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By: Russell Hsiao

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After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 shocked the equilibrium of geopolitics, the world is now bearing witness to the outbreak of another destructive and potentially large-scale military conflict in the Middle East. Since the Iranian-backed organization Hamas launched a brutal surprise attack against Israel in early October 2023—the latest kinetic military conflict in a war-torn region—it has provoked an ongoing [retaliatory assault](#) that will likely last for months, if not longer. Concerningly, the conflict has the potential to escalate into a broader, regional conflagration if Hezbollah and other actors join the fight. Recognizing that their fate is intrinsically connected to what the People's Republic of China (PRC), with its own revanchist ambitions, learns from these ongoing conflicts—and in part because Taipei increasingly [sees its fate](#) as tied to that of the free world—the Taiwan government and its people are [paying close attention](#) to the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas.

The other articles in this special issue examine various facets of the Middle East conflict in terms of their implications for the Taiwan Strait. In this article, I will assess what public opinion in Taiwan tells us about how its people view the outbreak of military conflict in the Middle East, as well as what knock-on effects the conflict might have on how they see other factors that bear more closely to Taiwan's security, including the United States' commitment to Taiwan's defense. This initial assessment will survey preliminary public opinion polls from both Taiwan and the United States conducted in the immediate aftermath of the attack by Hamas, extrapolating their implications for public views about the Taiwan Strait based on correlated variables.

Taiwanese Sympathetic toward Israel

After Hamas—which has been [designated by the United States](#) as a terrorist organization—launched its attack on Israel on October 7, the Green-leaning Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF, 台灣民意

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基金會) conducted a poll on [October 15-17](#) that asked respondents, among other questions, which party in the Middle East conflict they were generally more sympathetic toward. Israel came out on top, with 35.1 percent of respondents expressing sympathy; 14.8 percent sympathizing with Palestine; 9.8 percent sympathizing with neither; 6.8 percent sympathizing with both; and 33.6 percent expressing no opinion.

In interpreting the result, TPOF President You Ying-long (游盈隆) noted that the poll does not reflect a judgment of who the Taiwanese people feel is right or wrong, as there appears to be no clear consensus on this issue. However, he observed that Taiwanese public opinion is indeed trending toward sympathizing with Israel. You [speculated](#) that the pro-American attitude of Taiwanese people may be an important reason for this phenomenon.



Graphic: The results of TPOF's October 15-17 poll on Taiwanese public opinion regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict. While many respondents did not express an opinion, the overall consensus was in favor of Israel. (Source: [TPOF](#))

While the broadly pro-American attitude of the Taiwanese population is evident from [multiple opinion polls](#), there could also be other factors at play influencing—or at least reinforcing—Taiwanese perceptions on this issue. These may include the fact that Israel is a fellow democracy (similar to Ukraine), the broadening of [exchanges between Taiwan and Israel](#) in recent years, and perhaps a general lack of awareness about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among the general Taiwanese population. This final issue could potentially be linked to the general lack of subject matter expertise within Taiwan's expert community, as anecdotally reflected in the lack of distinction between Hamas (the actual aggressor) and Palestine in the TPOF polling question.

The Knock-On Effects of the Israel-Hamas War on Taiwanese Public Opinion

Beyond the direct indicators of support or non-support for the parties involved in the conflict, the knock-on effects of the Israel-Hamas conflict on the Taiwanese people's views could have the most relevant implications for shaping perceptions toward a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait.

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War, Taiwanese leaders and experts have [described the invasion](#) as a serious “wake-up call” that has increased awareness about the likelihood of war in Asia. These concerns have led to a range of measures in response, such as the rapid and unprecedented formation of civil defense initiatives on the island. The breakout of kinetic military conflict in the Middle East could further crystalize this reality in Taiwanese people's consciousness, potentially leading to a strengthening of views about the urgency of strengthening resilience.

On October 12, a major Taiwanese online news outlet, *EBC News* (東森新聞), posted an [online poll](#) that has since received more than 50,000 responses from netizens. The survey prompt noted: “After the start of war between Israel and Palestine, does being in the ‘most dangerous place in the world’ [Taiwan] increase your sense of crisis?” In response to the question, a majority of the respondents (61 percent) agreed with the statement “Of course, I fear that the Chinese Communists will suddenly attack;” whereas only 26 percent of the respondents stated “Probably not, the cost of war is too high.” A mere 9 percent of netizens agreed with the statement “No, I believe there will be peace,” with the remaining 3 percent expressing alternative sentiments. While such online polls have questionable reliability, *EBC's* findings could nevertheless provide at least a general if hazy gauge of public views.



Graphic: The findings of an October 12 *EBC News* poll on the implications the Israel-Hamas conflict for a potential PRC attack on Taiwan. The poll found that the majority of respondents were concerned that a Chinese invasion had become more likely. (Source: [EBC News](#))

Moreover, just as Beijing is learning from the Ukraine War about Ukrainian resilience—as well as from US action, and inaction, in response to the invasion—it will also attempt to draw out lessons from the Middle East conflict. Taiwan will do so, as well. Depending on their perceptions of the US response, the conflict could have significant impacts on the Taiwanese people's belief in the likelihood of US intervention. It is the people's perceptions of these two factors—[war readiness and US intervention](#)—that will likely contribute most to the Taiwanese “will to fight” and form the foundation of Taiwan's resilience.

Effects of the Israel-Hamas on American Public Opinion

For both Beijing and Taipei, it will also be critical to keep tabs on the [implications of the Israel-Hamas war](#) for American public attitudes toward the defense of Taiwan—as well as the overall US wherewithal and capacity to militarily intervene in the event of a military conflict.

As noted earlier, a key to forecasting the effects on Taiwanese perception will also be to understand the US reaction to these events. In the case of the Ukraine War, Washington's decision to not intervene directly contributed to [heightened doubts](#) about the likelihood of US intervention in the event of a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Accordingly, the [US response](#) to the Israel-Hamas war—depending on the scale and level of support—will likely have a reverberating effect on public perceptions within Taiwan concerning US commitment to its defense. It stands to reason that stronger perceived support for Israel from the United States will likely buoy perceptions in Taipei that the US would be more likely to defend Taiwan against a PRC attack. Conversely, a perceived lack of support will likely contribute to deteriorating confidence in US support in the event of a military conflict.

