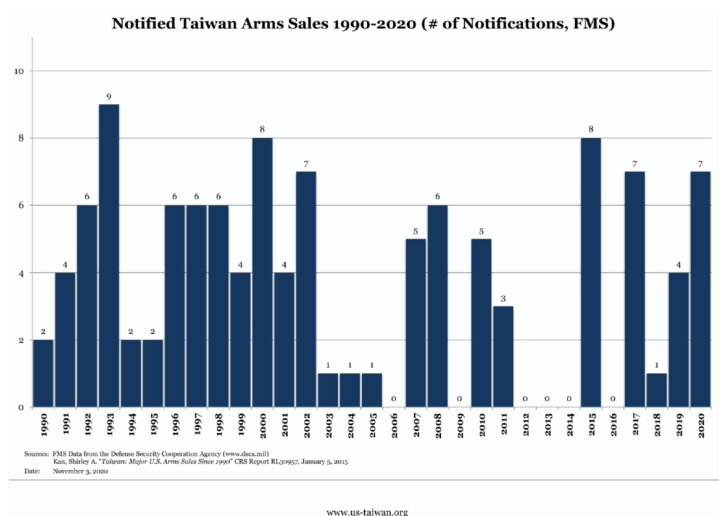
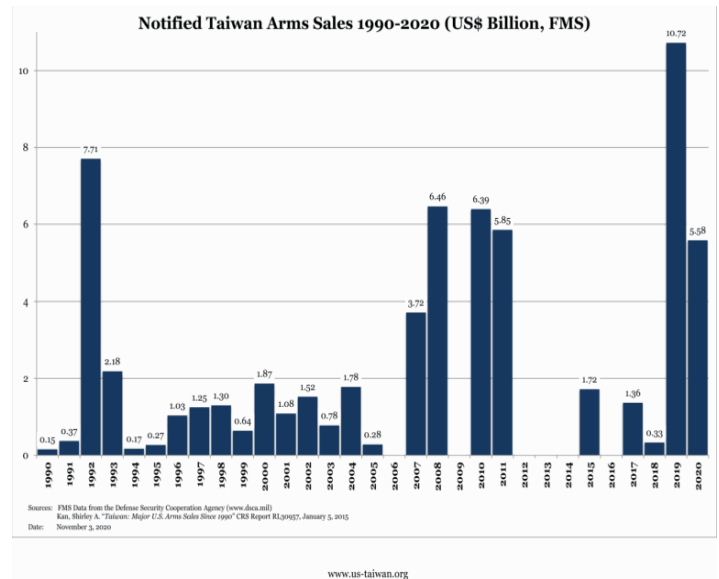
[1] Cole, B. D. (2008). *Taiwan’s Security: History and Prospects*. London: Routledge.

US Authorizes Record Amount of Arms Sales to Taiwan as Tensions Mount

As China ramps up its military coercion of Taiwan with almost daily intrusions into the island’s airspace—including 20 such intrusions just in November—the US top diplomat in Taiwan Brent Christensen publicly held up the country as one of America’s top security partners in the world. Speaking in terms of US arms sales to the island democracy, Taiwan was America’s top arms sales recipient in Asia and second only to US treaty ally Japan in 2020. According to data compiled by the US-Taiwan Business Council (USTBC)—which tracks the amount and number of notified arms sales to Taiwan—the US government notified more in arms sales to Taiwan by measure of amount in 2019 than in any previous year in the past three decades.

The amount of arms sales approved for Taiwan under the Trump administration has been unprecedented. Since the beginning of the Trump administration in 2017, the United States has issued 19 notifications to Congress of arms sales to Taiwan, for a total amount

of USD \$17.99 billion. This represents a significant increase from the Obama administration, which issued only 16 notifications from when it took office in 2009 through 2016 for a total amount of USD \$13.96 billion.



(Charts courtesy of [US-Taiwan Business Council](#))

According to Christensen, the director of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT)—the *de facto* US embassy in Taiwan—these sales are consistent with long-standing US policy. Referencing the declassification of previously classified memorandums related to Taiwan, Christensen [alluded](#) to the Six Assurances to Taiwan as justification for continued US arms sales to Taiwan, adding that these arms sales were critical for Taiwan’s defense as well as for augmenting the island’s asym-

metric warfare capabilities.

In addition to the aforementioned memos, the US National Security Council (NSC) released a significant [declassified memo](#) in September 2019. The document, written by President Ronald Reagan in 1982, emphasized that any reduction in arms sales to Taiwan would be premised on peace in the Taiwan Strait and China's declared "fundamental policy" of a peaceful resolution to the question of Taiwan. Reagan [added](#) that "the US willingness to reduce its arms sales to Taiwan is conditioned absolutely upon the continued commitment of China to the peaceful solution of the Taiwan-PRC differences. It should be clearly understood that the linkage between these two matters is a permanent imperative of US foreign policy." "It is essential that the quantity and quality of the arms provided Taiwan be conditioned entirely on the threat posed by the PRC. Both in quantitative and qualitative terms, Taiwan's defense capability relative to that of the PRC will be maintained," Reagan emphasized.

As noted by GTI Advisor [Shirley Kan](#):

"The NSC's release of this memo is overdue and puts the guidance in the unclassified, official record for Congress in its oversight and other actions. [...] The memo enables consistency in policy rather than Presidential whims affecting arms sales. Finally, the memo enhances strategic communication that counters China's constant false narratives about the United States, Taiwan, and other countries."

