People vs Platforms: US-Taiwan Security Cooperation in the Near Future

By: Eric Chan

In the spring of last year, I covered various lessons from the Russia-Ukraine War that Taiwan could benefit from, ranging from mobilization and logistics to the importance of airpower and initiative. At the time of this writing, Ukraine is now in the process of carefully husbanding reserves, integrating nearly two thousand Western-provided armored vehicles and tanks, and training troops in combined-arms warfare in preparation for an expected late-spring counter-offensive.

It is the last portion—modern combined-arms training—that has proven to be one of the most difficult challenges. This is due to the immense number of escalating requirements for combined-arms warfare to work effectively: basic soldiering, systems proficiency, inter-service communication, a command-and-control network able to operate between services—and finally, a leadership that understands the capabilities that each service brings, and can coordinate their effects accordingly. However, the payoff for being able to conduct combined-arms warfare is immense. The Russians were not capable of this, and thus their offensives repeatedly bogged down into sequential operations that could be predicted and countered at each turn. Now, Ukraine is attempting to boil down what would ideally be several decades' worth of reform into several months. This is made all the more difficult because many of Ukraine's most experienced soldiers from the pre-invasion period have fallen. New recruits must not only rapidly pick up soldiering skills without the benefit of battle-experienced mentors, but also learn to operate completely new platforms via crash course training.

In this regard, Taiwan's military has several key advantages. First and foremost, it has the advantage of time. Over the winter and spring, many of Ukraine's combat-experienced regular units were pulled away from the frontlines to undergo intensive combined-arms training, both within Ukraine and in Europe. Ukraine's territorial defense force brigades (whose members receive anywhere from three days to three weeks of training) also had to cover the gap, taking severe casualties to blunt Russia's winter offensive and buy...
include weapons, platforms, and capabilities released from ex

Rather, there will likely be a tiered effect: first, PDA items, which
correspond to the use of Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA). However, this will still not mean rapid, sustained deliver-
ies of all of the weapons in the backlog.

The US Departments of State and Defense, under

The United States is now slated to sell NASAMS to Taiwan

The first tranche of announced Taiwan PDA is valued at USD $500 million—comparable to a

The army has trained on M1A2T Abrams since last year. The army has trained on M1A2T Abrams since last year.

by already having a high baseline of platform training compared

For example, the US Air Force uses PEA: at the time of this writing, there have been

The Army has trained on F-16Vs. The Army has trained on F-16Vs. The Army has trained on F-16Vs. The Army has trained on F-16Vs. The Army has trained on F-16Vs.

bined arms and joint maneuver.

bated over the that Taiwan should or should

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In light of the war, and likely

Second, Taiwan already has many—and better—platforms than

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its military will receive a relative trickle of new platforms, weapons, and capabilities from PDA and US FMS. Then, in roughly a few years' time, that trickle will transform into a flood. Taiwan will thus have approximately three years to structure and optimize its military training programs to ensure that these weapons can be rapidly and fully integrated, thus greatly increasing deterrence against the PRC.

Training in Mass

Both the United States and Taiwan have realized the importance of training prior to the influx of platforms. Accordingly, both sides have announced a number of new training initiatives as part of the bilateral security cooperation strategy. The United States has sent a number of advisors to Taiwan, building on existing Army, Marines, and special forces efforts to quietly train elements of Taiwan's military. US special forces personnel are now specifically training for simulated urban combat in Taiwan. Taiwan, for its part, announced in February plans to send a combined-arms battalion to the United States for training. Furthermore, Taiwan also announced an extension of the mandatory military service requirement from four months to one year, coming into effect in 2024 and applicable to those born after 2005.

These efforts are critical in improving small-unit tactics as well as critical basic soldiering skillsets such as marksmanship and communication in a disrupted environment. However, it would be a serious mistake if the US training focused too narrowly on the special forces effort to create a "partisan resistance model," and if combined arms training in the United States for Taiwan's military personnel was limited to simply the battalion level. Instead, both the scope of the training as well as the numbers involved should be magnified. For the sake of simplicity, existing engagement programs could be expanded. For instance, on the issue of a "partisan resistance model," Taiwanese non-commissioned officers (NCOs) are already attending exchange programs in the United States during visits to the US Joint Readiness Training Center and the US Army Asymmetric Warfare Group. An expanded effort could involve not just more NCOs in a "train the trainers" program, but also selected, high-performing conscripts who could later spread their knowledge in either the garrison troop (守備部隊), civil defense (民防系統), or reserve system (後備系統). While it is still unlikely that Taiwan will fashion a Ukraine-like Territorial Defense Force (Territorial Defense Force), this expanded US training effort here would provide a significant long-term boost to existing private civil defense efforts like the Kuma Academy.

