

## Taiwan's Bottom-Up Approach to Civil Defense Preparedness

Russell Hsiao

## The 37 Incident Investigation Report and Transitional Justice in Taiwan

Alayna Bone

## The CCP Commemorates the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the “1992 Consensus”—and Seeks to Change Its Meaning

John Dotson

## The KMT Continues to Grapple with its “1992 Consensus”

Jessica Drun

## The Underestimated Crisis Surrounding Pratas Island

Cheng-yi Lin

## Taiwan's Bottom-Up Approach to Civil Defense Preparedness

By: Russell Hsiao

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

Matters of war and national defense are commonly considered to be the exclusive domain of soldiers and national security officials. Even though non-military actions must be considered secondary to military operations in time of war, they are nevertheless critical for mitigating the loss of life and protecting civilian infrastructure from an armed attack. [Civil defense](#) in peacetime is arguably even more important for its ability to enhance [resiliency](#)—defined as “a society’s ability to resist and recover from such shocks and combines both civil preparedness and military capacity.” While the military capacity of Taiwan’s armed forces—and also that of the United States—to deter an attack by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) have taken center stage in debates in defense circles in Washington and Taipei within recent years, there has been an overall lack of attention and investment in civil preparedness. This may be starting to change, however, as the Ukraine War enters its seventh month and the Chinese military’s unprecedented August exercises have resulted in a visible swelling of [public concern](#) about the possibility of war erupting across the Taiwan Strait. These factors have all resulted in a marked increase in the Taiwanese public’s interest in civil defense preparedness.

### ***A Bottom-Up Approach to Civil Defense Preparedness***

The proliferation of civil defense skills and real combat training programs—especially in the [past year](#)—highlights the development of a bottom-up approach to civil defense within Taiwan. Two examples of non-governmental civil defense training programs stand out. In particular: the [Kuma Academy](#) (黑熊學院), and [Forward Alliance](#) (壯闊台灣聯盟).

The [Kuma Academy](#) was co-founded in 2021 by a team of volunteers led by Puma Shen (沈伯洋), an assistant professor at National Taipei University, and Ho Cheng-hui (何澄輝), the deputy secretary-general of the Taiwan Association for Strategic Simulation (台灣安保協會). The organization now organizes several dozen whole-day courses throughout the island that are intended to improve people’s awareness and

*The Global Taiwan Brief is a bi-weekly publication released every other Wednesday and provides insight into the latest news on Taiwan.*

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Russell Hsiao  
**Associate Editor**  
John Dotson  
**Staff Editor**  
Marshall Reid

*The views and opinions expressed in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Global Taiwan Institute.*

*To view web sources cited in the published papers (underlined in printed text), visit <http://global-taiwan.org/2022/09/vol-7-is-iss-19/>.*

Global Taiwan Institute  
1836 Jefferson Place NW,  
Washington DC 20036  
[contact@globaltaiwan.org](mailto:contact@globaltaiwan.org)

To subscribe, visit  
<http://globaltaiwan.org/subscribe/>.

basic skills involved in civil defense. Its [courses](#) emphasize disaster prevention, medical rescue, and self-defense combat, and are taught by professional practitioners. In addition, the courses cover topics like cognitive warfare methods, modern warfare, and basic rescue and evacuation practice in an [easy-to-understand way](#).

The Kuma Academy reportedly raised around USD \$225,000 (NTD \$4.7 million) in August 2022, and the organizers had planned to offer 50 or 60 of its civil defense courses around the island. Ostensibly as a result of China's increased aggressiveness towards Taiwan and Hong Kong, the former chairman of United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC, 聯華電子), [Robert Tsao](#) (曹興誠)—who recently reclaimed his Republic of China (Taiwan) citizenship—pledged USD \$20 million (NTD \$600 million) to support Kuma Academy, with the goal of providing training to 3 million “Kuma Warriors” (黑熊勇士) over the next three years.



Left image: The logo of Kuma Academy. (Image source: [Kuma Academy](#)); Right image: The logo of Forward Alliance. (Image source: [Forward Alliance](#)).

Another example of a non-governmental organization in Taiwan leading the way on civil defense is [Forward Alliance](#) (壯闊台灣聯盟). The organization, which began its [civil defense training](#) courses in February after the onset of the war in Ukraine, reportedly hosts around 15 civil defense sessions and attracts around 400–500 participants each month. Headed by Enoch Wu (吳怡農), a former special forces soldier and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) politician, the [organization](#) aims to further involve Taiwan's general population in civil defense and disaster relief. According to [Wu](#), “civil preparedness is a whole-of-nation approach to defense and security [...] Our mission is to teach citizens how to respond in an emergency. In peacetime, this means disaster response. In wartime, the same skills form the backbone of civil defense.” Notably, all the attendees to these two programs have been paying out of their own pockets.

### ***The Legal Framework for Civil Defense***

This [growing movement](#) by Taiwanese civil society and private companies to enhance the nation's civil preparedness has been complemented by a patchwork legal framework that was brought together under the [Civil Defense Act](#) (CDA, 民防法) in 2021. Passed in January 2021, the CDA designated the Ministry of Interior (MOI, 內政部) as the competent authority with jurisdiction over civil defense in peacetime, in conjunction with the Ministry of Defense (MND, 國防部). The responsibility for control over the “civil defense force” (民防團隊) would transfer over to the MND in wartime. The law details the [legal scope](#) of civil defense, competent authorities at the central and local levels (down to the village level), and overall organization of civil defense forces.

Although the CDA was only passed in early 2021, the concept of civil preparedness is not necessarily new in the country's defense vernacular. In practice, it was tied more to [military concepts](#) like “all-out defense” (全民國防), with initiatives that were heavily centered on military-channels, and had focused more on civil-military education than on practical civil defense training. For instance, in 2015 Taiwan's Legislative Yuan (LY, 立法院) passed the “[All-Out Defense Education Act](#)” (全民國防教育法), which authorizes the MND as the competent authority at the central level to implement an “All-Out Defense Education Day” (全民國防教育日) and expand public participation in national defense education.

Since at least 2013, the [National Police Agency](#) (NPA, 內政部警政署) under the MOI has jurisdiction to direct civil defense matters according to the “Rules for the Civil Defense Command and Control Office of the National Police Agency of the Ministry of the Interior” (內政部警政署民防指揮管制所辦事細則). Given the role of the NPA as a subordinate agency of the Ministry of Interior, separate from the MND and with core competency in public security, it is logical that it has been authorized to [direct civil defense](#) through its [Civil Defense Office](#) (民防指揮管制所). Yet, after nine years, advances have been limited at best. There is no official data on the number of civilians currently involved in the NPA's civilian defense force, and details about their training and proficiency are sparse. In turn, this has allowed for little public accountability for what the law mandates. Recent [anecdotal evidence](#) claims that the NPA's civil defense force has around 50,000 civilians, mostly comprised of men between the ages of 50 and 70, who perform four hours of training per year.

