

Navigating Taiwan's Complex Relationship with Israel

James Baron

The PRC Sends a Message to the International Community with Its December 2024 Naval Exercise

John Dotson

Recruitment of Online Influencers Reveals a New Tactic of China's United Front

Yuchen Lee

Don't Overlook APEC's Usefulness to Taiwan

Benjamin Sando and Owen Maireni Daniel Sanchez

Building a Regional NGO Hub in Taiwan

Robert Wang

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By: James Baron

James Baron is a Taipei-based journalist, whose writing is focused on Taiwan's history, culture, and foreign relations.

Since the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023 and Israel's subsequent bombardment of Gaza, Taipei has maintained a position generally supportive of Israel. Following the October 1 launch by Iran of over 100 ballistic missiles against Israel, [Taiwan's foreign ministry condemned the attack](#) as "seriously damaging regional and global peace and stability," and stated that "Taiwan and all peace-loving democratic partners around the world together condemn [Iran's] use of force, and call for the relevant parties to exercise restraint and resolve the conflicts through diplomacy and communication to prevent the crisis from expanding." By contrast, Taiwan's government has been silent on the issue of Israel's bombing campaign in Gaza.

In an [op-ed published by Taipei Times](#) on November 8, Israel's representative to Taiwan Maya Yaron wrote of the "close cooperation" between Taiwan and Israel, and a "unique bond" based on "shared values." Praising Taiwan's government for its unambiguous stance in condemning Iran's missile attack, she stressed that Israel's need to defend itself was well understood by Taipei.

The comments followed the October signing of a [bilateral agreement on artistic and cultural exchanges](#) between the two countries, and the [visit of a delegation of scholars](#) from Israel's Hebrew University's East Asian Studies program in September to Taiwan's Institute for National Policy Research (INPR) (a private, multidisciplinary think-tank established by the late Chang Yung-fa, founder of the Evergreen Group conglomerate). Speaking at the event, INPR President Tien Hung-mao (田弘茂), a former foreign minister, expressed hopes of "establishing a framework for ongoing exchanges to explore issues of mutual concern," which could include security cooperation. Also present was Yaron, who criticized "unfair" depictions of Israel's "counterattacks" by Western media.

Taiwan's Historical Ties with Israel

The roots of Taiwan's ties with Israel are long and tangled—and in some instances, problematic. At crucial stages in the development of both states, Israel and the martial law-era Republic of China (ROC) regime were both cultivated by American support during the Cold War as anti-communist states. As [described by the South African political scientist Peter Vale](#), Taiwan, Israel, and South Africa were united by mutual characteristics found in "pariah states"—including rule by immigrants or their descendants, and the surpassing of regional rivals in economic and political development.

The Global Taiwan Brief is a bi-weekly publication released every other Wednesday and provides insight into the latest news on Taiwan.

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Image: Then-ROC President Tsai Ing-wen speaking with Israeli Knesset Member Boaz Toporovsky, the leader of a delegation from the “Knesset Taiwan Friendship Group” visiting Taipei (April 15, 2024). In the meeting, Tsai thanked the delegation “for demonstrating your support for Taiwan,” and for promoting cooperation in areas such as education, public health, and tourism. (Image source: [ROC Presidential Office](#))

Because of their pariah status, this [“alliance of the shunned”](#) (or “fourth world”) stuck together on issues such as nuclear weapons development: From the late 1970s, a [triangular relationship](#) emerged between Taiwan, Israel, and South Africa, with Pretoria providing uranium, Taiwanese scientists enriching it to weapons-grade levels, and Israeli engineers offering rocket technology. [1]

The martial law-era ROC and Israel were also linked by arms sales, with the United States as an intermediary. “Obviously it was easier for them to operate as outcasts, but for Israel it was really practical,” says Mor Sobol, an Israeli associate professor in the Department of Diplomacy and International Relations at Tamkang University in New Taipei City. “In the 60s and 70s, Israel sold weapons to anyone who moved. It wasn’t really bothered who the client was.”