It is also worth pointing out that Ukraine and Israel are not necessarily viewed as equally critical to US foreign and security policy. While debates continue to rage within the US Congress about whether supporting Ukraine is a vital US interest—with some [arguing](#) that doing so serves as an unnecessary drain on resources—there is strong, bipartisan [Congressional and public support](#) for Israel. Indeed, according to an [NPR/PBS poll](#): “Overall, 65 percent said the US should support Israel publicly. That was true of big majorities of both parties—77 percent of Republicans and 69 percent of Democrats.”

To be sure, American public opinion on US foreign policy is far from monolithic. Such diversity of thought would also impact support for Taiwan's defense, depending on whether Taiwan is seen more like Ukraine or Israel in the eyes of the American

public.

Impact of the Israel-Hamas War on Support for the Defense of Taiwan

Relevant to this analysis is a [Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#) survey, released in October 2023, that revealed how the Ukraine War has contributed to declining US support for militarily intervening in Taiwan's defense. The [poll](#) “finds evidence that US involvement in the war between Russia and Ukraine has played a role in American attitudes on foreign policy, from dampening public support for defending US allies and maintaining US military bases abroad to continued financial and military assistance to Kyiv.” Indeed, the Ukraine War is likely dampening the American public's willingness to commit troops to come to Taiwan's defense. As kinetic military conflict [reignites in the Middle East](#)—and is likely to continue for months if not years—how will public support for the defense of Taiwan shift in the coming months as these simultaneous conflicts wear on?

While it is still too early to predict with any certainty, anecdotal evidence suggests that Taiwan is seen as more analogous to Israel than to Ukraine. Despite [growing fissures](#) in the Democratic Party, Israel continues to enjoy broad Congressional and public support, much like Taiwan. Secondly, Taiwan's crucial role in the United States' strategic competition with the People's Republic of China means that the same factors present in a dampening of public support for defending US allies in the Ukraine War may not be present in this current case.

Yet, it is important to note that there appears to be a general sense of war fatigue prevailing in the United States, and how these simultaneous conflicts play out in the months to come could have unexpected and compounding effects that would be hard to forecast, especially with presidential elections on the horizon in both countries.

The main point: Though it remains unclear how exactly the Israel-Hamas conflict will impact Taiwan, it is already influencing public perceptions, both in Taiwan and the United States. With wars raging in both Ukraine and the Middle East, it will be crucial to monitor public opinion and learn critical lessons.

A Knife Fight in a Closet: Initial Implications from the Israel-Hamas War for Taiwan

By: Eric Chan

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The October 7 attacks by the Hamas terror organization against Israel profoundly shocked Israeli society. Roughly 1500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants [conducted a well-practiced operation](#) that overran Israeli border outposts while simultaneously blinding Israeli intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. With Israeli defenses paralyzed, the militants then murdered more than 1400 people, while taking several hundred hostages. It was [the bloodiest day in Israeli history](#), evoking comparisons to the Holocaust. Militarily, some observers believed that Hamas' complete penetration of the Israeli security cordon represented an even [greater intelligence failure than the Egypt/Syria surprise attack](#) that started the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

In return, the Israeli political leadership has vowed to "[eradicate Hamas](#)." At the time of this writing, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are now engaged in a bloody war against Hamas in Gaza. On October 27, the [IDF began ground operations in the Gaza Strip](#) following hundreds of IDF airstrikes. By November 6, the IDF encircled Gaza City (a city of some 650,000 people over 18 square miles, or 46 square kilometers) in the northern part of the Gaza Strip as part of a systemic campaign to isolate Hamas' military headquarters in the city center. Hamas was aware that Israel would respond aggressively to such a massive terror attack, and [prepared massive tunnel/bunker complexes](#) beneath Gaza. These complexes have [immense stockpiles of food, fuel, medicine, ammunition](#), and even underground factories capable of weapon/rocket manufacturing. Moreover, the IDF must fight in [densely populated urban terrain](#), against an enemy utilizing mines, short/long-range rockets, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), mortars, and small-arms. More challenging still, Hamas' defenses are built around using both the kidnapped Israeli hostages and the [Palestinian civilian populace as human shields](#). Thus, the war can be likened to a knife fight in a dark closet.

On a strategic level, Taiwan's national security establishment [immediately recognized](#) the implications of a war that began as a result of a catastrophic intelligence failure. The People's Liberation Army (PLA), after all, has far more capabilities than Hamas, and the prospect of strategic surprise by the PLA might mean the destruction of Taiwan and not "just" the deaths of hundreds of civilians.

On an operational level, observers must consider that the war is still in a relatively early stage, when details are still fairly hard to ascertain. Both the IDF and Hamas recognize the criticality of

the information war, and thus both have attempted to control information flow. The IDF, in particular, has sought to limit communications coming from Gaza, including [threatening to halt the establishment of Starlink operations](#) there.

However, given the proliferation of open-source intelligence (OSINT), as well the information released thus far, it is possible to look at several operational implications of the war for Taiwan. In particular, I look at Israel's rapid mobilization and the IDF's use of airpower.

Rapid Mobilization as a Deterrent

At the beginning of the war, Israel's primary concern was the potential for the Lebanon-based Hezbollah terror group to opportunistically open a new front in Israel's north while the IDF was tied up in brutal fighting in Gaza. Hezbollah is widely considered to be [more deadly, organized, and professional](#) than Hamas, with the last round of fighting in 2006 being [far harder for the Israelis](#) than they anticipated. Moreover, the Israeli military was in considerable disarray at the beginning of the war. This was not just because of the shock of the Hamas' attacks, but also because domestic political upheaval over the summer of 2023 had resulted in [hundreds of Israeli reservists threatening resignations](#) as a protest. These reservists included elite and specialized personnel, such as senior fighter pilots, special forces commandos, and cyber-intelligence specialists.

