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Resolution 2758 and the Fallacy of Beijing's UN "One-China Principle"

By: Russell Hsiao

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On October 25, 1971, 73 members of the United Nations participated in a pivotal vote over three draft resolutions to consider the matter of China's seat in that international body, as well as the UN Security Council. Ultimately, the General Assembly adopted the 23-power text (commonly referred to as the "Albanian Resolution") with a vote of 76 yes to 35 no, with 17 abstentions, "[recognizing](#) that the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China are the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations and that the People's Republic of China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council." Notably, the Assembly did not proceed to vote on the third resolution that was sponsored by 19 countries including the United States (commonly referred to as the "US Resolution"). [1]

Since its adoption, Resolution 2758 has been utilized by the PRC as the basis to [prevent Taiwan's meaningful participation](#)—both its government and its people—in the UN system without Beijing's assent. [According to the PRC](#), "Resolution 2758 of the UN General Assembly has restored the lawful seat of the People's Republic of China at the UN and affirmed the *one-China principle* [emp. added] at the Organization, which has been strictly observed across the UN system and widely respected by UN Member States."

While UN Resolution 2758 did indeed dispose of the question of who had China's seat in the United Nations, the resolution itself makes no explicit mention of Taiwan, nor of the territorial or population scope of China. A plain reading of the adopted Resolution makes this point abundantly clear and a careful reading of the considerations within the Assembly debate clearly shows that the resolution, as adopted, disposed of neither the critical question of Taiwanese self-determination nor the status of Taiwan. It was for this very reason that, on the former issue, Saudi Arabia submitted a separate resolution "express-

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ing the view that the whole question revolved around the right of self-determination and that the Assembly had neither the right nor the power to compel the people of Taiwan to merge with the mainland.” [2] As Ambassador Robert O’Brien, the 28th National Security Advisor and chairman of GTI’s US-Taiwan Task Force, [stated](#): “[Resolution] 2758 relates solely to the occupancy of the China seat at the United Nations. Nothing more.”

Moreover, the resolution made no disposition on the status of Taiwan—much less recognize it as a part of China. Again, a fact of the matter is that the adopted [Albanian Resolution](#) did not even mention Taiwan. Indeed, some countries tried to suggest that the Assembly take on this issue during the debate over the resolution but it was ultimately not addressed. [3] Till this day, these conflicting positions have never been reconciled despite Beijing’s distortions and even though senior leaders in Beijing knew full well of this at the time. Four days before the resolution was adopted, Henry Kissinger, who was then serving as the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, met with Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai (周恩來). According to a memorandum of the conversation with Kissinger and Zhou on October 21, 1971, Zhou [recognized](#) this issue:

“The question is that in the other resolution [Albanian Resolution] it calls for the restoration of all lawful rights of China in the United Nations, including its seat in the UN.

In that resolution it is not possible to put in a clause concerning the status of Taiwan, and if it is passed, the status of Taiwan is not yet decided.”

These outstanding issues were largely sidestepped for four decades until they came to a head in 2007, when then-UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon [declared](#): “In that resolution [Resolution 2758], the General Assembly decided ‘to recognize [that] the representatives of the People’s Republic of China are the only legitimate representatives of China to the United Nations. In accordance with that resolution, the United Nations considers Taiwan *for all purposes* [emp. added] to be an integral part of the People’s Republic of China.’” This overly broad interpretation, however, runs counter to both the original text of the resolution and the consid-

erations of actual debate over the resolution, as well as the fact that the PRC [never exercised sovereignty](#) over Taiwan.



Image: Republic of China (ROC) Foreign Minister Chow Shu-kai (周書楷) speaking before the UN General Assembly on October 25, 1971, the day that UN Resolution 2758 passed, which shifted the China seat in the United Nations from the ROC to the PRC. (Image: [AP/Youtube](#)).

The rationale with any modicum of validity for this interpretation is if one believed that the Republic of China (ROC) somehow ceased to exist in 1949—this is Beijing’s position. This flies in the face of the facts and has not been the position of the United States and many other countries. The fact of the matter is that the ROC did not cease to exist in 1949 or 1971 (for an excellent explanation of this logic, see Richard Bush’s article “[Thoughts on the Republic of China and its Significance](#)”). While Taiwan was still under a one-party dictatorship in 1971, there may be more basis to assume that “representatives of Chiang Kai-shek” could apply to any successive leader of the ROC; after Taiwan evolved into a full-fledged democracy with direct presidential elections, any elected representative of Taiwan could not conceivably be described as a representative of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石). The myth that the ROC does not exist is a political construct—not a legal one—and obscures the objective reality that not only is there a vibrant democracy in Taiwan, but there are two mutually non-subordinate governments across the Taiwan Strait then and now.

In August of this year, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) laid out his government's [argument](#) plainly: "The resolution contains no mention of a Chinese claim of sovereignty over Taiwan, nor does it authorize the PRC to represent Taiwan in the UN system. [...] By falsely equating the language of the resolution with Beijing's 'one China principle,' the PRC is arbitrarily imposing its political views on the UN."

The PRC's continued misrepresentation of Resolution 2758 are reflected in countless official statements about how Taiwan is neither eligible to become a member of the United Nations, nor be able to meaningfully participate in any of its affiliated organizations without Beijing's acquiescence. PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian (趙立堅) [stated](#): "We fully believe that the UN and its members will continue to understand and support the just cause of the Chinese government and people to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, oppose secession and achieve national reunification [sic]." Furthermore, [according to Zhao](#), "the UN and its vast membership recognize the fact that there is only one China in the world, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory," and other countries "respect China's exercise of sovereignty over the island." These statements misrepresent the Resolution, as there was no disposition on the matter of sovereignty.

It is within this context that the significance of Congressman Gerry Connolly's (D-VA) introduction of the "[Taiwan International Solidarity Act](#)" in April 2021 snaps into view:

"(10) United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 (XXVI) established the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China as the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations. The resolution did not address the issue of representation of Taiwan and its people in the United Nations or any related organizations, nor did the resolution take a position on the relationship between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan or include any statement pertaining to Taiwan's sovereignty.

(11) The United States opposes any initiative that seeks to change Taiwan's status without the consent of the people."

Further underscoring Beijing's persistent distortion and misuse of UN 2758, Ma Xiaoguang (馬曉光)—the spokesman for the PRC State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO)—[stated](#) in response to the introduction of the Act: "The resolution fully embodies the one-China principle upheld by the UN [...] it completely settled China's representation in the UN 'politically, legally and procedurally.'" While implicit in the positions taken by the United States but not affirmatively stated since 2007, consistent with the language of the Act and in practice by successive administrations, Ambassador Kelly Craft, who served as the US ambassador to the UN under the Trump Administration, [stated](#) it clearly: "Obviously we really are pushing for them [Taiwan] to be back into the UN, or have a role in the UN health assembly."

Taiwan's continued exclusion reflects the constant tension between the principle and practice of the United Nations. Because the Assembly could not agree on a broad scope for its decision on the Resolution, the final action only disposed of the narrow question of who held China's seat on the Security Council and representation in the international body. By virtue of the fact of Foreign Minister Wu's [argument](#), it is not contesting Beijing's seat in the United Nations. And as then US-Ambassador to the United States George Bush stated during the 1971 proceedings on the US resolution that "reflect[s] [...] incontestable reality" that two mutually non-subordinate entities exist.