In late August of 2020, the United States again declassified two additional sets of diplomatic communications from 1982 relating to Taiwan arms sales, as well as Washington's "Six Assurances" to Taiwan. Publicly announcing the declassification of those memos, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs [David Stilwell](#) stated: "It is important to review history like this because Beijing has a habit of distorting it."

According to *Voice of America*, "experts have argued that even though the United States is not setting new precedents in its relationship with Taiwan, the reassurances communicated by declassifying the 1982 cables seem new. 'They rarely mentioned the Six Assurances publicly,' said [Bonnie Glaser](#), director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and In-

ternational Studies in Washington, 'so this is an effort to elevate their importance.'"

The main point: The United States approved more arms sales to Taiwan in 2019 in terms of dollar amount than in any previous years as China ramps up military coercion of Taiwan.

Steps Forward in Taiwan-Netherlands Relations

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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

On November 3 and 10, [the Netherlands](#) joined Taiwan, the United States, and Japan in co-hosting the first sessions on the circular economy and marine waste issues under the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF, 全球合作暨訓練架構). The Netherlands is the fourth country to co-host the US-Taiwan collaborative platform after [Japan, Sweden, and Australia](#) recently joined as GCTF partners. The two virtual GCTF meetings, which included representatives from [16 countries](#), discussed sustainable materials management solutions to marine debris, particularly focusing on leveraging the circular economy to address global marine waste. The event was co-organized with the [Dutch representative office in Taiwan](#) for the first time amid a [broadening of exchanges](#) between the two sides. While economic and political ties between the Netherlands and China are likely to remain strong over the short term, Taipei and Amsterdam can seek to expand economic and trade ties, as well as improve cooperation in several other areas, including science and technology and public health and medicine.

China's Elevated Role in Dutch Policy

The Dutch government has placed prime importance on building relations with China and securing opportunities for [Dutch companies and knowledge institutions](#), despite warnings from [European partners](#) and [the United States](#) against overreliance on China's economy. "Although in practice we are in many ways closer to the US than to China, we always make our own considerations and strive for broad and close relations

with China,” stated the Dutch government’s [China policy memorandum](#) released last year. Indeed, the Netherlands is a founding member of the China-led [Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank](#) (AIIB) and has actively embraced China’s “[Belt and Road Initiative](#)” (BRI, formerly “One Belt, One Road,” 一帶一路). Amsterdam believes that the [BRI](#) can offer Dutch companies logistical opportunities, transport options, and open up relatively underdeveloped areas for investment. More broadly, Amsterdam seeks to reap benefits from [China’s economic development](#) and assist Dutch companies in gaining access to [Chinese markets, talent pool, and knowledge infrastructure](#).

The Sino-Dutch trade and financial relationship is deeply intertwined in ways that increase the difficulty of forcing Dutch divestment from the Chinese economy. China ranks as the Netherlands’ [largest trading partner](#) in Asia, with two-way trade reaching [USD \\$85 billion](#) in 2018. The Chinese are also its [second-largest foreign investor](#), as China’s accumulated investment in the Netherlands reached USD \$18.5 billion at the end of 2017. Meanwhile, the Netherlands—referred to by Chinese state media as China’s “[gateway to Europe](#)”—is also China’s [second-largest trade partner](#) and [largest importer of Chinese goods](#) among European Union (EU) member states, as well as the [third-largest investor](#) in China among EU countries. Nearly [900 Dutch companies](#) have operations in China.

Furthermore, the Dutch government has invested significant diplomatic capital to boost economic ties and global governance cooperation with China, including on [climate change](#). Since taking office in 2010, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte traveled to China in [2013](#), [2015](#), twice in [2018](#), and in [2019](#). King of the Netherlands Willem-Alexander also visited China in [2015](#) and [2018](#) after ascending the throne in 2013. [Taiwanese media](#) reported that a Dutch newspaper once satirized the Dutch heads of state by depicting them as queuing to go to Beijing in order to strengthen relations with the world’s second-largest economy. Beyond leadership visits, all [Dutch ministries](#) and various government agencies have ongoing dealings with China. The Netherlands’ [largest diplomatic mission](#) is in China, with representation consisting of the Dutch embassy in Beijing, four consulates-general, and six business support offices.

Concerns over Cyber Security and Human Rights

While high-level contacts between the Dutch and Chinese governments remain strong, public sentiment in the Netherlands is souring. According to a [Pew Research Center](#) survey released in October 2020, Dutch public opinion on China has reached a new low. In 2020, [70 percent](#) of people polled in the Netherlands say they distrust Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) and “have no confidence in him to do the right thing in world affairs,” representing an increase of [17 percentage points](#) since last year. Overall, [73 percent](#) of those surveyed in the Netherlands hold unfavorable views of China, compared to [25 percent](#) who have favorable views of China.

The Netherlands was the first EU member state to issue a [China strategy paper](#) in May 2019. The paper stressed potential [security issues](#)—including economic security, cyber espionage, and undesirable influence—raised by China’s growing influence in Europe and around the world. The [policy document](#) stated that “despite the good relations between our countries, China poses a substantial cyber threat to the Netherlands.” Indeed, the [Dutch General Intelligence and Security Agency](#) (AIVD) warned in 2017 that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was utilizing the latest communications technology and 5G to engage in espionage. [AIVD](#) has advised the Dutch government not to use technology from China and Russia in its new 5G telecommunications network in the coming years.