In this context, the CDA's authorization of [one civilian executive agency](#) with the authority over civil defense makes administra-

tive sense. What it appears to be doing is taking a whole-of-government approach, rather than simply relying on the limited resources of the NPA to coordinate civil defense matters. According to [NATO](#), there are seven baseline requirements for national resilience and preparedness: continuity of government and critical services; effective maritime border controls; resilient energy supplies, as well as water and food resources; resilient health system with medical supplies; resilient and reliable civil communications systems; and resilient transport systems. Such a broad set of responsibilities cannot just be the remit of the NPA, and it would make sense for the MOI to take charge of civil defense given its core function for homeland security.

### Conclusion

As the ongoing Ukraine War demonstrates, the preparedness of a civilian population during peacetime will directly contribute to its effectiveness during wartime. For Taiwan, time is of the essence, and resiliency is critical for its [effective defense](#).

In the case of Taiwan, this means the integration of will-to-fight concepts into both civilian and military defense. As the United States and her allies look at ways to [strengthen integrated deterrence](#), sustaining and enhancing Taiwan's will to fight ought to be an integral part of that strategy. While the military capacity of Taiwan's armed forces has long been the primary focus, there should be more attention and investment paid to Taiwan's budding civil preparedness efforts. One way to bolster Taiwan's civil preparedness could be the deployment of teams of civil preparedness experts from the United States and like-minded countries to Taiwan and to help develop shared situational awareness. Down the road, the Taiwanese government can use this renewed sense of national vigor to form a [territorial defense force](#).

Whether such efforts for civil defense are sustainable, however, will also depend in part on whether there is broad support for the initiatives on the part of the political authorities. In this sense, Taiwan's initial, bottom-up approach may make more sense, as an entirely government-led initiative may be unsustainable should a new government be elected. For instance, Taipei mayor and likely presidential hopeful, Ko Wen-je (柯文哲), has [criticized](#) the efforts of these NGOs training a civil defense force as being similar to the young rebels that formed the Boxer Rebellion (義和團). Such criticisms, however, are narrow and misplaced. There is no substitute for soldiers to fight a war, but national resiliency requires both civil preparedness and military capacity.

Both governments and civil society have important functions in

organizing civil defense initiatives, as seen in the [United States](#) and the [United Kingdom](#). Taiwan's civil society, well-known for its robust and actively engaged non-governmental organizations, is increasingly stepping up to address many of the nation's challenges, and civil defense preparedness is not an exception. However, it cannot carry the burden all on its own. The government, with its resources and organizational capacity, will be critical to such efforts, though in the case of Taiwan the political will appears to be lacking at this time. Effective public-private partnership will be key to the durability of any future civil preparedness initiatives.

**The main point:** While most analyses of Taiwan's defensive capabilities have focused on traditional military preparedness, there has been a notable lack of focus on civil defense efforts. Taiwan's government should work closely with civil-society organizations to develop a resilient, whole-of-society approach.

*The author would like to thank GTI Summer 2022 Intern Meghan Shoop for her research assistance.*

\*\*\*

## The 37 Incident Investigation Report and Transitional Justice in Taiwan

By: Alayna Bone

*Alayna Bone is a summer fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute.*

On July 13, 2022, Taiwan's Control Yuan (監察院) released an unprecedented [investigation report](#) on the "37 Incident" (37事件), formally recognizing the unjustified killings of unarmed refugees by Republic of China (ROC) soldiers on March 7, 1987. Since the end of martial law 35 years ago, Taiwan has made important strides on many fronts to redress the wrongs committed during its authoritarian era, with reparations projects and political reform rapidly expanding over the last six years. The investigation of this relatively unknown incident is emblematic of Taiwan's continuing transitional justice movement, as well as its efforts to develop itself as an advocate for human rights and democratic values on the international stage.

### The 37 Incident

Less than 50 years ago, violence plaguing mainland Southeast Asia precipitated one of the [largest refugee crises](#) in world history. Between 1975 and 1995, over 2.5 million Vietnamese citizens fled hostility and discrimination during the country's civil war, early communist rule, and Sino-Vietnamese border conflicts. During the peak of the crisis, Vietnam's ethnic Chinese



population faced extensive persecution, leading many to seek refuge overseas in Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong. Through the first half of the crisis, Taiwan was an active participant in providing refugee relief. Nonprofits and government organizations alike donated food and supplies, and reception centers were set up on the Penghu Islands (澎湖縣). During the mid-1980s, likely due to a combination of a strain on national resources, political pressure, and paranoia regarding Communist subversion, this pro-refugee sentiment reversed. Despite the lack of evidence, Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) politicians began to argue that the continuing inflows of refugees were part of a “refugee war” conducted by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to destabilize Taiwan. In August of 1985, the Kinmen Defense Command (金門防衛司令部) formally adopted the hardline policy of “[no acceptance, all repatriation](#)” (“不予接納, 全部遣返”). This new protocol, however, was extremely vague, and did not provide clear guidelines for how to handle cases of those who either would not remove themselves from the area or had already made it to ROC shores. Within this gray area, and further clouded by Kinmen’s distance from central oversight, local officials developed an unmitigated hostility toward even the most vulnerable persons that approached the islands.



Image: Kinmen’s locations relative to the PRC and Taiwan. (Image source: [Island Studies Journal](#))

On the morning of March 7, 1987, a boat carrying around 20 ethnically Chinese Vietnamese refugees, who had already been rejected in Hong Kong, approached Lieyu Island (烈嶼鄉) requesting political asylum. [1] After several rounds of warning shots from members of the Kinmen Garrison (金門駐軍), the boat reached a beach on the southwest coast of the island and quickly fell under fire. During a pause in the attack caused by a faulty grenade, three men jumped out, begging the ROC soldiers to stop shooting, and were immediately killed. Soldiers then boarded the boat and removed the other passengers, ordering them to kneel on the beach before killing them execution-style. The victims included elderly persons, a pregnant woman, young children, and an infant.

