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By: John Dotson

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On October 10, Republic of China (ROC) President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) [delivered his first ROC National Day address](#) in Taipei. Despite the speech's content and tone—which upheld the ROC identity of Taiwan and offered broad continuity with past speeches offered on the occasion—People's Republic of China (PRC) spokespersons and media outlets condemned the “separatist” content of the speech, and initiated another military exercise around Taiwan. This exercise, conducted on October 14, was designated *Joint Sword-2024B* (聯合利劍-2024B), and involved multi-service drills by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the sea and air spaces around Taiwan. This latest exercise was the second this year (and third overall) in what is likely emerging as a regular series of exercises surrounding Taiwan—with PRC propaganda claiming each time that the exercises are in reaction to political events connected to Taiwan's political leadership.

Recent PLA Exercises Around Taiwan

The August 2022 PLA military exercises around Taiwan were the most provocative yet conducted—to include missile firings over Taiwan and into Japan's exclusive economic zone—and started the process of (at least nominal) blockade exercises that the PLA has conducted in the past two years (see previous articles [here](#) and [here](#)). The [inaugural Joint Sword \(聯合利劍\) exercise](#) was conducted in April 2023—per PRC narratives, in reaction to then-President Tsai's meeting with then-US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy—and involved both a symbolic encirclement of Taiwan and a series of simulated strikes directed against key node targets on the island. The [Joint Sword-2024A exercise](#) was conducted on May 23-24 of this year—per PRC claims, in reaction to Lai's inaugural address—and involved another symbolic encirclement of the island, as well as an increased role for patrols by the PRC Coast Guard (中國海警) (which operates under military authority, [subject](#)

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to the Communist Party Central Military Commission).

Highlights of the Joint Sword-2024B Exercise

Naval Activity

Based on the limited data made available to the public, much remains unclear regarding the specific operations conducted by the PLA during *Joint Sword-2024B*. According to [ROC Ministry of National Defense \(MND, 國防部\) information](#), on October 14 there were x14 PLA Navy vessels (not specified by class or individual ship) and “12 official ships” (公務船)—not otherwise explained, but likely meaning PRC Coast Guard vessels—operating in the vicinity of Taiwan. Per [information disclosed by the Japanese Ministry of Defense](#), the PLA Navy vessels included the aircraft carrier *Liaoning* (遼寧), operating in a task group of at least four ships—including the Type-055 destroyer (NATO classification *Renhai*-class cruiser) *Anshan* (鞍山). [1] During *Joint Sword-2024B* the *Liaoning* was reported to be operating to the east-southeast of Taiwan, near the Bashi Channel, and the carrier and its supporting surface combatants likely account for the reported PLA flight operations east of Taiwan (see below).

Aviation Activity



Figure 1: A PLA media graphic depicting the declared operating areas for *Joint Sword 2024B* (in red). The image also depicts the operating areas for the May 2024 *Joint Sword 2024A* exercise (in yellow), and the unnamed August 2022 exercise (in blue). (Image source: [China News Service](#))

Per [ROC Defense Ministry information](#), the PLA conducted 153 aviation sorties around Taiwan on the day of the exercise, in six broad operating areas (see *Figure 2, below*), divided in three broad classifications of “main fighters” (主戰機), “support aircraft” (輔戰機), and helicopters. Per this data, the breakdown of the flights was as follows:

1. A total of x6 support aircraft (not otherwise identified, but likely patrol and/or airborne early warning aircraft) operated to the north-northeast of Taiwan.
2. A total of x47 support and fighter aircraft (not otherwise delineated) operated in the Taiwan Strait. Of these, x28 crossed the Strait center-line.
3. A total of x41 support and fighter aircraft (not otherwise delineated) operated to the southwest of Taiwan, in the southwest corner of Taiwan’s declared air defense identification zone (ADIZ).
4. A total of x8 support and fighter aircraft (not otherwise delineated) operated further to the southwest of Taiwan, outside the ADIZ, in the Bashi Channel.
5. A total of x9 fighter aircraft and helicopters operated southeast of Taiwan, outside the ADIZ. This likely correlates with aircraft of the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier and its associated surface group.
6. A total of x42 fighter aircraft operated east of southern Taiwan, inside the ADIZ. This likely correlates with aircraft of the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier.

Coast Guard Circumnavigation of Taiwan

As with *Joint Sword-2024A* in May, the exercise also featured an expanded role for the PRC Coast Guard, in both operational and propaganda terms. PRC state media boasted that PRC Coast Guard task groups (“formations,” 編隊) numbers 2901, 1305, 1303, and 2102 (specific vessels not identified) [circumnavigated Taiwan](#) on the day of the exercise: in a track proceeding through the Bashi Channel, northwards parallel to the east coast, and then turning west-southwest across the north of the island and into the Taiwan Strait. Attempting to depict the circumnavigation as an affectionate and protective maneuver, PRC state-sponsored social media posts declared that “[Our] patrols take

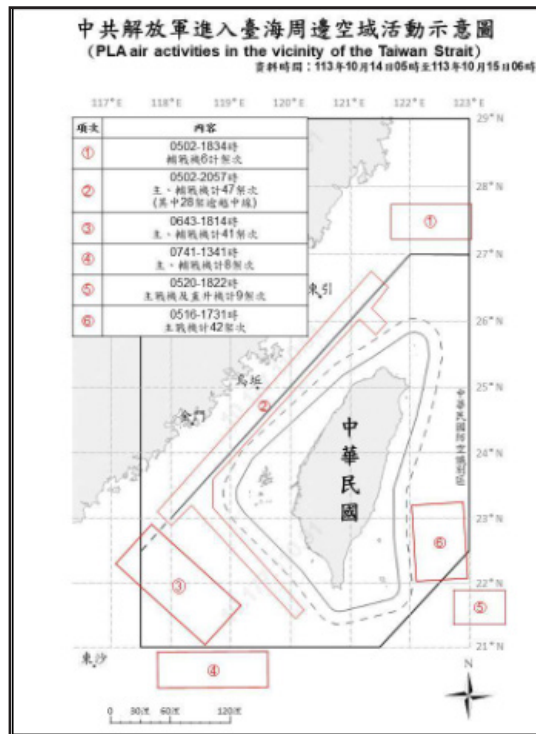


Figure 2: A graphic depicting operating areas for PLA aircraft during the Joint Sword-2024B exercise on October 14. (Image source: [ROC Ministry of Defense](#))

the shape of loving you” (巡航都是愛你的形狀) (see *images below*). While ham-handed—and carrying a definite creepy stalker vibe—the messaging also connects with PRC propaganda in another sense: the increasing use of the coast guard for patrols closer to Taiwan’s coastline and outlying islands, in the effort to present PRC maritime operations as routine exercises of domestic law enforcement.

