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By: Russell Hsiao

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

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is engaged in a concerted [information operations \(IO\) campaign](#) on a global scale in an attempt to influence governments and voters in democratic states. Given Taiwan's position as one of the primary targets of Chinese influence operations, it should not be surprising that its local elections in November 2022 were not spared. The PRC's well-documented interference in the country's 2018 and 2020 elections underscores the growing challenge facing all democracies from [authoritarian sharp power](#). Such measures will likely expand in the lead-up to the island democracy's January 2024 presidential and legislative elections.

Several Taiwan-based research organizations, such as Doublethink Lab (台灣民主實驗室) and the Information Operations Research Group (IORG, 台灣資訊環境研究中心), have publicized their assessments on the PRC's *modi operandi* during the local elections. A careful study of these tactics as exposed by these studies will help to inform other countries about the PRC's evolving strategies, techniques, and procedures in disseminating propaganda and disinformation.

This article seeks to highlight the key findings of some of those research studies, specifically spotlighting the case of [Zhonghua Weishi](#) (中華微視), also known as China Micro Vision (hereafter "Micro Vision"). Micro Vision is a global Chinese media outlet whose proxy within Taiwan saw its offices searched in November by Taiwanese authorities, on grounds of deliberately amplifying PRC disinformation and propaganda in the local elections. Micro Vision has local intermediaries in other countries and should be considered a vector for Chinese information operations campaigns.

Chinese Information Operations in Taiwan's 2022 Local Elections

According to [Doublethink Lab](#)—a leading Taiwan-based research and advocacy organization focused on Chinese information operations—there are three key findings based on their analysis of Chinese IO activ-

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

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Global Taiwan Institute
1836 Jefferson Place NW,
Washington DC 20036
contact@globaltaiwan.org

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ities targeting the 2022 local elections: 1) influence operations were less readily visible than those observed in 2018 or 2020; 2) the method employed by the PRC was different, in that it focused on issue amplification rather than targeted support or attacks; and 3) the operations worked to undermine US credibility by focusing on issues such as semiconductors.

During a [public seminar discussion](#) hosted by the Global Taiwan Institute (GTI) in late November 2022, Poyu (Fi) Tseng (曾柏瑜), the deputy CEO of Doublethink Lab, offered several hypotheses for why there was ostensibly less Chinese influence in 2022 when compared to the previous elections. Specifically, she speculated that: 1) the 20th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress may have created a delay due to “uncertainty in the chain in the command”; 2) the pandemic created less vectors for influence, as united front agents were unable to interact with local collaborators due to travel restrictions; 3) pandemic-induced economic decline may have led to lower budgets for subversive activities; and 4) there was not a stand-out preferred candidate in Taiwan to target for information operations support during the local election. Moreover, Doublethink researchers found that these information operations shared several key characteristics. There were four IO narratives covered during the local elections: 1) cultural unification; 2) attacking Taiwan government integrity; 3) attacking US credibility; and 4) the promotion of China’s interpretation of the “One-China Principle.”

Facebook fan pages (粉專) were a prominent vector for Chinese information operations during the local elections. One such page highlighted by Doublethink was “[Taiwan Headlines](#)” (兩岸頭條, @taiwanheadlines), which reported on the accidental breaking of some historical Chinese ceramic artifacts at the National Palace Museum (故宮博物院) in Taipei, an institution that contains some of the world’s most treasured Chinese artifacts. These claims were later amplified by PRC state-run media outlets as efforts by the authorities to “de-Sinicize” Taiwan.

According to [IORG](#), the top 20 most frequently posted content on these fan pages mostly came from major local news sources, with content farms the second largest source, followed by YouTube. For instance, the content farm “[Mission](#)” (密訊), which had been exposed in 2019 as a major source of Chinese disinformation, was banned from sharing news on Facebook, but later resurfaced using a different domain name. Lin Shao-hong (林昭弘) of IORG pointed out that although news articles from content farms may not be read by many people—and had little to no influence in the [2020 local elections](#)—they can nevertheless influence the algorithms that affect the popularity of related news items on Facebook, and thereby increase the prominence

of specific issues. Researchers refer to this phenomenon as “[fer-tilization](#)” of related online discussions.

For the purposes of their recent study, IORG [purportedly analyzed](#) eight million Chinese-language Facebook fan posts, 6,000 news articles in Taiwan, 800,000 Weibo articles and other data, 2,000 Chinese official statements and official media articles, and 50,000 Tik Tok (抖音) videos. In doing so, they found that “war” and “epidemic” were the two main axes for [information manipulation](#) in the 2022 local elections. Notably, these operations focused heavily on the theory of the United States abandoning Taiwan.

Another distinctive feature of Chinese IOs during the local elections found by researchers was that there did not appear to have been any particular favored candidate that such campaigns supported. This represented a notable departure from the 2018 and 2020 elections, when Chinese IO campaigns boosted the candidacy of Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜). Instead, the 2022 operations focused on attacking the ruling government and the United States’ credibility by focusing on COVID-19 and the Taiwanese semiconductor giant TSMC (台積電) through a series of [propaganda and disinformation](#) campaigns issued by CCP-affiliated organizations and Chinese state-run media outlets. The attacks argued that the ruling Democratic Progressive Party’s (DPP, 民主進步黨) COVID-19 policy had failed and that it was selling out TSMC to the United States. These narratives were [reported-ly](#) being promoted by the Communist Youth League (中國共產主義青年團), the United Front Work Department (中共中央統一戰線工作部), CCTV (中國中央電視台), the *Global Times* newspaper (環球時報), and Weibo writers.

In one case thoroughly investigated by Taiwanese authorities, several social media fan pages were found to be amplifying news that included the tragic drowning of people in the southern metropolis of Kaohsiung, suggesting that the situation in Taiwan was chaotic and hopeless. Taiwanese investigators found that at least one local company was being used as a proxy of China- and Hong Kong-based media companies, with possible ties to the Chinese government. Indeed, one Taiwan-based company was suspected by [Taiwanese investigators](#) of amplifying fake news on Facebook fan pages such as “Zhonghua Weishi” (中華微視, @Chinavtv) and “Taiwan Headlines,” which the [Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau](#) (MJIB, 法務部調查局) has identified as receiving funding from the PRC government.

The Case of Micro Vision and its Global Footprint

In a particularly telling case of the PRC’s sophisticated propaganda and disinformation operations, MJIB investigators have

[alleged](#) that the Taiwan-registered China VTV Co., Ltd. (中華微視股份有限公司) and its owners Tsai Yue-ting (蔡岳廷) and Chang Chiao-lin (張巧琳) were instructed by Chinese partners to establish the media company in Taiwan in 2017 to promote audio-visual content from the China- and Hong Kong-based companies. These Chinese partners also assisted in the [operation and management](#) of the Facebook fan pages of “China Micro Vision” (中華微視), as well as its YouTube channel.