Initial investigations of the incident, performed by Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND, 中華民國國防部) and Army

General Headquarters under pressure from Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) lawmakers during the same year, profiled the victims as “18 bandits” and charged four military commanders with short sentences for killing unarmed civilians. Nonetheless, these sentences were [suspended](#) when the military court argued that the defendants “took action out of duty and responsibility” and acted with “mercy.” The victims of the incident remain unidentified, with their bodies buried in an unmarked grave on Lieyu Island.

Since the initial investigation, the 37 Incident has received minimal attention, almost exclusively from independent bloggers and smaller media groups (see examples [here](#) and [here](#)). After 1987, it was rarely acknowledged by the Taiwanese government, let alone by KMT officials. One of the most [public mentions](#) of the incident occurred during a 2018 Foreign and National Defense Committee (立法院外交及國防委員會) hearing, when legislator Freddy Lim (林昶佐) requested an examination of the 37 Incident’s archived files in order to offer formal apologies to the victims’ families. The Minister of National Defense, at the time, disagreed with such actions, stating that the troops who carried out the incident were following standard operating procedures of the martial law period. The MND later [followed up](#) on the question by stating that because of the time that has passed since the incident, it would be too difficult to try to investigate the victims’ names and backgrounds.



Image: Control Yuan Member Kao Yung-cheng, a member of the 37 Incident investigation committee, presents its findings at a press conference on July 13. (Image source: [Liberty Times](#))

Given this institutional resistance, the Control Yuan’s investigation report and its public presentation in July by Control Yuan Member Kao Yung-cheng (高涌誠) caught many off guard. The report concluded that the 37 Incident was the culmination of years of unchecked hostility toward refugees by the Kinmen

Garrison. As early as 1972, similar acts of violence were performed by ROC soldiers in Kinmen against civilians and refugees traveling in the surrounding waters, and commanders were repeatedly penalized if such cases were not handled aggressively. The report also found that the initial 1987 investigation omitted evidence, neglected identifying the victims, and failed to alert the necessary authorities in Vietnam of their deaths. In addition, the actions taken against the victims were determined to not be in line with the official laws and policies of the time, contradicting the 2018 MND statement. The Control Yuan's report concluded by advising the MND to include more on refugee rights in the military's training curriculum. It also requested that the MND conduct its own probe into the original investigation and the relevant incidents that preceded it.

### ***Transitional Justice in Taiwan***

When presenting the report, Kao stated that his motives for conducting the investigation were to increase government trust and address online speculation around the facts surrounding the incident. Correspondingly, the investigation into the 37 Incident seems to be another stride forward in Taiwan's transitional justice movement. [2] Although many efforts have been made over the last few decades to correct the wrongs committed during Taiwan's one-party era, the DPP has led the crusade with renewed vigor since President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) 2016 election. During that same year, the [Act on Promoting Transitional Justice](#) (促進轉型正義 條例) was passed with the intent to expand public access to political archives, restore historical truths, remove authoritarian symbols, [settle issues of ill-gotten party assets](#), and redress judicial wrongs that occurred between 1945 and 1992. In 2018, the "[Ill-Gotten Gains Act](#)" (政黨及其附隨組織不當取得財產處理條例) was passed to begin the restoration of assets seized by the KMT during the martial law era.

Also in 2018, the Transitional Justice Commission (TJC, 促進轉型正義委員會) was established to oversee the removal of authoritarian symbols, declassification of critical documents, and the creation of a political trials database. By October 2020, the TJC had removed around 70 percent of [Chiang Kai-shek](#) (蔣介石) statues in Taiwan and [exonerated](#) 5,874 people wrongfully convicted during the "White Terror" (白色恐怖) period. Earlier this year, the TJC met the demands of many to double reparation amounts for the families of those killed during the era. While the investigation of the 37 Incident was not led by the TJC, the event's reconsideration fits squarely into the movement's growing push to restore truths and redress the oppression of Taiwan's former authoritarian system.

### ***Transitional Justice as a Component of Taiwan's Soft Power***

Transitional justice is a tool regularly used by states to address repressive actions imposed by former regimes. When rooted in the rule of law and protection of human rights, [transitional justice movements](#) contribute to the development of a representative democracy, as they help to empower victim groups and promote more transparent governance. In turn, these movements can work as a soft power tool to signal democratic progression to the international community. This process was clearly demonstrated during Taiwan's first wave of transitional justice in the early 1990s. As the country projected to the world policies that promoted healing from the 228 Incident (二二八事件), Western states, anxiously observing Taiwan's recovery from martial law, watched as it "[galloped toward democracy](#)." Since 2016 especially, the same countries have cited Taiwan's robust political system and respect for human rights as justification for strengthening relations. US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi stated in her recent [op-ed](#) that the US-Taiwan relationship is "rooted in shared interests and values: self-determination and self-government, democracy and freedom, human dignity and human rights." Similarly, a European Union [web page](#) detailing EU-Taiwan relations states in its first paragraph that "Taiwan is a reliable and valued like-minded partner in Asia. The EU and Taiwan share common values, such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights."

Nevertheless, the administration of transitional justice is hardly straightforward, and the legacy of the 37 Incident itself will be difficult to settle. If the MND does move forward with its own investigation, the burden of identifying its victims and the victims of similar events that preceded it will be heavy, and could prove to be only partially successful. Despite these obstacles, this reinvestigation almost 35 years later is an important move that demonstrates that Taiwan's transitional justice movement is concerned with even less-visible incidents of martial law injustice. By taking up cases that are largely unknown by the public, Taiwan can signal its commitment at home and abroad to transparency and indiscriminate justice, even when it is costly to do so. Continuing to strengthen Taiwan's human rights standards and democratic representation through transitional justice will not only serve as a balm for its own domestic issues, but will also continue to strengthen its positioning in the international system.

**The main point:** July's release of the Control Yuan's 37 Incident investigation report shed light on the violent and systematic mistreatment of Indo-Chinese refugees by the Kinmen Garrison during Taiwan's martial law era. It also confirmed Taiwan's

commitment to its transitional justice movement, an important component of Taiwan's soft power.

[1] No official number of victims is confirmed, and sources will identify the total count as at least 19 or around 20. This is likely due to two reasons: many of those killed in the incident were small children, and evidence that could lend clarity to the details of the incident were heavily suppressed during the initial 1987 investigation.

[2] Transitional justice is [defined by the United Nations](#) as an approach to systematic or massive violations of human rights that both provides redress to victims and creates or enhances opportunities for the transformation of the political systems, conflicts, and other conditions that may have been at the root of the abuses.