Key Takeaways from the Exercise

Overall, the October 14 exercise was noteworthy in continuing three general trends for the *Joint Sword* series. The first of these was that the single day *Joint Sword-2024B* exercise was relatively modest in scale, in terms of both duration and numbers of units involved, in comparison with its predecessors. This fits a pattern: the 2023 *Joint Sword* exercise was larger in scope than *Joint Sword-2024A*; and *Joint Sword-2024A* was larger than *Joint Sword-2024B*. (*Joint Sword-2024B*, however, did appear to involve more aviation sorties than its predecessor in May.) The reasons for this descending scale of the *Joint Sword* exercises remain unclear.

Second, the exercise continued the encirclement and notional blockade scenarios established by its predecessors, with the air and naval operations apparent-

ly directed more towards this scenario than for an amphibious invasion. As [stated by Su Tzu-yun \(蘇紫雲\)](#), director of defense strategy and resources at the MND-affiliated Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR, 國防安全研究院), “This time there was a rather special component, the so-called quarantine or blockade, during which they practiced their blockading abilities.”

The third noteworthy trend of the exercise—and arguably the most salient one—was the continuing creep of PRC military activity closer to both the main island of Taiwan, and Taiwan’s smaller outlying islands. The six declared exercise areas adjoined and/or crossed over into Taiwan’s contiguous zone (the zone of 12 to 24 nautical miles from the coast) (see [here](#) and [here](#)). This represents a significant escalation of the PRC’s military pressure directed against Taiwan’s territorial sovereignty—and another step forward in the steady creep closer to the 12 nautical mile line of territorial waters.

Narrative Framing

Following an established pattern, PRC messaging has repeatedly depicted the *Joint Sword-2024B* exercise to be a spontaneous expression of righteous anger at the “independence” content of President Lai’s [October 10 address](#). In the speech, Lai maintained continuity with the overall policy direction of the previous Tsai Administration, and continued to uphold the ROC constitutional framework for Taiwan. However, most international coverage of the speech centered on Lai’s assertions of Taiwan’s *de facto* independence from PRC sovereignty: as in his assertions that “the Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China are not subordinate to each other,” that “the People’s Republic of China has no right to represent Taiwan,” and that “our determination to defend our national sovereignty [...] [and] our efforts to maintain the status quo of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait remain unchanged.”

Such statements were predictably condemned by the PRC, as with the [statement issued the same day](#) by PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning (毛寧), who declared that:

“Lai Ching-te’s words attempt to sever the historical connections between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. He is again peddling various versions of [the] ‘Taiwan independence’ narrative, such as ‘China and Taiwan are not subordinate to each other’ and ‘Taiwan has sovereignty.’ It once again exposed that he is hell-bent on advancing ‘Taiwan independence’ and has the ill intention

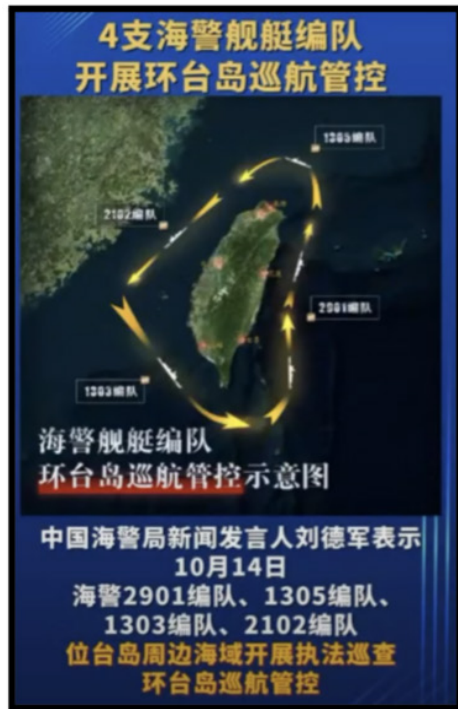


Image left: A PRC state media image depicting four PRC Coast Guard vessel formations circumnavigating Taiwan, in a track forming the image of a heart, on October 14. (Image source: [China News Service](#))

Image right: A social media post made by the PRC Coast Guard declares that “[Our] patrols take the shape of loving you.” (Image source: [PRC Coast Guard](#))

of heightening tensions in the Taiwan Strait for his selfish political interest.”

In a similar fashion to its reaction following Lai’s inauguration speech in May, when the PRC identified the “separatist” content of Lai’s speech as the justification for operation [Joint Sword-2024A \(聯合利劍-2024A\)](#), PRC outlets invoked the supposedly provocative content of Lai’s “Double Ten” speech to justify the military exercise. [PRC state media touting the drills](#) asserted that “strong intimidation of Taiwan independence forces on the path of promoting independence is a necessary action for defending national sovereignty and safeguarding national unification” (台獨分裂勢力謀獨行徑的強力震懾是捍衛國家主權維護國家統一的必要行動).

Conclusion

The October 14, 2024 *Joint Sword-2024B* exercise represents another installment of what appears to be an emerging series of PLA military exercises intended to continue the PRC’s gradually intensifying coercive

military pressure directed against Taiwan. Although the PRC has attempted to frame these as spontaneous reactions to actions or statements by Taiwan’s political leaders, they are better understood as carefully planned outbursts of indignation. These exercises align with—and may be subsuming—the spring and autumn aircraft carrier group training deployments conducted by the PLA Navy in recent years.

The [political warfare element](#) is key to understanding these and other recent PLA military exercises. The steadily gathering encroachment of PLA naval and aviation activity—a “boiling the frog” process of creeping in closer and closer, in measured stages—is intended to intimidate Taiwan’s population and its political leadership, and to erode the effective sovereignty that Taiwan’s government exercises over its territory. In this respect, the declaration of military operational areas that cross into Taiwan’s contiguous zone is a significant provocation: not an outright violation of territorial waters and airspace, but a violation of norms—and one that points ultimately in the former direction.

The political warfare element is also clearly displayed in the narrative framing that Beijing places around these planned exercises: consistently portraying them as an aggrieved reaction to “Taiwan independence” moves undertaken by Taiwan’s leaders. This narrative framing has been remarkably successful in coloring international media coverage of these events, which often uncritically follows PRC messaging—and thereby (at least implicitly) paints Taiwan as the instigator, rather than identifying Beijing as the aggressor.

If this year’s pattern holds, we are likely to see the PLA conduct a *Joint Sword-2025A* in spring 2025 (following a manufactured pretext), and a *Joint Sword-2025B* in autumn 2025 (perhaps after the next “Double Ten” speech, or similar pretext). The PRC’s political posture is very unlikely to change, but the presumed future iterations of *Joint Sword*—whether under that name, or another—will be worth watching to see what additional incremental coercive measures the PRC leadership decides to direct against Taiwan.

The main point: On October 14, the PLA conducted the *Joint Sword-2024B* multi-service exercise in the air and sea space around Taiwan. This exercise included operations by the aircraft carrier *Liaoning* and supporting ships east of Taiwan, as well as a circumnavigation of the island by PRC Coast Guard vessels. There was a significant political warfare element to the exercise, with PRC propaganda depicting it as a reaction to supposedly provocative statements made by Taiwan’s President Lai Ching-te. This exercise may be part of an emerging series of exercises intended to place continued pressure on Taiwan, and to prepare PLA personnel for a potential future blockade or other major military scenario.