After half a century, the issue remains, at best, unsettled. As stated presciently by the delegation of El Salvador, which opposed the adoption of the Resolution: "The people of Taiwan will have to emerge from the impasse they find themselves in and say what they want to do with their island." [4]

The main point: Beijing maintains that UN Resolution 2758, which in 1971 shifted China's UN seat from the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek to the PRC, also recognized Beijing's "One-China Principle" and that Taiwan is a part of the PRC. This is false reading of the text of the resolution and considerations of the Assembly debate, which did not recognize Taiwan as falling under PRC sovereignty.

[1] Marc J. Cohen and Emma Teng, eds., *Let Taiwan Be Taiwan* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Taiwan Interna-

tional Relations, 1990), 124.

[2] Ibid., 121.

[3] Ibid., 121.

[4] Ibid., 158.

Australia's Increased Engagement on Taiwan Strait Security

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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[Australia](#) has voiced concerns about China's largest incursions—comprising 145 fighter jets and bombers—into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over four consecutive days from October 1 to 4. "Australia is concerned by China's increased air incursions into Taiwan's air defense zone over the past week," said a [spokesperson](#) for Canberra's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. "Resolution of differences over Taiwan and other regional issues must be achieved peacefully through dialogue and without the threat or use of force or coercion."

The Chinese military maneuvers were arguably meant to test the [Biden Administration's support](#) for Taiwan; yet these Chinese measures have further alarmed US regional allies such as Australia about the growing security threat posed by China. [Canberra](#) said it wants to see "an Indo-Pacific region that is secure, prosperous, and based on the rule of law." Australia's statements on Taiwan Strait security come as the country has grown more concerned about a [potential conflict](#) in the Taiwan Strait and the deleterious effects on Australian national security.

Australia's Awakening to the China Threat in the Indo-Pacific

As a middle-sized power in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia has long been striving to balance its [alliance with the United States](#) and its [economic and trade relations with China](#). After coming into office in 2018, Australian Prime Minister [Scott Morrison](#) initially did not want to choose between his country's main security ally and

largest trading partner as US-China trade and security ties mounted. However, Australia's own deteriorating relationship with China, which has boiled over due to Beijing's imposition of [trade sanctions](#) on Canberra, coupled with a more dangerous security environment marked by Chinese aggression in the [East China Sea](#), [South China Sea](#), and [Taiwan Strait](#), seems to have pushed Canberra more firmly toward its security alliance with the United States.

China's [growing military power](#) and its expansionist behavior in the Indo-Pacific region have exposed the vulnerabilities of Australia's defense capabilities. Retired army general and Liberal Senator [Jim Molan](#) called China the most "dangerous threat to the existence" and prosperity of Australia. Molan also expressed concern that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan could force [the United States](#) out of the western Pacific—resulting in Chinese military and political dominance over the Indo-Pacific region, to the detriment of Australian national security. [Molan](#) argued that because the Biden Administration is "not confident" it can handle a Taiwan contingency, Australia may be left on its own to repel possible Chinese military action against it and thus needs to seriously focus on defense preparations for a potential war. In recent months, the [Australian government](#) has been ramping up its internal preparations for a Taiwan Strait contingency. [Australian officials](#) are increasingly worried that their country might be dragged into a war in the Indo-Pacific over Taiwan.

Against the backdrop of a rising China threat in the Indo-Pacific region, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States announced the formation of the trilateral [AUKUS alliance](#) on September 15, 2021. Under the new partnership, the United States and United Kingdom will help Australia obtain and deploy [nuclear-powered submarines](#) and [share information and technology](#) in an effort to strengthen Australia's declining [defense capabilities](#) and contend with Chinese naval and military activities in the region. After signing the AUKUS agreement, [Morrison](#) called Australia's security alignment with the United States a "forever partnership [...] between the oldest and most trusted of friends." In essence, Canberra finally made the critical decision to [double down](#) on its alliance and deepen military relations with the United States. Contrary to the Australian government's past stance that the [Aus-](#)

[Australia, New Zealand, and United States \(ANZUS\) treaty](#) does not oblige Canberra to assist Washington in a conflict over Taiwan, the AUKUS agreement has raised some expectations that Australia may join the United States in a potential [Taiwan Strait conflict](#).

[Taipei](#) praised the AUKUS agreement that could help counter China's military power and assertiveness in the region. Taiwan's Foreign Minister [Joseph Wu](#) (吳釗燮) remarked, "We are pleased to see that the like-minded partners of Taiwan—the United States and the UK and Australia—are working closer with each other to acquire more advanced defense articles so that we can defend [the] Indo-Pacific." [Wu](#) commented, "I'm very glad to see that Australia is going to shoulder more responsibility to maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific." [He](#) also reiterated his previous calls for Taiwan and Australia to share intelligence and engage in security exchanges.

Indeed, Australia could play an important role in a US-led deterrence strategy to increase the political and security costs of a Chinese military invasion of Taiwan. As former Australian prime minister [Tony Abbott](#), who served from 2013 to 2015, said at a news conference on October 8, in order to avoid a Taiwan Strait war, the best way is to show Beijing that "Taiwan has friends." Speaking at the annual Yushan Forum (玉山論壇) in Taipei, [Abbott](#) emphasized solidarity with Taiwan, and asserted that neither the United States nor Australia should allow China to take over democratically-ruled Taiwan. Taipei, meanwhile, has trumpeted the regional costs of a Chinese takeover of Taiwan in its external diplomacy. In a bid to internationalize Taiwan Strait security, [President Tsai Ing-wen](#) (蔡英文) wrote in a recent *Foreign Affairs* article that "a failure to defend Taiwan [...] would overturn a security architecture that has allowed for peace and extraordinary economic development in the region for seven decades."

Australian Official Statements on Taiwan

Over the past several months, the Australian government has issued numerous statements emphasizing the importance of Taiwan Strait security in its meetings with the United States and other key partners. During the [Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations](#) (AUSMIN) on September 16, the secretaries and ministers of both sides "stated their intent to strengthen ties



Image: Former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott speaking at the Yushan Forum in Taipei, October 8. (Image: [Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#))

with Taiwan, which is a leading democracy and a critical partner for both countries." Washington and Canberra also "reiterated continued support for a peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues without resorting to threats or coercion" and pledged support for Taiwan's "meaningful participation in international organizations," according to their [joint statement](#).

The critical importance of the Taiwan Strait has also become a salient issue in Australia's foreign relations with other key partners such as France and Japan. The first ever [Australia-France 2+2 Ministerial Consultations](#) in August called for a "peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues," while also supporting Taipei's enhanced participation in international organizations. In addition, a [joint statement](#) issued following the [2+2 meeting](#) on June 9 between Australian and Japanese foreign and defense ministers stated for the first time that both sides "underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues." The Australia-Japan statement on the Taiwan Strait was identical to the [US-Japan joint leaders' statement](#) issued earlier in April.