Thus, the surprise attack on October 7 meant that the IDF needed to demonstrate its ability to mobilize quickly and efficiently. Prolonged decision-making would have operationally hobbled the IDF, as it is dependent on reservists for protracted fighting. On a strategic level, even the appearance of paralysis or a split Israeli society would have been an open invitation for more of Israel's enemies to attack. This was akin to Ukraine's situation in February 2022, when Ukrainian President Zelenskyy's decision to [delay mobilization](#) only served to feed into Putin's belief that Ukraine was not willing or capable of defending itself.

Israel began mobilizing on October 8. [Within 48 hours, roughly 360,000 troops had been mobilized - equivalent to 4 percent of its population](#). While the mobilization was not perfect—the effort was dependent on an uncounted number of volunteers and donated equipment—the sheer scale from a cold start is an enormous demonstration of Israeli capability, organization, and will to fight. In comparison, it took Russia well over a month to mobilize 300,000 troops, and most of them were poorly armed and trained, with [hundreds of thousands choosing to flee](#).

Once the Israeli reserve was mobilized, IDF planners had the

freedom of maneuver and resources to plan two separate campaigns. First, they organized a campaign to isolate and then attack Hamas headquarters in the heart of Gaza City; second, they launched a deterrent campaign against Hezbollah involving massive reinforcement of Israeli military units on the border with Lebanon, as well as an [interdiction campaign](#) on the Syrian airports at Damascus and Aleppo. As a result, [Hezbollah has not intervened significantly](#) in the war, other than propaganda and nuisance rocket barrages.

In Taiwan's case, replicating Israel's feat should be considered aspirational – and as a warning. Taiwan will likely face a far higher volume of cyber-attacks—and even insider sabotage attacks—designed to delay mobilization. If the political order for mobilization comes late, then these efforts would likely be compounded by PLA Rocket Force strikes on mobilization centers and logistics nodes. Thus, Taiwan must consider both the political triggers for mobilization as well as ensuring that once the order goes out, mobilization can be conducted in a rapid yet resilient way. This requires practice at scale.



Image: IDF Merkava tanks assembling near Gaza, October 12 2023. Rapid Israeli mobilization and assembling of forces was critical in deterring Hezbollah from full-scale intervention in the conflict. For Taiwan, rapid mobilization will likely be significantly more difficult: the PRC will likely seek to slow down mobilization through both non-kinetic means such as cyberwarfare or through outright firepower strikes. Taiwan must practice mobilization under realistic conditions to replicate the Israeli feat.

(Source: [Reuters](#))

Airpower as a Shield and Force Multiplier

One of the reasons why Israel could mobilize so quickly was because of the IDF's air dominance. This air dominance allowed the IDF to defend against Hamas' standoff strike capability. During the initial surprise attack, Hamas fired over [3500 rock-](#)

[ets into Israel](#). However, Hamas could not meaningfully disrupt Israeli mobilization; they were not given any space to do so, as Israel instantly struck back with persistent airpower. One day after the initial attack, the IDF [struck over 800 targets](#), ramping up to over [7000 targets](#) by October 25. The IDF started by striking rocket launchers and firing areas, followed by attacks on command centers and munition factories. This expansive air campaign [drastically reduced the number of rocket attacks](#) that Hamas was able to carry out.

With the announcement of an impending ground campaign, the IDF started use of penetrating munitions against the vast Hamas tunnel system. Finally, with the commencement of the ground campaign, the IDF began a general bombardment of Gaza City [to force the militants into the tunnels](#). As ground troops advance, [F-35s have provided close air support](#), sometimes using 2000-lb GBU-31 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs). The use of this type of heavy munition in close proximity to ground forces is a demonstration of the professionalism and jointness of the IDF. It is also a testament to the incredible tactical effects of airpower to enhance the ability for ground forces to maneuver, despite a lack of overwhelming numbers. This is particularly important for Israeli armor, [which has notably been able to effectively fight with relatively limited infantry support](#) despite the known presence of Hamas fighters armed with anti-tank guided missiles.



31 JDAMs, fitted with solid nose plugs to penetrate hardened targets. The IAF's technical sophistication combined with practice of joint warfare allows the IDF to exercise airpower for strategic, operational, and tactical effects. Conversely, Hamas' complete lack of ability to contest the air domain means the IDF can persistently, quickly, accurately, and massively target forces on the ground, allowing the Israelis to selectively box in and overwhelm the defenders. (Source: [Israeli Air Force](#))

This use of airpower integrated with ground attack is something that the PLA wishes to achieve, and will undoubtedly

seek to learn from this war. The PLA knows full well that in any full-scale invasion of Taiwan, a primary limiting factor for them will be logistics. Even if a beachhead is established or a port is seized, throughput will be highly constrained. This would be highly problematic, as urban combat requires immense resources, including everything from [tanks to armored bulldozers to mine clearing vehicles to specialized engineering and assault teams](#). Even in terms of sheer numbers, previous operations have indicated that the [standard 3:1 force ratio advantage by the attackers is often insufficient for urban warfare](#), instead requiring a 6:1 force ratio. Thus, as the PLA becomes a more joint force, they will likely rely more heavily on airpower to provide the same type of persistent strikes that have allowed the Israelis to economize on manpower.

This indicates several key objectives for Taiwan. First, Taiwan's air power can be used in the early phases of a conflict to contest air space relatively close to Taiwan proper, buying time for Taiwanese forces to mobilize. Second, survival of mobile air defense and keeping even a skeleton manned fleet alive is critical. These will help prevent the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) from achieving air dominance and thus being able to provide persistent fires as well as close air support operations for their landing forces.

Conclusion

Israel's fight in Gaza is still in a relatively early phase. As of November 6, the IDF has surrounded Gaza City and cut the Gaza Strip into two parts, seeking to slowly force Hamas into a kill-box where airpower can be applied in mass. Israeli commanders have said that they believe this war will be protracted, with continual raids even after the end of major ground maneuvers.