[1] PLA Navy aircraft carriers are accompanied by a task group of other surface vessels when conducting training deployments, and the autumn 2024 *Liaoning* carrier deployment likely included other vessels not identified in the Taiwan and Japanese official reporting. For example, in spring 2022 the *Liaoning* conducted a training deployment to the Philippine Sea (east of Taiwan) accompanied by five guided missile destroyers, a frigate, and a supply ship. See: John Dotson, “The PLA Navy Spring 2022 Aircraft Carrier Deployment ‘Beyond the Island Chain’ and Its Significance for Taiwan’s Security,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, June 15, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/06/the-pla-navy-spring-2022-aircraft-carrier-deployment-beyond-the-island-chain-and-its-significance-for-taiwans-security/>.

Love Boat Taiwan: Soft Power and Taiwanese American Identity

By: Lillian Ellis

Lillian Ellis was a Summer 2024 intern at the Global Taiwan Institute.

“Soft power” as imagined by scholars and politicians in the context of cross-strait relations is often discussed in terms of [film](#), [music](#), [food](#), and [social media messaging](#). Less commonly analyzed, however, is the “[Love Boat Taiwan](#)” program—formally referred to as the “[Overseas Compatriot Youth Taiwan Study Tour](#)” (全球青年返台營隊). The program, established in 1966 by the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) but now generally funded by the Taiwanese government, continues to play an extremely important role in how young Taiwanese Americans conceptualize their Taiwanese identity and how Taiwanese influence is established in the United States. [1] For instance, two of [the program’s most famous alumni](#) are Congresswoman Judy Chu and American singer Wang Leehom (王力宏).

As Taiwan stands as a beacon for democracy and human rights in the Indo-Pacific, programs like Love Boat Taiwan should be promoted as a crucial soft power mechanism to attract international support and counter Chinese influence globally. Taiwan must use soft power tools to “increase global awareness, gain sympathy and win support from the international community”—as [an East Asia Forum report](#) argued this March. Love Boat Taiwan is an important program for Taiwan advocates to focus on, especially as President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) faces [ever-increasing Chinese opposition](#) and [a polarized legislature](#).

Love Boat Taiwan: A History

Offered each summer, Love Boat Taiwan recruits college-aged Chinese and Taiwanese Americans to learn about Taiwan’s history, study Mandarin, and engage in cultural activities. The “Love Boat” nickname reflects the program’s reputation for participants hoping to find love on the trip. While the Love Boat program’s history is complicated by its KMT origins and has been [criticized](#) for its failure to acknowledge indigenous displacement, it has been regarded as a prestigious program for Taiwanese American families to participate in, especially as its current programming promotes Taiwanese culture and society.

The China Youth Corps (救國團)—a youth organization

founded in 1952 at the recommendation of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) to ensure youth loyalty to the Republic of China (ROC, 中華民國)—established the original Study Tour in 1966. The Corps aimed to “help youths with their intellectual and physical development ... and cultivate their sense of comradeship for the final victory over the Chinese Communists and the restoration of national order.” [2] Government officials, university faculty, and even local community members committed to promoting the KMT cause helped staff the program. Growing from 102 participants in 1967 to 1,075 in 1999, the program gained traction among Taiwanese American families especially, becoming a tradition within Chinese and Taiwanese communities abroad and even a status symbol as admission became more competitive. [1] As described by [2000](#) program alum Audrea Lim, “[Love Boat] is thought to be popular among diaspora Chinese parents for its alter ego ... [a] code for ‘suitable marriage partners.’”

Historically, the KMT worked to promote Chinese culture through the program. The tour originally hosted students for four to six weeks, providing classes in Chinese folk dancing, martial arts, and calligraphy. Field trips to KMT-established memorials, such as the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, and museums with [extensive KMT history](#), like the National Palace Museum, were common. [1] Love Boat was established to promote not only youth support for the KMT but also to “reconnect overseas Chinese and Taiwanese people to Chinese language and culture, of which the KMT believed they were the rightful heirs,” as scholar Mila Zuo describes [in a review of a Love Boat documentary](#).

The political aims of the program during its early years were evident to participants, who recognized KMT biases within the program’s idolization of Chiang Kai-shek and failure to address [flaws of KMT rule](#). “[The program was] very political. You could not be unaware of the propaganda they were pushing,” 1995 alum Karen Houa said. “A government luncheon? A lecture and brochure packet about the government prior to a visit to some government museum? It wasn’t subtle.” Additionally, 1996 alum Cynthia Cheng reported that she “came back from the trip a militant, proud, pro-Taiwanese individual even though my family’s actually from Hong Kong.” There were “a lot of lectures on Chiang Kai-shek and how great Chiang Kai-shek was,” said Felicia Sze, a 1994 alum. [1]

Political motivations of the program, however, became less obvious once a 2000s Democratic Progressive Party-led (DPP, 民進黨) government also took charge of the tour. “I kept waiting for the political indoctrin-



Image: American and Canadian students arriving in Taiwan for the 1967 Love Boat program. (Image source: [Wikipedia](#))

nation session to materialize,” [Lim described](#), “but it never did.” “Instead, we marveled at the architectural symmetries and upturned roof of the National Concert Hall, ate our way through every market in Taipei, witnessed superhuman feats of acrobatics and martial arts, and hiked through the lush mountains of central Taiwan.”

When the 2024 Love Boat class embarked on their summer trip, a new class of around 1,000 global college-aged participants with connections to Taiwan was led on trips around the country, similarly exposed to the beauty of Taiwan’s famous night markets, phenomenal food, and diverse landscapes. The Taiwanese government continues to annually fund the program with hopes that these students will tell their Taiwan stories back home.

The Importance of Soft Power and Taiwanese Identity

Love Boat continues to foster a strong sense of Taiwanese identity among its participants, encouraging international connections to the country while creating a feeling of belonging. For many Love Boat participants, the program is not only their first time in Taiwan—but their first time contemplating their Taiwanese and Asian identities while in a group of similar peers. “I have always wondered whether the Study Tour ‘worked’ on me. Not despite, but because of my Asianness, I found that I belonged,” [Lim writes](#). “I now understand that this feeling of belonging is what Love Boat is attempting to forge.”

The effectiveness of programs like Love Boat in fostering a connection between participants and host countries is evident. For example, [Israel’s Birthright program](#)—which offers free trips to Israel for Americans



Image: Taiwan's National Theater and Concert Hall.
(Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

with Jewish ties—has effectively formed connections between participants and the country. While a [May 2023 Brandeis University study](#) found that the trip had “little or no effect on participants’ political opinions with regard to Israel’s political conflicts,” the strongest impact of the trip was on participant’s connection to Israel. Prior to the trip, 30 percent of participants felt “very much” connected to Israel—a figure which increased to 49 percent at the conclusion of Birthright.