Furthermore, the Dutch government has expressed concerns about human rights and religious freedom in China. During Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s (王毅) visit to the Netherlands in August, Dutch Foreign Minister [Stef Blok](#) raised concerns about human rights in China and the potential of China’s national security law to erode Hong Kong’s autonomy. [Blok](#) also called attention to “the restriction of freedom of religion and belief in China, which affects in particular Muslims, Christians, and Tibetan Buddhists.” [Dutch lawmakers](#) used Wang’s visit to call for tougher action against Beijing and argued there cannot be “business as usual” with China while the suppression of religious minority populations continues. “Given that Taiwan and Netherlands share the values of freedom, democracy, and a rules-based order, both sides should work together to combat disinformation and boost information securi-

ty,” commented [President Tsai Ing-wen](#) (蔡英文).

Bolstering Taiwanese-Dutch Relations

Amsterdam has adopted a [“One-China Policy,”](#) “under which it recognizes the government of the People’s Republic of China (in Beijing) as China’s only legitimate government.” According to [the Dutch policy memorandum on China](#), Amsterdam is “alert to attempts by China to restrict the scope that exists within the framework of the ‘One-China Policy’ for maintaining good relations with Taiwan, since this would harm Dutch [economic and other interests](#).” In the absence of official relations, the Dutch government has strong economic, cultural, and scientific ties with Taiwan, which are promoted through its representative office in Taipei.

Indeed, the Netherlands is a strategic economic and trade partner for Taiwan, specifically for its semiconductor industry. The Netherlands constitutes Taiwan’s [top European trade partner](#) and [largest foreign investor](#) in cumulative and yearly terms. The Netherlands became Taiwan’s [10th largest trading partner](#) last year after bilateral trade reached a new height of [USD \\$13.7 billion](#), up [41 percent](#) from 2018. Dutch cumulative investments reached a total of [USD \\$35.4 billion](#) between 1952 and 2019, accounting for [20 percent](#) of total foreign investment in Taiwan.

Most Dutch investments have poured into Taiwan’s semiconductor industry, and the Dutch company [ASML](#)—the largest global supplier of photolithography for the semiconductor industry—has been a major investor in Taiwan. Both Taiwan and the Netherlands are small countries with large [semiconductor companies](#) that supply a huge global market. In addition, [at least 10 Dutch companies](#) have invested in the development of the offshore wind energy industry in Taiwan. This investment is emblematic of the enhanced cooperation in [science and technology](#), [agriculture](#), and the [circular economy](#). The Tsai administration has expressed hope that robust exchanges with Dutch officials can help kick-start negotiations with the EU on a [bilateral investment agreement](#).

Dutch Representative Office Name Change

In April, [the Netherlands Trade and Investment Office](#) (荷蘭貿易暨投資辦事處) changed its name to the [Netherlands Office Taipei](#) (荷蘭在台辦事處). “By tak-

ing out the words ‘trade and investment,’ we have become more inclusive of all the other areas we are collaborating on. So clearly, less here is much more,” said [Guy Wittich](#), who served as the Dutch Representative in Taiwan at the time. Taiwan’s Foreign Minister [Joseph Wu](#) (吳釗燮) cited the name change as evidence that “the relationship between Taiwan and the Netherlands has continued to strengthen.” Some media outlets in Taiwan viewed the name change as a [“huge move”](#) in diplomatic terms, calling it a [“breakthrough”](#) for Taiwan’s external relations. The renaming of the Dutch representative office followed similar changes to the official names of other foreign representative offices in Taiwan—including those of the [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#), and [Japan](#)—over the past several years.

As expected, the [Chinese Embassy](#) in the Hague expressed outrage at the name change, lodging a complaint to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A Chinese commentator said that renaming the Dutch representative office suggests that the Netherlands intends to boost cooperation with Taiwan beyond trade—particularly in the [diplomatic and national security arenas](#)—calling it a [“provocative move.”](#) The Dutch behavior may trigger similar moves from other European countries to challenge the “One-China Principle,” according to an editorial in the Chinese state-run *Global Times*.

Furthermore, [Chinese netizens](#) called for a boycott of all Dutch products, as well as a ban on the provision of Chinese medical supplies to the Netherlands amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In April, the Netherlands reported more than [37,000](#) confirmed cases for a population of only [17.3 million](#). Amsterdam has been dependent on imports of [Chinese medicines](#), with half of the raw materials to produce antibiotics coming from China. Yet, this very dependence on China in the healthcare sector could become leverage for Beijing to [threaten](#) and exact punishment on the Dutch government for expanding cooperative relations with Taiwan. Alternatively, Amsterdam could pursue a more beneficial partnership with Taiwan—a leading authority on public health and medicine—which also donated [60,000 face masks](#) to the Netherlands, including [orange-tinted face masks](#) representing the Dutch national color.

Given the interdependence of the Dutch and Chinese economies and the robust government-to-government and industry-to-industry exchanges between the two

countries, sudden and complete Dutch divestment from China is unlikely in the short run. Therefore, the Netherlands will continue to grapple with China's role and rising influence in Europe and abroad. Nonetheless, there is still room for Taiwan and the Netherlands to bolster ties. Taiwanese-Dutch partnership in public health is a promising area for enhanced cooperation. Strengthened exchanges could alleviate Amsterdam's dependence on Chinese medical supplies and expertise, which could be used as a political tool against growing Dutch cooperation with Taiwan, particularly during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The main point: The Dutch government has made strong relations with China a foreign-policy priority. Nonetheless, there is still room for Taiwan to collaborate with the Netherlands in an unofficial capacity and expand multifaceted cooperation.