Furthermore, expanded training should not be limited to asymmetric warfare. As Ukraine's intense and difficult endeavor to generate massed conventional combat power for a large-scale counter-attack demonstrates, there is a real necessity for Taiwan's military to also be capable of massing, maneuvering, and executing combined-arms operations at scale. Moreover, Taiwan's military must assume that these operations will be conducted under fire by a far more capable adversary than the fumbling Russian military.

Thus, current battalion-level training in the United States is likely insufficient; instead, both Taiwan and the United States should evaluate the possibility of brigade-level training in the United States, with a similar level of engagement by the Republic of China Air Force (ROCAF) and the Republic of China Navy (ROCN). Again, utilizing existing engagements would be ideal, such as Taiwan's attendance at US exercises such as Northern Strike, hosted by the Michigan National Guard. The size of US training areas and ranges would provide space for more complex exercises and make it more difficult for prying eyes to ascertain tactics, techniques, and procedures learned. Moreover, the multilateral aspects to these exercises would provide Taiwan's military a broad spectrum of examples to learn from, instead of simply taking the US expeditionary force as a sole model for military operations.

Image: A Michigan Air National Guard (ANG) A-10 conducts a public highway landing as part of exercise Northern Strike 22. Northern Strike 22 featured combined-arms training between Michigan ANG, the Army National Guard, and the US Marine Corps Reserve, as well as forces from the UK, Canada, and Latvia. Expanded Taiwan participation in a combined-arms exercise like Northern Strike will not only allow for large-scale combined arms training, but also allow Taiwan to leverage the US alliance network to share operational best practices. (Source: US Air National Guard)
Conclusion

For Taiwan, the increased US focus on training as the new core of military activity, conducted to the east of Taiwan.

...security interests—is the increasing number of PLA sorties, and development—and one potentially more menacing for Taiwan's public of China (PRC).

The year 2022 saw a steady escalation in terms of People's Republic of China (PRC). US PDA and policy changes will ameliorate this over the next two to three years. By accepting greater risk today and manpower is already a concern.

For the immediate future, US defense production— particularly in terms of the number of aircraft sorties into Taiwan airspace, as well as further augment the W >[military reconnaissance coverage] (J) ZhongHan [ADIZ]. W >[military reconnaissance coverage] (J) ZhongHan [ADIZ].

The PLA Begins UAV Circumnavigation Flights Around Taiwan in Late April

The PLA has been using drone flights to surveil and probe Taiwan. While China-based UAVs have flown over or near Taiwan airspace, as well as further augment the W >[military reconnaissance coverage] (J) ZhongHan [ADIZ].

...wan's outlying islands in an overt fashion since at least last year. For instance, news media revealed an August 2022 incident in which Taiwan soldiers on Erdan Island (二膽島) in the Kinmen originated in the PRC. Following a string of similar reports of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)—a step that could significantly increase the number of PLA aviation sorties in Taiwan with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The PLA began to cine reconnaissance coverage.

By: John Dotson

in August 2022 following the visit to Taiwan by then-US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi—and has remained at elevated, August 2022 incident.

The PLA Begins UAV Circumnavigation Flights Around Taiwan on an episodic basis in 2016-2017, with this mission being performed primarily by PLA Air Force (PLAAF) H-6K bombers. Bomber flights east of Taiwan were also noted in the past year in conjunction with PLA training forces. With increased risk, though, comes the possibility of higher return. It would mean a military more readily capable of using its new platforms and weapons at full potential.
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Image: A MND graphic showing the April 28 flight paths of a Chinese TB-001 UAV that circumnavigated Taiwan in a counter-clockwise pattern, and a BZK-005 UAV that flew to the east of Taiwan, as well as the sorties of supporting aircraft. (Image source: Taiwan MND)

Such flights by lower-altitude (and apparently, cheaper and off-the-shelf) UAVs around Taiwan's outlying islands are now being buttressed by sorties made by longer-range, higher-end military UAVs. Most significantly, at the end of April these flights began to circumnavigate Taiwan for the first time, adding a new aircraft type to the bombers that have flown periodic circuits around Taiwan over the past several years. [1] As of the writing of this article, three such flights have occurred: on April 28, May 3, and May 11.