According to a [public release](#) issued by the MJIB, the Taiwan-registered company signed a “[strategic cooperation agreement](#)” with the China-based “Micro Vision Network Technology Jiangsu Co., Ltd.” (大陸微視網絡科技江蘇有限公司) and the Hong Kong-based China VTV Holding Co., Ltd. (香港中華微視有限公司). Taiwanese investigators uncovered that the agreement between the Taiwan-based China VTV Co., Ltd. obligated the companies in China and Hong Kong to provide 3 million RMB (roughly USD \$434,000) in exchange for a 67 percent share in the Taiwan-registered company. The Taiwanese company also allegedly received 500,000 RMB (roughly USD \$72,000) in 2017 from the PRC companies.

Standing at the nexus of this sprawling web of *Zhonghua Weishi* media organizations is [Song Tijin](#) (宋體金). Song is a Chinese media magnate who Taiwanese investigators claim had ties to the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA). According to [public records](#), Song joined the PLA in 1981 and began work in the media after retirement—although any further involvement and ties with the PLA could not be independently verified at the moment.

Taiwanese authorities further determined that the Taiwan-based China VTV Ltd. was attempting to incite public alarm by [spreading fake news](#), as exemplified by one article entitled “Japan readying evacuation of its citizens from Taiwan due to an emergency in the Taiwan Strait.” While media co-optation is already a well-known tactic employed by the PRC, more troubling is the fact that the amplification of this propaganda and disinformation was facilitated by a paid local intermediary of PRC companies that attempted to conceal its ties with the Chinese companies by setting up several shell companies to evade disclosure requirements. The owner of the Taiwan-based company [reportedly](#) confessed to the alleged crimes.

Interestingly, according to publicly available information, the media companies owned and operated by Song, such as the Hong Kong-based China VTV Holding Co., Ltd., have [branches or local intermediaries](#) in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United States, Malaysia, and Australia. In fact, one was even

listed as an over-the-counter (OTC) security (i.e., a security that is not listed on a major exchange, but rather traded via a broker-dealer network) in the United States (under symbol CVTV) as recently as 2019. Although the company is [listed as a Hong Kong entity](#), the locus of its activities appears to be in Xuzhou in Jiangsu Province, where Micro Vision Network Technology Jiangsu Co., Ltd. is headquartered.

Notably, in 2019 Song also legally [became the executive officer](#) of the US-registered [China Microvision](#) (美國中華微視) operating under the name of China VTV Limited. According to a [filing](#) with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the company was [incorporated in Nevada](#) in 2015 and was formerly known as T-Bamm. As a holding company, the company has not carried out substantive business operations within the United States, although the website’s [YouTube page](#) indicates that it has a technical research and development platform located in Los Angeles, as well as business development agreements with other companies. Song became the head of the US-registered company through a reverse merger with the Hong Kong-based China VTV Ltd., which became a wholly owned subsidiary of the US-based China VTV Limited. Song, as chairman of the parent board, was then [appointed](#) as the principal and CEO of the parent company. Wang Yatao (王雅韜) and Meng Liqiang (孟立強), the co-founders of the Hong Kong-based China Micro Vision, then [joined the board of directors](#) of China VTV in the United States.



Front row, left to right: Li Tai-yi (李泰毅) [second from left], Chin Yan-I (金宴儀) [third from left], Song Tijin (宋體金) [fourth from left], Wang Yatao (王雅韜) [second from right], Meng Liqian (孟立強) [first from right] in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province.

(Image source: [Line](#))

Based on data from 2019, China VTV is the first Chinese online and television media company listed as an OTC security in the United States. Across its various platforms, the media company boasts a [worldwide audience](#) of 3.5 million. With the help of the US-based CVTV, the company appears to be using the US

entity and its access to international capital to help financially support its global operations and enhance its credibility with international partners. According to [public reporting](#), China Micro Vision is focused on the internet TV user market in Chinese communities outside the PRC and in countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, formerly known as One Belt, One Road, 一帶一路).

Conclusion

While there did not appear to be a substantively new method of Chinese IO deployed in Taiwan's 2022 local election—most of the observable activity followed similar models observed in the past—the case of Micro Vision reveals a more subtle and difficult to detect vector of IOs that is worthy of further analysis. This particular method exposes the growing sophistication of China's information operations network, since the organizations' ties to the central government or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are less discernable. Combating these new tactics will require not only looking at national- and state-level actors, but also provincial actors and their local intermediaries in the target country.

As noted by [Doublethink](#), the methods deployed in the local elections involved what researchers there described as the "Pink Mode," in which IOs were largely controlled at the local government level and disseminated through marketing agencies with highly specific target audiences—often using social media outlets such as Weibo, Wechat, livestreaming platforms, YouTube, and Facebook. In terms of capital flows, they were characterized as small, decoupled, and mostly online.

It should be noted that the leadership of the Jiangsu- and Hong Kong-based media outlets in question—Micro Vision Network Technology Jiangsu Co., Ltd. and China VTV Holding Co., Ltd.—are highly inter-related. In particular, Song serves as vice chairman of the [former](#) and is the principal executive officer of the [latter](#), whereas Meng serves on the board of directors of the former. These relationships underscore the expansive infrastructure and resources available for Chinese information operations. Indeed, the company had used the US-registered company to [purchase additional media companies in Taiwan](#)—ostensibly in an effort to heighten its credibility, as well as obfuscate connections with its original mainland precursors and bankroll its foreign influence operations. While the local Taiwan branch, China VTV Co., Ltd., has been [shut down](#) for having undeclared financial support from China and conducting a disinformation campaign to create social division and mistrust in Taiwan's government, this is likely only the tip of a larger iceberg. It is possible that the China-based company will work to cultivate

ties with other Taiwanese businesses, allowing it to reestablish a presence on the island.

Taiwanese investigators [concluded](#) that the owners of the Taiwan-based China VTV Co., Ltd., had taken instruction from company executives in China to establish and operate programming for social media produced by outlets in Beijing and Hong Kong in what MJIB described as "propaganda efforts." It is plausible then to expect that the company's operations in the United States and other countries may also be conducting similar activities. Moreover, with the acquisition by Hong Kong-based China VTV of the US-based China VTV, the method it is using to target Taiwan may also be used to target the Chinese diaspora in the United States and elsewhere.

The main point: China is expanding its global media footprint and utilizing a sophisticated web of companies with relationships with local media intermediaries, in order to spread disinformation and propaganda into local markets.