Love Boat Taiwan works as a similar soft power tool, creating cultural ties between overseas participants and Taiwan. While no longer promoting a KMT-centered political agenda, the ability of Love Boat to connect international participants to Taiwan bolsters support for the nation globally. Soft power programs like Love Boat are especially important as Taiwan attempts to gain international leverage, and even more so when understanding the need to compete with similar, extensive Chinese soft power campaigns.

China's Soft Power Campaigns

While China has experienced recent economic downturns and US policies that have thwarted some of its most successful soft power projects—from China’s continued Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to Confucius Institutes to educational exchanges to TikTok campaigns—the [People’s Republic of China’s \(PRC\) soft power ambitions continue to operate at full force](#). [Brand Finance’s Global Soft Power Index](#) recently ranked China as the fastest growing “nation brand” this year.

China’s economy has experienced a [significant downturn](#) in recent years due to lasting effects of pandemic policies, with [China’s BRI facing liability forgiveness](#)

[issues and skepticism](#). However, the BRI continues to work as an effective soft power mechanism. The BRI has [exceeded USD \\$1 trillion in participation since 2013 with China signing over 200 cooperation agreements](#). Countries continue to subscribe to China’s “global network of connectivity,” [as Xi Jinping \(习近平\) described the program in October](#).

China’s continued establishment of [Confucius Institutes](#) across American university campuses perhaps even more clearly captures the PRC’s soft power goals. While 104 Institutes were closed in June of 2022 due to US State Department policy, [reports indicate](#) that at least 28 of them have been replaced with similar programs—with at least 58 of them retaining close ties with their old partners. The State Department [described these institutes in 2019](#) as “foreign mission[s] of the People’s Republic of China” as they censored China-critical speech on campuses and sponsored free trips to China.

The CCP additionally continues to influence American audiences through TikTok. TikTok only recently announced it had taken down thousands of accounts conducting [“covert influence operations,”](#) with the second largest network of these operations belonging to China. A [February report](#) from the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence outlined how the PRC influenced US midterm elections in 2022, warning of the impacts of PRC influence this November.

These programs, coupled with [various cultural exchanges](#) sponsored by the CCP, directly work to expand Chinese influence globally. While Love Boat offers a small counter-effort to these Chinese campaigns, the importance of Taiwan’s summer program becomes clear when understanding China’s continued influence within global educational, economic, and entertainment spheres.

Conclusion

Each summer, Love Boat Taiwan works as an effective tool to expand global education and appreciation for Taiwanese culture, people, and even independence. Love Boat’s ability to expose international participants to the natural beauty of the island, Taiwanese cuisine, and nightlife within the progressive, democratic environment of the country alone is enough to foster national ties. Taiwan’s government continues to offer the program in hopes that these connections are communicated globally as participants marvel about their Taiwan summer trip memories.

Recent successes of Love Boat Taiwan can be seen through the publication of the [Loveboat, Taipei](#) (2020) series, an American young adult romance about the program. The series was turned into a Paramount+ film in 2023 called [Love in Taipei](#), starring American actors Ross Butler, Ashley Liao, and Nico Hiraga. Love Boat Taiwan is actively influencing American audiences. The program should be considered and promoted as a powerful soft power tool as it continues to educate international youth about Taiwan's importance and counter Chinese soft power campaigns.

The main point: Love Boat Taiwan is an important soft power mechanism for Taiwan. As the program continues to host international youth for portions of the summer, participant's experiences on the trip form global connections and support for Taiwan as they explore the nation. Love Boat must be upheld as a strong tool to promote Taiwan's global influence, especially among the world's youth, as the CCP continues to expand its soft power campaigns.

[1] Wu, Ellen D. 2005. "Chinese-American Transnationalism Aboard the Love Boat." *Chinese America: History & Perspectives*, 51–64. <https://search.ebscohost.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aph&AN=19424095&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

[2] Brindley, Thomas A. 1994. "The China Youth Corps: Democratization in Process." *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 2, no. 2, 195–217. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44288491>.

Taiwan's Missile Production Program: A Success Two Years Ahead of Schedule

By: Jonathan Harman

Jonathan Harman is a freelance defense writer and was GTI's 2024 Ya-Hui Chiu Summer Fellow.

In response to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP, 中國共產黨) increased aggression and rhetoric towards Taiwan, the Taiwanese government passed a separate [special military budget](#) in 2021 to improve its defense industrial base, giving particular attention to its domestic missile production. Two years after implementing this budget, Taiwan's missile production program has seen great success, with Taiwan meeting its missile production goals two years ahead of schedule. Producing missile platforms domestically yields several advantages for Taiwan—chiefly, faster delivery times and

lower costs for weapons with comparable performance to American weapons systems. Because of this, Taiwan is working to [replace](#) some US missile systems with its own indigenous weapons. However, while many of its indigenous missile platforms are comparable to American weapons, some systems need to be improved to provide more credible deterrence against the People's Liberation Army (PLA, 人民解放軍).

The Origins of the "Sea-Air Combat Power Improvement Plan Purchase Special Regulations" Program

Since 2020, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased military provocations against Taiwan—most notably with large-scale [naval blockading drills](#) around the island every year since 2022. In response to PRC aggression, the Republic of China (ROC) government has made efforts to increase its defense capabilities by bolstering its weapons stockpiles. Taiwan has paid particular attention to its [missile acquisitions](#), as they are the front line of defense against a potential PLA invasion.

To stock its arsenal, Taiwan has traditionally relied on purchasing US missiles through US foreign military sales (FMS). However, US International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) and low US defense production capacity combine to make defense deliveries to Taiwan excruciatingly slow. While the United States is increasing production by opening new munitions facilities and streamlining the [FMS process](#), the ever increasing global demand for American arms means weapons deliveries still take several years to complete. Currently, countries that order US missiles tend to [wait between 18 and 29 months](#) before they see their first deliveries. The weapons packages Taiwan ordered in 2019, which included 250 Stinger missiles, will likely not be completely delivered until at least [2026](#).

In response to slow US defense deliveries, the Taiwanese government announced its ["Sea-Air Combat Power Improvement Plan Purchase Special Regulations" \(制定海空戰力提升計畫採購特別條例\)](#) program in 2021—a separate special defense budget of USD [\\$7.4 billion](#) to develop indigenously produced defense articles. The program particularly focuses on missile production, with approximately [64 percent](#) of the total budget going towards indigenous missile programs. The budget, which spans 2022 to 2026, aims to enable the National Chung Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST, 國家中山科學研究院)—Taiwan's primary arms manufacturer—to produce more than 1,000 missiles a year by the budget's end date.



Image: A test firing of Taiwan's indigenously-designed Hsiung Feng-III anti-ship missile (undated). (Source: [National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology](#))

Taiwan's Success in Missile Production

Developing a robust defense industrial base is difficult to undertake even for developed nations. However, Taiwan is a unique case. Unlike other countries, Taiwan mass produces many of the materials needed to build advanced weaponry like microchips and microelectronic components. Such [components](#) are often some of the greatest limiting factors countries face in missile production.