The “1992 Consensus” and the Illusion of Detente in the Taiwan Strait

By: J. Michael Cole

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Former President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) told a [forum](#) on November 7, 2020, that Beijing and Taipei should recommit to the so-called “1992 Consensus” (九二共識) to reduce the risk of war in the Taiwan Strait, adding that he was open to the idea of a meeting between the leaders from both sides. Organized by Chinese Culture University (中國文化大學) and the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation (馬英九基金會), the forum coincided with the fifth anniversary of Ma's historic 2015 meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Secretary General Xi Jinping (習近平), in Singapore.

Cross-Strait Peace during Ma Ying-jeou's Administration?

As tensions between Taipei and Beijing have risen since 2016, Ma has [consistently and repeatedly blamed](#) the Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) administration for stoking tensions in the Taiwan Strait. According to Ma, President Tsai has contributed to the tensions by (a) refusing to

embrace the “1992 Consensus”—a foundational element of his cross-strait policy from 2008-2016—and (b) by overly prioritizing Taiwan's relations with the United States at the expense of cross-strait relations.

Since 2016, the Tsai government has countered that although it [recognizes the “historical fact”](#) that a meeting between representatives from both sides did occur in 1992, it maintains that no actual consensus ever existed. It adds, furthermore, that it is [illusory](#) to believe that the CCP subscribes—as Ma does—to the tenet that the two sides can hold different interpretations of what “One-China” (一個中國) signifies. While Ma got away with this construct in the early days of his administration—due in large part to the fact that his counterpart in China at the time, CCP Secretary General Hu Jintao (胡錦濤), was much less assertive than the man who succeeded him in November 2012—the notion that Beijing under Xi could countenance two conflicting definitions of “One-China” and therefore the possibility of “two Chinas,” is untenable (in his remarks, Xi makes it clear that the “One-China Principle” underpins the “1992 Consensus”). Much more forcefully than his predecessor, Xi has [emphasized](#) that there is only one China—the People's Republic of China (PRC)—and that Taiwan is a province within it, one that awaits “reunification” under the “one country, two systems” (一國兩制) formula.

Although Ma called on Beijing to halt the incessant incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) by the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) in his [November 7 remarks](#)—arguing that they only cause antipathy among the Taiwanese—his comments over the years have made it clear that he largely blames President Tsai for the current state of affairs. Much like Beijing, he [contends](#) that increased Chinese belligerence is *in reaction to* moves by the Tsai administration that destabilized the relationship by prioritizing the United States over China, rather than Chinese aggressive behavior being the very cause of Taipei's decision to get closer to the United States. In other words, Ma paints Chinese belligerence as *defensive*—the result of provocation—rather than it being the source of instability in the Taiwan Strait and across the region.

Since 2016, Ma has not only ignored President Tsai's repeated attempts to extend an olive branch to Chi-

na by suggesting [a meeting with her Chinese counterpart](#) without preconditions—offers that were immediately spurned by Beijing—but he has also refused to acknowledge that even under his watch, when Taipei abided by the “1992 Consensus” and encouraged bilateral rapprochement, the CCP was continuing its massive military buildup against Taiwan. During that period, the PLA continued to [modernize its forces](#), [acquire various platforms that would play a role in an amphibious assault on Taiwan](#), and hold exercises in preparation for an attack on Taiwan, complete with a [simulation of the Presidential Office in Taipei](#). (Military drills in the Taiwan Strait continued during the Ma administration but were described by official media as [routine annual drills](#), downplaying their significance; only later, when Beijing realized it could not win the hearts and minds of the Taiwanese, did the [propaganda machine](#), often with unwitting assistance by the international press, seek to turn similar exercises into “major drills” aimed at deterring Taiwanese independence.)

Despite the signing of various cross-Strait agreements under the Ma administration, chief among them the [Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement](#) (ECFA, 海峽兩岸經濟合作架構協議) of 2010, by 2014 the Chinese regime had run out of patience with the Ma administration. This was ostensibly the result of Taipei’s reluctance to negotiate on the status of Taiwan or sign a peace agreement that, among other things, would likely result in the cessation of US arms sales to Taiwan. Another factor was the [Sunflower Movement](#) (太陽花學運) of March–April 2014, which derailed future cross-Strait agreements, severely weakened the Ma administration, and underscored the limits that democratic forces and civil society could impose upon further integration across the Taiwan Strait. From the beginning of Ma’s second term in office, CCP officials had already concluded that they could not rely on the ruling Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) or the central authority in Taipei to bring about “reunification.” Thus, the CCP increasingly began to bypass the central government and interact with local officials and civic organizations, benefiting from the greater access that a more permissive Ma government gave to various elements within the CCP.

Ma’s claim that cross-Strait relations under his administration were more stable also ignores the arc of

Chinese assertiveness within the region during that same period, including the [unilateral declaration of an ADIZ in the East China Sea](#) and the [militarization of the South China Sea](#). These developments, rather than being isolated from cross-Strait relations, were instead part of a pattern of expansionism within which Taiwan—because of its geographical location within the first island chain—was one of the principal pieces. Once it became clear that Taiwan would not be neutralized by “peaceful” means, Beijing [shifted from a strategy of engagement to one of coercion](#). For the CCP, both approaches constituted a path toward the same outcome: subjugation to the PRC. Thus, by the time Ma and Xi met in Singapore in 2015, peace initiatives were mere propaganda: the Chinese leadership knew that Ma was a sitting duck who, seven months hence, would be stepping down following two terms in office and was likely to be replaced by Tsai.