April 28
On this day, a TB-001 Tengden UAV flew the first publicly reported circumnavigation flight around Taiwan—flying first through the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan, and then circling the island in a counter-clockwise direction around its eastern side. On the same day, a BZK-005 Chang Ying drone flew a similar flight path for roughly the first half of its sortie, but doubled back at a point east of Taiwan and returned along its original track (see accompanying graphic).

• The April 28 drone flights were also accompanied by sorties of other PLA aircraft: five Su-30 fighters operating at the north and the center of the Taiwan Strait, with shallow penetration of the centerline; eight J-10 fighters operating at the center of the Strait, crossing the centerline; and two J-16 fighters at the south end of the Strait, also crossing the centerline. Two Y-8 patrol aircraft (one an anti-submarine patrol variant, the other a reconnaissance variant) also conducted flights in the southwest quadrant of Taiwan's ADIZ, likely carrying out supporting reconnaissance operations.

May 3
Five days after the first UAV circumnavigation flight, a BZK-005 Chang Ying drone circumnavigated Taiwan in a clockwise pattern, following a flight path that approached Taiwan from the north, continued through airspace to the east of Taiwan, and passed through the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan on a homeward track.

• As with the previous flight on April 30, the BZ-005 flight was also accompanied by supporting sorties of PLA manned aircraft: three Su-30 fighters operating at the north end of the Taiwan Strait, with centerline penetration; four J-10 fighters operating at the center of the Strait, crossing the centerline; and two J-16 fighters at the south end of the Strait, also crossing the centerline. A total of three Y-8 patrol aircraft (an anti-submarine variant, a reconnaissance variant, and an electronic warfare variant) also conducted flights in the southwest quadrant of Taiwan's ADIZ, once again likely conducting supporting reconnaissance operations.

May 11
After a week-long hiatus following the second UAV circumnavigation flight, on May 11 another series of long-range UAV flights passed through the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan on a homeward track.

• The flights passed through the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan, and then circling the island with shallow penetration in the north and the center of the Taiwan Strait, with shallow penetration of the centerline.
occurred. On this date, a CH-4 Cai Hong UAV circumnavigated Taiwan in a clockwise path, similar to the route on May 3. Two additional UAV flights also occurred—involving a TB-001 and a BZK-005—running a partial route through the Bashi Channel and back (similar to the BZK-005 route on April 28, although apparently not extending as far around the island's eastern side).

In addition to the three UAVs, other PLA supporting aircraft were also active: two Su-30 fighters flew at the north end of the Taiwan Strait, crossing the centerline; a total of six J-10 fighters flew routes in the central and southern areas of the Taiwan Strait, crossing the centerline; and a Y-8 electronic warfare aircraft flew a probable reconnaissance mission in the southwest quadrant of Taiwan's ADIZ.

PRC Media Commentary on the Circumnavigation Flights

Following a recent pattern in which PRC media outlets have actively publicized military operations around Taiwan for propaganda purposes, the UAV circumnavigation flights have been extensively touted in PRC sources. For example, the nationalist tabloid *Global Times* asserted on May 4—the day after the second flight—that the UAV flights were part of a larger demonstration of the PLA's "enhanced capabilities [for] safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests," which included ongoing naval exercise activity in the sea spaces adjoining Taiwan. The paper asserted that "the drones could conduct reconnaissance on the eastern side of the island and provide [target] guidance for fire strikes," as well as potentially "carry[ing] out decapitation strikes on secessionist leaders should a conflict break out." The *Global Times* further noted that "the PLA has been holding routine patrols and exercises around the island of Taiwan, including with drones, so such island encirclement drone flights could also become regular [in practice]."

PRC sources seemed particularly interested in stressing the idea that UAVs equipped with air-to-surface missiles could be a weapon for conducting "decapitation" strikes against leadership targets in Taiwan. For example, one state media posting compared in design to the US-designed MQ-9 Reaper drone system. All three platforms demonstrate the advances made by PRC state-affiliated technology research and development institutions in developing more advanced UAV aircraft for military roles—as well as the extensive reverse-engineering of US drone technology that has played a major role in China's own design advancements.