\*\*\*

## The CCP Commemorates the 30th Anniversary of the “1992 Consensus”—and Seeks to Change Its Meaning

By: John Dotson

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

The so-called “1992 Consensus” (also “’92 Consensus,” 九二共識) has been a matter of recurring controversy within Taiwan politics for years, particularly as it pertains to relations between Taipei and Beijing. The term, reportedly coined by Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) official Su Chi (蘇起) in 2000, referred to the political legerdemain employed by KMT and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials in negotiations in the early 1990s, during which they reached a vague agreement that both Taiwan and the Chinese mainland belonged to “one China,” but with differing interpretations (一中各表) of that meaning—i.e., whether “China” referred to the Republic of China (ROC), or the People's Republic of China (PRC). [1]

Taiwan's current President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has [rejected the formulation entirely](#) on grounds of Beijing's linking it with the “One Country, Two Systems” (一國兩制) blueprint for unification under PRC sovereignty. The KMT has explored ways to preserve the “1992 Consensus,” but has found the effort challenging: as recently as spring of last year, then-KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang (江啟臣) [attempted to update the formulation](#) to better fit Taiwan's current circumstances—to include assertions of the need to uphold Taiwan's democratic system and

ROC sovereignty—only to encounter a stern rejection from Beijing.

For its part, the CCP continues to invoke the “1992 Consensus” as a vital component of any constructive engagement across the Taiwan Strait. However, in line with its increasingly hardline policy on Taiwan, the CCP has been attempting to redefine the “1992 Consensus” as an affirmation of PRC sovereignty over Taiwan. This effort was fully on display over the latter half of the summer, as the CCP hosted events and media commentaries to commemorate the supposed 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “1992 Consensus”—with the CCP's rigid interpretation of that “consensus” placed front and center.

### “1992 Consensus” Commemoration Events in Summer 2022

In July and August, multiple events were hosted in the PRC that emphasized the anniversary theme. For example, on August 27, the annual gathering of the [“Conference of Global Overseas Chinese for Promoting the Peaceful Reunification of China”](#) (全球華僑華人促進中國和平統一大會)—a front organization linked to the CCP United Front Work Department (UFDW, 統戰工作部)—was convened in Chengdu. According to official media, the conference “was convened on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ‘1992 Consensus,’ and its theme was ‘adhering to the One China Principle and the 1992 Consensus, creating together national unification and the great enterprise of national rejuvenation.’” In another example, the [“1992 Consensus 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Academic Seminar”](#) was convened in Beijing on August 30, with a reported 60 “cross-Strait experts and scholars” taking



*Image: “Commemorating the ‘92 Consensus’ 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary”: A photo of CCP and KMT representatives meeting in 1992, part of PRC state media materials released in early August as part of a campaign to revive the “1992 Consensus”—and to promote the CCP's interpretation of it. (Image source: [Beijing City Taiwan Affairs Office](#))*



part in the event.

The most prominent of these events, however, was the “[1992 Consensus’ 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Forum](#)” (“九二共識”30周年座談會) convened on July 26 in Beijing’s Great Hall of the People. The meeting was officially chaired by You Quan (尤權), the director of the CCP United Front Work Department. However, the senior official present was Wang Yang (汪洋), who serves as the chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中國人民政治協商會議)—and more importantly, as the member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee with responsibility for the united front policy portfolio. In conjunction with his united front responsibilities, Wang is also the deputy director of the Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group (TALSG, 中央對台工作領導小組), the party’s senior decision-making committee for Taiwan issues.

### Wang Yang’s Keynote Speech

During the forum, Wang delivered a [keynote address](#), which is worth quoting at length, as it lays out the essentials of Beijing’s new official interpretation. The crux of this updated position is that acceptance of the “1992 Consensus” equates to acceptance of the PRC’s “[One-China Principle](#)” (一個中國原則), which holds that the PRC is the one and only China, of which “Taiwan island” is a province. According to Wang, in 1992 the two sides had “reached a consensus [...] that ‘both sides of the Taiwan Strait uphold the One-China Principle’—that is, the ‘1992 Consensus’” [emphasis added]. Wang then went on to say that:

*“The core idea of the ‘1992 Consensus’ is that ‘the two sides of the strait belong to one China, [and both must] commonly strive for national reunification.’ The historical significance of the ‘1992 Consensus’ lies in the fact that it laid the political foundation for the development of cross-Strait relations. It is only with this political foundation that we are able to open up cross-Strait consultations and negotiations, move forward with cross-Strait exchanges [between] political parties, and establish institutionalized cross-Strait mechanisms for consultation and contacts between the two sides.*

*The practice of the past 30 years has enlightened us that the ‘One-China Principle’ is [fundamental] for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations. The reason why the ‘1992 Consensus’ is important is that it has clearly defined the fundamental nature of cross-Strait relations: that the mainland and Taiwan belong to the same China, [and] the two sides of the strait [do not represent] state-to-*

*state relations, [and neither are they] ‘one China, one Taiwan.’”*



Image: CCP Politburo Standing Committee member Wang Yang (featured table, center) speaking before the “1992 Consensus’ 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Forum” in Beijing, July 26.

(Image source: [Xinhua](#))

Wang also took aim at Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) for its alleged “separatism,” and went on to say that: “The DPP authorities challenge the ‘One-China Principle,’ refuse to recognize the ‘1992 Consensus,’ falsely claim that ‘neither is subordinate to the other,’ and conduct ‘de-Sinicization’ on a broad scale.” The criticism that Taiwan’s current ruling party refuses to recognize Taiwan’s “subordinate” status is particularly noteworthy, in that it further undercuts an unspoken assumption of the 1990s talks: that the two sides could engage in negotiations on terms of parity.

While much of Wang’s speech continued in this heavy-handed vein, there was one noteworthy point where he appeared to offer a carrot alongside the rhetorical sticks. At one point in the speech, Wang further commented on the importance of accepting the “1992 Consensus” by stating: “It is only with this political foundation that Taiwan’s participation in the World Health Assembly, the International Civil Aviation Conference, and the activities of other such international organizations could be fair and reasonably arranged.” Wang thereby seemed to dangle an implicit offer that Beijing might drop its rigid opposition to Taipei’s membership in such international organizations, in exchange for Taipei’s embrace of the “1992 Consensus”—and with it, Beijing’s “One-China Principle.”