Confidence Building Measures as Propaganda

Propaganda efforts were also at the core of the CCP’s approach to Taiwan during the Ma years. This includes a little-known operation that sought to convince Taipei, as well as its backers in Washington, D.C., that further integration could result in a reduction of PLA forces targeting Taiwan. This operation was conceivably aimed at encouraging Taipei to move toward signing a peace agreement with a reduction, if not cessation, of US arms sales to Taiwan. The operation in question began with obscure reports of a cross-Strait conference, held in 2010, during which Chinese officials hinted at a possible redeployment of ballistic missiles aimed at Taiwan in return for continued negotiations between Taipei and Beijing—the first and only clear instance where an actual PLA drawdown appeared to be on the table amid warming ties. These military confidence-building mechanism (CBM) “efforts” received some attention (and generated a modicum of optimism) abroad, but there was little understanding of who was involved, or what the objectives were.

The CBM dialogues, which accelerated after Ma’s election in 2008, largely involved retired military personnel from both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Civilian groups, such as the Chinese Association for Study of Sun Zi (CASSZ, 中華孫子兵法研究學會) and the Society of Strategic Studies ROC (SSS, 中華戰略學會), both comprising of retired ranking military officers, made

several trips to China to meet with their counterparts on the Chinese side, who mainly consisted of retired PLA personnel who also visited Taiwan. The visits were not sanctioned by the Ma administration and did not involve active officials. The CASSZ was created by Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Fu Wei-gu (傅慰孤), a former deputy commander of the Republic of China Air Force, in January 2007 (Richard Bitzinger and James Char also [briefly discuss](#) the CBM meetings in *Reshaping the Chinese Military: The PLA's Roles and Missions in the Xi Jinping Era*). Tellingly, the CASSZ's counterpart in China was the then-PLA General Political Department's (GPD, 總政治部) Liaison Department (LD, 聯絡部), [a key player in the CCP's political warfare apparatus](#). [1] Other "deep blue" KMT members who were involved in the talks included Gen. (Ret.) Hsu Li-nong (許歷農) and his close associates.

If legitimate, this effort could have demonstrated that the CCP was indeed willing to reduce tensions in exchange for gains in the political sphere (i.e., concessions by Taiwan), and would support Ma's current theory that a return to the "1992 Consensus" and concessions to Beijing could help reduce tensions in the Taiwan Strait. The problem, however, is that (a) even under substantially more "peaceful" conditions, this initiative went nowhere and (b) the dialogue was not sanctioned by the Ma administration and involved participants who, as a source who was present at one of the meetings told this author, were instead engaging in political warfare. It was also clear from the outset that all of this would need to occur under Beijing's "One-China Principle." That such efforts failed to deliver even under optimal conditions in the Taiwan Strait—and that they did not occur at the official level despite Ma making CBMs a key, if aspirational, element of his policy—also demonstrates the furtiveness of such exercises. Finally, it should be pointed out that the hinted redeployment of short-range ballistic missile units would have coincided with the [modernization and replacement of old Dong Feng 11 missiles](#) with newer versions with greater accuracy and extended range—all of this, again, occurring while cross-Strait ties were supposedly showing a promise of reduced tension.

Illusions of Peace

Ma, who showed great willingness to make concessions to Beijing with the "1992 Consensus" as a prerequisite

for dialogue, could not achieve any force reduction from China under Hu and his successor. It is therefore very difficult to imagine that, a decade on, concessions by the Tsai administration could yield more positive results, especially with a balance of power in the Taiwan Strait that has continued to shift in China's favor and leadership in Beijing that has become much less flexible and increasingly assertive. Thus, while every effort to reduce tensions in the Taiwan Strait should be explored, Taipei must also be extremely careful not to fall into a trap by making concessions, which will cause irreparable damage to Taiwan's sovereignty and security. Moving toward capitulation simply isn't an option.

The main point: At an event commemorating the fifth anniversary of the historic Ma-Xi summit in Singapore, former president Ma Ying-jeou has called for a return to the "1992 Consensus" to reduce tensions in the Taiwan Strait. History, however, shows that even when Taipei did embrace the "Consensus," Chinese coercion and the threat of military force were still very much part of the equation.

[1] Under Xi's PLA restructuring in 2015-2016, the GPD was renamed the Department of Political Work [DPW, 中央軍委政治工作部], a staff department directly under the Central Military Commission. Under DPW, a Liaison Bureau is now responsible for the same kind of operations as the LD.

Implications of the KMT-CPC Breakdown

By: Shirley Kan

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Is the relationship between the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) and Communist Party of China (CPC, 中國共產黨) only "mostly dead" or "all dead," in the immortal words of Billy Crystal's *Miracle Max* in *The Princess Bride*? In any case, the KMT-CPC breakdown raises implications for Taiwan, United States, and other democratic countries. Observers and officials have watched for decades to see whether Taiwan builds a consensus that can fight off the CPC's united front plots. Now is

a great time for the KMT and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) to forge a stronger consensus and resilient society for national security. As the US presidential transition raises hope for bipartisanship, Taiwan also has hope for bipartisanship to counteract the CPC's existential threat and to reciprocate US support. What are new developments and potential implications?

United Fronts and Pottinger's Warning

Looking to 2021, the CPC's propaganda about the centennial of its founding in 1921 has seeped into the US conventional conversation about the People's Republic of China (PRC). [1] Just as the CPC has grafted onto the PRC as a party-state, the party's propaganda proclaims "[two centennial goals](#)" for the 100th anniversaries of the founding of the CPC and the PRC in 2021 and 2049, respectively.