Sobol also points out that Israel’s strategy of using arms deals to advance political goals contrasts with the approach of most state actors, who generally do the opposite—starting with diplomacy before moving on to “the sensitive issues.” Sobol further emphasizes that Israel and Taiwan share a pragmatism that allows them to work with whoever can help them achieve their goals—and that this, more than shared experiences as threatened states, is what connects the countries. [2]

Taiwan’s More Recent Diplomatic Posture Towards Israel

Sobol has also noted that, in a break from its traditionally cautious approach to international defense cooperation, Taiwan has become increasingly forthright in discussing its strategic partnerships. He gives the example of Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu’s [interview with the Jerusalem Post in 2022](#), noting that Wu’s tough talk on China was “problematic” for Israeli officials—who, despite Chinese support for Palestine, remain wary of incurring Beijing’s wrath. “Diplomats in Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs now have a

much longer leash to say and do things that would have been unthinkable a couple of years ago,” says Sobol. [3]

In regard to the Israel–Palestine issue, geopolitical considerations have historically influenced Taiwan’s reticence to speak out, according to Tuvia Gering, a researcher with the Diane & Guilford Glazer Foundation Israel-China Policy Center at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). Foremost among these are fears that upsetting the Arab world could harm access to energy. Gering believes that the [Abraham Accords](#) of 2020, under which the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain recognized Israeli sovereignty, played a role in Taiwan’s new-found boldness.

This more active diplomatic posture has been exemplified by the efforts of Taiwan’s “very competent” representative to Israel, Abby Lee. “She has been extremely active at using this window of opportunity where the fissure between Israel and China is at its widest and mutual trust is at its lowest point in recent memory,” says Gering. He highlights Taiwanese humanitarian assistance and capacity-building projects in kibbutzim in the south of Israel and Druze communities in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights region of Syria. “They’ve been all over the place, backing rhetorical support with action, while the Chinese were nowhere to be seen,” he says. [4]

Dissenting Voices on Taiwan’s Israel-Palestine Policies

Taiwan’s generally pro-Israel policies—and commentary such as the [November 8 Taipei Times op-ed](#) in particular—have been received with incredulity by some observers in Taiwan. “Yaron’s piece is a good example of *hasbara*,” says Aurora Chang, referring to the Hebrew term for Israel’s public diplomacy efforts—which translates literally as “explanation,” but has connotations of propaganda. A human rights activist, Chang is involved in coordinating the Palestine solidarity movement in Taiwan.

Calling the parallels that Yaron drew between Taiwan and Israel “disingenuous,” Chang quotes from the text of the Israeli representative’s article, ridiculing the claim that Israel has pushed for peace and attempted to minimize casualties. “Israel’s ‘efforts to advance the peace process’ in the region have seen them attacking Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iran,” she says. “Their attempts to ‘prioritize the sanctity of life’ have led them to slaughter over 40,000 Palestinians in Gaza, many of whom were civilians.” While Yaron emphasizes the importance of freedom to both Taiwan and Israel, “it is Israel who tramples on the freedom of the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination, reminiscent of what China continually threatens to inflict on Taiwan,” says Chang. [5]

There is little public understanding in Taiwan regarding the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the issues at stake, though some see signs of change in this regard. “Taiwan’s strong identification with Israel as a democracy facing external threats, particularly in contrast to China’s backing of Palestine, complicates the situation,” says Hazem Al-

massry, a Palestinian research fellow at National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University in Hsinchu. “Nevertheless, I remain hopeful that increased awareness of humanitarian issues in Gaza may shift perspectives over time.” In stark contrast to Yaron’s comments, Almassry has publicly lamented what he describes as Israeli propaganda in Western media coverage of the war in Gaza. After making this point in an interview posted to social media, there were responses calling for NYCU to fire him. [6]