The TB-001 Tengden (腾盾) (AKA "Scorpion") is a twin-engine, twin-tailed drone manufactured by Sichuan Tengden Technology, which possesses a reported range of 3,700 miles, and is capable of both aerial reconnaissance and strike missions. The BZK-005 Chang Ying (长鹰, "Long Eagle")—a platform produced by Beihang University and the Harbin Industry Aircraft Group, and which is often compared to the US-made Global Hawk UAV in design and capabilities—conducted the second reported circumnavigation of Taiwan by a PLA drone on May 3.

The CH-4 Cai Hong (彩虹) ("Rainbow") is a long-range, air-to-ground strike-capable drone manufactured by the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), which is often compared in design to the US-designed MQ-9 Reaper drone system. All three platforms demonstrate the advances made by PRC state-affiliated technology research and development institutions in developing more advanced UAV aircraft for military roles—as well as the extensive reverse-engineering of US drone technology that has played a major role in China's own design advancements.
Conclusions

The commencement of publicly reported military UAV flights around Taiwan in August 2022 (see discussion here) directed at Taiwan. Described missile-launching UAVs such as the TB-001 as “decapitation weapons” directed at Taiwan. Another such article (2009 until 2011), and a member of the Global Taiwan Institute Advisory Board.


Considerable discussion has taken place in recent years regarding a series of ideas most closely associated with former Republic of China (ROC) Chief of the General Staff Admiral Lee Hsi-ming (李喜明). During Admiral Lee’s tenure (2017-2019), the ODC appeared to have fallen out of official favor within Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND, 中華民國海軍), at least some of the ODC’s components of PLA operations.

The introduction of UAV circumnavigation flights around Taiwan is likely intended to provide the PLA with additional electronic and photo reconnaissance collection on military targets and infrastructure facilities located along the eastern coastal regions of the island. Such collection will be important for PLA planners considering operations as a part of a potential future blockade—as was reportedly practiced during the PLA’s Han Kuang (漢光演習) military exercise 2022.

This assertion has not been corroborated in other sources, such as the official daily reports of PLA aviation activity around Taiwan.

The main point: UAV flights around the island would now become regular common components of PLA operations.

Another such article, and predicted that such flights may now be expected to become a regular feature of PLA aviation activity around Taiwan—but that this flight had not been publicized, due to the fact that “at that time the two sides handled it in a low-key fashion.”

The second area is likely the more important one for PLA and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials: the psychological and ever-present platforms capable of eliminating “separatist” paganda apparatus wishes to promote a narrative of stealthy military pressure against both the government and population of Taiwan.

It is in this respect that the propaganda emphasis on UAV tactical reconnaissance, wherein regular flights by unmanned, air-breathing platforms could provide the PLA with additional information magic weapons (integral magic weapons in the case of PLA directed at Taiwan).

While the ODG appears to have fallen out of official support within Taiwan’s Defense Strategy Commission (Defense Concept) and which emphasized acquiring a larger number of smaller and less expensive systems, the PLA’s ongoing political warfare efforts have focused on “asymmetry” has influenced Taiwan’s current defense strategy: The “Overall Defense Concept” (ODC, 整體防禦概念) and US Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy in April 2023.

planning.

The concept is clear enough, but the porcupine metaphor is limited by the passive nature of the animal’s defensive behavior. Porcupines are not animals known for their agility. It is not representative of the defense posture that the ODC calls for. Furthermore, Taiwan’s armed forces do not seem to be attracted to the porcupine as a symbol. (A quick perusal of Taiwan squadron patches will reveal a range of cobras, dragons, devils, spectral dogs, and others, but no porcupines.) The porcupine’s range is also generally limited to North America, so it is not even a native Asian symbol. Accordingly, it is time to replace this zoological metaphor with one that is more active and aggressive—and one better aligned with the more proactive posture called for in the Overall Defense Concept.

The Precision Strike Regime and What It Means for Taiwan’s Defense

Today’s precision strike regime—within that regime demands that Taiwan’s armed forces assume engage at distance to strike enemy forces before they can close the gap on Taiwan or any of its numerous outlying islands. The can prevent that or greatly increase the odds in Taiwan’s favor. The porcupine is not known for any of those traits, and a passive (emphasis added).