### The United Front Work Department’s Editorial

Lest Wang’s speech be taken as a one-off, it has been buttressed by other material in official PRC media in August and September. One of the most prominent—and provocative—examples



Image: An editorial published in early September by a CCP UF-WD-affiliated newspaper, which asserted that “In the ‘1992 Consensus’ there is only ‘One China,’ there are no ‘different interpretations.’” (Image source: [Beijing Youth News](#))

of this was a leading editorial published on September 10 in a spin-off magazine of the *People's Political Consultative News* (人民政协报), a newspaper published by the Central Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the leading public institution of the CCP United Front Work Department. Titled “[Thoroughly Reform, the ‘1992 Consensus’ Must Not Be Distorted](#)” (正本清源, “九二共识”不容歪曲), the editorial drove home in no uncertain terms the PRC’s new and uncompromising position on the “1992 Consensus.”

As stated in the editorial, “In 1992, with the authorization of both sides of the strait, the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS, 海峡兩岸關係協會) and Taiwan’s Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF, 海峡交流基金會) reached a consensus [...] that ‘both sides of the strait uphold the One-China Principle.’ The core essential point of this is that ‘both sides of the strait belong to one China and will make joint efforts to seek national reunification.’” Per the editorial, however, a political shift has since occurred in Taiwan, brought about by “the unceasing infiltration of the interference of foreign forces.” As a result, the meaning of the “1992 Consensus” has become “distorted” (歪曲). The editorial goes on to state that:

*“In regards to the ‘1992 Consensus,’ for a long time on Taiwan island it has been understood as ‘One China, Different Interpretations,’ meaning that both sides acknowledge that they belong to one China, but that in this understanding, the Taiwan side interpreted it as ‘The Republic of China.’ In recent years, at high levels the KMT has sought to change the subject mid-argument, and*

*when referring to the ‘1992 Consensus,’ has taken steps towards calling it the ‘One China, Differing Interpretations 1992 Consensus.’ [...]*

*On the DPP side, that party not only refuses to acknowledge that the ‘1992 Consensus’ exists, but is also intentionally confusing [it] with ‘One Country, Two Systems’ and other concepts, scheming to blur the meanings and change the argument, using the unfamiliarity of the island’s masses with ‘One Country, Two Systems’ to stir up a mentality of resistance.”*

All of this is wrong, the editorial insists, and sums up its core message in one sentence: “In the ‘1992 Consensus’ there is only ‘One China’—there are no ‘different interpretations’” (“九二共識”只有“一中”沒有“各表”) [emphasis added].

## Conclusions

In its propaganda campaign to commemorate the supposed 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “1992 Consensus,” the CCP is now staking out the position that the tacit agreement, from its very beginnings, represented acceptance of Beijing’s “One-China Principle.” In turn, this implies that the PRC is the one and only Chinese state in the world, and that Taiwan is a subordinate region of the PRC. While Beijing is accusing both of Taiwan’s major political parties of backtracking on a past commitment, it is Beijing that is now attempting to impose a *post facto* reinterpretation on a formulation that was always meant to be studiously vague—an act of rhetorical legerdemain that allowed negotiators from the two sides to sidestep thorny issues of sovereignty.

Beijing’s revisionist and rigid position now invalidates the entire concept of the “1992 Consensus” as a basis for cross-strait engagement. With the exception of marginalized figures from the pro-unification fringe of Taiwan politics, the idea of blindly embracing PRC sovereignty is politically dead on arrival in Taiwan. Furthermore, the PRC’s new position undercuts the entire concept of cross-strait negotiations being conducted on any sort of equal basis. As intended, such an assertion reduces Taiwan to a dependency, with no agency in determining its own future. Alongside the provocative military activity of summer 2022 and Beijing’s shrill “wolf warrior” diplomacy, this latest propaganda campaign is yet another sign of the increasingly hardline Taiwan policy of the CCP central leadership under Xi Jinping (習近平). If Xi, as expected, further tightens his grip over the party apparatus at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in October, this summer’s developments will likely prove to be harbingers of even harder-line measures to come.



**The main point:** During and after a series of events commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the so-called “1992 Consensus,” CCP officials have worked to redefine the previously vague agreement as representing acceptance of PRC sovereignty over Taiwan. This new, much more rigid interpretation could serve as a harbinger of harsher PRC policy toward Taiwan in the future.

[1] Maeve Whelan-Wuest, “Former Taiwan President Ma on One China, the 1992 Consensus, and Taiwan’s Future,” Brookings Institution, March 16, 2017.

\*\*\*

## The KMT Continues to Grapple with its “1992 Consensus”

By: Jessica Drun

*Jessica Drun is a non-resident fellow with the Atlantic Council’s Global China Hub.*

With renewed attention on cross-Straits relations in recent years, the bulk of foreign media and analytical attention has been on the potential for a People’s Republic of China (PRC) invasion of Taiwan. These assessments have included attempts to draw parallels with other major geopolitical events, such as the [US withdrawal from Afghanistan](#) and the current [war in Ukraine](#); assessments of the [military balance](#) between the two sides; or discussions of the risk that a Taiwan contingency could pose to critical global [semiconductor supply chains](#).

Yet, what has been overlooked—and what, in part, undergirds these discussions—is PRC perceptions of whether time is on its side in regards to Taiwan. And a critical element of Beijing’s calculus on this front is whether it can reshape the trajectory of Taiwan domestic politics to, once again, better align with its viewpoints. Accordingly, one of the major questions is the future cross-Straits policy of the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨), Taiwan’s current opposition party, and whether the so-called “1992 Consensus” (九二共識) will continue to be pursued—and, if so, in what conceptualization.

The term “1992 Consensus” was formally coined not in its titular year, but in the year 2000, [ahead](#) of Taiwan’s first formal transition of power as a democracy. Then-Mainland Affairs Council (MAC, 大陸委員會) Chairman Su Chi (蘇起) devised the term to refer to the outcome of a 1992 meeting between the semi-formal authorities of each side that are tasked to manage cross-Straits relations, Taiwan’s Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF, 海峽交流基金) and the PRC’s Association for Relations

Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS, 海峽兩岸關係協會). During the SEF-ARATS meeting, which took place in Hong Kong, the two sides were [unable](#) to come up with a common baseline on which to build cross-Straits negotiations and agreements. Accordingly, the two subsequently agreed to instead orally [state](#) their respective—and dissimilar—stances on “One China.”

In its conception, Su [argued](#) that the “1992 Consensus” would allow for the continuation of semi-official contacts across the Taiwan Strait, as it would help interlocutors avoid direct mention of sensitive terms: “One China” (一個中國) for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) and “with respective interpretations” (各自表述) for the PRC. However, critics have [viewed](#) the move as an attempt to constrain incoming DPP President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and his administration before they took office. From the DPP’s perspective, the “1992 Consensus” is particularly contentious because it failed to incorporate the will of the Taiwan people—with the Hong Kong meeting having taken place prior to the island’s democratization.