Veteran Chinese Official Song Tao Assumes the Taiwan Portfolio

By: J. Michael Cole

J. Michael Cole is a senior advisor on Countering Foreign Authoritarian Influence (CFAI) at the International Republican Institute (IRI) and a senior non-resident fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute.

On December 28, 2022, the Chinese government [announced](#) that Song Tao (宋濤) had been appointed as the new director of the State Council's [Taiwan Affairs Office](#) (TAO, 國務院臺灣事務辦公室), the leading organization in charge of Beijing's relations with what it regards as a province needing to be "re-unified." Replacing Liu Jieyi (劉結一), who had headed the TAO since March 2018, the 67-year-old Song is expected to play a key role in cross-strait affairs amid escalating tensions and ahead of Taiwan's presidential election next year. His three deputy directors are Chen Yuanfeng (陳元豐), Long Mingbiao (龍明彪), and Pan Xianzhang (潘賢掌).

A [veteran diplomat](#) who previously served as ambassador to Guyana and the Philippines, Song has also served as counselor at the Chinese Embassy in India, vice minister of foreign affairs, and deputy head and executive deputy chief (minister-level) of the Foreign Affairs Office, the execution arm of the Foreign Affairs Leading Group. Song was a member of the 19th Chinese

Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (中國共產黨中央委員會) from 2017 to 2022. He also headed the CCP's International Liaison Department (ILD, 中共中央對外聯絡部) from November 2015 to June 2022.

According to [analysts](#), Song will likely be named one of the 24 vice chairpersons of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, 中國人民政治協商會議), an advisory body under the United Front Work Department (中共中央統一戰線工作部).

New Direction, or More of the Same?

Unlike his three most recent predecessors as heads of the TAO—Liu, Zhang Zhijun (張志軍), and Wang Yi (王毅)—Song assumes the new role without being a member of the CCP's Central Committee (he was not re-elected at the CCP National Congress in October last year). As a result, within the government hierarchy, Song does not technically have ranking equal to that of provincial heads, which could complicate his ability to negotiate with—if not impose his will on—the heads of the various provinces that are key to China's Taiwan strategy.

Song nevertheless has the advantage of having worked in Fujian Province when Xi Jinping (習近平) served as governor there (1999-2002), where he was considered a close confidant of the future CCP secretary general. Song was also Xi's [special envoy to North Korea](#) in November 2017, and played similar roles on visits to Vietnam and Cuba. This, above all else, may have been the factor leading to Song's appointment, given Xi's emphasis on elevating sycophants. (Song had been due for probable retirement after leaving the ILD.) This also suggests that Xi, as the head of the CCP's Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs (中央對台工作領導小組)—the party's highest decision-making body on Taiwan affairs—will continue to have final say on the tone and direction of the TAO. Consequently, as some analysts have noted, Song will likely be tasked with [implementing Xi's personal will on Taiwan](#).

Song is also [close](#) to [Wang Huning](#) (王滬寧), the fourth-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP (PSC, 中國共產黨中央政治局常務委員會) and a deputy to Xi at the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs. Wang Huning is also a candidate for [elevation to chairman of the CPPCC](#) later this year. Wang Yi, who it has just been announced will serve as [director of the Foreign Affairs Office](#) of the Central Committee of the CCP, is also expected to become secretary-general of the CCP Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs. Given the grip the “[big three](#)” (Xi, Wang Huning, and Wang Yi) will have on Taiwan affairs, we

are unlikely to see a major departure from past TAO approaches to Taiwan under Song—who, as the junior partner on the Taiwan file, will merely play the role of [executor](#).

For Taiwan, the most pertinent aspect of Songs résumé could be his experience with “united front work” and the ILD, the ministerial-level agency that coordinates the party's relations with foreign political parties, international political organizations, and overseas political elites. The ILD is also believed to be involved in intelligence collection and political work against foreign political parties. Thanks to his recent and relatively long stint with the ILD, Song is expected to play a significant role in Beijing's efforts to further increase the pressure on—and to isolate—Taiwan in the lead-up to the presidential and legislative elections in January 2024. Such efforts will accompany the PRC's ramped-up military pressure on Taiwan, which has escalated significantly since August 2022 following then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan visit.

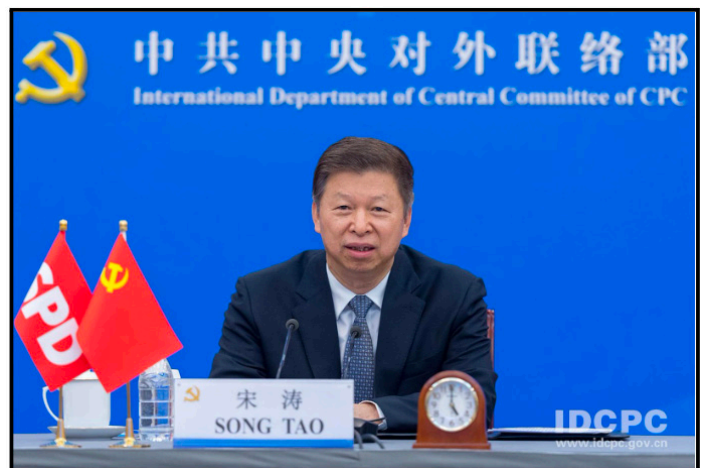


Image: Song Tao, in his prior role as the director of the CCP International Department, speaking at an event in March 2021.

(Image source: [Peng Pai News](#))

“Work Together”

It did not take long for Song to set the tone. In an 1,800-character [New Year message titled “Work Together, Create Great Achievements Together”](#) (攜手奮鬥 共創偉業) published in the [first 2023 issue](#) of *Relations Across Taiwan Straits* magazine (兩岸關係), Song emphasized that “peaceful reunification [sic], one country, two systems [一國兩制] and the ‘1992 consensus’ [九二共識]” remained Beijing's non-negotiable plans for Taiwan. Analysts [observe](#) that Song's TAO is now aimed primarily at promoting “national reunification”—both within Taiwan and internationally—rather than opposing Taiwan independence. To this end, Song wrote that during 2023, the Chinese side will “carry out extensive and in-depth discussions on cross-Straits

ties and national reunification with people of foresight from all walks of life of Taiwan society.”

Such remarks suggest that greater emphasis will be placed on outreach to, and negotiations with, various pro-CCP or amenable elements within Taiwanese society (the “people of foresight”) to influence politicians, elites, and the public ahead of the 2024 elections. While such efforts may encounter difficulties as long as people-to-people exchanges between the two sides continue to be hampered due to the COVID-19 situation in China, it is expected that once regular travel resumes, the CCP will quickly seek to intensify its influence work within Taiwan (various events have been held online since the onset of COVID and attendant travel restrictions). This will likely include focusing on traditional political parties through the TAO’s Liaison Bureau (聯絡局) and the [Political Parties Bureau](#) (政黨局)—the latter of which was created in 2009 by then-TAO chief Wang Yi, primarily to strengthen exchanges with various political parties in Taiwan (especially with the Democratic Progressive Party [DPP, 民進黨]), with a focus on eroding its hostility toward China). TAO efforts will also focus on outliers and independent candidates, as well as [persons of influence](#) within the business, cultural, religious, and political spheres.