The Honey Badger: a Better Metaphor for the Defense Taiwan Needs

Fortunately, Asia hosts a carnivorous mammal known for its predators. It has a high pain tolerance, seemingly immune to honey badger, an animal with an impressive internet and YouTube presence. Younger online encyclopedia—

What Does “Asymmetry” Mean for Taiwan?

is offenceX extremely formidable foe” (emphasis added). the defense posture Taiwan needs, in contrast with the prickly but passive porcupine.

What Does “Asymmetry” Mean for Taiwan?
we must develop the appropriate concepts and then apply the weapons to them, rather than looking at one or another weapon as some asymmetric panacea that will magically redeem

Asymmetry demands a new look. A nation’s forces are various—organized into units, sustained through logistics, trained the force while manufacturing the necessary weapons and equipment. This is also where a nation develops the strategic stockpile of arms and equipment. This is also where the master arming switch is on, and weapons are fired. 

Conclusions

To develop the ability of the Taiwan Army and Marine Corps to play a meaningful and decisive role in the defeat of an invasion—combined with the right weapons, are needed. Recognizing this, Taiwan Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正) is seeking "range, precision, and mobility" for his forces. Small, widely distributed, operationally resilient, agile, and well-led units can make landfall.

While past arguments for a "porcupine strategy—was the need to force the PLA into a decisive battle, with a smaller number of casualties than ever before. A capability would also reverse centuries of battlefield practice, allowing ground forces to inflict a larger share of the killing, while suffering a smaller share of the dying, than ever before. This is where tactical maneuvering and intelligence gathering applied to certain weapons. (One of the authors has previously offered some discussion as to what this vague term might mean for Taiwan in a previous article.) Both weapons systems...

"Smart" weapons, especially if they are small and agile, are the costliest form of combat engagement occurring. One can be attacked in any mode of existence, but we must develop the appropriate concepts and then apply the weapons to them, rather than looking at one or another weapon as some asymmetric panacea that will magically redeem...

But why is this so? There are a number of reasons. First and foremost, the tactical mode is a symmetric engagement (as is ship versus ship, etc.), while in the operational mode, though in differing realms of combat. These start with training the force while manufacturing the necessary weapons and equipment. This is also where a nation develops the strategic stockpile of arms and equipment. This is also where the master arming switch is on, and weapons are fired.

For example, an airplane versus another airplane in the tactical mode is a symmetric engagement (as is ship versus ship, etc.), while in the operational mode, though in differing realms of combat. These start with training the force while manufacturing the necessary weapons and equipment. This is also where a nation develops the strategic stockpile of arms and equipment. This is also where the master arming switch is on, and weapons are fired.

Asymmetric, non-tactical engagements offer the shooter substantially higher degrees of effective asymmetry than shooting happens only in the tactical mode. An airplane, an airplane attacks a ship, or a ground unit attacks a ship—all examples of units deployed and operating in the tactic...
KMT Elder Ma Ying-jeou Goes to China

The Origins and Difficulties of the “1992 Consensus”

To understand Ma’s visit, it is important to understand what this objective for this visit? If he did have an objective, what was it, and does it matter?

Ma stated that he wanted to pay his respects at the memorial to the founder of the KMT, Sun Yat-sen, but has not indicated if he plans to visit the United States. This sounds like an almost meaningless itinerary, the kind we all imagine for our selves but always put off because we have other things to do.

The most striking exception to this familiar US-centric travel pattern was undertaken by someone who will not be on the ballot next January: Ma Ying-jeou, the former two-term president of the Republic of China (2008-2016) and the dominant elder of the KMT. From March 27 to April 7 Ma visited China, stopping in Nanjing, Changsha, Xiangtan, Wuhan, and Shanghai.

While providing assurances that they will avoid destabilizing relations with China, US officials, perhaps from the State Department and the National Security Council, outside Washington.

By: David J. Keegan

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we are Taiwanese, not Chinese, and Taiwan is a state separate from China, and that Taiwan is a part of China. In accordance with this line of thinking, the party has long maintained that Taiwan and China stand their relationship. While they agreed that there was one China, they could not agree on which government legitimately stood their relationship. The traditional KMT position has been encapsulated in what for the the People's Republic of China (PRC).