The “1992 Consensus” was formally [adopted as policy](#) by the KMT’s Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) when he secured the presidency in 2008. With the “1992 Consensus” in play, Taipei and Beijing had a tacit agreement over a “One China” baseline—that Taiwan is a part of China, but with a deliberate lack of clarity on what exactly “China” entailed. The Ma Administration held that there is a “respective interpretations” stipulation, meaning that each side [maintains](#) its own view of what “China” is—with it being the Republic of China (ROC) for Taipei, and the PRC for Beijing. Notably, PRC representatives have never officially reiterated “respective interpretations,” and have only held that there is “One China.”

The eight years under the Ma Administration saw a period of rapprochement with the PRC, with a series of enhanced cross-Straits agreements and engagements, including the reopening of formal lines of communication. This period also included the first meeting between the leaders of the two sides since the Chinese Civil War, with Ma [meeting](#) with Xi Jinping (習近平) in Singapore in November 2015—two months ahead of the 2016 Taiwan general election. In the meeting, both Ma and Xi stressed the importance of maintaining the “1992 Consensus.”

Given the timing of the Ma-Xi meeting, there was speculation that it was an attempt to shore up support for the KMT and its cross-Straits policies before voters went to the polls, particularly as the public was questioning whether the benefits of these policies were evenly distributed, if they compromised or put at risk Taiwan’s *de facto* sovereignty, and if the party was skirting

democratic procedures to support its political objectives. All of these concerns came to the fore in the 2014 Sunflower Movement. The Sunflower Movement also brought to public light the fissures within the KMT, when Wang Jin-pyng (王金平)—the then-speaker of the Legislative Yuan (LY, 立法院), who was often viewed as a rival to Ma Ying-jeou within the party—[met](#) and made concessions with the student leaders who were occupying the Legislature.

Since the KMT has been in opposition, however, the party has attempted on multiple occasions to make adjustments to its framing of the “1992 Consensus.” Sometimes, this has been informed by the personal beliefs of the party chairperson; at others, however, the party has introduced proposals in an attempt to garner greater appeal among the Taiwanese public. Notably, over the course of the past six years and throughout these deliberations, there has been pushback from opposing factions within the KMT itself, as well as from PRC leadership in Beijing. These dynamics showcase that the party is constrained in its space for action as it tries to square the circle between what is palatable to Taiwan’s electorate and what would be tolerated by Beijing.



*Image: The four candidates for the KMT chairmanship—including then-Chairman Johnny Chiang (left), and current Chairman Eric Chu (right)—pose for a photo at a debate in September 2021. The “1992 Consensus” was one of the key issues debated at that event, and remains a significant issue in internal party debates. (Image source: [Taipei Times](#))*

In the aftermath of the KMT’s defeat in the 2016 elections—during which the party’s nominee, Eric Chu (朱立倫) called for a continuation of the “1992 Consensus” as articulated under President Ma—Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) was [elected](#) as the party’s chair (taking on the position from an interim chair who was [assigned](#) the role after Chu stepped down). Hung is perhaps best known as the party’s initial—and failed—nominee for

that year’s general election, with her candidacy [revoked](#) after three months of campaigning due to fears that her [rhetoric](#) was too hardline for the mainstream Taiwanese voter. Under Hung’s leadership, the KMT [removed](#) the “with respective interpretations” caveat from the “1992 Consensus” in the party platform.

This approach was short-lived, however, as the next year Hung lost the KMT chairperson election to Ma Ying-jeou’s second-term vice president, Wu Den-yih (吳敦義), who [reverted](#) the party position back to the Ma-era formulation. This was met with disdain from the PRC, which [perceived](#) Wu as backpedaling from Hung’s stance. Wu later stepped down as chair after the party’s defeat in the 2020 election, which occurred against the backdrop of the PRC’s tightening grip on freedoms in Hong Kong and [Xi Jinping’s 2019 statement](#) that tied the “1992 Consensus” together with “One Country, Two Systems”—the latter of which has been rejected by both major parties in Taiwan, as well as its populace.

In a post-election internal review meeting of its reform committee, the KMT cast [blame](#) on both the DPP and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for contributing to the Taiwan public’s misunderstanding of the “1992 Consensus” and reaffirmed its stance as “respective interpretations.” Nonetheless, leadership attempted to make minor tweaks to their articulation of the “1992 Consensus.” Newly elected Chairman Johnny Chiang (江啟臣) called for greater [emphasis](#) on the Republic of China and [proposed](#) four new pillars for its cross-strait policy to go alongside the “1992 Consensus,” though these were ultimately rejected due to [opposition](#) from the Ma camp. Thus, the only minor adjustment made was framing the “1992 Consensus” as based on the ROC Constitution, [adding](#) this formally into the party platform, though it has conceptually been [espoused](#) since the Ma Administration.

Chiang lost the subsequent chairmanship election held in September 2021 to Eric Chu. Since his election, Chu has worked to garner greater appeal for the party, especially as his selection as KMT chair came a little over a year before Taiwan’s November 2022 nine-in-one local elections. He has pursued deeper engagement with the United States, [reopening the party’s representative office](#) in Washington, DC this summer. During his formal remarks commemorating the launch, he called the “1992 Consensus” the “[No Consensus Consensus](#)”—a phrase that was met with immediate backlash from both the more traditionalist camps of the KMT, as well as from the PRC.

In essence, the KMT has grappled with its party policies over the course of the last five years. It first hardened its view under Hung

before returning to the original Ma framework, with the two most recent chairs attempting to further soften the approach—by placing greater emphasis on the ROC and more ambiguity in its supposed common ground with the PRC. Both Chiang and Chu, however, have been unable to reach a party-wide accord. Chu's chairmanship may be up for question depending on party performance in the upcoming local elections in November, and it remains unclear what the party's stance will be on the "1992 Consensus" going into the critical 2024 general elections.

It seems that the KMT leadership understands that the "1992 Consensus," in any of its recent configurations, has not been palatable to the Taiwan public, but the room that the PRC had previously [allotted](#) the party—through the political will to tacitly agree to disagree—may also no longer be on the table. Thus, the question looking forward is, which one will win out: an attempt to better preserve electoral viability, or to safeguard the generally positive relationship the party has long enjoyed with the CCP?

**The main point:** While the KMT has worked to reevaluate its framing of the "1992 Consensus," it has thus far proven unable to balance its electoral interests regarding the wider Taiwan public with those of the PRC and more hardline factions within the party. This challenge will only grow more pressing as the party approaches the 2024 general election.