As for Taiwan’s media, Palestine solidarity activists bemoan the lack of local coverage. At a protest that saw around [200 demonstrators march through Taipei’s busy Ximending area in October](#) to mark a year of war in Gaza, activists noted the absence of reporters from local news networks. “We’ve had more than ten events—protests, press conferences—and sent out invites each time, but they never show up,” says Lala Lau, a Hong Kong-born organizer with Taiwan Alliance for a Free Palestine (TWAFFP), an umbrella organization for pro-Palestine groups in Taiwan. “It’s like we’re invisible.” [7]

Felix Chechien Brender-Wong, a Taiwanese-Israeli interpreter and security consultant, characterizes Taiwan’s reaction to the October 7 Hamas attacks as intuitive. “The immediate alignment with Israel tells you a lot,” says Brender-Wong. “Taiwan knows what it’s like to have a neighbor which doesn’t accept you exist.” He believes the more radical pro-Palestine activists in Taiwan do not represent the majority. “They tend to take the same narratives you would get in similar circles in, say, the US and translate them into spaces and contexts where it doesn’t make sense for Taiwanese.” [8]

Yet, for others, Taiwanese community with Palestinians makes perfect sense. “In at least one vital way, Taiwanese have more in common with Palestinians than with Israeli Jews,” said Kerim Friedman, an American-born anthropology professor at National Dong Hwa University in Hualien, during a speech at October’s demonstration. Arguing that the “colonial project” to kick Palestinians off their land could not have proceeded without the erasure of Palestinians as a people, Friedman said this was accompanied by “the deliberate undermining of Palestinian aspirations for statehood”—an act of politicide. “I think this is something that Taiwanese can easily relate to,” said Friedman. “Taiwan has long been a victim of Chinese efforts at politicide.” [9]

Acknowledging “a shared struggle for self-determination” could be key to fostering empathy for Palestine among Taiwanese, says Almassry. He finds it hard to witness “limited support” for his homeland in the country he now lives in and admires. “Highlighting these similarities could encourage Taiwanese to see the Palestinian cause not just through geopolitical lenses, but as a shared fight for freedom and dignity,” he says.

Taiwan’s Connection to the Explosive Pagers Incident

One incident that local media could not ignore was the use of thousands of pagers bearing the logo of a Taiwanese

manufacturer in attacks against Hezbollah, the Lebanese Islamist political party and militant group. Although no one has claimed responsibility for the targeted killings, which claimed a reported 42 lives in Lebanon and Syria, Israel is [widely assumed](#) to have masterminded them.

Gold Apollo, the Taiwanese pager company, denied producing the devices, explaining that their branding had been [licensed by a Hungarian firm](#). Taipei confirmed that none of the [components](#) had been produced in Taiwan. Asked whether he had consulted Yaron about the incident, [Taiwan’s Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung simply answered, “No.”](#)

These assurances should not be doubted—it is inconceivable that Taiwan was involved in the attacks. Yet, at October’s demonstration, protestors appeared to suggest otherwise. [Reporting on the event](#), the activism- and youth politics-focused *New Bloom Magazine* misleadingly described “Taiwanese pager company Gold Apollo” as “being used for the pager attacks.”

Such ambiguity has spawned wild claims about secret agreements. “You’ve already got conspiracy theories about the parliamentary delegation [that visited in April] setting the scene, which—to be honest—is complete bullshit,” says Sobol. “You’re talking about parliamentarians with zero power, who are completely disconnected from the security establishment.” [10]

These ideas are perhaps understandable, given the TWAFFP’s demands for Taiwan’s government to enforce supply-chain transparency from Taiwanese manufacturers whose components are suspected to have been used in Israeli military equipment. At the TWAFFP protest, a spokesperson for Amnesty International Taiwan urged the government to require Taiwanese high-tech companies to guarantee their products would not be used for military purposes in Israel. This, the speaker stressed, would respect a [draft resolution by the United Nations Human Rights Council in April 2024](#), calling on all states “to cease the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to Israel.”