However, even now, some lessons are clear. Decisive, rapid mobilization is a powerful deterrent. Letting a technologically and operationally savvy enemy control the air is fatal. Taiwan must be able to achieve the former and avoid the latter.

The main point: The Israeli-Hamas War demonstrates the importance of rapid, efficient mobilization as a method of deterrence. It also shows how deadly persistent airpower can be, even against entrenched defense, when integrated with ground maneuver. Taiwan thus must practice the ability to conduct a rapid mobilization as well as double down on strengthening a multi-layer air and missile defense.

Teetering Domino: Implications of the Isra-

el-Hamas War for the Taiwan Strait

By: Bonnie Glick

Bonnie Glick is the former deputy administrator and chief operating officer of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as a member of the Global Taiwan Institute's (GTI) Advisory Board.

By now, images have been seen around the world of the savage assault that Hamas terrorists unleashed on the Israeli population on October 7. President Biden, reflecting the will of the [vast majority of the American people](#), swiftly condemned the acts of terror and [affirmed](#) America's commitment to stand squarely with Israel, with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and with the Israeli people in the face of unspeakable horror. To be clear, Hamas is waging a war of annihilation against the only [free](#) democracy in the Middle East—and America's strongest ally in the region, and some would say the world. Yet, a vocal minority—including in the US Congress—have influenced American media and have forced the Biden Administration to attempt to unduly [impose some constraints](#) on the IDF. Other world powers might see the attacks as openings for them to undertake their own wars of aggression.

What does This Foretell or Forebode for Simmering Conflicts around the World?

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, [many observers](#) believed that the next authoritarian attack on democracy would be from China in the form of an effort to invade or otherwise gain control of Taiwan. However, it turns out that the next instigator would in fact be the Islamofascist regime in Iran—acting through its proxies Hamas, Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Houthis, and other terrorist hangers-on.

Chinese Communist Party (中國共產黨) General Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平) has been given another opportunity, in real-time, to evaluate how global conflict plays out, observing what works and what does not. There should be no doubt that Xi is evaluating the Hamas terror attack with Iranian support in the context of his ultimate goal: the takeover of Taiwan. Xi is not just looking for ways in which China can insert itself as a power broker in the Middle East, he is also looking at the role China (with the subjugation of Taiwan) can play on the world stage.

International Forums

This month (November) China sits as the president of the UN Security Council. We should expect a flurry of anti-Israel activity to flow from the Council's agenda, along with language that

condemns the West and its support for Israel.

It is telling to look at the [UN General Assembly Resolution](#) introduced in October by many of the world's Muslim-majority countries, Russia, Venezuela, and a scattering of countries that are bound either to Russian and Arab revanchist ambitions or to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, formerly known as "One Belt, One Road," 一帶一路). The resolution called for a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war, something Israel and the United States have stated publicly that they do not support as it would give Hamas a chance to regroup and re-arm. The final vote was 121 countries voting in favor, with 14 against, and 44 abstentions.

Looking at the states who voted either against the resolution or abstained (the two together can be viewed as votes aligned with the United States and Israel) is similarly telling. Of the [13 countries](#) with UN seats that recognize Taiwan (the Vatican does not have a seat in the UN General Assembly), four voted against the resolution and three abstained. Of the total votes either against the resolution or as abstentions, [15 countries](#) view China as a threat—either to their political/economic stability, or as a threat to the regional order. Interestingly, India, usually a stalwart leader of the non-aligned movement who could typically be counted on as a vote against Israel, abstained. This is likely due in part to the investment Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made in building a strong bilateral relationship with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, it is also linked to India's very real concern that China is a regional threat. Thus, its decision to vote against China, as much as helping out Israel, represents a newly minted realpolitik approach to international relations.

Additional countries voting against or abstaining include regional powerhouses like Japan, South Korea, and Australia, the Philippines, as well as Pacific Island countries such as Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Kiribati, Palau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The message is clear and stark, and these countries understand it: Israel, like Ukraine, is a domino that is teetering. Neither can be allowed to fall, as such a development would empower the third axis of the authoritarian triad, China, to act aggressively toward Taiwan.

Xi as a Dealmaker in the Middle East

Earlier this year, General Secretary Xi fancied himself a rising power broker in the Middle East when he facilitated the renewed relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. As a newcomer to the region for anything other than oil, surveillance technology, and cheap Chinese exports, Xi has little understand-

ing of who the players are or how to work with them. However, Xi perceived a clear American effort to disengage from the Middle East during the Biden Administration, and he saw this as an opportunity to exert his influence and expand his desire to be a kingmaker. Xi also fancies himself something of an expert in the area of global economic strategy. His Belt and Road Initiative has ingratiated dozens of leaders from developing countries to him through the CCP's assistance in building vital infrastructure including bridges, roads, soccer stadiums, etc. He has had some success with a few of the poorer Middle East countries, including Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. But he has also made inroads with wealthy Gulf countries, with Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait [signing up for the BRI](#).

What Xi has certainly seen since the barbarous, Iran-backed Hamas massacre of Israelis on October 7 is that he does not understand the Middle East. His "make nice" efforts with all sides are largely stage-managed operations, designed to ensure the free flow of oil to China in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the attendant uncertainty surrounding Moscow's ability to export. Does Xi Jinping have what it takes to be a kingmaker in the Middle East? To date he has not been able to demonstrate the agility or understanding to flex the CCP's muscles in this arena. Like the mullahs in Tehran, Xi is betting that the conflict between Israel and Hamas intensifies, and that support for the Palestinians among Sunni Arab Muslims will force leaders to denounce Israel. They hope that the US-led Abraham Accords will be derailed and that countries that normalized relations with Israel—the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco—will stray from their commitments (to date, the UAE and Bahrain have made statements condemning Hamas). China's grand vision is that America's role will diminish and the CCP will be able to export its vision for regional security as articulated in its February 2023 [Global Security Initiative](#).