\*\*\*

## The Underestimated Crisis Surrounding Pratas Island

By: Lin Cheng-yi

*Lin Cheng-yi is a research fellow at the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica.*

In the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) [first started](#) its "long-distance training over the sea" (遠海長航) in March 2015 and then [conducted](#) its first "circumnavigation around the [Taiwan] island" (繞島巡航) following President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) inauguration in 2016. The PLA later referred to its air operations as "[combat readiness cruises](#)" (戰備警巡) in February 2020, as tensions in the Taiwan Strait were mounting. Since September 2019, the PLA has [continued](#) its air [intrusions into Taiwan's southwest Air Defense Identification Zone](#) (ADIZ), whose southwestern boundaries lie between Taiwan and Dongsha (Pratas, 東沙島) Island, on a nearly daily basis. This article will assess the motivations and implications of these gray-zone activities and the potential for a

crisis to erupt in the area.

### Chinese Motivations

Through so-called [gray-zone activities](#), which operate in the space between peacetime and wartime, the PLA is pursuing a campaign of military coercion and attrition designed to reduce Taiwan's air strength, and to increase pressure on the garrison stationed on Pratas Island. This gray-zone conflict is deliberate, calculated, and has gained significant traction in recent years. While it is characterized by measured aggression and carefully choreographed shows of force, it is not a war of air engagements. It is defined by coercive, aggressive action, but it is deliberately intended to avoid crossing the threshold of an actual military attack on either Taiwan or Pratas Island.

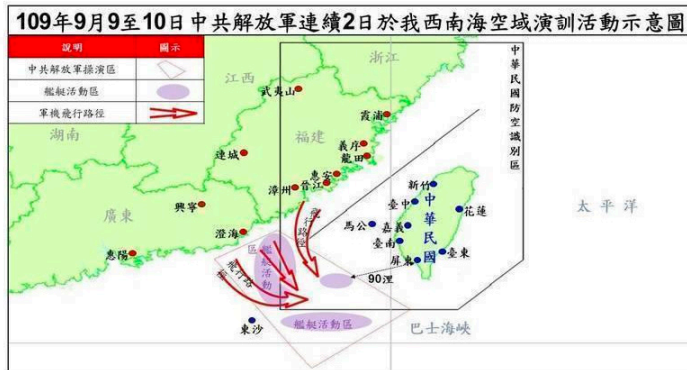
China's continuous "combat readiness cruises" targeting Taiwan's southwest airspace serve several purposes. First, they indicate that in a "Taiwan military scenario," this would be the airspace that China intends to control from the very beginning. Second, they show that China plans to cut off Pratas Island from external communications. Given the island's position—far from Taiwan, and beyond the median line of the Taiwan Strait—this could signal that China believes that the United States and Japan may not take any concrete military response to such an action. Third, they demonstrate that the People's Republic of China (PRC) believes that it could deter or delay the US military from entering the Bashi Channel or the South China Sea during a Taiwan crisis by pursuing an anti-access and area denial (A2AD) strategy. Fourth, they show that China could use its punishment tactics to prevent the United States from "[using Taiwan to contain China](#)" (以台制中) and the Tsai Administration from "[relying on the United States to seek independence](#)" (倚美謀獨), both common accusations in PRC propaganda. Fifth, they demonstrate the PLAAF's ability to wear down Taiwan fighter jet pilots through an air campaign of attrition, while also upgrading its cross-theater coordination between the Eastern Theater Command (東部戰區) and the Southern Theater Command (南部戰區).

Chinese fighter jets have gradually increased the number of [intrusions into Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ](#) from [380 sorties in 2020 to 961 sorties](#) in 2021. Taking the whole year of 2021 as an example, the PLAAF intruded into the airspace southwest of Taiwan with a [variety of planes](#), including slow-speed aircraft (Y-8, Y-9, Y-20 and Air Police 500)—used in a total of 361 sorties—and high-speed aircraft (J7, J-10, J-11, J-16, Su-30)—used in a total of 533 sorties. These were accompanied by H-6K bombers (60 sorties) and helicopters (seven sorties). Most of the bombers



were flying in the outermost periphery of the southwest corner of Taiwan's ADIZ, close to the northeast shore of Pratas Island.

Notably, the penetrated area is not part of Taiwan's territorial airspace, and the PLA's intrusions are unlikely to cause a strong reaction from Taiwan or the United States. However, the intrusions demonstrate that the PLA would be able to interdict Taiwan's air resupply missions to Pratas Island, and leave resupplies via sea as the only alternative. Taiwan faces many difficult questions in dealing with gray-zone activities involving Pratas Island: for example, when and how might China cross the threshold and take actual steps to seize the island? Can the PRC achieve domination of the island without firing a shot? Will the PRC launch a blockade of the island, potentially leading to a capitulation of Taiwan's beleaguered defensive forces on the island? Under all these circumstances, if the Tsai Administration were forced to respond with its military forces, it would likely follow the principle of proportionality—instead of expanding the military confrontation—in order to avoid any unmanageable or irreversible consequences for cross-Straits relations. This situation has been exacerbated by the crisis in August 2022, which indicated that Taiwan's leaders could quickly shift their focus away from the remote island in the South China Sea.



Graphic: A map showing the location of Chinese military exercises to the southwest of Taiwan on September 9-10, 2020. (Graphic source: Taiwan Ministry of National Defense)

### Security Implications

Pratas Island is 260 kilometers (140 nautical miles) away from Shantou, in China's Guangdong Province, 315 kilometers (170 nautical miles) southeast of Hong Kong, 740 kilometers (400 nautical miles) northwest of Manila, and 450 kilometers (240 nautical miles) away from Kaohsiung, Taiwan. While the island is of significant geostrategic importance along the major sea route connecting the Pacific and Indian oceans, it is not considered to be explicitly covered by the [Taiwan Relations Act](#), which only mentions the islands of Taiwan and the Pescadores

(Penghu Islands, 澎湖群島). [Pratas Island](#) was first placed under the administration of Kaohsiung in 1939 and is now treated as a component part of the city. [1] Due to the island's unique position, it seems likely that US reactions to a contingency in Pratas Island would be different from a military crisis involving Taiwan or Penghu. Regarding the security situation of Pratas Island, Japanese scholars [Yoshiyuki Ogasawara](#) and [Rira Momma](#) have given stern warnings of the possibility of a Chinese military attack. The US think tank [Center for a New American Security](#) (CNAS) has also described the dilemma that could face Taiwan and the United States should hundreds of hostages from Pratas be taken to mainland China. This could prevent both Taiwan and the United States from being able to take concrete actions to restore the status quo, forcing them to accept China's annexation of a piece of its long-claimed territory.