So far, the program has been a success and the NCSIST is on track to produce over [1,000](#) missile units by the end of this year—two years ahead of schedule. If the current projection holds, the NCSIST will increase its output this year by [five times](#) what it was in 2021. Much of this success can be attributed to NCSIST now being able to afford incorporating more automation in its production lines, which has greatly improved production efficiency. Indeed, increased automation has allowed the NCSIST to expand to [16 mass production lines](#) for various missiles, including the *Chien Hsiang* (劍翔) suicide drone, the *Wan Chien* (萬劍) air-to-surface missile, the *Hsiung Sheng* (雄昇) surface-to-surface missile, the *Tien Kung III* (TK III, 天弓-3) air defense missile system, the *Tien Chien II* (天劍-2) air-to-air missile, and the *Hsiung Feng III* (HF III, 雄風) anti-ship missile.

While the special defense budget is playing a key role in increasing Taiwan's indigenous missile production, this surge did not happen overnight. The NCSIST has developed and produced missiles for [decades](#) and has

worked to increase its output for the past six years. In [2018](#), President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), seeing the need to beef up domestic missile production, directed the NCSIST to expedite and increase production for several missile systems. As part of this directive, the Tsai Administration ordered the NCSIST to develop a plan to streamline production over the next [two years](#). With a plan for producing various missile platforms more efficiently in place, the NCSIST was able to hit the ground running once it got the requisite funding in 2022.

Taiwan's domestic missile production has allowed it to continue expanding its defense capabilities despite US backlogs. Domestically produced missiles are faster to procure and do not require Taiwan to rely on the US FMS process, in which it must compete with other countries in desperate need of weapons. One production example is that of the *Hsiung Feng* missile: in [2022](#), the Ministry of National Defense of Taiwan (MND, 中華民國國防部) ordered 131 *Hsiung Feng* missiles from the NCSIST, which are on track to be completed by the end of this [year](#). This is markedly fast in comparison to missiles bought through US FMS—where, at best, only the first batch of munitions would arrive within that timeframe.

Domestically produced missiles also tend to be far cheaper to produce than ordering American missiles through FMS. It will cost the NCSIST less than USD \$1.5 billion to produce 1,000 missiles this year. Most prominently, the [list](#) will include: 70 super-sonic *Hsiung Feng III* anti-ship missiles; 131 *Hsiung Feng II* anti-ship and *Hsiung Sheng* cruise missiles; 96 *TK III* anti-air missiles; 50 *Wan Chien* air-to-ground cruise missiles; 150 *Tien Chien II* missiles; and 48 *Chien Hsiang* attack drones. Compare those figures to the approximately USD [\\$4.43 billion](#) that Taiwan spent in 2020 on missile purchases from the United States, to include: 400 Harpoon Block II surface-launched missiles, 100 Harpoon coastal defense systems, 64 ATACMS, 135 Standoff Land Attack Missiles (SLAM-ER), 4 ATM-84H SLAM-ER Telemetry missiles, and training missiles, and Patriot missile life extension services.

Further, when looking at individual systems, Taiwanese-produced missile systems tend to be much more cost effective than similar American systems. The *TK III* and Patriot PAC-3 missile defense systems serve as a good example. The US-made Patriot system costs approximately USD [\\$3.7 million](#) per missile interceptor, and its 30-year life extension services cost about USD [\\$620 million](#). However, according to [Shu Hsiao-huang](#) (舒孝煌), an associate research fellow at the Institute

for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR, 國防安全研究所)—the top military think tank in Taiwan—the *TK III* system costs about one-sixth the cost of the Patriot system.

Indigenous systems are not only timelier and more economical than US systems, but they are also largely comparable to—and, in some ways, better—than American weapons. Again, the *TK III* system serves as a perfect example. Like the Patriot PAC-3 system, the *TK III* system is a mobile trailer-mounted missile defense system with anti-aircraft, cruise missile, short-range ballistic missile, and anti-radiation missile capabilities. While the *TK III* missile defense system [performs](#) roughly the same as the Patriot PAC-3 missile defense system, it travels almost twice the Patriot's maximum speed, at a top speed of Mach 7, giving it [greater range](#).

Because many of Taiwan's indigenous systems are comparable to American weapons systems, the ROC is beginning to phase out certain US platforms and replace them with Taiwanese-made weapons. In [October 2023](#), the MND announced that it would replace six of its aging joint *TK II* and US-made MIM-23 Hawk missile sites with *TK III* systems and create six additional *TK III* sites from scratch. The MND plans to complete the conversion to the *TK III* system by 2026.

Taiwan's Remaining Shortcomings in Missile Production

While many of Taiwan's indigenous systems are comparable to US systems, they are largely untested in combat. Additionally, some systems do not have the same stealth capabilities as American weapons. Taiwan's premier long-range attack cruise missile, the *Hsiung Feng IIE* (HF IIE), boasts a range of up to [745 miles](#)—enough to strike targets as far as Shanghai and Hong Kong. The HF IIE, however, is large and subsonic, making it easier for the PLA to detect and intercept. However, the NCSIST is currently working around this issue by developing the [Yun Feng missile](#) (雲峰), which will have a greater range than the *HF IIE* and will be supersonic, making it more difficult to shoot down. To better deter the PRC, Taiwan will need to continue to improve its missile technology to be less detectable to the PLA.

Recommendations

Because the special military budget has been so successful in increasing Taiwan's missile production output, the ROC government should expand it to maintain current production rates beyond 2026. Doing so

would allow Taiwan to rapidly stockpile munitions it would quickly use up and may have difficulty producing during wartime.

To further improve its production, Taiwan should take further steps to secure its supply chains. Currently, like every other country in the world, Taiwan relies almost exclusively on China for rare earths like gallium and germanium that are critical to missile production and other technologies. To its credit, the Taiwanese government has made [efforts to reduce reliance on China](#) through rare earth recycling programs. However, this is not enough to sustain Taiwan's operations long-term. To further lessen its reliance on China, Taiwan should invest in other foreign rare earth mining startups.

A good place to start would be the United States. The US government is actively trying to build up its domestic rare earth production. It has done this by invoking [Title III of the Defense Production Act](#) multiple times, and reducing timeframes for mining operations by creating hard two-year deadlines for government agencies to complete environmental reviews and issue a permit. However, despite these actions, high capital costs make it difficult for US mining companies to get off the ground. To alleviate these capital costs and increase demand for US production, Taiwan could invest in US rare earth mining companies. Such an investment would be mutually beneficial both for the US economy and defense industrial base, as well as Taiwan's defense supply chain security.

The main point: Taiwan's domestic missile production program has been largely successful. Unlike other countries, Taiwan possesses many of the components needed to both design and mass produce advanced missile platforms. In the face of a clogged US defense industrial base, Taiwan's unique situation allows it to provide for its own defense needs for a fraction of the cost, and without having to compete with other countries vying for US FMS. To better ensure Taiwan can continue to address its own national security needs, the ROC government should continue to fund the NCSIST to mass produce missiles and other defense supplies beyond the 2026 expiration date.