Japanese Defense Minister [Nobuo Kishi](#) (岸 信夫) said at the 2+2 meeting that both countries must "further deepen security cooperation" in order to "proactively contribute to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region." Last November, both sides signed a [milestone defense pact](#) that allows for reciprocal troop visits to conduct training and joint operations. Indeed, Australia and Japan are playing key roles as the two main regional powers that are upholding the US [Indo-Pacific](#)

Strategy. Similar to the [Japanese policy evolution](#) on the Taiwan Strait, Australia is also becoming more vocal and transparent about China's threat to Indo-Pacific security and stability.

Canberra's Support for Taiwan's CPTPP Bid

Furthermore, Australia has become increasingly supportive of [Taiwan's enhanced participation](#) in regional and international organizations. In light of its broader regional economic objectives, [Taipei](#) has asked for Australia to support Taiwan's bid to join the [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) (CPTPP), a regional trade bloc formed in 2018 that comprises Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. [Taiwan](#) formally applied to join the CPTPP on September 22, less than a week after China submitted its membership application. Procedurally speaking, the 11 member nations of the CPTPP need to unanimously [approve](#) Taipei's and Beijing's applications in order to admit them into the agreement. News reports suggest that [Australia](#) may be strategically coordinating with other partners on helping Taiwan gain entry into the trade agreement.

Former Prime Minister [Tony Abbott](#), in particular, has championed Taiwan's accession to the CPTPP and the deepening of economic ties between the two sides. [Abbott](#) has publicly expressed support for Taiwan's entry to the CPTPP, which he called the best substantive support for the island. "I think right now the front-line of freedom is effectively Taiwan, and I think it's very important that we do everything that we can to help strengthen Taiwan at this time," [Abbott](#) remarked during an online discussion on October 15 hosted by Project 2049. "Personally, I think a very important way to strengthen Taiwan and to acknowledge Taiwan would be to admit it into the [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for] Trans-Pacific Partnership," [he](#) said.

Therefore, he urged fellow [democratic nations](#) of the CPTPP to support Taipei's bid. "I can't think of a stronger signal of democracies standing shoulder to shoulder with Taiwan than Taiwan's accession to the CPTPP," [Abbott](#) said during his recent trip to the island. The former prime minister has also urged Taipei and Canberra to negotiate and sign an [Economic Cooperation](#)

[Agreement](#) (ECA) to further strengthen economic ties, particularly at a time when the Morrison government is not eager to negotiate a [free trade agreement](#) (FTA) with Taipei. Trade has become part of a strategy to deepen all-around ties between Taiwan and like-minded partners.

Australia's increased engagement on Taiwan Strait security, as well as its support for Taipei's meaningful participation in international organizations, is occurring amid a deteriorating security environment in the Indo-Pacific region. A shift has occurred in Australia's efforts to balance its relations with the United States and China. Canberra has come to realize the [existential threat](#) posed by China's military strength and aggressive tactics in the region, and that Australian national interests are best protected by preserving US dominance in the Indo-Pacific. As tensions continue to rise in the Taiwan Strait and between China and the United States, Taipei should further engage Australia and other US allies on security and economic issues—and thereby [internationalize attention](#) to the Taiwan Strait—as part of a multilateral strategy to deter China from forcibly seizing the democratic island.

The main point: A shift has occurred in Australia's efforts to balance its relations with the United States and China, with Canberra doubling down on its alliance with the United States. Australia's own security concerns *vis-à-vis* China have driven its growing engagement on Taiwan Strait security.

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Taipei and Beijing Both Strike Defiant Notes Amid Escalating Tensions

By: J. Michael Cole

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Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) used her [National Day address](#) on October 10 this year to strike a note of defiance after [comments](#) by People's Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping (習近平) the previous day. These two speeches were made against the

backdrop of escalating [tensions](#) in the Taiwan Strait, following a major increase in Chinese military activity near Taiwan.

Double Ten

For the first time since 2007, the celebrations in front of the Presidential Office in Taipei included a [military parade](#), in which a variety of weapons systems were on display, including cruise missile launchers and air defense systems. The decision to put greater emphasis on the military was no doubt intended as a show of support for the armed forces—as well as a signal, to both China and to the international community, that in the face of a growing threat from China and recent acts of intimidation, Taiwan is determined to defend itself.



Image: President Tsai Ing-wen delivering an address during the Republic of China National Day ceremonies on October 10, 2021. (Image: [Taiwan Presidential Office](#))

In her [address](#), President Tsai emphasized national unity and resilience, and sent a clear signal to Beijing that pressure and intimidation will not succeed in cowing the Taiwanese.

“I want to remind all my fellow citizens that we do not have the privilege of letting down our guard. [...] Free and democratic countries around the world have been alerted to the expansion of authoritarianism, with Taiwan standing on democracy’s first line of defense.

[T]he Republic of China today finds itself in a situation that is more complex and fluid than at any other point in the past 72 years. [...] The routin-

ization of Chinese military activity in Taiwan’s southwestern air defense identification zone (ADIZ) has seriously affected both our national security and aviation safety.

We call for maintaining the status quo, and we will do our utmost to prevent the status quo from being unilaterally altered. I also want to emphasize that resolving cross-Strait differences requires the two sides of the strait to engage in dialogue on the basis of parity.

We hope for an easing of cross-Strait relations and will not act rashly, but there should be absolutely no illusions that the Taiwanese people will bow to pressure. We will continue to bolster our national defense and demonstrate our determination to defend ourselves in order to ensure that nobody can force Taiwan to take the path China has laid out for us. This is because the path that China has laid out offers neither a free and democratic way of life for Taiwan, nor sovereignty for our 23 million people.”

On the sovereignty issue, President Tsai’s speech showed continuity with previous public addresses by using the terms Republic of China (seven times) and Republic of China (Taiwan) (three times) interchangeably. As in previous years, Tsai also made it clear, with words to the effect that they are “not subordinate to one another,” that the Republic of China (Taiwan) recognizes the legitimacy and sovereignty of the People’s Republic of China while reaffirming that the latter does not have sovereignty over the former. Tsai also made clear references to the intertwined—and symbiotic—nature of the ROC and Taiwan when she stated that “the Republic of China came to Taiwan in 1949, 72 years ago. Over these past 72 years, we have gone from poverty to prosperity, from authoritarianism to democracy, and from uniformity to diversity. Slowly but surely, we remade the Republic of China (Taiwan) into what it is today.” The formulation and choice of the word in this passage was not accidental: it shows, instead, the transitory nature of the relationship between the ROC and Taiwan, starting with a reference to the ROC arriving in Taiwan in 1949 and, through the passage of time, becoming today the ROC (Taiwan). It is a message of inclusiveness, a non-denial of the legitimacy of the ROC as a component of Taiwan’s history

and was therefore altogether in line with her appeals to unity—and this even if the opposition KMT, in hearing the same words, again [accused](#) the Tsai Administration of “erasing” the ROC.

Within hours, Beijing had [responded](#) to Tsai’s address, saying that her rhetoric only contributed to further tensions in the Taiwan Strait. Responding to questions later that day, Ma Xiaoguang (馬曉光), a spokesman for the State Council’s Taiwan Affairs Office (國務院臺灣事務辦公室), [said](#) that Tsai’s speech “advocated for Taiwan independence, incited confrontation, split history, distorted the facts using the so-called consensus and unity as a pretense to try to kidnap Taiwanese public opinion, link up with external forces, and provoke independence.”