According to former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT, 國民黨) legislator Alex Tsai (蔡正元), who hews ideologically close to the CCP line, of all the TAO directors since the agency’s inception, Song is the one who has “the deepest knowledge of the DPP” and has had “many contacts and communications with” Chiu Tai-san (邱太三), the current minister of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC, 大陸委員會), Taiwan’s TAO counterpart.

Song’s note also played on the [themes](#) of “peace” (mentioned nine times) and the “Taiwan issue” as a “domestic matter” that needs protection from “external interference” (primarily from the United States). He also equated the results of last November’s local elections in Taiwan, in which the ruling DPP fared rather poorly, to overwhelming desire among the Taiwanese public for peace and opposition to independence. With this latter element, Song was signaling what we can assume will be one of the key themes of the TAO’s efforts on Taiwan for the next year in preparation for the 2024 general elections: that a vote for the DPP is a vote for war. Much of this will be handled through the TAO’s Information Bureau (新聞局).

As the Mainland Affairs Council’s [response](#) to Song’s New Year note made clear, a majority of Taiwanese remain opposed to the idea of unification with China under the “one country, two systems” formula, a lack of appeal that has been compounded

by the deepening authoritarianism in China under Xi. As such, Song’s ability to use the TAO to win the hearts and minds of the Taiwanese through exchanges and inducements—in other words, to promote the new focus on “reunification”—will remain limited, all the more so due to his expected inability to depart from Xi’s dictates. Consequently, the TAO’s principal role will be to coordinate multifaceted efforts to divide Taiwanese society by exacerbating polarization, spreading disinformation, and heightening, in parallel with military coercion, a sense of imminent crisis. If China cannot win over a sufficiently large number of Taiwanese to shift political decisions in Taipei, it can at least endeavor to turn the Taiwanese public against the DPP—and whomever will be President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) successor as the party’s candidate in 2024—as well as to discredit the United States as a security partner of Taiwan. This, above all, will be Song’s remit for the foreseeable future.

The main point: Although he brings an impressive résumé, the new head of the Taiwan Affairs Office will be a mere executor of the CCP’s Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs policies on Taiwan. Beyond continuing his agency’s efforts to co-opt politicians and other influential figures on the Taiwan side, Song will be charged with implementing the CCP’s cognitive warfare efforts in the lead-up to Taiwan’s general elections in 2024.

Beijing’s Air and Naval Activity in December Dials Up the Coercive Pressure Against Taiwan—and Political Signaling towards the United States

By: John Dotson

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

A central theme of cross-Straits relations throughout 2022 was the intensification of People’s Republic of China (PRC) military coercion directed against Taiwan, exemplified most clearly by the provocative military exercises conducted by China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in August in the immediate wake of a visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (see [here](#) and [here](#)). In the latter half of December, the PRC capped off the year by conducting a series of significant naval and air operations in the maritime space surrounding Taiwan. These included: a deployment by the PLA Navy (PLAN) aircraft carrier *Liaoning* (遼寧); a combined naval exercise held in conjunction with the Russian Navy; and a dramatic surge in PLA aviation sorties over the Tai-

wan Strait centerline on Christmas Day. While individually these actions are consistent with existing patterns in PLA exercise activity, collectively they represent both gradually increasing confidence on the part of PLA forces in operating in an open ocean environment, as well as a further intensification of coercive pressure directed against the island and its citizens.

The Liaoning Carrier Deployment and Exercises East of Taiwan

This first of these three significant events was the [deployment of the Liaoning aircraft carrier group](#), whose ships departed from the PLAN North Sea Fleet homeport of Qingdao on December 15. For this deployment, the Liaoning was accompanied by five other surface vessels: the guided missile destroyers *Anshan* (鞍山), *Wuxi* (無錫), and *Chengdu* (成都); the guided missile frigate *Zaozhuang* (棗莊); and the supply ship *Hulunhu* (呼倫湖). The ships transited through the Miyako Strait (between Miyako Island and Okinawa in the Ryukyus) by December 16, and entered the open Pacific to operate in the waters east of Taiwan and the Philippine Sea. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) reportedly deployed a destroyer and multiple maritime patrol aircraft to [track the vessels of the Liaoning patrol group](#) throughout its deployment.

Liaoning Carrier Group Training Deployment Vessels, December 2022			
Ship Name / Pennant Number	Ship Class / Type (Chinese Designation)	NATO Designation	Subordination
<i>Liaoning</i> (遼寧) / 16	Type 001 Aircraft Carrier	KUZNETSOV CV	PLAN Headquarters
<i>Anshan</i> (鞍山) / 103	Type 055 Destroyer	RENHAI CG-103	PLAN North Sea Fleet
<i>Wuxi</i> (無錫) / 104	Type 055 Destroyer	RENHAI CG-104	PLAN North Sea Fleet
<i>Chengdu</i> (成都) / 120	Type 052D Destroyer	LUYANG-III DDG-120	PLAN North Sea Fleet
<i>Zaozhuang</i> (棗莊) / 542	Type 054A Frigate	JIANGKAI-II FFG-542	PLAN North Sea Fleet
<i>Hulunhu</i> (呼倫湖) / 901	Type 901A Supply Ship	FUYU AOE-965	PLAN North Sea Fleet
Other PLAN Vessels Underway in Western Pacific / Philippine Sea, December 2022			
<i>Lhasa</i> (拉薩) / 102	Type 055 Destroyer	RENHAI CG-102	PLAN North Sea Fleet

<i>Kaifeng</i> (開封) / 124	Type 052D Destroyer	LUYANG-III DDG-124	PLAN North Sea Fleet
<i>Taihu</i> (太湖) / 889	Type 903A Supply Ship	FUCHI AOR-889	PLAN North Sea Fleet
<i>Taizhou</i> (泰州) / 138	Sovremennyy Destroyer	SOVREMEN-NYY II DDG-138	PLAN East Sea Fleet
<i>Huanggang</i> (黃岡) / 557	Type 054A Frigate	JIANGKAI-II FFG-557	PLAN East Sea Fleet
<i>Kaiyangxing</i> (開陽星) / 856	Type 815A Electronic Surveillance Ship	DONGDIAO II AGI-856	PLAN North Sea Fleet

(Sources: Adapted from [INDSR](#), December 23, 2022; and [ONI](#), December 2022)

Three other PLAN vessels in a smaller formation—the Type 055 guided missile destroyer *Lhasa* (拉薩), the Type 052D guided missile destroyer *Kaifeng* (開封), and the Type 093A supply ship *Taihu* (太湖)—reportedly passed through the Osumi Strait (south of Kyushu) on December 14. Three additional vessels also passed through the Miyako Strait between December 14–16: the Type 815 electronic surveillance ship *Kaiyangxing* (開陽星), as well as the East Sea Fleet-based Sovremennyy-class guided missile destroyer *Taizhou* (泰州) and the Type 054A guided missile frigate *Huanggang* (黃岡) (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).