But the KMT is overshadowed. The older, reformist party in China's modern history is the KMT, or Nationalist Party of China (中國國民黨). Sun Yat-sen (孫中山) served as a leader of the KMT that was founded [in 1919](#). Called modern China's "founding father," Sun's portrait has hung prominently in the grand reception room of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei, during the terms of KMT as well as DPP presidents.

The KMT has the longest, bloodiest history with and closest knowledge of the CPC. What lessons has the KMT learned about the CPC's fundamental nature to threaten the existence and democracy of the Republic of China (ROC)?

The KMT and CPC forged three united fronts. Their third united front just died.

US Deputy National Security Advisor [Matt Pottinger](#) delivered a spectacular speech ([in Mandarin](#)) in October, in which he called for countries to be candid about the CPC's interference in free societies. He cautioned that the CPC operates through plots of united front and political warfare. United front efforts exploit intelligence collection, propaganda, and psychology to corrupt the truth and insidiously influence the targeted elites and their organizations.

Pottinger did not mention Taiwan. But his warning is salient for this US partner.

Although often in conflict, the KMT and CPC started their First United Front in 1924 to fight against warlords and cooperate for national unification. Their Second United Front commenced in 1936 to fight against Japan. [2]

The CPC schemed to expand control across the strait with another united front. Now, what began in 2005 as effectively the Third CPC-KMT United Front has failed. In 2005, then-KMT Chairman Lien Chan (連戰) met with then-CPC General-Secretary Hu Jintao (胡锦涛), the first KMT-CPC meeting in 60 years. Lien flew to Beijing in April 2005, even though—just a month before—the PRC had issued its commonly condemned "Anti-Secession Law" to authorize the use of force against Taiwan. The CPC and KMT agreed, *inter alia*, to resume cross-strait negotiations on the basis of the "[1992 Consensus](#)," conclude a "peace agreement," and set up a party-to-party platform. [3]

Isolation and Division

The Third United Front was part of the CPC's attempts to induce Taiwan's isolation and division. Paramount leader Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) sought to undermine US diplomatic recognition of the ROC and its internal cohesion.

I have anticipated the latest book published in October by former United States Representative Lester Wolff. He published his account of a Congressional Delegation that met with Deng in July 1978. Deng was frustrated by delays in US-PRC normalization. He expressed concessions about respecting Taiwan's realities in pursuing unification and about creating conditions for a peaceful solution.

Significantly, Deng privately said to Wolff, "put the Taiwan question aside. Taiwan will fall like a ripe apple from the tree. Let us adopt the Japanese formula." The Japanese formula meant de-recognition of the ROC and an informal relationship, which was the framework that formed the [Taiwan Relations Act](#) (TRA) of 1979, co-sponsored by Wolff. [4] Wolff has told me about his clear memory of Deng's exact words.

Deng apparently assumed that Taiwan under the KMT would be easy to take over. He also sought another CPC-KMT united front. In 1983, he said that "unification must be brought about in a proper way. That is

why we propose holding talks between the two Parties on an equal footing to achieve the third round of Kuomintang-Communist cooperation, rather than talks between the central and local governments.” [5]

Belligerency and Breakdown

Deng promised a “peaceful resolution”—without renouncing the use of force—before US-PRC normalization in 1979. In contrast, CPC General-Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平) has shifted to a more belligerent approach to annex Taiwan.

For the first time since 2009, the KMT did not attend an annual event with the CPC scheduled last September as the 12th [Straits Forum](#). The latest spat started when a CPC propaganda outlet, CCTV, issued an insulting headline to claim that KMT legislator Wang Jinpyng (王金平) was going to the “mainland” to “beg for peace” amid the strait on the brink of war. KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang (江啟臣) did not send his party.

This dispute was not the first but the last sign of the breakdown. In January 2019, the CPC signaled at the top level that it was shifting its tactics. Xi Jinping delivered a speech on the 40th anniversary of the [CPC’s message](#) to “compatriots.” Xi stated, *inter alia*, that all political parties and sectors may send representatives for cross-strait talks to uphold the “1992 Consensus.” Thus, the CPC departed from past exhortation for talks between the PRC and Taiwanese authorities, which could be led by the DPP or KMT. The CPC has re-directed its “divide and conquer” and influence campaign to the grassroots.

Moreover, Xi warned of a potential use of force. He declared, “we do not renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary measures.”

Then, in March 2020, Xi Jinping [did not congratulate](#) the KMT’s new chairman, Johnny Chiang. The omission was the first departure from the CPC’s practice started in 2005.

National Consensus and Resilient Society

Where does the breakdown leave the KMT? What did it gain for its goodwill, while the CPC continually escalated military and other threats?

Several factors affect a new opportunity, along with the united front’s perhaps final breakdown. President Tsai

Ing-wen (蔡英文) of the DPP has governed under the rubric of the ROC, without overt attempts at *de jure* independence like those by the previous DPP president, Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁). Even more than the DPP, the KMT emphasizes the ROC’s existence. In January, voters re-elected the centrist Tsai, who supports the status quo. In short, the KMT and DPP have more in common with each other than the KMT has with the CPC, whose ulterior motive is to annihilate the ROC.

Moreover, in March, the KMT elected US-educated Johnny Chiang as chairman. He is a reformist and relatively young leader (48 years old) who calls for “[new perspectives](#).” His election raised the prospect of rejuvenation and a new generation of leaders.