Xi’s Xinhai Address

The day before Tsai’s speech, in an [address](#) commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命)—and demonstrating the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) attempt to hijack Sun Yat-sen’s (孫中山) legacy—Xi issued a series of remarks concerning Taiwan.

“To achieve the reunification [sic] of the motherland [sic] by peaceful means is most in line with the overall interests of the Chinese nation, including the Taiwan compatriots. We adhere to the basic policy of “peaceful reunification” and “one country, two systems” [一國兩制], adhere to the “One-China Principle” [一中原則] and the “1992 Consensus” [九二共識], and promote the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations. Compatriots on both sides of the strait must stand on the right side of history and jointly create the glorious cause of the complete reunification of the motherland and the great national rejuvenation.

The Chinese nation has a glorious tradition of opposing division and maintaining unity. The “Taiwan independence” split is the biggest obstacle to the reunification of the motherland and a serious hidden danger to national rejuvenation. Those who forget their ancestors, betray the motherland, or split the country have never ended well. They will definitely be spurned by the people and judged by history! The Taiwan issue

is purely China’s internal affair, and no external interference is allowed. No one should underestimate the Chinese people’s determination and strong ability to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity! The historical task of the complete reunification of the motherland must be fulfilled, and it will definitely be fulfilled!”

Although some analysts judged that Xi’s remarks were somewhat less threatening than earlier ones—such as those that he had made in [July 2021](#), when he had vowed to “smash” any attempts at formal independence—the tone-deafness of his Xinhai address was not missed by the Taiwanese (at least those who noticed that he had made the remarks at all). On the whole, his October 9 remarks were replete with the usual tropes and demonstrated a complete lack of flexibility on Beijing’s part: from the insistence on the “one country, two systems” formula that was already a non-starter before Beijing completely neutralized the same arrangement in Hong Kong, to “peaceful unification” and the “One-China Principle,” both of which go [against the wishes of the great majority of Taiwanese](#).

Still, Xi’s inclusion of the “1992 Consensus” in his remarks continues to give ammunition to the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and its [newly elected chairman](#), Eric Chu (朱立倫), who has [retained](#) the consensus as a key platform of his party. The KMT continues to argue that tensions in the Taiwan Strait are largely the result of the Tsai Administration’s refusal to recognize the “1992 Consensus,” a construct which the CCP and the KMT have long regarded as a precondition for dialogue in the Taiwan Strait. (The KMT has been largely silent on the recent military activity in Taiwan’s ADIZ.)

Know Your Audience

As always, Xi sought in his [Xinhai address](#) to give the impression that opposition to the inevitability of “reunification” and “national rejuvenation” is limited to a small coterie of “separatists” from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨). This is a claim that flies in the face of [political reality in Taiwan](#) and that can only be the result of extremely poor intelligence—or the fact that such rhetoric was not aimed at the Taiwanese but, in fact, to a domestic audience back in China, which is continually fed lies about the state of affairs in Taiwan. In large part, the perpetua-

tion of these lies is meant to insulate the CCP from criticism that its entire Taiwan policy has been an abject failure. Xi also emphasized that the “Taiwan issue” is an “internal affair” of China, another lie that seeks to depict the internationalization of the Taiwan Strait as external meddling while fueling the idea that Taiwan is merely unfinished business in a family quarrel.

And while Xi didn’t make any direct reference to “smashing” the Taiwan independence movement, his reference to things “never ending well” for such people was only compounded by the recent People’s Liberation Army (PLA) activity near Taiwan, with as many as [150 intrusions into its southwestern ADIZ](#) over a period of four days from October 1. (Editor’s note: For further discussion of this topic, see “Assessing One Year of PLA Air Incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ” by Thomas Shattuck, in this issue.)

Xi’s speech, and the CCP’s inability to adapt to changing circumstances in Taiwan and within the international community, is the result of an ideological drive cultivated by the Party, which has painted it into a corner. It is also a campaign that the CCP cannot de-escalate, lest doing so threaten its reputation with the Chinese public and more hawkish elements within the Party and the PLA. The inflexible language, along with the destabilizing PLA activity, underscore a note of defiance aimed both at the Taiwanese public and the international community. It is a signal that, despite a shifting external environment, Beijing will not be deterred, and that it will continue to shape the environment in its favor. Therefore, while PLA incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ have been markedly reduced since October 5—ostensibly due to [stern warnings](#) from Washington—a new cycle of escalation, one that will perhaps be even more threatening than that seen in the early days of October, is very likely in the offing. When it comes, this next round will either be in response to some “provocation” by Taipei (basically anything that suggests or reinforces statehood for Taiwan, or that deepens Taiwan’s connectivity with the international community), or other developments in the Indo-Pacific that point to the consolidation of an alliance of countries that aims to contain China’s more destabilizing activities.

The main point: Taipei and Beijing are digging their heels in as Beijing refuses to accept changing realities in Taiwan and within the region. Meanwhile, the CCP

cannot show weakness with its hardline constituents by backing down and must therefore continue to escalate, a recipe for greater instability down the road.

Taiwan Defense Reform and the Follies of Contrarianism

By: Craig M. Koerner

Craig M. Koerner is a professor at the US Naval War College. The opinions expressed are solely his own and are not intended in any way to reflect an official position of the US Naval War College, US Navy, US Department of Defense, or any branch of the US Government.

In a recent two-part article (see [here](#) and [here](#)), Global Taiwan Institute Adjunct Fellow Eric Chan [argued](#) that Taiwanese adoption of an asymmetrical “porcupine strategy”—a term coined by [William S. Murray](#)—is virtually impossible for reasons related to Taiwan’s military structure, political system, and society. Additionally, Chan stated that Taiwan’s current military is more appropriate strategically, despite its disadvantages in operational warfare. This strategic superiority of Taiwan’s current defense force allegedly lies in its ability to deal with “gray zone warfare.” Thus, different recommendations for the defensive scheme for Taiwan arise from different priorities, not any failure to assess the operational picture correctly. As Chan [says](#), “The basis for this incongruence is that both sides have differing definitions of asymmetry and deterrence.”

This view is more of an apologia than a tightly reasoned defense of Taiwan’s policy. The different recommendations for procurement and training lie not in differing definitions or goals, but in a fundamental failure to understand effective counters to Chinese threats to Taiwan, including those occurring in the “gray zone.”

There is no logical basis for preferring Taiwan’s current conventional, symmetric defense to a porcupine strategy defense. As this piece will attempt to argue, in peacetime or in a crisis, addressing “gray zone” activity symmetrically does little or nothing to delay or deter China from using so-called “salami-slicing” tactics. However, and by Chan’s [own admission](#), it does force the Taiwanese into a ruinously expensive symmetric game. In wartime, an asymmetrical defense would ex-

exploit the overwhelming advantage of having numerous cheap units operating in the clutter of Taiwan's land-mass, where they can hide, assisted by camouflage and decoys, while detecting and firing into an invading sea and air force which lacks such clutter. This asymmetrical strategy of using ground-based anti-ship and anti-air weapons avoids vulnerability to the Chinese rocket force and its long-range precision fires informed by modern overhead surveillance. The porcupine strategy would be cheaper than Taiwan's current weapons mix and present a far greater deterrent to Chinese aggression, and be just as effective as the current force in the gray zone.