Image: The ships of the Liaoning aircraft carrier group that deployed to the east of Taiwan in December 2022. Clockwise, from bottom left: the aircraft carrier Liaoning, the destroyer Wuxi, the frigate Zaozhuang, the destroyer Anshan, the destroyer Chengdu, and the supply ship Hulunhu. (Image source: [USNI](#), from Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force)

The *Liaoning* deployment is consistent with a recent pattern. In both 2021 and 2022, the carrier and its escorting ships conducted “[beyond the island chain training](#)” (跨島鏈訓練) in the Philippine Sea/waters east of Taiwan twice each year (in the spring and in December), in underway periods lasting approximately three weeks. [1] However, per [analysis by Jiang Hsin-biao](#) (江忻杓), a research fellow with the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) in Taipei, this year’s total of 12 ships “was of unprecedented scale” when compared to the PLAN’s previous carrier group deployments east of Taiwan. Also per Jiang’s analysis, the *Liaoning* and its escorts—including the additional destroyers and support vessels—established an exercise area from 23 to 25 degrees north latitude and 125 to 130 degrees east longitude (forming a box south of the Ryukyus, and east of Taiwan), in order to conduct training operations intended to “strengthen battlefield experience in an expected combat area” (預想作戰海域加強戰場經營). Jiang also assessed that the December 16 sorties of two PLAN Air Force (PLANAF) H-6J bombers, which flew through the Miyako Strait and near Japan’s Daito Island before turning around, were likely used by both the bombers and the *Liaoning* escort ships for a mutual targeting exercise.

Despite the observable pattern in aircraft carrier training deployments, PRC media sources have, for propaganda purposes, attempted to link this deployment to criticisms of both US actions and growing US-Taiwan defense ties. For example, a researcher with the state-operated Yuan Wang military think tank (遠望防務研究院) in Beijing [stated](#) that the “*Liaoning* carrier group training is also a response to the US Navy’s increasing intrusion into waters near the Spratly Islands, showing them that the PLA is always ready to cope with the American’s provocation[s].” The nationalist outlet *Global Times*, citing reports that the *Liaoning* battle group had operated in waters to the west of Guam in late December, [commented](#) that this occurred at the same time that “the PLA Eastern Theater Command organized ‘record-breaking’ cross-service joint combat alert patrols and joint fire strike exercises in maritime and aerial areas around the island of Taiwan in a resolute response to the recent escalation in the US-Taiwan collusion.” The same commentary opined that “China will never attack US military bases in Guam as long as the US military does not attack China or interfere in the Taiwan question, but having such capabilities is a deterrent against potential US provocations.”

Combined Chinese and Russian Naval Exercises in December

China’s second major naval event of the month was the “[Maritime Union-2022](#)” (海上聯合-2022) exercise, held jointly by the

PLAN and vessels of the Russian Pacific Fleet from December 21-27. Participating PLAN ships, drawn from both the North and East Sea Fleets, included the Type 052D guided missile destroyer *Baotou* (包頭), the Type 052C guided missile destroyer *Jinan* (濟南), and the Type 054A guided missile frigates *Binzhou* (濱州) and *Yancheng* (鹽城). (PRC sources also indicated participation by one or more submarine units, but did not provide specifics.) [Russian Navy vessels participating in the exercise](#) included the guided missile cruiser *Varyag*, the destroyer *Marshal Shaposhnikov*, and the corvettes *Sovershennyy* and *Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov*, all part of the Russian Navy’s Pacific Fleet. The Russian vessels sailed from Vladivostok, and reportedly transited the Tsushima Strait and entered the East China Sea on December 20-21.

Per an [official PLA spokesman](#), the naval exercise was held in an area “from Zhoushan to Taizhou in the East China Sea,” indicating an operating area off the coast of Zhejiang Province. The official theme of the exercise was “uniting to uphold maritime security” (聯合維護海上安全), with activities consisting of: “establishing united closure and control, inspection and seizure, united air defense, united rescue, [and] united anti-submarine operations.” [Russian state press](#), echoing a statement from the Russian Ministry of Defense, indicated that the purpose of the exercise was to “strengthen Russian-Chinese naval cooperation” and “to maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region”—and that the exercise was “a natural reaction to the actions of the US” in destabilizing the region.

One particularly interesting aspect of the PRC’s messaging surrounding the exercise was the language pertaining to maritime navigation, as well as potential closure and/or blockade operations. [Official PRC sources](#) described one of the key points of the training exercise as “jointly upholding safety and unimpeded strategic maritime passages” (共同維護海上戰略通道安全暢通)—even as it invoked unspecified maritime “closure and control” (封控) activities conducted by both navies. [2] The intended implication seems to be that Russian naval forces could become engaged alongside the PLAN in future blockade or inspection/seizure operations—although this is not explicitly stated.

The PLA’s Christmas Aircraft Sortie Surge

PLA aircraft began making periodic [sorties over the Taiwan Strait centerline \(TSC\) in 2019-2020](#), and this trend [spiked dramatically in 2022](#)—with the most dramatic surges often timed to accompany significant political events, such as visits to the island by senior US government figures. Such a spike in activity occurred

again in late December, when the PLA sent a [major surge of aircraft](#) over the TSC on Christmas Day: on the 25th-26th, a total of 71 PRC aircraft reportedly entered Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Per Taiwan Ministry of Defense information (see *graphic below*), at least 44 of these aircraft (including 42 fighter aircraft) conducted sorties over the TSC.