What Does the Hamas Attack Mean for Taiwan?

Taiwan's chief lesson in the wake of the sudden and brutal assault in southern Israel is that constant and vigilant intelligence is key. In the early hours of October 7, 2023, it appears that there was some sort of colossal intelligence failure in Israel, likely due to an Iranian—or, while speculative, Iranian-Chinese—takedown of Israeli communications and surveillance in and around Gaza. Israeli intelligence was blinded, and that is when the massacre began.

American intelligence, too, failed. Indeed, under the Biden Administration, many intelligence assets have been [relocated](#) to

the Asian or European theaters, especially following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The simultaneous failure of two of the world's greatest intelligence services was key to the brutal success of the heinous Hamas terror attacks. As soon as intelligence was back online and there was a clear picture of what was happening, Prime Minister Netanyahu declared war. There will be plenty of after-action reports from which Israel and the United States will glean information about intelligence failures.

Taiwan should pay close attention to these after-action determinations, and it should heed the warnings. Taiwan's Minister of National Defense Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國正) stated that the conflict between Israel and Hamas has forced Taiwan to enhance its ability to forecast possible threats. Yet apart from military preparedness, Taiwan needs to focus on better understanding the nature of its enemy and predicting its moves.

Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Taiwan Invasion

The Chinese Communist Party and Xi Jinping himself take a more calculated approach to their interest in Taiwan's "reunification" with the mainland. It is more of a cost-benefit analysis, and less of a scorched earth approach. In fact, Xi hopes that Taiwan will be pressured to join the mainland without the need to fire a single bullet. His goal is coercion, which is very different from the objectives of Putin or the Iranian mullahs. This coercion will come through social media, through hacking, and through attempts to manipulate the psyche of the Taiwanese population through disinformation to weaken its will to resist. Indeed, Xi's approach may be more like what has unfolded in the United States rather than what has unfolded in Israel.

In the United States and, indeed, across much of the civilized world, what has unfolded is something far more insidious, something that has been decades in the making. Flagrant displays of antisemitism throughout university [campuses](#) have shocked the free world. Over 100,000 pro-Palestinian and Hamas sympathizers [demonstrated](#) in London, thousands of pro-Palestine demonstrators in New York, Sydney, Copenhagen, Wellington, Berlin, and Rome. Indeed, the gates of the White House in Washington, DC were nearly breached by protestors throwing red paint at the President's residence.

In the case of China, infiltration is well-documented and has come under scrutiny from federal and state governments. [Confucius Institutes](#) have been kicked off of campuses, with only five remaining in America, Chinese researchers have been [unmasked](#) as agents of the CCP or People's Liberation Army, and

the [theft of intellectual property](#) from research labs has been documented. That said, should China threaten Taiwan, it is all but certain that the tide of anti-Taiwan rhetoric will be massively amplified by PRC-centered efforts across academia on a level that is on par with anti-Israel protests seen on campuses and in major cities today. The advantage the CCP has is, frankly, its massive scale—even if its other, more nefarious efforts such as united front penetration are only sometimes effective.

Taiwan needs to understand that winning the hearts and minds in civil society, whether on university campuses, in the media, or within the United States and allied governments, is just as important as preparing for a full-on Chinese military assault.

The lesson Israel learned is that intelligence is not enough. Vigilance and relationships are key.

The main point: As the Hamas attack on Israel has made clear, Taiwan cannot afford to relax in its confrontation with China. Already, China is working to shape global narratives and undermine networks of support. Taiwan must be vigilant and active in building up its defense and its relationships with democratic partners.

An Israeli Perspective on the Gaza War and Its Broader Implications

By: Efraim Inbar

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The [war](#) imposed on Israel by Hamas on October 7, 2023, is of crucial importance. It is not just another round of violence between Israel and Hamas, the radical Islamist terror organization that [took over Gaza](#) in 2007. The barbaric [atrocities](#) planned and executed by Hamas, and the magnitude of the destruction in the communities along the Gaza border, which was accompanied by rapes, killings, and mutilations of bodies—leaving 1,200 Israelis dead, over 4,000 wounded, and 240 kidnapped, including women, children and the elderly—require a strong response. It is not just about the administration of justice and retribution, which is in itself justified, but about deterrence and defending the civilized world with implications far beyond the region

Israeli Deterrence under Threat

The Middle East, where Israel is located, is a tough neighbor-

hood. Israel, a Jewish state surrounded by hostile Muslim entities, cannot survive unless it is militarily strong and its neighbors understand that an attack on it would be very costly. This is the essence of deterrence. Moreover, fear is the best political currency in the Middle East, and probably in other conflict-ridden regions.

The successful surprise attack perpetrated against Israel by Hamas has eroded the deterrence of the Jewish state. Perceived weakness invites aggression. Accordingly, it is imperative for Israel to restore deterrence. Only by exacting a very heavy price against Hamas can Israel signal a message of deterrence to the region. The need to rebuild lost deterrence explains the Israeli government's decision to send the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) into the Gaza Strip to dismantle Hamas' military capabilities. The IDF mission will be a grand effort to decapitate the political and military leadership of Hamas, destroy its military arsenal, and dismantle its industrial capability to manufacture missiles and other types of armaments.

Israel's leadership, its army, and its people understand this. Moreover, there is a clear realization that operating in an urban environment—and the inevitable tunnel warfare that these operations will entail—will be costly and lengthy. In light of the importance attributed to this war, Israel is ready to pay the price—whatever it may be. After 16 years of continuous attacks on Israel's population, during which Israel has tried to contain Hamas and to deter it, the presence of such an aggressive and violent terrorist entity along its border is no longer tolerable.