A more detailed exploration of Chan's arguments follows:

After citing [Murray's arguments](#) for an asymmetrical, cost-effective defense against "*the most dangerous scenario*" [emphasis in the original], Chan alleges that culture and gray zone activity work in favor of Taiwan's symmetric approach. "[F]rom a cultural-linguistic Chinese perspective, an operationally defensive military does not exert deterrent power" [says Chan](#), adding that "an operationally defensive military aimed at efficiently inflicting casualties on the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—aka the People's Liberation Army (PLA)—may not be optimized to coerce the leadership of the CCP, as high PLA casualties may not necessarily threaten the legitimacy of the Party." This seems to highlight an excessively narrow aspect of the asymmetrical defense. If the Chinese invasion forces are defeated, it is not the casualties that threaten the CCP's legitimacy, but the failure of its "reunification" effort. Arguing that casualties are irrelevant to coercion—and therefore deterrence—seems to miss this critical point.

Chan immediately [adds](#) that "an asymmetric military would cede significant portions of the gray-zone space," and gives the specific example of "using radars or ground-based missile tracking or UAV patrols and intercepts of hostile incursions." He then goes on to say that "without the physical response of interception, there is a significant chance that far from deterring the PLA Air Force (PLAAF), these tactics could encourage the PLAAF to utilize salami-slicing tactics to move its incursions closer to Taiwan, thereby testing Taiwan's willingness to escalate to a kinetic response." In fact,

Taiwan's intercepts with aircraft, the sort of response that Chan defends, have failed to keep the PLAAF from advancing these very salami-slicing tactics. Faced with Taiwan's air intercepts, China has been increasing the numbers of aircraft flown and decreasing their distances from Taiwan.

The recommendation of keeping Taiwan's current-style air force clearly suffers from exactly what Chan claims as a disadvantage to an asymmetrical approach. Moreover, it is not clear how any response proves Taiwan's willingness to escalate to a kinetic response, except of course responding with actual kinetic fires. It is clear from Chan's own arguments and other writings that Taiwan's current method is extremely expensive ([see here and here](#)), and that these Taiwanese aircraft are vulnerable to either China shooting first or outnumbering the defenders. Ground-based air defenses, by contrast, are cheaper and, since surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) can hide in ground clutter, they can almost always get in the first shot. This makes SAMs a far better means of defeating China in a war, and therefore a far better deterrent to a China that fears defeat.

The message that Taiwan is aware of the Chinese flights could just as easily be sent by radar tracking and radio messages, without bankrupting Taiwan's defense force. Chan, however, [argues](#) that because "these responses are not public in nature, they do not provide an effective rejoinder to the CCP integrated military/propaganda campaign touting the [omnipotence of the PLA](#) and [the weakness of the Taiwan military](#)." It is not clear that physical intercepts are "public in nature" unless they happen to be within visual range on a clear day, assuming that coast-visiting Taiwanese are the relevant public. Nor is it even remotely clear how physical intercepts do provide "an effective rejoinder to the CCP [...] campaign touting the omnipotence of the PLA and the weakness of the Taiwan military." The ability of Taiwan to fly outnumbered fighters to within visual range of Chinese aircraft proves little to nothing about what would happen in a military campaign. Taiwan's dependence on aircraft intercepts only highlights Taiwan's vulnerability to offensive missile strikes against these aircraft, which depend on massive and vulnerable fixed infrastructure like runways.

Taiwan should instead build *mobile* radars and SAMs, in the style of Russia or of the Chinese themselves. This

would provide a far more effective air defense, in terms of both surviving Chinese missile strikes and in subsequently firing from hide-sites in ground clutter. To reassure the Taiwanese populace, this ground-based air defense could be made “public in nature” by anti-aircraft SAM tests. It could be made public to a different and directly relevant audience simply by tracking Chinese air movements, broadcasting them, and issuing statements to Chinese pilots themselves, during the flights, on international commercial frequencies. This would create misgivings on the part of Chinese air commanders and the aircrew themselves, to whom SAMs are a deadly threat. To quote a [US fighter pilot](#), “There is nothing, absolutely nothing, to describe what goes on inside a pilot’s gut when he sees a SAM get airborne.”

Finally, Chan mentions the disruption of a new scheme. Many of Chan’s objections are generic objections to all change. For example:

“Furthermore, these reforms could also cause other thorny problems associated with training/re-training, promotion, retention, and logistics. This type of disruption would (and does) face significant opposition from within military leadership, thus weakening military cohesion and actually reducing deterrent effects in the short to medium term.”

All reforms cause some disruption and problems in morale and promotion for those invested in the prior system. However, this is as an argument against reform in general; to use this as an argument against a specific reform is generic contrarianism. Surely some reforms are worthwhile, so an argument that works against them all is more than a little suspect.

Chan, however, does offer more specific [arguments](#):

“[T]he Taiwan military is dealing with significant issues of morale. Given that asymmetric recommendations generally posit a shift to an air force that consists of ground-based air defense, a navy primarily composed of small fast-attack craft, an army that is built around elastic denial (i.e., ability to conduct a fighting withdrawal), and a reserve system that focuses on territorial defense/insurgency, implementing them would likely result in additional, and severe, morale and recruitment issues.”

There are two overwhelming problems with these arguments. First, “elastic denial” and “insurgency” are not recommendations from Murray’s [porcupine strategy article](#). In fact, Murray’s recommendations include AH-64 attack helicopters, MLRS, and a “highly professional and highly trained army.” This is the opposite of a guerrilla or insurgency defense. If others have advocated guerrilla warfare for the defense of Taiwan, I will gladly join Chan in arguing against such a scheme, as it is not only counter-cultural but almost certainly ineffective as a deterrent against the perpetrators of the Hong Kong crack-down and Xinjiang gulags. Defenders against an amphibious or airborne invasion want to confine the invaders to a minimal zone with no safe area for the delivery of supplies and reinforcements. The porcupine strategy involves a conventional defense against amphibious and airborne landings, once they have been weakened by anti-ship missiles and SAMs fired from ground launchers and small naval vessels.

It seems the other half of Chan’s allegation that morale would suffer is found in the description of an air force based on SAMs and a navy based on small attack craft. Why a SAM-based air defense system is bad for morale is never explained. Virtually all competent militaries have ground-based air defenses, and there is no evidence of morale problems in this branch of their services—even when it is a major component, as in Germany in late World War Two, or even the primary arm, as in the case of North Vietnam. The same is true of small attack craft—although it would actually be more asymmetric to replace these with trucks firing anti-ship missiles. The ultimate “hide with pride” forces, the strategic nuclear missile submarine branches of the great powers, do not suffer from morale problems either. Chan’s concerns are needless; SAM and coastal missile battery crews are not low morale troops compared to other air force or naval service members. This view, that crews for SAMs and anti-ship missile units would have morale problems, seems to be an ahistorical argument.