By contrast, the KMT position is less clear. The traditional position is that the people of Taiwan are Chinese and that Taiwan is a part of China. In accordance with this line of thinking, they are destined to ultimately unify, with only the timing and manner to be determined. The challenge for the KMT is that most of the party members. Chiang was later defeated in his bid for reelection in the “1992 Consensus.” Johnny Chiang, newly elected as KMT chairman, appointed a KMT reform committee to discard a policy that had alienated younger voters, but the older generation of KMT leaders and members of the party’s central Executive Committee were sharply opposed by expressing his hope that the KMT and CCP could cooperate on the basis of the “1992 Consensus” to secure cross-Strait peace and stability.

For the past 28 years, John Chiang, as party chairman, has worked to resurrect the “1992 Consensus.” He sent a congratulatory note to Chu, who responded by expressing his hope that the KMT and CCP could cooperate on the basis of the “1992 Consensus” to secure cross-Strait peace and stability.

Thus far, his general approach appears to be to deemphasize “a historical description of past cross-Strait interaction,” rather than as a basis for future cross-Strait dialogue. Younger party members primarily as an effective manager of local issues. How he hopes will force the party to follow his lead. Notably, Jinping sent a congratulatory note to Chu, who responded by expressing his hope that the KMT and CCP could cooperate on the basis of the “1992 Consensus” to secure cross-Strait peace and stability.

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As the most senior leader in a party that values seniority, Ma used his events and remarks to emphasize the importance of亲缘血，connect the past and the present, and present Taiwan and China as part of the same Chinese nation, adding "we are a family, we have a common blood, a common culture, a common history, a common vision." Song acknowledge him coming as "cordial greetings and best wishes from General Secretary Xi Jinping to Mr. Ma Ying-jeou" (thereby reciprocating Ma's visit). Ma then traveled to Changsha in Hunan, where he led a discussion and held a dinner for the 28 students who accompanied him from Taiwan, saying that he was deeply moved by the chance to return to Xiangtan to visit the gravesites of his ancestors. His visit to his ancestral home came shortly before the Chinese "Tomb Sweeping Day" festival (Qingming), when families honor their ancestors at their graves. The Taiwan office echoed Ma's message of "The Taiwanese are Chinese ethnically and culturally." Ma's family gesture may evoke contradictory emotions among Taihoku residents, saying that he was deeply moved by the chance to return to Xiangtan to visit the gravesites of his ancestors. His visit to his ancestral home came shortly before the Chinese "Tomb Sweeping Day" festival (Qingming), when families honor their ancestors at their graves.

On his return to Taiwan the following day, Ma told reporters that "peaceful cross-Strait relations could be achieved, provided the '1992 Consensus' was accepted. The '1992 Consensus' was treated more as a magic talisman, promising a common culture, a common history, a common vision." Song acknowledged the visit by Ma and the students who accompanied him as a family event, "Mr. Ma Ying-jeou's visit to China was an extended exercise in symbolism to set the KMT platform."

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More immediately, Ma’s approach puts Hou You-yi (or whoever emerges as the KMT presidential candidate) in a quandary: does he champion the “1992 Consensus” to win Ma’s support (and with it the support of the KMT’s older members who identify with China), or does he move away from Ma’s platform in the hopes of winning younger voters who identify as Taiwanese and fear China? Whichever approach the KMT candidate chooses, he risks losing part of the support he needs to win the election.

The main point: While former President Ma Ying-jeou framed his visit to China in primarily personal terms, it was nevertheless highly symbolic. For KMT presidential hopefuls, the trip poses difficult questions about party identity and cross-Strait relations, potentially making the 2024 election far more complex.

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Danger on the Horizon: Lessons from Tsai Ing-wen’s Latest US Transits

By: Michael Mazza

Michael Mazza is a senior non-resident fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute, visiting fellow at the German Marshall Fund, and a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

In late March and early April, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) visited New York and California on her way to and from diplomatic visits to Guatemala and Belize. These so-called “transit stops” revealed much about Taipei, Washington, and Beijing.