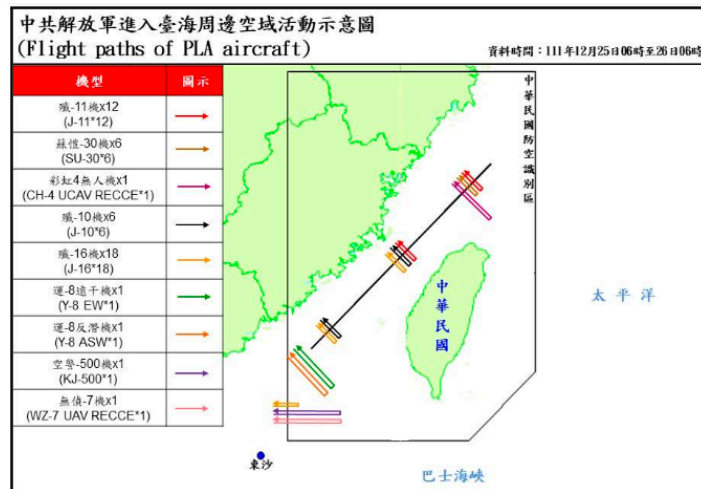


Image: A Taiwan government graphic depicting the surge of PLA aviation sorties on December 25-26. (Image source: [ROC MND](#))

This surge of cross-TSC sorties appeared (at least on the surface) to represent a PRC reaction to another significant advancement in US defense support for Taiwan: on December 23, US President Joseph Biden signed into law the Fiscal 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which included [authorization for up to USD \\$2 billion in Foreign Military Financing \(FMF\) loans](#) to Taiwan for the purchase of US-manufactured defense equipment. This drew furious criticism from PRC state outlets, which criticized the legislative provision as another example of “[US-Taiwan collusion](#).” On December 24, the PRC Foreign Ministry issued a [specific statement condemning the NDAA](#), stating that:

“This act disregards facts and plays up the ‘China Threat,’ recklessly interferes in China’s internal affairs, attacks and smears the Chinese Communist Party, and is a serious political provocation against China. [...] This act also contains many provisions of negative interference [regarding] Taiwan; seriously violates the One-China Principle and the stipulations of the three China-US joint communiques; sends seriously mistaken signals to ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces, [and] causes serious damage to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan is China’s Taiwan, [and we will] not tolerate any foreign interference in China’s internal affairs. The American side should immediately cease ‘using Taiwan to control China,’ [...] stop hollowing out and distorting the

One-China Principle, [and] stop going further and further down this mistaken and dangerous path.”

Conclusions

The PRC’s steadily increasing campaign of provocative military activity around Taiwan finished out the year with a bang, encompassing three significant events in December. The *Liaoning* carrier group deployment, the “Maritime Union-2022” naval exercise with Russia, and the Christmas aircraft sortie surge were not outliers. Rather, they represent continuity in terms of both increasing PLA operational proficiency, as well as the continuing effort by the CCP leadership to employ the PLA as a coercive geopolitical tool. Despite this, PRC state outlets have undertaken an active propaganda effort to paint these aggressive actions as a defensive response to US “interference” in the Taiwan issue, as well as the “provocation” of closer ties between the United States and Taiwan. The PLA’s demonstrative, coercive military operations in the air and sea spaces around Taiwan—a centerpiece of cross-Strait relations in 2022—can only be expected to continue, and likely to continue increasing in scale, as we move into 2023.

The main point: The PRC capped off a year of high-profile coercive military activity directed towards Taiwan with three significant events in December: an aircraft carrier deployment east of Taiwan, a combined naval exercise with Russia, and a surge of aircraft sorties near Taiwan. Such actions may be expected to continue as Beijing further attempts to employ the PLA as a tool to intimidate both Taiwan and other states in the region.

[1] For its part, the PLA Navy’s second (and first indigenously constructed) carrier, the Type 2 *Shandong* (山東), conducted South China Sea training deployments in [May 2021](#), [November-December 2021](#), and [August 2022](#).

[2] Of note, the choice of language in official PRC media regarding exercise activities focused on controlling maritime traffic is interesting. The official description of such activities is “closure-control” (封控, *fengkong*); the word “blockade” (封鎖, *fengsuo*) is not employed. The former usage seems intended to imply the latter, without the potential complications of explicitly saying so.

Japan's New National Security Posture and Taiwan's Security: Japan's Constitution Is Not a Suicide Pact

By: Lt. Gen. Wallace “Chip” Gregson Jr. (USMC, ret.)

Lt. Gen. (USMC, ret.) Wallace “Chip” Gregson is the former Assistant Secretary of Defense, Asian and Pacific Security Affairs (2009 until 2011), and a member of the Global Taiwan Institute’s Advisory Board.

Taiwan’s security just got a significant and positive boost. Japan’s new security assessment and direction, clearly intended to enhance the defense of all of its 6,852 islands, serves Taiwan well. Taiwan is now no longer stranded in an anomalous “special” status, separated somehow from the Japanese archipelago, which forms the northern part of the First Island Chain. It’s no longer just a matter for the United States, and Japan’s declaration of the obvious—that Taiwan’s security is critical to Japan’s security—marks a real sea change, literally as well as figuratively.

The informal league of democratic maritime nations, including relationships like “[The Quad](#)” (Japan, India, Australia, United States), and [AUKUS](#) (Australia, United Kingdom, United States), and the five US treaty allies, as well as numerous other friendly regional states, is stirring. The whole-of-government power represented by these various arrangements can be decisive. Japan, already a regional leader, will be assuming a stronger leadership position.

On December 16, Japan formally published its new [National Security Strategy](#). It was accompanied by a new [National Defense Strategy](#) and an ambitious Mid-Term Defense Buildup Program (now called the Defense Buildup Program, or DBP). A defense budget increase, the start of a process to double resources in five years, is explained in detail. It will bring Japan up to the NATO standard, which calls for a commitment of 2 percent of gross domestic product to defense. This will represent a doubling of Japan’s resource commitment to defense.

The three documents are solidly linked and integrated. This is no accident. The strategy and the implementation plans were developed by an array of security and government specialists, both active and retired, and overseen by the ruling party’s defense council, ensuring support in Japan’s Diet. The strategy document itself is a well-reasoned and measured explanation of how Japan intends to defend its national interests and how it intends to expand security ties across the nations along the First Island Chain, and with the nations of Southeast Asia. It explains

Japan’s intent to exercise its right of self-defense, including collective self-defense. It makes clear that all of this is within Japan’s constitutional requirements.

The *National Defense Strategy* replaces the periodic alliance defense guidelines. The new defense strategy is “made in Japan” for the defense of Japan, and adds more detail to the military components of the National Security Strategy. The third piece is the *Mid-Term Defense Plan*, detailing the resources needed, how they will be applied, and when, over the next few years. Most notably, the plans and the increased spending plans will allow Japan to acquire many standoff counter-force weapons, starting with the US-made Tomahawk missile. The missiles will be used in a counter-strike role, not in a preemption role. Less well-known, but perhaps of even more importance over time, is the increase in resources to better house and support the soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF). Technology can provide wonderful capabilities, but ultimately the proficiency of the force depends on taking care of the people who choose to serve. Look no further than today’s Ukraine for proof.