Also, a clearer Taiwan-centric identity has emerged by mid-2020. The share of people who identify as Taiwanese shot up from 54.5 percent in 2018 to 67 percent in 2020 ([a record high](#)). Meanwhile, those who identify as both Taiwanese and Chinese dropped from 38.2 percent to 27.5 percent. Most reject Beijing’s “one China, two systems.”

Furthermore, through 2020, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) further increased its aggressive actions. Moves have included flying PLA aircraft across the median line of the strait and into the air defense identification zone (ADIZ) of Taiwan, in the [most frequent cases](#) since 1990, reported its Defense Minister Yen Teh-fa (嚴德發).

In October, the CPC regime released its 14th Five-Year Plan for 2021-2025. Under this plan, the PLA will further [accelerate](#) its modernization by 2027.

In short, as the CPC escalates intimidation, the KMT is liberated now to show leadership to forge a stronger national consensus and resilient society. The KMT can turn to cooperate inside Taiwan for its people’s interests, instead of crossing the strait.

Bipartisanship and Reciprocity

The KMT’s contribution to a stronger consensus to counter the CPC would have positive implications for Taiwan, United States, and other democratic countries. The KMT has signaled its shifting stance. The previous chairman, Wu Den-yih (吳敦義), refused to send representatives to the annual US-Taiwan defense industry conferences until October 2019, when senior retired

military commanders convinced Wu to allow them to attend to engage with US officials and industry leaders. At this past October's conference, however, Chiang not only permitted a representative, Admiral (retired) Richard Chen (陳永康), but Chiang personally [read remarks](#) (although in a video).

The US presidential transition highlights hope for bipartisanship and Congress' bipartisan and staunch support for Taiwan, as some question whether Biden will reverse gains in the stronger partnership in the past four years. In turn, it is imperative that the DPP and KMT unite so Taiwan reciprocates US support, including in bilateral agricultural trade based on science and international rules.

Taiwanese should recognize that there is no moral equivalency between the United States and the CPC/PRC regime. Some in Taiwan are wrong to say it was "abandoned," is a "bargaining chip," or "must choose" between Beijing and Washington. Some Taiwanese miss the point in translating a US strategy as "Indo-Pacific Strategy."

Taiwan is a democracy and part of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. Taiwan survives and thrives as part of the US-led, rules-based international order. Taipei has enjoyed a window of opportunity for a robust partnership with Washington. Another opportunity is open for DPP-KMT leadership to fortify Taiwan as a force for freedom. The PLA is the only threat to Taiwan.

The main point: The KMT is rejuvenating, rebuilding support, and recalibrating its appeal just when Taiwan requires resiliency. The KMT is now free to lead with the DPP in national security to strengthen their democratic homeland.

[1] This author precisely translates "中國共產黨" as Communist Party of China (CPC) (which the CPC also officially uses) and avoids ambiguous association of the CPC with "Chinese" culture or people.

[2] Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990).

[3] KMT and CPC, "Joint Statement on Peaceful Development," April 29, 2005.

[4] Lester Wolff, *Legislative Intent of the Taiwan Relations Act: A Dilemma Wrapped in an Enigma* (Xlibris,

2020).

[5] Deng Xiaoping, "An Idea for the Peaceful Unification of the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan," *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Volume III, 1994.

Defending Taiwan: Lessons from the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War

By: Michael Mazza

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Nearly the whole of the Asian continent—more than 4,000 miles—sits between Taiwan and Nagorno-Karabakh. They inhabit vastly different geographies, ongoing conflicts as to the ultimate fate of each have emerged from different historical contexts, and political realities on the ground bear little in common. Even so, Taiwan's defense thinkers should be closely studying the recent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan. The use of both modern military capabilities and legacy systems and their interactions on the battlefield provide insights into how wars will be fought during the next two decades. Taiwan would do well to consider lessons learned as it works to better prepare itself for the ever-present possibility of Chinese military action.

Lessons Learned

The war in Nagorno-Karabakh has only recently come to an end, but early [analyses](#) largely [share](#) some [key findings](#). None is particularly surprising, but confirmation of expectations in real-world observations is valuable nonetheless.

Tanks Are Vulnerable

Drone footage of aerial attacks on tanks has provided some of the defining imagery of the war. Armor, of course, has long been vulnerable to attacks from the sky, but the role of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in enabling and carrying out such strikes is relatively new. Writing for *War on the Rocks* two weeks into the

conflict, Michael Kofman and Leonid Nersisyan [described](#) Azerbaijani success against Armenian tank formations in the war's opening days:

"The largest counteroffensive on the Armenian side took place on the fourth day. As Armenian armored vehicles and artillery maneuvered into the open, they found themselves relatively exposed to the use of combat aerial vehicles, loitering munitions, and drones marking targets for artillery. These Armenian units were left largely unprotected by the old air defense systems that they had available, and suffered considerable losses as a result. The loss of a total of 84 tanks thus far by Armenia, along with numerous multiple launch rocket systems and artillery systems, compared to a total of 13 to 15 air defense systems, suggests a fairly low availability of air defense relative to the size of the armored force fielded."

As described, the aerial threat to armor on the ground was multifaceted, as it would likely be in a Chinese invasion scenario. And while it may be true that Taiwan's terrain offers more opportunity for concealment than the terrain in Nagorno-Karabakh, tanks on the move will remain vulnerable. Taiwan's tank drivers can take some comfort in the knowledge that Taiwan's air defenses are far more advanced than Armenia's, but those air defenses must also grapple with a far more potent threat than Azerbaijan's.