The main point: Since the beginning of the Israel-Gaza war in October 2023, Taiwan has maintained a generally pro-Israel set of policies, with the government and much of population seeing common cause with Israel as a state threatened by its neighbors. However, significant voices in Taiwan’s civil society have remained critical of Israel’s military response in Gaza.

[1] Israel’s nuclear cooperation with Taiwan began in the early 1960s, when Professor Ernst David Bergmann—the first chairman of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission—visited Taipei, where he developed a close relationship with Chiang Kai-shek. While it is unclear whether Israel’s authorities approved of Bergmann’s activities, he came to be regarded as “a prominent player in Taiwan’s defense modernization and one of the forefathers of its nuclear program.” It was not until the late 1980s, when Taiwan was [reportedly on the verge of completing a deliverable weapon](#), that Washington

pressured Taipei into stopping the project.

[2] Author's interview, conducted online on September 19, 2024.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Author's interview, conducted online on September 23, 2024.

[5] Author's interview, conducted online on November 8, 2024.

[6] Author's interview, conducted online on September 22, 2024.

[7] Author's interview, conducted in person on October 13, 2024.

[8] Author's interview, conducted online on September 22, 2024.

[9] Part of a speech delivered on October 13, 2024.

[10] Author's interview, conducted online on September 19, 2024.

The PRC Sends a Message to the International Community with Its December 2024 Naval Exercise

By: John Dotson

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

From December 9-12, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) People's Liberation Army (PLA) conducted a [large-scale aviation and naval exercise](#) in the air and sea spaces around Taiwan, as well as in waters farther eastwards into the Pacific Ocean. This was the third large-scale PLA exercise of 2024 in the areas around Taiwan (not counting smaller exercises, and growing routine levels of PLA presence operations around Taiwan). The first major exercise of 2024, [Joint Sword-2024A](#) (聯合利劍-2024A), was conducted on May 23-24—per PRC narratives, in reaction to Republic of China (ROC) President Lai Ching-te's (賴清德) inaugural address—and featured a symbolic encirclement of the island by the PLA Navy (PLAN), as well as an increased role for patrols by the PRC Coast Guard (中國海警). [1] The second major exercise, [Joint Sword-2024B](#) (聯合利劍-2024B), was conducted on October 14—again, per PRC messaging, in response to the October 10 National Day address by President Lai—and was smaller in scope than its predecessor, though distinguished by intense levels of aviation activity and the provocative declaration of exercise areas that crossed into Taiwan's contiguous zone (the sea area just outside of territorial waters, ranging 12-24 nautical miles from the shore-

line).

While PRC military activity around Taiwan, and in the Taiwan Strait, has been on a [steady uptick since 2020](#), a watershed event came with the unnamed August 2022 PLA military exercise around Taiwan, conducted in the immediate wake of a visit to Taiwan by then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The August 2022 exercise (*see previous GTI articles [here](#) and [here](#)*) was the most provocative yet conducted: it included missile firings over Taiwan and into Japan's exclusive economic zone, and a nominal naval blockade exercise that has been repeated (with changes in operating areas) over the course of the subsequent two years. The blockade scenario was maintained in the [inaugural Joint Sword \(聯合利劍\) exercise](#) of April 2023, which involved both a symbolic encirclement of Taiwan and a series of simulated strikes directed against key node targets on the island.

The PRC routinely employs such [military exercises around Taiwan](#) and other intimidating military “gray zone operations” (灰帶行動) as part of its ongoing political warfare directed against Taiwan. [2] This pattern has been noted by the US Department of Defense, which noted in its December 2024 annual report on the PLA that “Beijing [has] continued to erode longstanding norms in and around Taiwan by employing a range of pressure tactics against Taiwan, including maintaining a naval presence around Taiwan, increasing crossings into Taiwan's self-declared [Taiwan Strait] centerline and [air defense identification zone], and conducting major military exercises near Taiwan.” [3]

While it exhibited continuity in many respects with recent preceding PLA exercises, the unnamed December 2024 exercise was noteworthy for the ways in which it departed from many standard PRC practices. The most salient of these elements included: the scale of the naval component in terms of ship numbers; that the exercise area appeared to extend farther out into the Pacific than previous exercises; and that PRC government outlets toned down the heavy propaganda that ordinarily accompanies such exercises. This article will seek to examine some of the major factors surrounding the exercise, and draw possible conclusions as to what they might mean for PLA military pressure on Taiwan in the coming year.