Chan is quite correct in pointing out that adoption of the recommended asymmetrical program, for which he gives the purchase of anti-ship missiles as an example, is meeting with resistance. However, to use this as an argument against change is to reflexively agree with

defenders of the status quo regardless of the merits of asymmetry. The original recommendations in Murray's article were not made because the reforms were considered easy, but because the asymmetrical approach offers the only viable defense against a geographically close and far richer opponent. It is exactly these adherents to the status quo who must be refuted. To support the status quo by arguing that the alternative is disruptive and unpopular is to avoid all change and, in this case, invite defeat.

The porcupine strategy, suitably updated with modern technology, remains Taiwan's only hope for defeating an invasion and therefore deterring a China that fears defeat—not casualties, but defeat. The porcupine strategy loses nothing in the gray zone except the expense of playing at symmetry in a hopeless arms race. China is trying to deter the United States from intervention with a missile force that fires from ground clutter; it seems likely that China would respect a threat to their seaborne and airborne forces that is exactly parallel. This is one sense in which Taiwan would benefit from symmetry.

The main point: A porcupine defense for Taiwan—based on SAMs, anti-ship missiles, and mobile radars—is a better deterrent against China in that it displays a more capable and economically sustainable defense, and is no less effective in the “gray zone.” Arguments that its adoption would be disruptive are, in effect, arguments against change in general and prioritize continuity over actual effectiveness.

An Asymmetric Information Operations Strategy to Defeat the Chinese Communist Party

By: Holmes Liao

Holmes Liao has more than 30 years of professional experience in the US aerospace industry and previously served as a distinguished adjunct lecturer at Taiwan's War College.

In recent years, China has escalated its disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining democracies. Beijing has devoted significant resources to increasing their sophistication and efficacy. One prominent example

is the Chinese disinformation campaign attempting to [change the narratives surrounding COVID-19](#) even as the global pandemic worsens, by painting the picture that China's authoritarian government is the best model for combatting the infectious disease.

With its increasingly menacing stance in East Asia—including Australia—China's intention to compete with Western democracies in the military, economic, technological, and information domains has intensified. Though the West still has the competitive edge today, China's enormous resources may give it enough ammunition to catch up in time. Democracies and like-minded partners should leverage an asymmetric information operations strategy to counter this growing challenge.

The Targets of an Asymmetric Information Campaign

The Chinese mentality to revenge the “One Hundred Years of Humiliation” (百年國恥) grows stronger as the country becomes ever more powerful. Suppose the Chinese “patriotic” (i.e., vengeful) mindset is not reined in: in that case, the Chinese “wolf warrior” practice is bound to become more prevalent, and the nightmarish scenario of the “China threat” will become a reality.

In the last three millennia, China's succession of dynasties is, in essence, a history of revolutions. Each time an empire collapsed and was replaced by another, millions of people lost their lives. Chairman Mao's aphorism that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” (槍桿子裡面出政權) is not only a manifestation of the communist regime's violent nature but also an astute embodiment of China's history.

China's ancient proverb, “water can carry the boat but can also overturn it” (水能載舟，亦能覆舟), serves as a constant reminder that a regime is kept afloat by the peoples under its reign. If the people were angry, they would overthrow the empire. The CCP is no doubt acutely aware of that notion.

Due to its extreme concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a small number of elites, Beijing is afraid of what the truth may reveal to its people, thereby weakening the hold of the communist regime. In 2013, [Beijing-sponsored hackers attacked the New York Times' computer systems](#) over four months, ap-

parently in retaliation for a series of stories that the paper ran exposing vast wealth accumulated by the family of China's Premier Wen Jiabao (溫家寶).

In addition to setting up the Great Firewall to block western websites, the CCP also [established the Cyber Police](#) to monitor content and punish those who violate the CCP's suppressive rules to fabricate its version of "truth" and prevent outside information from leaking into China. Beijing also employs hundreds of thousands of members of the so-called "[Fifty-Cent Party](#)" (五毛黨) to shift public opinion on social media inside the firewall in favor of the CCP. The purpose is nothing less than obfuscating the truth and brainwashing the Chinese people, lest the truth should endanger the regime. This is an Orwellian prophecy fulfilled in the 21st century.

That the CCP spends such great resources to control the flow of information says volumes about its deepest apprehension and profound weakness. Democracies can and should capitalize on the CCP's vulnerability in the information domain.

High-Tech Influence Operations

[Leaflet-filled balloons and radio waves](#) epitomized the propaganda methods for crossing the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. In the 21st century, democracies can and should invent novel information technology to complement or substitute the old means to reach a far greater audience at the speed of light.

Influence operations are closely related to psychological warfare. Their purpose is to use information to manipulate an adversary's perceptions without their awareness, and to compel them to make decisions that are to the originator's advantage. Both offensive and defensive influence operations employ modern information and communications technologies to improve efficiency and effectiveness. China's disinformation campaigns and audacious cyberattacks against Western countries must be analyzed in this context.

If the West wants to reverse the ominous trend of the China threat, influence operations can be one important tool to strike its Achilles' heel. The strategy entails two major elements: technology and content. That means developing technologies to deliver outside information feared by the CCP directly to the mobile

devices owned by the Chinese people (more than [96 percent](#) possess one), thereby informing them that the real world is not what the CCP portrays.

There are at least 30 social media platforms in China, such as [Zhihu](#) (知乎, the Chinese equivalent of Quora), [Douban](#) (豆瓣, their IMDB or Flixster), [Youku](#) (优酷, similar to YouTube), [Weibo](#) (新浪微博, China's Facebook), [QQ](#) (腾讯QQ, equivalent to MSN Messenger), and [Wechat](#) (微信, which combines the functions of WhatsApp and PayPal), to name a few. The West can take advantage of these platforms as a perfect battleground to conduct influence operations directly inside China.

A Multinational Approach to Information Operations

US Special Operations Command has recently created a [joint task force](#) in the Indo-Pacific region to thwart China's information and influence operations in the theater. The US could conceivably go one step further by forming a multinational coalition—covert or otherwise—that would bring in countries such as Japan and Australia to create and deploy technologies at the coalition's disposal.

While the task force can jointly develop the influence operations technologies, the second element of the strategy—content—is equally if not more important. Creating persuasive text, image, audio, and video content requires familiarity with the Chinese language and culture. In addition, the team needs to monitor and acquire a deep appreciation of what is currently trending on China's social media to create content that can shift the target audience's perceptions.

Taiwan can come into play here. The island country can play a pivotal role in the coalition to help create content because the Taiwanese are both proficient in the Chinese language and well versed in Chinese culture. Given the current geopolitical situation, Taiwan would be an ideal partner in the coalition.

At the operational level, such a multinational team would need to classify the socio-economic demographics of the audience and their preferences to formulate content-positioning parameters. To that extent, the technology will draw on behavioral data analytics, monitor social media discussion trends in real-time, and use machine learning algorithms to digest the vast

amount of data collected over time as training data sets.

Since all [Chinese social media apps require personal identification](#) to register, the US-led task force would need to develop innovative methods to penetrate the Great Firewall and create active accounts. At the same time, it would need to identify topics of interest to Chinese netizens, and then join and create discussion groups in social media. To attract followers, the information the task force disseminates would have to employ the language of local discourse, so as to avoid raising suspicion among both China's Cyber Police and its netizens.