The declared military mission cannot be accomplished without a large-scale ground operation. Airpower is important in destroying Hamas installations, but it has limitations, particularly when the enemy is hiding among a supportive population and finds refuge in well-designed and fortified tunnels. The presence of many Gaza civilians is a complicating factor, as well. Hamas' [strategy](#) aims at maximizing the casualties among the Gazan population. Through the use of force, it prevents attempts by Gazan citizens to leave the war zone as they have been instructed by the IDF. Moreover, Hamas uses civilians as human shields—in violation of international law—hoping that the pictures coming from Gaza will create international pressure on Israel to stop its advance.

US Involvement in the Israel-Hamas Conflict

Israel has been encouraged by the American support rendered from the outset of the war. [President Joseph Biden promised](#) unconditional support for Israel, and compared Hamas to ISIS—a civilizational enemy. He announced additional military

aid to Israel, including armaments and interceptors for the Iron Dome missile defense system, and emphasized that the United States would make sure that Israel would not run out of resources vital to the war effort. The United States [dispatched a task force](#) headed by an aircraft carrier to the eastern Mediterranean, and later [sent another carrier](#) to deter Iran and Hezbollah from joining the war against Israel. Washington also decided to [deploy a nuclear submarine](#) to the region. The US secretaries of defense and state visited Israel, followed by the unprecedented visit of President Biden himself, demonstrating a high level of friendship.

The United States has become deeply involved, even directly influencing the conduct of the war itself. A corridor for humanitarian aid from Egypt was the result of American prodding, as was the restoration of the telephone and internet systems in Gaza, which were disrupted by Israel. Such American benevolence has been characterized by some as a “bear hug,” which might negatively affect Israel's freedom of action. One concern based on past experience is whether Washington will impose a ceasefire before Israel attains its objectives. Moreover, the naïve obsession of the current [American administration](#) with a two-state solution—as well as its preference to bring the Palestinian Authority (PA) into power in Gaza, when it is hardly able to exercise its authority over Ramallah—is problematic.

Washington signaled through its involvement that the Gaza war is more than a just local Israeli-Palestinian armed conflict. It is about the struggle for supremacy in world politics. Hamas is a tool for Iran—which is backed by Russia and China—to push the United States out of the Middle East. These revisionist powers oppose the community of democratic nations, whose strongest representative in the Middle East is Israel. Iran wants Israel's demise, not only due to religious fervor, but also its recognition that it is the only state in the region that can prevent Iranian hegemony.

Despite the misguided American policy toward Iran (the attempt to reach a nuclear understanding), the military and political presence of the United States alongside Israel in the eastern Mediterranean is an effort to preserve the status quo—and to halt Iran's attempt to erase the existence of America's best and strongest ally in the region. Isolating the conflict in Gaza has become a cardinal American interest.

Containing the Conflict and Implications for Taiwan

It seems that the Biden Administration believes that the reverberations of the war on Hamas in Gaza might lead to a regional conflagration affecting other arenas, potentially including

Ukraine and the South China Sea. Indeed, the war in Gaza is an important test of American leadership and credibility. America's allies around the world look at its behavior for clues to how Washington might react to a crisis in their region. For example, Taiwan should be heartened by the quick American decision to dramatically increase its military presence in the Middle East. As noted, the United States started an airlift to [provide Israel with ammunition and other military equipment](#). Similarly, Washington's high-profile and vigorous diplomatic support for the Israeli government was very impressive. Significantly for Taiwan, Israel does not have a formal defense treaty with the United States that requires such American intervention on its behalf. Despite the absence of formal obligations, however, the United States has decisively stepped in to help its embattled ally.

The whole world is watching how effective American deterrent power is in this latest conflict in the Middle East. American success in deterring Iran from instigating a multi-front campaign has only had limited success. Hezbollah, Iran's proxy in Lebanon, has initiated a [low-intensity operation](#) aimed at restraining Israeli advances in Gaza. The Houthis in Yemen, another proxy of Iran, have also opened an additional front by [launching long-range missiles](#) (with little accuracy) toward Israel, with American ships in the Red Sea and Israel's anti-missile defenses intercepting most of them. Iran-supported Shiite militias have also attacked American bases in the region. Iran and its proxies are eroding the American [ultimatum issued by President Biden](#), and testing the American determination to respond militarily. The outcome of this confrontation will affect the reputation of the United States as a reliable ally and the thinking of its friends and foes.

Beijing, the primary rival of the United States in the international arena, has closely followed the Gaza war. The image projected by Washington during the war on Hamas will inevitably factor into future Chinese strategic calculations. Moreover, as the war crystallized the lines dividing the West and its opponents, China opted to side with Hamas—a civilizational enemy of the West. China's voting at the [UN National Security Council](#) and the [content of its media](#) have shown a clear preference for Hamas. It has proven that it is in the same camp as Iran and Russia. This position has been very problematic for China, causing it to lose much goodwill in Europe and in the United States. Moreover, the more pragmatic Arab states that view Hamas—the Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has a significant presence in Arab states such as Egypt—as a danger to their regimes are very [displeased with the Chinese stance](#). Informally, they wish good luck to Israel in destroying the Islamist terrorist

organization. In parallel, they are getting closer to the United States while simultaneously growing more suspicious of Chinese attempts to encroach on the Middle East.

Looking toward the Future

President Biden, by comparing Hamas to ISIS, clearly sees the war on Hamas in civilizational terms. He believes that the civilized world is challenged by the barbaric actions of Hamas. Iran unleashed Hamas as part of its struggle against the West, viewing the Western democracies as weak and riven by internal fractures. Israel looked vulnerable when domestic strife [paralyzed its government](#). It looked weak when Washington emphasized its differences with Jerusalem. The fall of 2023 seemed an opportune time to attack Israel—the western bastion in the Middle East. And in the United States, polarization and partisan bickering have hindered foreign policy decision making. Elsewhere, the West is faced with an almost-nuclear Iran; a nuclear North Korea; and an expansionist Russia, all while China is extending its malign influence over the globe. With these challenges in mind, President Biden decided to let Israel administer the same unforgiving treatment to Hamas as the United States did in its crusade against ISIS.