Lai's International Trip to Diplomatic Partners in the Pacific

The nominal prompt for the PRC exercise was an international trip conducted by President Lai from November 30 – December 6, during which time he visited three of the ROC's official diplomatic allies among island states of the Pacific (Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, and the Republic of Palau). In the course of the trip, Lai also conducted “transit stops”—the diplomatic legerdemain employed to allow for senior Taiwan leaders to make brief visits onto US soil—in Hawaii and Guam. In Honolulu (November 30 – December 1), Lai met with Governor of Hawaii Josh Green and Mayor of Honolulu Rick Blangiardi, in addition to giving a speech at the East-West Center think tank. On the US

territory of Guam (December 4-5), Lai visited the territorial Legislature of Guam and attended a luncheon for Taiwanese expatriates. (See references [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#)).



Image: Taiwan President Lai Ching-te (center) visiting the Guam Legislature, December 5. Speaker of the Guam Legislature Therese M. Terlaje (front, center-left) stands next to Lai; also visible in the background is American Institute in Taiwan Managing Director Ingrid Larson, who met with Lai in Hawaii and Guam. (Source: [ROC Presidential Office](#))

The PRC predictably issued condemnations of Lai's trip, and of the US transit stops in particular. At a [PRC Foreign Ministry press conference on December 5](#), Spokesperson Lin Jian (林劍) responded to Lai's trip, and news that Lai had engaged in a phone call with US House Speaker Mike Johnson, as follows:

"[W]e have made clear our serious opposition more than once to the US's arranging for Lai Ching-te's 'stopovers' and having official interactions with the Taiwan region. [...] [T]he Taiwan question is at the core of China's core interests, and the first red line that cannot be crossed in China-US relations. We urge the US to fully understand the grave damage that 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities do to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait [...] [to not support] 'Taiwan independence,' stop interfering in China's internal affairs, and stop sending any wrong signal to 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces. China will take resolute and strong measures to defend our nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Despite such boilerplate rhetoric, PRC rhetoric surrounding Lai's trip—and the subsequent exercise—was actually relatively muted overall, and PRC state media sources initially refrained from playing up the exercise as a punitive measure against Taiwan. This was a departure from standard PRC practice, which has consistently been to portray its exercises around Taiwan as a necessary reaction to political events connected to Taiwan's political leaders.

The PLA Exercise of December 9-12

Even prior to Lai's trip, in late November, Taiwan officials had begun to signal that a [significant PLA exercise was likely shaping up](#) for the early-mid December timeframe, following Lai's overseas trip. Some observers speculated that this would become a ["Joint Sword 2024C,"](#) continuing the named series of encirclement/blockade exercises around Taiwan that first commenced in spring 2023. PRC officials did not make an announcement of a named exercise as such, but deployed a large number of vessels—both PLA Navy and PRC Coast Guard—forward in early December, and declared restricted areas of airspace for flight operations off the Chinese coast (*see details below*).

Aviation Activity

The PRC declared seven ["temporary reserved airspace zones"](#) (空域臨時保留區) to be in effect from December 9-11, in coastal areas ranging from eastern Guangdong Province in the south to the vicinity of Shanghai in the north (*see graphic below*). In a [December 10 press conference](#), ROC Air Force Lieutenant General Hsieh Jih-sheng (謝日升), head of the Ministry of National Defense's (國防部, MND) Office of the Deputy Chief of General Staff for Intelligence, noted the scope of these zones (extending up to 1,000km into the Pacific), and opined that they were part of "anti-access / area denial" (反介入 / 區域拒止) efforts directed at other states beyond Taiwan.