The new defense posture will also include a hardening of bases in Japan, as well as new command and control structures to ensure effective operations across all domains. Joint and combined capabilities will be improved across air, land, and sea, and across the alliance. [Ammunition, fuel, and other resource storage capacities will be increased](#), especially in the Ryukyu Islands.

Hyperbolic reactions from critics charge that Japan is abandoning pacifism and undertaking the largest military buildup since World War II. [China’s embassy in Tokyo charged](#): “Saying such things within the documents severely distorts the facts, violates the principles and spirit of the four China-Japan political documents, wantonly hypes the ‘China threat’ and provokes regional tension and confrontation.” China subsequently demonstrated its pique by sailing an aircraft carrier and flotilla through the Miyako Strait in Okinawa Prefecture. [1]

On the contrary, Japan’s new *National Security Strategy*—the second ever, and the first since 2013—is the product of a very careful reappraisal of the changing nature of Japan’s security challenges since the end of the Cold War, especially in the last ten years. The documents represent a profound shift in response to the rise of major threats and the transformative effects of emerging technologies on combat – for example, massive surveillance capabilities paired with weapons accurate at a great distance. Russia’s attack on Ukraine occurred in the last phase of Japan’s careful reappraisal, serving as a proof statement, should

any be needed, of the growing threat.

It is not hyperbolic to say that the new policies are unprecedented in nature. Japan's security policies and strategies have been changing incrementally over time. The pace of change began to accelerate under the late Prime Minister Abe, demonstrating that the constitution was never intended to be a suicide pact. The overworked adage of change happening slowly, then suddenly, proved true in this case.

In this new *National Security Strategy*, China is cited as the most worrisome threat, over North Korea. Taiwan's importance to Japan's own security, cited seven times in the document, is made clear:

"Japan's relationship with Taiwan has been maintained as a non-governmental working relationship based on the Japan-China Joint Communiqué in 1972. Japan's basic position regarding Taiwan remains unchanged. Taiwan is an extremely important partner and a precious friend of Japan, with whom Japan shares fundamental values, including democracy, and has close economic and personal ties. Peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait [are] an indispensable element for the security and prosperity of the international community, and Japan will continue to make various efforts based on its position that the cross-strait issues are expected to be resolved peacefully. [2]"

But what, exactly, would Japan be expected to do in a Taiwan contingency? A strong defense of Japan, and specifically that of the hundreds of islands of Okinawa Prefecture, is a good place to start. They are often referred to as the Ryukyu Islands, the Southwest Islands, and as the *Nansei Shoto*. They were called a "keystone" in early Cold War days. Those islands are 63 miles from Taiwan at their closest point of approach, well south of Taipei's latitude. They also constitute the eastern barrier, or limit, of the East China Sea.

Recent events in these islands signal Japan's new posture. Yoma Guni, only 63 miles from Taiwan, is home to a JSDF surveillance station. [The deployment of a surface-to-air guided missile unit is now under consideration](#). An [Okinawa defense group](#), vastly upgrading the Ground Self-Defense Force 15th Brigade now based in Naha, is currently being planned.

Japan and the United States maintain and enjoy a range of unofficial relationships with Taiwan. These relationships can be valuable channels to ensure mutual understanding of plans and strategies at the operational and tactical levels. A strong cadre of liaison officers, military and civilian, can and must be enhanced.

A strong defense of Japan—including the Ryukyu Islands—and Taiwan is solidly within the ethos of collective self-defense at the core of our alliance. The way is clear, thanks to Japan's new declarations, to greatly enhance this defense with solid integration of our alliance forces under a single common operating picture. (Defense jargon might call this the integration of fires and maneuver in real time, across all alliance forces.) A valuable strategic effect of this would be the denial of sea and air control to hostile forces—eventually leading to our recovery of sea and air supremacy, a critical objective for ensuring Taiwan's security.

The main point: Japan's new *National Security Strategy*, released in December, commits the country to double its defense spending over the course of five years. This represents a significant and positive change that will allow Japan to better defend its own territory—and thereby better uphold its defense commitments as an alliance partner of the United States in the event of a major crisis over Taiwan.

[1] See a fuller discussion of December's *Liaoning* aircraft carrier deployment in "Beijing's Air and Naval Activity in December Deals Up the Coercive Pressure Against Taiwan—and Political Signaling towards the United States," elsewhere in this issue.

[2] Office of the Japanese Prime Minister, *National Security Strategy of Japan* (December 16, 2022), p. 14. <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>.

How Taipei Can Achieve Greater Civilian Buy-in for its Military Challenges

By: Thomas Shattuck

Thomas Shattuck is the Global Order program manager at the University of Pennsylvania's Perry World House, and a member of Foreign Policy for America's NextGen Foreign Policy Initiative and the Pacific Forum's Young Leaders Program.

As Taiwan continues to grapple with preparing for—and deterring—a future invasion by the People's Republic of China (PRC), there has been significant debate about the proper ways in which Taipei should boost its ability to fight and improve the capacity of its armed forces. Such conversations have accelerated in the aftermath of Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which led many observers to speculate about whether Taiwan would be next. One of Taiwan's greatest military challenges is its relatively [small number of active-duty personnel](#) and repeated failures to meet recruiting goals. Without a prop-

erly staffed and equipped force, Taiwan will continue to face existential questions about its ability to stop a Chinese military invasion.

In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war, conversations about Taiwan's military preparedness, defense strategy, military recruitment, and civil defense have all heightened. The efforts of [Forward Alliance](#) (壯闊台灣), a civil defense and disaster response organization founded by former special forces soldier-turned-politician Enoch Wu (吳怡農), and [Kuma Academy](#) (黑熊學院), a civil defense organization cofounded by Doublethink Lab Chairman Puma Shen (沈伯洋), are geared towards preparing civilians for the worst by educating them with the necessary skills to carry out first aid in disaster situations and identifying fake news and conspiracy theories, while also providing general civil defense information and skill-building. While these organizations are working to fill a knowledge and skill gap on the part of Taiwan's citizens, they currently have limited reach.

However, semiconductor billionaire Robert Tsao (曹興誠) is working to change that—and quickly. Inspired by the people of Ukraine taking the fight to Russia after the invasion, Tsao has promised [to donate nearly USD \\$100 million](#) to improve Taiwan's defense. He also pledged to fund the production of [one million combat drones](#) to defend Taiwan during an invasion scenario. As a part of his plans, Tsao has donated about [USD \\$20 million to the Kuma Academy](#) to train [three million “black bear warriors”](#) by 2025. He has pledged another USD \$13 million [to train 300,000 marksmen](#). Given Taiwan's lack of a culture of gun ownership, and its restrictive gun laws, much will be required to elevate Taiwanese people's ability to mirror that of the Ukrainians to properly fight back against an invading force.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine could mark the beginning of an important culture shift in terms of Taiwan's civilian population taking preparedness more seriously. This movement has been accentuated by bombastic figures like Tsao, who makes [public appearances](#) in a bulletproof vest, and who moved back to Taiwan and regained his citizenship in an effort to demonstrate how seriously he is taking the country's future. While his style may not be perfect, seeing a wealthy individual put money on the table in the hopes of making positive change should not go unnoticed by Taiwan's people, especially considering his many media appearances.