External and Internal Strategies for Preserving Taiwan's Autonomy amidst Threat, Ambiguity, and Oscillation

By: Yin-Chun Hsiao

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On May 20, Lai Ching-te (賴清德) of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) took office as Taiwan's new president. 2024 not only marks the first time that a party has secured a third consecutive presidential term in Taiwan, but it is also the 45th anniversary of the enactment of the *Taiwan Relations Act* (TRA) and a decade following the [Sunflower Movement](#)—all of which represent both external support and internal efforts for preserving Taiwan's autonomy in the face of the threats posed by China's deep-seated desire to “reunify” with Taiwan.

The TRA represents the United States' special commitments to supporting Taiwan's security within the framework of its “One-China Policy.” Since the United States' promise to provide Taiwan with defensive arms is conditional on the understanding that Taiwan [will not contravene the interests of the United States in protecting human rights](#), the TRA brought Taiwan to a pivotal moment in its democratization—as exemplified by [the Kaohsiung Incident](#) at the end of 1979, which called for freedom, democracy, and the lifting of martial law.

Despite the fact that Taiwan appears to be secured by the TRA amidst its tense relationship with China, it has also long endured US strategic ambiguity in its foreign policy, which intends to dissuade China from attempting to “reunify” with Taiwan and discourages Taiwan from declaring independence—for now.

Not only the TRA, but also the US-Taiwan relationship as a whole, reflects the United States' strategic ambiguity in foreign policy. [Statistics](#) show that there has been an increase in US officials visiting Taiwan in recent years, with five delegations and 32 US lawmakers visiting Taiwan in total in 2023. Despite an increase in high-level visits by US officials, Taiwan still faces challenges in deepening its ties with the United States. The *US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade*, launched in 2022, was allegedly a compensation for Taiwan's exclusion from the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, aiming to ensure cooperation between the United

States and Taiwan in different sectors—however, without granting waiver tariffs, which are key in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

As US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in his [congratulatory message](#) to Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te, the United States looks forward to advancing their “longstanding unofficial relationship, consistent with the US One-China Policy,” but the ongoing symbolic support for Taiwan from the United States may continue falling short of Taiwan's expectations.

The United States' strategically ambiguous stance also leads to oscillations in its rhetoric. It was nothing new when the White House reiterated that its policy towards Taiwan remained unchanged following [US President Joseph Biden's blunt public statements and commitments](#) on Taiwan's defense.

Even though in January US President Biden said that Washington does not support Taiwan independence, on March 7 he toughened his language in the [State of the Union address](#) by stressing that Washington stands up for peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits. Professor Li Da-jung (李大中) of Tamkang University's (淡江大學) Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies said that this reflects US President Biden's desire to urge Beijing not to act recklessly by shifting towards [clearer statements within the framework of strategic ambiguity](#).

Some experts believe that it is time for the United States to introduce a policy of [strategic clarity](#) as the status quo across the Taiwan Straits changes—which is evident as China becomes increasingly assertive, and Taiwanese identity becomes more consolidated.

China has demonstrated its assertiveness by building up gray zone pressure through subtle maneuvers, such as a [75 percent increase in its Air Defense Identification Zone violations](#) to Taiwan in 2023 compared to 2021, along with its growing defense budget—which [increased by 7.2 percent in 2024](#), reaching RMB \$1.67 trillion (USD \$231 billion). As for Taiwan, with its identity [becoming increasingly consolidated](#), its economic and foreign policy typically is moving away from, or opposing, the society that the nation increasingly defines as the “other.” [1]

For Taiwan, not only the changing status quo, but also the dynamics of cooperation and conflicts between the United States and China, all raise concerns about its capacity to preserve its autonomy. For instance, even though on March 11 the United States announced a [historic 2025 investment](#) in Taiwan's security assis-

tance—allocating USD \$100 million as a specific line item for the first time—this followed positive [talks at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference](#) on November 15, 2023.

The fluctuating attitude of the United States towards China makes the United States an unreliable partner for Taiwan, and even for its alliances in the Western Pacific. Therefore, as the United States reconsiders whether strategic ambiguity might be an outdated strategy, Taiwan should actively find a way to extricate itself from the trap of an ambiguous attitude and oscillating rhetoric from the United States in the context of the Chinese threat to Taiwan, both by leveraging its techno-diplomacy externally and bolstering its resilience internally.

Taiwan's flourishing semiconductor industry has been known as a "silicon shield," as former Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) explicitly said in her article in [Foreign Affairs](#) in 2021, "Our semiconductor industry is especially significant: a 'silicon shield' that allows Taiwan to protect itself and others from aggressive attempts by authoritarian regimes to disrupt global supply chain." However, given Taiwan's [equivalent vulnerabilities in both natural disasters and geopolitical risks](#), the United States has been reshaping the global semiconductor industry to secure its own supply chain, as demonstrated by the [Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's \(TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造股份有限公司\) Arizona plant](#).

Given [the global efforts in addressing geopolitical concerns](#), Taiwan should, in addition to seeking external support by leveraging its techno-diplomacy, focus on internal efforts to empower itself to maintain equilibrium amidst geopolitical risks, particularly by enhancing its resilience.

David Arase, a senior fellow at the Center for Asia-Pacific Resilience and Integration (CAPRI), said in March that Taiwan's composure in enduring unprecedented military intimidation, economic coercion, and political warfare waged by China demonstrates [its resilience](#). However, Taiwan's resilience may be jeopardized due to constraints in devising effective policy responses, stemming from a structural issue wherein its political dynamics limit the choices of its policy—as Richard Bush, a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution, has pointed out. [2] The situation may become more serious as Taiwan is currently experiencing a divided government following the January elections, with the DPP retaining its presidency for a third consecutive term and the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) holding the reins

of the legislature.

On May 3, the KMT and Taiwan People's Party (民眾黨) voted against amendments proposed by the DPP caucus in the legislature that require elected officials to file reports before visiting China. As a result, the proposal stands no chances of being discussed at the committee meetings in the Legislative Yuan (立法院). This exemplifies a typical political situation in Taiwan where—even concerning security issues—without a party's monopoly over policymaking, bills may take longer to pass, and policies may be challenging to reach a consensus. Nevertheless, these challenges in policymaking may lead to an increasingly ineffective democracy, potentially undermining Taiwan's resilience and leaving it more vulnerable to geopolitical risks.

Consequently, it is crucial for Taiwan to recognize the necessity of deconstructing the phenomenon wherein political ideology often overrides its policymaking. The divided government should cooperate and consolidate a strong political will to create a more resilient environment for Taiwan, possibly beginning by diversifying Taiwan's domestic economy or addressing pressing domestic issues such as unaffordable housing, stagnating wages, energy concerns, aging population, and more.