Taiwan is currently in the process of purchasing 108 new [M1A2T Abrams tanks](#) from the United States. Taiwan's defense planners expect that those tanks will [play a role](#) in [denying](#) the People's Liberation Army (PLA) a beachhead and in countering PLA tanks that do come ashore and attempt to drive inland. But those new Abrams, along with Taiwan's extant M48 Pattons (set for eventual retirement) and M60A3 Pattons (due for upgrades), will face both fighter aircraft and UAVs armed with ground-attack munitions, UAVs equipped with sensors used to cue long-range precision fires from more distant platforms, and loitering munitions, which *Al Jazeera* [describes](#) as "essentially a Kamikaze or suicide UAV." (Of note: China's [first](#) loitering munition was the IAI Harpy (or Harop), acquired from Israel in the 1990s to American consternation and [used](#) by Azerbaijani forces in recent weeks. China now indige-

nously [produces](#) two loitering munitions of its own.) Those various airborne platforms will fly at different speeds and different altitudes, all with different radar signatures operating in crowded airspace. Add attack helicopters to the mix—along with incoming cruise and ballistic missiles—and this presumably would make air defense particularly complex for Taiwan.

Even so, it is crucial that Taiwan deny China air supremacy, if not air superiority—not only so its ground platforms (tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery and rocket artillery, ground-launched cruise missiles, etc.) can continue to contribute to the fight, but also so that its own aerial systems can pose a reciprocal challenge to Chinese naval and ground forces. As it studies the latest Nagorno-Karabakh war, Taiwan should seek both to avoid Armenia's fate and to emulate Azerbaijan's successes—a feat that should be within reach.

UAVs and Setting the Narrative

Although UAVs played a central role in allowing Azerbaijan's owned armored forces to take and hold territory, they were also crucial in enabling Baku to shape the media narrative surrounding the conflict. *Al Jazeera* [explains](#):

"Drones have one more important effect. Their cameras, filming the destruction of a target in clear, unwavering high-definition video, allow a country to dominate the propaganda narrative. Media outlets were saturated with images of Armenian armour and artillery being effortlessly destroyed, not the other way round. Despite Azerbaijani losses, the Armenian armed forces, for the most part, did not have cameras trained on their intended target. These images have enhanced Azerbaijan's sense of success on the battlefield, presenting an image of near-total Azerbaijani victory."

Similarly unbalanced imagery availability in a Taiwan Strait conflict could be detrimental to Taiwan's chances of success, even if it is in actuality performing well on the battlefield. If China were to flood the media landscape with footage of battlefield successes, it would likely have five distinct audiences. Domestically, China could use imagery to boost morale within the PLA and among the civilian population. In Taiwan, China would seek the opposite effect, hoping to convince members

of Taiwan's military and the civilian population alike that resistance will ultimately prove futile. China will similarly aim to convince international observers that Taiwan is not putting up much of a fight and that its defeat is a forgone conclusion, thereby discouraging international intervention—military or otherwise.

Taiwan, then, will need to be prepared to compete for narrative dominance. Doing so will require that Taiwan gather and disseminate large amounts of footage from across the battlespace. Taiwan should, moreover, consider allowing journalists from local and international press outlets to embed with front line troops, much as the United States did during the Iraq War. While that may make the narrative more difficult to control, it will ensure that foreigners hear Taiwan's story. Finally, Taiwan and the United States should be planning together now for how they will compete with China in shaping narratives about a potential conflict. Washington has a far bigger megaphone than does Taipei and should be prepared to use it on Taiwan's behalf.

The Importance of Electronic Warfare Capabilities

Both challenges highlight the need for Taiwan to invest in robust electronic warfare capabilities. Shooting fighter jets and drones out of the sky is only one piece of the air defense puzzle. The ability to jam, blind, and otherwise interfere with the operation of UAVs and other airborne platforms—while defending against PLA efforts to interfere with Taiwan's own systems—could be a difference-maker.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) has recognized the importance of fighting effectively in the electromagnetic spectrum. In its [2019 National Defense Report](#), MND highlighted Chinese advances in electronic warfare capabilities as posing a growing threat to Taiwan and described electronic warfare (often paired with cyber warfare) as a priority. In 2017, MND established the [Information and Electronic Warfare Command](#) in order to “integrate and coordinate” duties of relevant units already existing across the military services, to guide research and development, and to “foster talent.” Whether Taiwan's armed forces are keeping pace with PLA advancements, however, is unclear.

Conclusion

The Taiwan Strait and Nagorno-Karabakh are seemingly worlds apart. A war in the Strait would involve a massive amphibious invasion, numerous naval engagements, and a fight that would largely take place on, over, or near the water. Such a conflict would look very different from the recent war in the South Caucasus. Even so, technologies employed in Nagorno-Karabakh would likewise be employed by China and Taiwan, making the war of interest to both parties. As my American Enterprise Institute colleague Hal Brands has argued, “it would be a mistake to downplay the importance of the fighting,” in part because “small wars have historically served as dress rehearsals for bigger ones, because they offer a testing ground for emerging concepts and capabilities.” Such may well be the case with this year's Nagorno-Karabakh war. Taiwan's defense planners ignore it at their peril.

The main point: Taiwan would do well to consider potential lessons learned from the recent Nagorno-Karabakh war as it works to better prepare itself for Chinese military action in the years to come.