The task force could also deploy artificial intelligence techniques to generate variants of narratives and analyze the netizens' social networks to disseminate them to a greater number of the Chinese people. With the aim to attract attention and engagement among the Chinese audience, the task force would need to recruit and cultivate proxies inside China to help spread its messaging to the wider public. To assess the effects of such a campaign, the team can collect information paths, among others, for data analytics. All these activities must be based on a stealth architecture for plausible deniability, thwarting efforts by Chinese digital forensics experts.

There are at least four benefits to this strategy:

1. The strategy can deter China from engaging in ever-more aggressive disinformation campaigns.
2. The outside content can "de-brainwash" and help transform the mindset of the Chinese people to one that is more amicable to the West.
3. The Great Firewall will crumble in time because of the damaging information to the communist regime, and because the CCP's invincible and impenetrable image will be shattered.
4. Last but not least, when the Chinese people who appreciate the truth reach critical mass, the strategy will jeopardize the CCP's regime survival and may even liberate the Chinese people from its oppressive rule.

Conclusion

Transforming people's perceptions and mindset is

by no means an easy feat. The influence operations strategy outlined above will be longer-term, yet much less expensive than acquiring and maintaining some big-ticket weapons systems. Properly executed, influence operations can also serve as a deterrent against Beijing's relentless disinformation campaigns where Australia, Japan, and Taiwan bear the brunt of the CCP's mischievous deeds.

Given the CCP's paramount fear of truth, and the ubiquitous nature of social media in China, there are grounds to believe that defeating the CCP in its own game of influence operations is possible. The time to act is now. The U.S. can instigate the transformation proactively by calling its friends and allies, including perhaps the Europeans, to join the coalition.

After all, the truth will set the people free.

The main point: To counter China's disinformation campaigns, this article proposes an influence operations strategy and approach to beat China in its own game. While the West is wary of fake news, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is very afraid of real information from the outside world. China's many social media platforms can serve as a perfect battleground for the West to conduct influence operations behind the Great Firewall by delivering real information directly to the hands of Chinese netizens.

Assessing One Year of PLA Air Incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ

By: Thomas J. Shattuck

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Note: This analysis of air incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone is focused on the period from September 2020 to September 2021, while also accounting for the large-scale incursions between October 1-4, 2021. This article serves as an update to a [previous article](#) published in the Global Taiwan Brief in April 2021.

In September 2020, Taiwan's Ministry of National De-

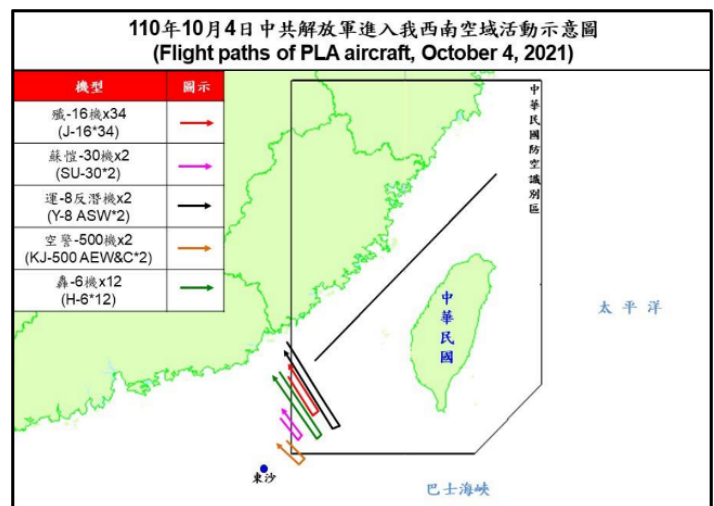
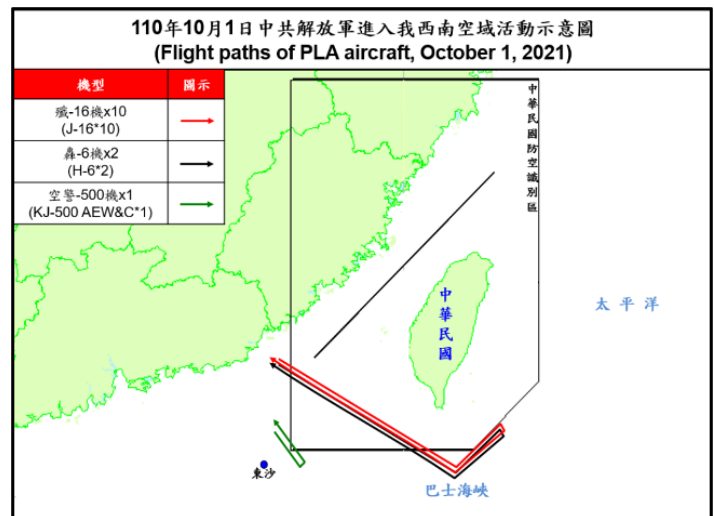
fense (MND) began publishing [regular, detailed reports](#) on Chinese military air incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ). [1] People's Republic of China (PRC) military flights into Taiwan's ADIZ have continued for over one year, and the incursions have become a near-daily occurrence. Between September 17, 2020 and September 30, 2021, PRC military aircraft entered Taiwan's ADIZ on [nearly 250 days](#). Almost all of these incursions took place in the southwestern part of the ADIZ near Taiwan-held Dongsha Island (東沙島) in the South China Sea; only a few occurred in the Taiwan Strait proper. Many of the larger-scale incursions were preceded by some development related either to US-Taiwan relations or Taiwan's international space.

The significant escalation in incursions in early October 2021 has demonstrated how Chinese intimidation of Taiwan continues to change the status quo between Beijing and Taipei. In the first four days of October—including the PRC's October 1 National Day holiday—almost [150 aircraft breached Taiwan's ADIZ](#), a higher count than the entire month of September. During the second incursion on October 4, [34 J-16 fighter jets](#) entered Taiwan's ADIZ, which is more aircraft than [the total number that breached the ADIZ](#) in May, July, and August.

The most troubling aspect of the ADIZ incursions is that the Chinese military has grown more brazen since September 2020. Throughout 2021, the [use of J-16 and J-10 fighter aircraft](#) has increased, and they have now become a regular feature of the incursions. The flying of nuclear-capable bombers, such as the [H-6K](#), is now also a normal occurrence in Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ. Studying these incursions allows us to draw lessons moving forward about the defense of Taiwan, as well as patterns in Chinese military coercion directed against Taiwan.

A Shift in Emphasis?

In the timeframe from September 17 – December 31, 2020, the Chinese military kept its patterns and numbers relatively stable. On only a few occasions did the number of aircraft exceed five. Fighter jets, like the J-16, were used infrequently. The most noteworthy of those incursions, in which People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft [crossed](#) the [centerline](#) of the Taiwan Strait, occurred in direct response to a visit to Taipei by



Images: Graphics depicting the flight paths of PRC military aircraft that entered the southern region of Taiwan's declared ADIZ on October 1 (top) and October 4 (bottom). The dramatic increase in incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ represents a significant escalation in the PRC's campaign of military intimidation against Taiwan. (Image source: [Taiwan MND](#))

then-Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Keith Krach, who attended former President Lee Teng-hui's funeral in September 2020. The purpose of that exercise, as expressed in the PRC, was to thwart "[Taiwan independence](#)." After two consecutive days of drills in the Taiwan Strait, the incursions reverted back to their usual tempo.