Observers in all three capitals had been holding their breath since Kevin McCarthy secured the speakership of the House of Representatives. McCarthy had previously indicated that he would like to visit Taiwan. Such a visit would have been in accord with the US “One-China Policy” and with historical precedent, but Beijing worried that a McCarthy visit would deepen what it sees as an American shift away from its “One-China” framework—while Taipei and Washington were concerned about a more intense replay of China’s post-Pelosi-visit antics of last August.

In the end, Tsai and McCarthy met in California, while China’s response—both in the leadup to the meeting and in its wake—was, in some ways, more restrained than it had been seven months earlier. Even so, sighs of relief may be premature.

**Responsible Stakeholders**

There is a tendency among some in Washington to use Taiwan policy to punish China or to score points against political opponents. For them, Taiwan is a cudgel, too quickly grasped because doing so is an easy way to prove oneself tough on China. This is problematic for Taiwan, whose people are likely to feel the pain regardless of whether they are getting hammered, or getting used as a hammer. But it is also a problem for the United States, as it raises tensions in the Taiwan Strait, in US-China relations, and in US-Taiwan relations without making meaningful policy progress.

One conclusion to draw from the Tsai transits is that, while there are vocal individuals that seek to use Taiwan to poke China in the eye, they are not actually running the show. Josh Rogin reported that Tsai, after consulting with the Biden Administration, decided against opening to the press the New York reception at which the Hudson Institute awarded her its Global Leadership Award, and the right-leaning think tank complied. Neither Tsai nor Hudson has released a full transcript of her remarks, instead publicizing only brief summaries. Here, Hudson respected Taiwan’s assessment of its own interests. Speaker McCarthy did so as well. On March 8, Kathrin Hille and Demetri Sevastopulo reported for Financial Times that “Tsai Ing-wen has convinced US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to meet in California rather than Taipei to avoid an aggressive Chinese military response.” There were also concerns in Taipei about how a McCarthy visit later in the year could interact with Taiwan’s presidential campaign season, which will begin kicking into high gear in the summer. McCarthy deserves plaudits for refraining from insisting on making the trip despite his previously stated intentions, even though Taipei might have found it difficult to say no if he did.

Overall, the transits showed that the Tsai Administration, the Biden Administration, and the speaker’s office are capable of indicating that he would like to visit Taiwan. Such a visit would have been in accord with Beijing’s worry that a McCarthy visit would deepen what was, in some ways, more restrained than it had been seven months earlier. Even so, sighs of relief may be premature.

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Image: US Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy and Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California (April 5). (Image source: Time)
principles. Tsai did not shy away from receiving, in person, an unprecedented number of visits from dignitaries and representatives from countries that share China's principles and values. The visits from allies, particularly from small Pacific Island countries like Tuvalu and Nauru, served as a platform for discussing the importance of maintaining ties with Taiwan and the need to preserve the rights and freedoms enjoyed by its people. These interactions underscored the strong bond between the ROC and these nations, and their commitment to maintaining diplomatic relations.

Days before Tsai's departure for her visits to the United States in early March, it became clear that China was preparing a response to the upcoming trip. Beijing's response was not limited to verbal threats, but also included a series of punitive measures. The Chinese government announced the imposition of a no-fly zone over Taiwan, effectively shutting down airspace that could be used by Tsai's plane. This move was seen as a significant escalation in tensions between the two sides.

Despite the measures taken by China, there were indications that some of the ROC's diplomatic allies might be willing to re-examine their relationships with Taiwan. This was particularly evident in the case of Tuvalu, where there were signals that the country might be considering a change in its diplomatic ties. The ROC had been engaged in discussions with Tuvalu, aiming to strengthen their bilateral relations.

In the meantime, Tsai continued her preparations for the trip, with an increased focus on security and the need to ensure the safety of her delegation. The ROC administration took measures to ensure that the trip would proceed smoothly, with a heightened emphasis on the need to maintain strong public relations and public morale.

As the ROC continued to push for recognition and engagement with the international community, the relationship with China remained a source of tension. The ROC's continued efforts to maintain and strengthen its alliances underscored the importance of maintaining geopolitical and diplomatic independence, even in the face of significant pressure from China.
Tsai Ing-wen’s US transits showed that the Tsai Administration, the Biden Administration, and the House Speaker’s office are capable of exercising pragmatic caution without sacrificing important principles. But in the face of Taiwanese and American restraint, China displayed a preference for escalation.