In the recent past, when US aircraft carriers assembled in the Philippine Sea to the east of Taiwan for drills, Chinese fighter planes have often penetrated Taiwan's ADIZ and flown close to the southeast corner of Taiwan. From October 1 to 4, 2021, the carriers USS *Ronald Reagan* (CVN76), USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70), and HMS *Queen Elizabeth* (R 08), as well as the Japanese helicopter destroyer JS *Ise* (DDH 182), conducted [unprecedented sea drills](#) in the eastern waters of Taiwan and the Philippine Sea. In response, Chinese fighter jets extended their "combat readiness cruise" routes into Taiwan's southeast ADIZ. China dispatched a total of [145 fighter aircraft](#) on October 1 (38), 2 (39), 3 (16), and 4 (52), significantly exceeding normal levels. China's intrusions into Taiwan's ADIZ have not only targeted Taiwan and Pratas Island, but also US military activities near Taiwan. In retaliation to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's trip to Taiwan on August 4, 2022, [the PLA launched five missiles](#) from Zhejiang and Fujian into eastern waters of Taiwan and Japan's claimed exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

In the conflict between the United States and China involving Taiwan, it is necessary to ensure freedom of navigation in the South China Sea waterway. If the United States controls the waters near Pratas Island in the northeastern part of the South China Sea, it will become more difficult for China to pass through the Bashi Channel. If China controls the same waters, it could further counter US military intervention in both the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. The PRC has already [changed the status quo of a median line in the Taiwan Strait](#) and denied the legality of the Taiwan Strait as international waters.

President Joseph Biden has emphasized the need for an [international coalition of like-minded democratic countries](#) to maintain security, and to encourage the internationalization of the South

China Sea and Taiwan Strait free from China's domination. This indicates that the waters surrounding Taiwan can no longer be as peaceful as they were during the Cold War era. Secretaries of State Mike Pompeo and Antony Blinken successively [reaffirmed](#) that the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty will apply to Philippine naval ships and troops under attack. In doing so, they linked military outposts occupied by the Philippines in the South China Sea with the United States security commitment.

However, Taiwan and the United States have no formal diplomatic relations, and it is not clear whether Pratas Island will be covered by the TRA. If China were to attack or blockade Pratas Island, which is larger than any reefs occupied by the Philippines in the Spratly Islands, will the United States sit tight and only issue verbal condemnations? Pratas Island dwarfs an almost submerged reef named the Scarborough Shoal, disputed among Taiwan, China and the Philippines. If the Obama Administration once took [military actions](#) to forestall Xi Jinping (習近平) from constructing the Scarborough Shoal into an artificial island in 2016, then the Biden Administration needs to watch China's military postures around Pratas Island more closely.

### ***Why Itu Aba is Safer than Pratas***

When comparing the security situation of Pratas Island with that of Taiwan's Taiping Island (Itu Aba, 太平島), major differences are clear. Taiping is surrounded by reefs occupied by Vietnam (Sand Cay, Dunqian Shazhou, 敦謙沙洲) and China (Gaven Reef, Nanxun Jiao, 南薰礁), both located within 12 nautical miles. When attacking Taiping Island to punish the Tsai Administration, Beijing cannot ignore—from a political point of view—the risks posed to Sand Cay, located to the east of Taiping. From a military perspective, Hanoi will not invade Taiping simply because it would meet strong countermeasures from Taiwan and the PRC. By comparison, Pratas Island lacks the geographic protections enjoyed by Taiping. Chinese fighter jets would most likely use gray zone operations to target Pratas, including flying H-6K bombers over the island before landing on Yongxing Island (永興島) or the Xisha Islands (Paracel, 西沙群島), harassing Taiwan Coast Guard patrol ships in law enforcement operations inside Taiwan's contiguous zone, interfering with air supplies to Pratas from Taiwan, and conducting military exercises in important waterways.

Beijing knows all too well that Pratas Island cannot realistically be controlled by any of the ASEAN claimants involved in regional territorial sovereignty disputes. China claims the final text of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, negotiated through ASEAN, is intended to be completed as early as possible. The

PRC has deliberately attempted to exclude the Paracel Islands and Pratas Island from the code, arguing that it only applies to the Spratly Islands. While taking actions to [delay finalization of the Code of Conduct](#), and utilizing time for greater control over the South China Sea, COVID-19 affects the consultation process. Furthermore, other political factors are also at play: If the PRC takes any military actions against Taiping or occupies other new reefs in the Spratly Islands, Xi Jinping's dream of building a "community of common destiny" will suffer a grave setback.

China's gray-zone strategy has changed the status quo of security in the vicinity of Taiwan. For example, the median line of the Taiwan Strait is now crossed on a regular basis, and the southwest corner of Taiwan's ADIZ faces frequent intrusions. China's overreaction to Pelosi's trip—bracketing Taiwan with missiles, rockets, destroyers and fighter jets—has led international media to focus on the increased tensions in the Indo-Pacific region. This also gives major countries the impression that the Taiwan Strait has a high possibility of military conflict. While this is important, such a focus on the Taiwan Strait risks ignoring China's gray-zone tactics against Pratas Island. In July 2020, former US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper [warned](#) that "the PLA's large-scale exercise to simulate the seizure of the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Island is a destabilizing activity that significantly increases the risk of miscalculation."

### ***Conclusion***

China recognizes that the Biden Administration has used mechanisms such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) security alignment, the US-Japan alliance, and the [US-Philippines-Vietnam tripartite coordination](#) to strategically contain China in the South China Sea. Pratas Island has been increasingly under Chinese threats, posing a growing risk to both Taiwan and the sea lines of communication in the South China Sea. If the PRC can control Pratas Island, then it could turn the island into an important strategic base asset, forcing the United States to contend with serious security consequences in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan is not China's only target. In the case of a blockade of Pratas Island, China will be able to reduce the ability of the United States military to freely enter and leave the Bashi Channel and the South China Sea. Policymakers and defense planners in the United States, Taiwan, and like-minded allies and partners should not underestimate the security implications and potential for crisis surrounding Pratas Island.

**The main point:** While recent events have resulted in increased international attention to tensions in the Taiwan Strait, China's

---

gray-zone tactics targeting Taiwan's Pratas Island have been largely ignored. Given Pratas' strategic importance, this could be a dangerous oversight.