With the changing status quo across the Taiwan Straits, the United States should revive the confidence of its alliances in the Western Pacific by eschewing ambiguity on the Taiwan issue, thereby narrowing the gap between its commitments and capabilities. As for Taiwan, given the United States' ambiguous attitude and oscillating rhetoric, the new government should externally leverage Taiwan's techno-diplomacy and internally empower the nation's resilience to adapt to the dynamics of geopolitical challenges. This strategic approach could bolster the preservation of Taiwan's autonomy and position it as a vital partner on the global stage.

The main point: Parties under the new Taiwanese government should collaborate and leverage its techno-diplomacy and resilience to confront unforeseen challenges amidst Taiwan's serious geopolitical risks.

[1] Syaru Shirley Lin, *Taiwan's China Dilemma* (Stanford, California: Standard University Press, 2016). Page 26.

[2] Richard Bush, *Difficult Choices: Taiwan's Quest for Security and the Good Life* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2021). Page 318-344.

Securing US Elections from AI-Enhanced Foreign Influence: Lessons from Taiwan's 4C Strategy

By: You-Hao Lai

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As the US election looms, nation-state adversaries are ramping up efforts to undermine election integrity. A recent [Microsoft report](#) highlights cyber operations by Iran, Russia, and China that are all aimed at disrupting the upcoming November polls. Even more concerning, these actors are now leveraging advanced AI tools to [amplify disinformation campaigns](#), creating more sophisticated and widespread content designed to exploit vulnerabilities in US defenses. Given these persistent threats, what lessons can the United States learn from other democracies that have faced similar challenges this year?

One notable example is Taiwan, an island nation on the frontlines of resistance against authoritarian influence. For over a decade, Taiwan has endured a relentless deluge of foreign disinformation and, according to V-Dem, has been the [most targeted country](#) for 11 consecutive years. Yet, despite these challenges, Taiwan upholds a vibrant democracy—[ranking 10th globally and first in Asia](#)—and successfully held a fair presidential election on January 13 this year, even in the face of heightened manipulation through [generative AI](#).

So, how does Taiwan safeguard its democracy against digital authoritarianism? The answer lies in a holistic approach it has adopted: the *4C Strategy*—*Cutting production, Clarifying falsehoods, Curbing dissemination, and Cultivating digital media literacy*. This comprehensive framework engages government, businesses, and civil society, each fulfilling its role to safeguard Taiwan's digital information infrastructure, protecting it from exploitation by malicious foreign actors at every stage of disinformation campaigns.

AI-Driven Disinformation in Taiwan's Elections

A disinformation campaign typically moves through three stages to distort public discourse and election processes: the *production*, *dissemination*, and *reception* of misleading content that ultimately sways the audience's beliefs and perceptions. Generative AI profoundly affects both the *production* and *reception* phases because it helps to enhance [the scale and](#)

[sophistication of content](#). As these tools mature, malicious actors can autonomously generate larger volumes of realistic text, images, or videos across various languages and genres [without a significant increase in labor costs](#).

In the following, I will focus on [two case studies](#) from the Research Institute for Democracy, Society and Emerging Technology (DSET, 科技、民主與社會研究中心), a government tech policy think tank in Taiwan, to illustrate how foreign actors strategically employed AI for information manipulation during Taiwan's presidential election.

The first involved a YouTube channel named "TrueTJL," which released a video three weeks before an election. It featured an AI-generated voice, allegedly that of retired investigator Zhao-lun Lin (林昭倫), accusing presidential candidate Lai Ching-te (賴清德) of being an informant during Taiwan's martial law period. This video ignited discussions across platforms, including [PTT](#), a well-known online forum, as well as on political influencers' [social media](#) and numerous YouTube channels, [many of which were newly created or previously inactive](#).

Another instance occurred on January 2, when an anonymous user uploaded a 318-page PDF titled *The Secret History of Tsai Ing-Wen* to Zenodo. This document quickly [spread](#) across various platforms, including X, Facebook, TikTok, Wikipedia, PTT, and Taiwanese sites like Vocus (方格子) and Mirror Fiction (鏡文學). Following this dissemination, a wave of new YouTube accounts featuring AI-generated images and profiles emerged between January 4 and January 10. According to the [Australian Strategic Policy Institute](#) (ASPI), an Australian think tank, these accounts posted up to 490 videos with virtual AI anchors mimicking news reporting styles and detailing scenarios from the document.

In both cases, it is evident that foreign actors are leveraging AI to enhance their manipulation efforts. The YouTube channel TrueTJL, whose website is linked to a [server in China](#), employed AI-generated audio to falsely accuse a prominent presidential candidate. Similarly, ASPI disclosed that *The Secret History of Tsai Ing-Wen* was crafted using software developed and widely [used in China](#), and was distributed through [videos](#) mass-produced by AI, made with Chinese-owned software and featuring idioms typical of simplified Mandarin. These tactics underscore AI's ability to create plausible content and significantly escalate content production for disinformation campaigns.

Moderate Impact and Taiwan's Countermeasures

According to [DSET](#), however, the impact of these campaigns was considered moderate. First, the informant accusation yielded only limited dissemination. In fact, the [spike](#) in shared posts stemmed from the Investigation Bureau's (法務部調查局) clarifying press release, not the initial accusation itself. Similarly, while the AI-driven content in the second case achieved considerable reach across platforms, the volume of discussions swiftly [declined](#) following official clarifications and had virtually disappeared before election day.

To address these manipulative attempts, Taiwan has implemented a range of countermeasures. Initially, government agencies debunked the disinformation promptly, with the [Investigation Bureau](#) discrediting the fabricated voice in the informant accusation within three days of the video's release. A week after the e-book about President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) was uploaded, [national security authorities](#) clarified in news interviews that the relevant videos contained extensive AI-generated falsehoods.

Furthermore, social media platforms played a crucial role in curtailing the spread of disinformation by downgrading or removing fake content and [suspending suspicious accounts](#) based on alerts from authorities or independent fact-checkers. [Media outlets](#) also refrained from covering questionable sources until obtaining verified information. Fact-checking organizations like [MyGoPen](#) and [Taiwan FactCheck Center](#) (TFC, 台灣事實查核中心) helped enhance citizens' ability to recognize AI fabrications by publishing detailed reports. Lastly, [law enforcement](#) traced the disinformation's origins and pursued criminal charges to deter the perpetrators.

Cutting Production

These measures reflect a broader framework for combating information manipulation in Taiwan: *the 4C strategy*. Firstly, Taiwan aims to *cut the production* of AI-generated disinformation by deterring malicious actors and increasing their costs of engaging in disinformation production. In 2023, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan amended the [Public Officials Election and Recall Act](#) (公職人員選舉罷免法) and the [President and Vice President Election and Recall Act](#) (總統副總統選舉罷免法), raising the maximum sentences for those found guilty of intentionally disseminating false and harmful information about candidates through deepfakes. Taiwan's [prosecutors' offices](#) have also established special task forces to swiftly trace the origins of deepfake content and initiate further investigation and prosecution.