This article suggests that civilian and military leaders in Taipei should create a new initiative to increase civilian buy-in for the country's military, with the goals of increasing recruitment and

improving civilian understanding of the forces' missions and operations. This initiative should be based on the United States' [Joint Civilian Orientation Conference \(JCOC\)](#), sponsored by the Department of Defense (DoD) and Secretary of Defense, which this author was selected to attend in October 2022. Adopting a Taiwan version of the JCOC could expose influential civilians to the daily lives of its armed forces and make them better advocates for the services.

What is the US JCOC?

The JCOC, established in 1948, is an annual program convened by the DoD that takes civilian leaders to [military bases and installations across the United States](#). Since 1948, over 7,000 people across 93 conferences have participated in the program. The JCOC's [mission](#) is to “[enable] American business and community leaders to have a full immersive experience with their military.” [A 1971 report by the US Comptroller General's office](#) noted that the program is meant to “(1) inform leading business, professional, and religious representatives about the mission of DOD and about the strength and readiness of the US Armed Forces and (2) encourage the conference participants to impart this information to their communities to stimulate support and interest in DOD activities.” While itineraries and budgets have changed over time, the spirit of the JCOC has remained steadfast.

Each of the armed services (including the Coast Guard) is represented in the JCOC. Notably, the 2022 JCOC was the first one to include the Space Force, as the program had to briefly pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each day, participants would meet members of a specific service—across every rank, from privates to generals and admirals—and dine with them, hear their stories, watch them train (and occasionally get to participate in demonstrations), and receive mission briefings. Getting to interact with servicemembers throughout these events allowed participants to get to know US military personnel as the people that they are. Everyone was honest about the triumphs and challenges of their service as well.

Throughout the week-long 93rd Joint Civilian Orientation Conference (JCOC93), my co-participants and I were passengers in Stryker armored vehicles, received hand-to-hand combat training, were coached in proper rifle and handgun use, watched how the global positioning system (GPS) is maintained, observed a Marine Corps graduation, conducted first aid training, and watched various training demonstrations, among much else. The days were long and intense, and most importantly, the schedules were kept a secret to maximize the surprise and fun

of each day. As a result of the week, 40 more civilians who live across the country and work in a variety of industries—from academia and entertainment to education and hospitality—now have a better understanding and appreciation for the US armed services, as well as the people serving the United States at home and across the world. Everyone went home from JCOC93 as better advocates for an effective national defense.



Image: Participants in the 93rd Joint Civilian Orientation Conference engage in a close-quarters tactical combat drill at Fort Carson, Colorado (Oct. 25, 2022). (Image source: [US DoD](#))

The Role of a “Taiwan JCOC”

As Taiwan faces down the China threat and leaders in Taipei decide on defense policy shifts, adding a JCOC-esque program for Taiwanese civilian leaders could potentially pay dividends in the short and long term. Specifically, it could help to generate support for younger Taiwanese considering service in the military, and contribute to more informed, well-reasoned debates on defense-related issues. And if Taipei targets high-profile individuals—like Robert Tsao—then there might be even greater cooperation by the country’s elite in supporting civilian defense and disaster relief initiatives.

The war in Ukraine and related defense conversations in Taiwan seem to have had an effect on views of service. Before the end of 2022, [the Tsai Administration](#) announced an extension of the mandatory service length from four months to one year. The extension takes effect in 2024, and only applies to men born after 2005. Before the announcement was made, even Minister of National Defense Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正) told the Legislative Yuan in October 2022 that the four-month-long service length [was not sufficient](#). [Chiu said](#), “Insufficient manpower in the military is one of the reasons for extending military service [...] Four months of service is not enough as threats from the enemy are now severe.” Increasing the length of service—and

more importantly, improving the quality and efficiency of the service year—is another good development to bolster defense.

Another reason for increasing the mandatory service period is that Taiwan’s attempt to pivot to an all-volunteer force in 2018 has largely failed to meet recruitment goals. [Between 2016 to 2021](#), an average of 14,000 Taiwanese volunteered to join the military per year. However, given the declining birth rate, that number is expected to shrink to 9,000 by 2025. The conscript pool for 2022 is the [“lowest in a decade.”](#) Other factors, such as low pay and a [stark disparity](#) in gender representation, diminish the military’s ability to recruit. The extension of mandatory service is one minor attempt to address the issue.

Since the JCOC program would be a new endeavor, Taipei has the ability to shape it with specific goals in mind. Given ongoing conversations around the role of civilians in combat and how to reform conscription requirements, a Taiwan JCOC could help to pinpoint what Taipei wants to achieve in relation to reforming the military, with specific goals in mind—such as increasing recruitment numbers and shaping civilian defense mechanisms. This top-down approach—utilizing high-level, influential civilians working across a variety of industries—would at a minimum provide space for executives to include disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and first aid trainings as a part of professional development for employees. Some benefits might be as small as an executive mandating and paying for first aid training. Others could be even more expansive, particularly if Tsao’s paramilitary training initiatives find success.

Without creating such a program, Taipei is depriving its military of getting to tell its story directly to the people. In the United States, military leaders often say that their best asset is their people. The same can be said for Taiwan’s military. Accordingly, Taiwan should allow Taiwanese military personnel to tell their own story, without restrictions, via a program modeled on the JCOC. What stuck with JCOC93 participants more than anything was not firing an M-4, freefall rappelling, or watching a search-and-rescue training; rather, it was talking over pancakes and eggs with the young men and women serving our country.

A Taiwan JCOC would allow Taipei to utilize the country’s civilian elite to achieve some of the goals that government officials struggle to achieve on their own. People like Robert Tsao, who has quickly leveraged his status and money to emphasize the need for change and reform in Taiwan’s defense, should be considered ideal candidates. Having greater public buy-in from such figures has the potential to change the public perception of volunteer military service.

The main point: Taipei should create a public outreach program similar to the US Department of Defense's Joint Civilian Orientation Conference (JCOC). The JCOC provides influential civilians with the opportunity to spend a week with every branch of the armed services, meeting personnel, receiving briefings on the services' missions, and participating and viewing training operations. A Taiwan version of the JCOC has the potential to increase recruitment and interest in civil defense by getting greater buy-in from the country's civilian elites.