After President Joseph Biden took office, the incursions became more provocative in nature, and the use of fighter jets and nuclear-capable bombers increased significantly throughout 2021. During Biden's first days in office, the PLA conducted two consecutive days of

exercises in Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ, which simulated an attack against the nearby USS Theodore Roosevelt carrier strike group. This [two-day exercise](#), which included 28 aircraft, marked the highest number of aircraft to enter Taiwan's ADIZ since September 2020. During Biden's first month in office, fighter jets and nuclear-capable bombers were used in ten incursions—a significant bump in usage from 2020. Also, for the first and only time in the reporting period, the MND noted that US aircraft breached Taiwan's ADIZ on [January 31](#) and [February 1](#).

Before Biden took office, these incursions started to become a part of the “status quo” in cross-Straits relations. They now have become a regular part of Chinese coercion against Taiwan. Given the increase in the use of fighter jets throughout 2021, what once would have been considered a major news headline is now a routine occurrence for the Taiwanese military. In 2020, J-16s made up less than 15 percent of the aircraft sorties, and J-10s under five percent. However, in 2021, J-16s have increased to under 30 percent, and the J-10 under 10 percent. [2] More troublingly, the J-16—the PRC's most advanced fighter jet in operation—is now [the most flown aircraft](#) in these incursions. The Y-8 anti-submarine warfare (ASW) variant ranks second, and the Y-8 electronic warfare (EW) variant, Y-8 reconnaissance (RECCE) variant, and J-10 fighter jet are all fighting for third place. However, it should be noted that the Y-8 ASW appears more frequently and regularly, often flying solo missions—whereas the J-16s are used in the larger-scale incursions in higher numbers, as occurred in early October 2021. The increase in the use of fighter aircraft again marks a shift in the status quo.

Action-Reaction?

While the incursions are now a regular element of cross-Straits relations, the prevailing media narrative around them has been their seemingly reactive nature. Whenever there was a major event related to Taiwan's international space, the Chinese military would respond with a large-scale incursion immediately after. As mentioned above, this pattern held for Krach's visit to Taipei. It also occurred after Biden's inauguration, which was attended by Taiwan's *de facto* ambassador Hsiao Bi-khim, and a transit by the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* through the area. The October

2021 incursions occurred around the same time as a [major joint naval exercise near Japan](#), in which the navies of the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Netherlands, Canada, and New Zealand participated.

It is not a coincidence that most of the 20 double-digit incursions occurred right after a major event. In March, [20 Chinese aircraft](#) breached Taiwan's ADIZ right after Washington and Taipei signed an agreement to establish a [Coast Guard Working Group](#). However, from the Chinese perspective, this was [reportedly](#) an exercise to simulate an attack on US ships in the region. A large-scale April incursion—which included 25 aircraft, at the time the most ever used in such an event—came right after Secretary of State Tony Blinken [signaled US support](#) for Taiwan in the face of Chinese aggression. Then, in June 2021, 28 aircraft (the highest count at the time) flew through Taiwan's ADIZ after the Group of Seven released the [Carbis Bay Communiqué](#), which “underscore[d] the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and encourage[d] the peaceful resolution of cross-Straits issues.” Interestingly, between these April and June incursions, not a single incursion spiked into the double digits. In September, after Taiwan announced that it had submitted its application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)—just days after Beijing had announced its own bid—[24 Chinese aircraft](#) breached Taiwan's ADIZ.

Looking at the trends in incursions in the past year, it is clear that some occurred in direct response to alleged “Western provocations,” or actions by so-called “Taiwanese independence” forces. However, these exercises require planning and coordination that cannot occur in the blink of an eye. It is likely that some of these exercises are pre-planned but held until the right moment so that Beijing appears to be responding—and more importantly, punishing—Taiwan for its actions. (Or, as may be the case much of the time, for Taiwan seeking to participate in world affairs.) The October show of force was undoubtedly a long-planned exercise to celebrate the PRC National Day holiday with a demonstration of Chinese military power.

Beyond the large-scale incursions, summer 2021 marked the beginning of a new development in incursion activities. In 2020, only one day—October 28—saw [two incursions](#) in the [same day](#). The [end](#) of [Janu-](#)

ary (January 28 and 31) had [two](#) such [days](#). However, between July and September, there have been seven double-incursion days ([July 2](#), [July 12](#), [August 12](#), [September 8](#), [September 19](#), [September 23](#), and [September 26](#)). [Between October 1-4](#), [there were three double-incursion](#) days. It is possible that the Chinese military is testing out a new element in its coercion against Taiwan, and giving pilots additional training during different times of the day. Increasing the number of incursions per day would mark a new phase in the ADIZ breach tactic. Throughout 2021, the use of J-16s, J-10s, and H-6s has become a regular part of the incursions. Now, it is possible that Taiwan will have to deal with double-incursion days as a new element of its defense planning. However, there is a stark difference between two Y-8 ASW incursions on one day, and two large-scale incursions featuring a variety of aircraft. The status quo in respect to the ADIZ is always evolving and changing.

The Success of Reporting

After one year of Chinese air incursions, it is clear that they are not going away. Regular, near-daily air incursions into Taiwan's southwestern ADIZ are now a part of the status quo in cross-Straits relations. As 2021 draws to a close, it will be interesting to see whether the PLA continues with its current patterns, or if double-incursion days become more regular. Another potential change could be the location of the incursions. There will come a point when the Chinese military's lessons learned from conducting these operations and exercises hit their peak. After so many incursions by solo Y-8 ASWs or Y-8 EWs, there's only so much more that can be improved (outside the obvious benefit of keeping pressure on Taiwan, and forcing changes in MND policies due to fuel costs). It is possible that these incursions could expand to more troubling areas—especially the Taiwan Strait proper—or longer missions to Taiwan's east coast through the Bashi Channel, which occur infrequently. No incursions have occurred in the northern part of the ADIZ, which would draw in Tokyo given that many Japanese islands are close to Taiwan's northern coast.

For Taiwan, the act of releasing regular reports on PLA incursions has proven to be a success. By releasing easily digestible reports with the number and type of aircraft along with the flight paths, Taipei is shedding light

on one particular aspect of Chinese coercion. These reports—and the concept of air incursions—are much easier to understand and comprehend than a longer report on Chinese misinformation, or even economic coercion. The world knows that China regularly pushes the boundaries of acceptable actions, but without consistent and simple reporting, it is hard to keep attention on the issue. For Taiwan, this lesson could be taken and applied to other aspects of Chinese coercive actions.

The main point: Evaluating one year of Chinese military aircraft incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone has demonstrated a steady rise in escalatory behavior, with an increase in the number of large-scale incursions and the use of fighter jets and nuclear-capable bombers. These ADIZ incursions have received much public attention and international condemnation, but they are only one example of Chinese military coercion against Taiwan.

[1] Distinct from territorial airspace, many states assert an ADIZ extending from their territory—a concept defined by the US Federal Aviation Administration as “[an area of airspace](#) over land or water, in which the ready identification, location, and control of all aircraft [...] is required in the interest of national security.”

[2] Calculations based on author's research.