However, it is important not to overestimate the effectiveness of criminal liabilities. To safeguard free speech and prevent the suppression of dissent and political competition, penalties for falsehoods must be meticulously crafted and restricted to easily verifiable facts. This narrow focus limits their ability to fully address the diverse forms of disinformation campaigns. Moreover, the slow pace of court proceedings fails to adequately mitigate the rapid spread of disinformation, and more critically, these measures are significantly less effective when malicious actors operate outside of legal jurisdiction.

To disrupt disinformation production, providers of digital infrastructure must take on greater responsibility. Given that the breakthroughs in generative AI enable the scaling up of disinformation output, efforts to elevate production costs must also target the design and operation of these models. AI providers should prioritize accuracy and ensure that AI-generated content is easily identifiable. This involves securing reliable sources for their models, enforcing strict content policies and establishing technical safeguards against falsehood creation, and integrating features like provenance and watermarking to trace origins and verify AI involvement through machine-readable signals.

These measures could be implemented through tech companies' voluntary compliance; however, governments should also explore leveraging existing regulatory tools to nudge businesses to advance these objectives. Earlier this year, major tech companies signed an [accord](#) aimed at combating deceptive AI in elections. One key [commitment](#) is to develop and implement policies and technologies that facilitate identifying and certifying AI-generated content and its origins. The European Commission then issued new [guidelines](#) incorporating these measures as part of the risk mitigation obligations for large platforms under the *Digital Services Act* framework. These international trends are worth considering for the United States to devise effective strategies to impose more barriers on the production of AI-driven disinformation.

Clarifying Falsehoods

The second pillar of the 4C strategy, *clarifying falsehoods*, is founded on a belief that the best way to counter false speech is through more speech and fact-checking. To this end, Taiwan's government has implemented the "[222 principle](#)," which requires every government agency to debunk misinformation within two hours using two images and 200 words, crafted to be especially sharable and understandable on social

media.

Additionally, [prosecutorial, police, and national security agencies](#) are committed to enhancing their capacity to swiftly identify deepfake videos and audio during the election period. The Executive Yuan (行政院) has also been [collaborating](#) with Taiwan's major online platforms since 2019 to improve the filtering, labeling, and debunking of misinformation. This initiative includes a collaboration with [LINE](#), the leading messaging platform, to develop user-friendly fact-checking channels and instant clarification pages within its system.

However, the task of fact-checking should not fall solely on the government. Its media reach is limited, and more importantly, government-provided clarifications often struggle to gain acceptance across the political spectrum, especially in a highly polarized society like Taiwan. Therefore, the broader success of this strategy depends crucially on the involvement of third-party fact-checking organizations.

In Taiwan, TFC, MyGoPen, and [Cofacts](#) are the three major civic groups having tirelessly worked to debunk disinformation. For instance, TFC had published over [200](#) online verifications and analyses during the 2024 elections alone. Their findings were extensively shared across media partners' sites such as *Yahoo! News* and the *Central News Agency*. [Digital platforms](#) like Meta and Google have also committed to better labeling AI-generated content and providing additional information to users who encounter false content flagged by their fact-checking partners. Collaborative efforts among government, media, platforms, and civic groups have enhanced the effectiveness of fact-checking in dispelling falsehoods.

Curbing Dissemination

But even this seemingly effective approach has its limitations. Counter-speech theory hinges on the assumption that individuals can and will discern truth from falsehood. Yet, people often [accept information without scrutiny](#) unless it challenges their preexisting beliefs. The overwhelming tide of disinformation and algorithmic filter bubbles can prevent clarifications from capturing individuals' scarce attention. Thus, *curbing the dissemination* of disinformation is essential, and social media platforms, which control the flow of information in the digital public sphere, must assume greater responsibility.

In this context, Taiwan's legislature enacted a "[deep-fake clause](#)" in 2023, requiring that broadcasters and

online platforms remove or limit access to officially verified deepfake content targeting election candidates, with violations subject to fines. Yet, broader legislative initiatives like the 2022 [Digital Intermediary Services Act](#) have stalled. As a result, Taiwan's government has primarily relied on platform self-regulation and cooperation, such as [TikTok's](#) reporting channel with authorities to flag and remove unlawful content. Similarly, [Meta](#) emphasized its commitment to reducing the reach of content flagged as false by its fact-checking partners.

Despite these voluntary measures showing some effectiveness, the need for robust regulatory solutions continues, especially as platforms frequently prioritize [budget reductions](#) over maintaining teams that combat online disinformation.

Cultivating Digital Media Literacy

Finally, *cultivating citizens' digital media literacy* stands as the last safeguard against disinformation campaigns. According to a [research report](#) published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, there is ample evidence that media literacy training helps individuals recognize false content and dubious sources. In Taiwan, civil society groups have proactively contributed to this cause.

For instance, the TFC initiated the [Taiwan Media Literacy Project](#) in 2021, aiming to educate a wide range of individuals, particularly those in need of improved skills. This initiative includes collaborations with organizations like the [National Association for the Promotion of Community Universities](#), which focuses on the elderly and middle-aged, and [FakeNewsCleaner](#), which imparts fact-checking skills in rural and vulnerable neighborhoods. These groups incorporate media literacy into community activities and develop online materials and training for the general public. Additionally, to address the rising threat of AI-generated disinformation, TFC incorporated AI literacy into their annual workshops, collaborating with MyGoPen to promote awareness and provide practical detection techniques in their fact-checking reports.

However, literacy education faces [challenges](#) in reaching large numbers of people, especially those most vulnerable to disinformation, within limited budgets and timeframes. This task is too extensive for civil society to handle alone. In response, Taiwan's government issued the "[White Paper on Media Literacy Education in the Digital Age](#)" in 2023 as policy guidelines. Since 2019, [efforts](#) have included integrating media literacy

into the compulsory 12-year education system, supplemented with specialized materials and teacher training. Moreover, the government provides courses and funding for public servants and community colleges, and bolsters media literacy resources through public libraries and radio stations.

These initiatives are worth considering for governments worldwide, and can be strengthened by legislation that ensures adequate funding, develops detailed strategies, and establishes specialized task forces to coordinate interdepartmental efforts in promoting digital media literacy.

Conclusion

There is no silver bullet to combat AI-enhanced foreign influence operations. Solely relying on criminal deterrence is slow and largely ineffective against actors beyond borders. Fact-checking, though crucial, struggles with the overwhelming volume of falsehoods and limited verification resources. Reducing disinformation's spread is impossible without robust verification and clarification. Over-reliance on individual literacy skills unfairly shifts responsibility from governments and media to citizens.

An effective response requires a holistic strategy that includes government, civil society, and digital infrastructure owners to address disinformation at all stages—production, dissemination, and reception. Taiwan's 4C strategy offers a proactive model that democracies, including the United States, can consider to strengthen their defenses and fortify election resilience against technology-enhanced foreign manipulation.

The main point: For democratic countries that are working on countering foreign disinformation, particularly ahead of upcoming elections, Taiwan's 4C strategy—which is a holistic defense that addresses disinformation at all stages by cutting production, clarifying falsehoods, curbing dissemination, and cultivating digital media literacy—offers a proactive model.