Yet, eradicating Hamas by force is not a realistic goal. Hamas represents a radical Islamist ideology that is utterly opposed to Western civilization and denies the right to the existence of a Jewish state. Unfortunately, this ideology has many adherents in the Muslim world. Moreover, Hamas has established kindergartens, schools, social services, and mosques, ensuring that it is firmly entrenched in Palestinian society. Its messages are popular and fall on responsive Palestinian ears. In the 2005 election (the last and only one) Hamas mustered a majority in the Palestinian parliament. Among Palestinians, a [poll](#) as recent as September 2023 showed that the Hamas candidate for Prime Minister has a 60 percent support rating in the Palestinian territories. All Israel can do is take out the accumulated military assets of Hamas in order to leave it harmless for the time being.

This means that even after the destruction of Hamas' military capabilities, dormant cells belonging to the Islamist movement will aim to regain control of Gaza and continue the terrorist campaign against Israel that is its *raison d'être*. The struggle against any Western presence will continue indefinitely.

For many Israelis, the war on Hamas confirms their view that it is their destiny to live on their sword. Having a Jewish state requires sacrifice and determination. The murderous attack of Hamas has also elicited the best qualities of Israelis. Outnumbered Israeli soldiers and civilians fought courageously and in-

generously to limit the consequences of the Hamas slaughter. Israelis reported in great numbers to their reserve units, and long lines of young Israelis have gathered at overseas airports, queuing to get a seat to return home as soon as possible to report for combat duty. Volunteers go to the fields to replace farmers called for military duty and take care of the many displaced Israelis who had to leave their residences in the border communities.

Israel will eventually prevail, and by doing so it will also do a great favor to the civilized world—including Taiwan.

The main point: While Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel was undoubtedly devastating, Israel—bolstered by US support—has already launched an effective counterattack. US involvement in these efforts is particularly crucial, as it serves as a deterrent against further authoritarian attacks against democratic states like Taiwan.

The New Battlefield of Influence Operations: The PRC's Israel-Palestine Strategy Poses New Challenges to the Taiwan Strait

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The recent [Hamas attack on Israel](#) has shocked the world, capturing attention in both Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The plight of the Palestinians *vis-à-vis* the Israeli state has a number of parallels with the complex relationship between Taiwan and the PRC. While the PRC has slightly recalibrated its traditionally pro-Palestinian stance, [citing humanitarian grounds](#), Taiwanese public sentiment is strongly and emotionally aligned with Israel. Media across the political spectrum in Taiwan have interpreted the attack on Israel—and the subsequent Israeli military campaign in Gaza—as potentially

reflective of how a Taiwan Strait conflict might unfold, despite Taiwan's more vulnerable position relative to the PRC. This narrative presents the PRC with an opportunity to craft a fresh cognitive framework, simultaneously fueling its [anti-United States influence campaigns in Taiwan](#) and bolstering its strategic position in the Middle East.

The PRC's Influence Operations: From Pro-Palestine to a More Neutral Approach

The outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in October has thrown international politics into turmoil, and granted the PRC a chance to craft a revised anti-United States narrative. Following the attack by Hamas from Gaza on October 7, the PRC government has consistently maintained a relatively balanced and tempered diplomatic stance. In the United Nations Security Council, the PRC [condemned](#) "all attacks against civilians" and advocated for genuine efforts from member states toward a "two-state solution." Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅), during his [call](#) with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on October 14, reiterated this position. In [later engagements](#) with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran, Wang emphasized the importance of compliance with international humanitarian laws, pushed for an immediate ceasefire, sought dialogue, and called for the safeguarding of living conditions in Gaza by promptly establishing humanitarian aid channels.

This diplomatic stance contrasts markedly with the PRC's previous approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Following the Israel-Hamas clashes in [April](#) and [May](#), the conflict swiftly emerged as a [key topic of Chinese influence operations, particularly those targeting Chinese audiences](#). On Douyin (抖音), a prominent Chinese social media platform, numerous influencer channels featured "live" depictions of Israel-Palestine encounters. Some even portrayed fictional scenarios in which various Arab nations joined the conflict, leading to Israel's gradual retreat. Such disinformation was often intertwined with critiques of countries—notably the United States—for backing Israel, combined with pejorative terms targeting Jewish culture. Such posts highlight how Israel has become a focus of PRC influence operations aiming to shape domestic perceptions of Western nations.

Following the outbreak Israel-Hamas war, all of this content was promptly removed, signaling China's efforts to present a more reconciliatory and gentle diplomatic stance. In his statements, Foreign Minister Wang, while remaining critical of Israel's perceived disproportionate actions toward Gaza, did not directly challenge Israel's policy direction. Instead, he underscored the urgency of humanitarian intervention and called for an imme-

diate ceasefire. [Mao Ning \(毛寧\)](#), the spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (中華人民共和國外交部), even stressed the PRC's role as a mutual friend to both nations. She consistently emphasized China's position as being on the side of fairness and justice concerning the Israel-Palestine conflict, fervently expressing her wish for the two nations' peaceful coexistence. These actions and statements marked a notable shift in China's internal and external communication strategies, transitioning from an "anti-Israel, pro-Palestine" stance to a more neutral "support for peaceful coexistence" approach.

This significant shift in Beijing's stance has yet to be [embraced](#) by the Chinese population, which has long been conditioned to support Palestine and oppose Israel. Within the PRC, there have been reports of assaults on Israelis, and platforms like Weibo (新浪微博) and Douyin still feature criticisms of Israel and the West. However, in countries without pronounced anti-Israel sentiments, this change in policy could potentially serve as a vector for PRC informational campaigns against Taiwan. By leveraging Taiwan's own media dynamics, the PRC can more effectively disseminate disinformation on the island to impact public opinion and make it more pro-China. It thereby creates suitable circumstances for reinforcing its renewed position and role in the Middle East.

Taiwan's Self-Identification with Israel Offers Avenues for PRC Propaganda

Taiwan stands out in East Asia as one of the few countries that sees its own national situation mirrored alongside that of Israel. Israel's challenging circumstances in the Middle East, stemming from Arab nations' antagonism, mirror Taiwan's diplomatic isolation due to PRC pressure. Moreover, throughout its long diplomatic history of isolation, Taiwan has [engaged in numerous forms of collaboration with Israel](#). Consequently, political parties, regardless of their political stance, maintain significant ties with Israel. Such self-projection has led many in Taiwan to link Israel's actions and circumstances to political discussions concerning Taiwan's national sovereignty.

Taiwan's identification with Israel has been shaped by multiple historical factors. In military terms, Israel's remarkable turnaround during the 1973 Yom Kippur War profoundly influenced the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) government, which was grappling with the aftermath of its removal from the United Nations and ensuing diplomatic isolation. Following the United States' cessation of diplomatic ties with Taiwan, Chiang Ching-kuo's (蔣經國) administration struggled with the loss of US military and political backing. Consequently, the Chiang regime looked to the

Israeli model of self-reliance as a potential lifeline. This [emulation](#) is evident in Taiwan's self-developed military arsenal—from air defense missiles and the AIDC F-CK-1 Ching-kuo fighter jet, to ventures in the nuclear industry—where one can trace the footprints of Israel's defense industry.

After the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) came to power in 2000 and faced pressure from the PRC and mistrust from the United States, Israel resurfaced once again as an essential source of military technology. Israel has offered support across various domains, including reconnaissance [satellites](#) and [submarine acquisitions](#). Israel's resolute responses to threats from Hezbollah in Lebanon, Palestinian attacks, and Iran's influence have resonated with the DPP and its supporters. For the DPP—which has ruled in the past as government holding a minority position in the parliament, while facing a rapidly developing PRC—Israel stood out as a prime example of how to defend national sovereignty amid massive external pressure.

In this context, during the ongoing conflict Taiwan's typically polarized mainstream media outlets have displayed a rare consensus in sympathizing with Israel, setting aside their usual political divisions over unification versus independence. Nonetheless, Taiwan's interactions with Israel have primarily focused on commercial trade in the defense and energy sectors—with many in Taiwan lacking a holistic understanding of Israel's political and social systems, and failing to distinguish the complexities between the Palestinian nation, Gaza, and Hamas. This has resulted in generalized indifference toward non-Israeli communities.

Taiwan's self-identification with Israel has contributed to the development of a unique perspective, using the outcomes of Israel's military operations in Gaza as a benchmark for shaping national security policies. However, due to the absence of a deeper understanding of the Middle East and historical context surrounding the Israel-Arab conflicts, external narratives can sow doubt and exacerbate ideological clashes within Taiwan. This environment can also be easily exploited by the PRC's influence operations. For instance, following the outbreak of the current Israel-Hamas conflict, during which Israel's Iron Dome failed to effectively intercept Hamas rockets, Taiwanese media raised doubts about the military's ability to fend off PRC missiles. Some experts further questioned whether the massive weapon procurements by the Taiwanese government from the United States are indeed appropriate, arguing for a reevaluation of military acquisitions. Such doubts not only demonstrate a void in the understanding of actual policy needs, but also undermine public confidence in national defense.

PRC Efforts to Establish a New Foothold in Taiwan's Public Consciousness

The PRC's sudden diplomatic pivot from supporting Palestine to adopting an ambiguous, neutral stance has not been well-received domestically. However, in Taiwan, this change could serve as a new framework for shaping perceptions of the Taiwan Strait situation. Within this narrative framework, the PRC can leverage Taiwan's self-identification with Israel, attempting to re-frame the recent Israel-Hamas war—as well as the United States' support for Israeli actions—as a potential precursor for a conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Such interpretations would no doubt increase skepticism among those Taiwanese who are already doubtful of US support, intensifying the aversion to US military aid. Meanwhile, by framing itself as a supporter of humanitarianism, the PRC attempts to diminish its negative impression as an aggressor held by many Taiwanese.

This approach aligns with the anti-United States narrative that the PRC has been cultivating for years. Its impact can be observed in the immediate [reactions within Taiwanese society](#) to the dissemination of misinformation regarding the Israel-Hamas war. Although Taiwanese generally see the fictional portrayals of Israel's setbacks on TikTok as tasteless jokes, any disinformation about Israel or the United States now receives additional attention. For example, misinformation about Israel using white phosphorus and the involvement of US troops has been repeatedly broadcasted. The circulation of disinformation in Taiwan, including rumors about Israel's non-compliance with international humanitarian law and Western nations' perceived lack of commitment to justice, enhances the credibility of the PRC's diplomatic narratives in Taiwan. In turn, this could also raise concerns within Taiwanese society about potential intervention by Western nations, particularly the United States, in the Taiwan Strait.

Indeed, the PRC's neutral stance aligns with its objectives in the Middle East. Following the PRC's successful efforts to facilitate diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran this March, traditional dynamics in the region are evolving. By integrating historically pro-US oil giants like Saudi Arabia into its economic networks, the PRC is positioning itself as a peace maker. While the US and other Western countries label Hamas's attacks as terrorism and back Israel's full-scale military operations in Gaza, the PRC is working to portray itself as an advocate for peace, attempting to foster dialogue between Israel and the Arab states.

The outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war has presented an opportunity for the PRC to recalibrate its role in the Middle East, ulti-

mately using the conflict as a tool to influence perceptions surrounding the situation in the Taiwan Strait. As more countries urge their governments to denounce Israel's military operations and the Global South seeks consistency in approaches to both Ukraine and Gaza, Taiwan's self-identification with Israel could potentially put it at risk of further international isolation. This scenario could pave the way for the PRC to wage a diplomatic campaign to gain more international support. At the same time, the war offers an opportunity for Taiwan to reflect on the potential new challenges that the PRC's Middle East engagement could pose to the Taiwan Strait from a broader, societal perspective.

The main point: While the PRC has historically aligned itself with Palestine, the recent Israel-Hamas conflict has seen Beijing take a more neutral approach. This shift could presage a broader effort by China to improve its international image and further marginalize Taiwan.