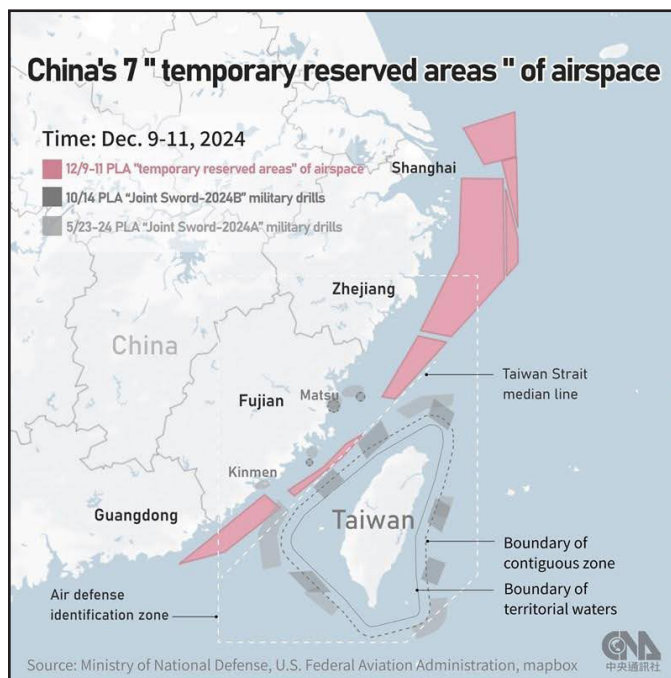


Image: The PRC's declared areas of restricted airspace for the December 9-11 exercise, as well as the declared operating areas for the two PLA Joint Sword exercises conducted earlier in 2024. (Source: [ROC Central News Agency](#))

The overall level of flight activity during the December exer-

cise appeared to be more modest than the intensive surge seen during the single-day *Joint Sword-2024B* exercise in October (which saw [153 sorties](#)). The [heaviest flight activity was seen on December 10](#), which saw 53 PLA sorties in the vicinity of Taiwan (including seven that crossed the Taiwan Strait centerline). [4]

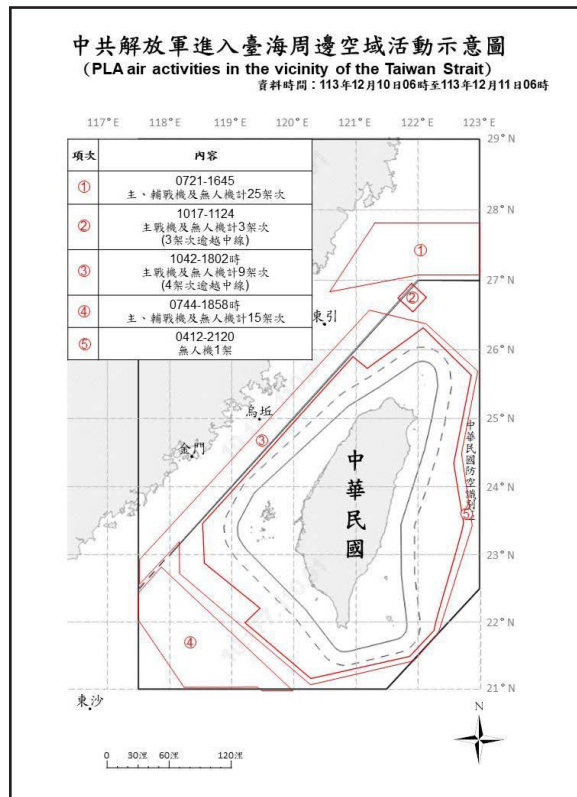


Image: A graphic of PLA aircraft types and operating areas on December 10, the day of heaviest aviation activity around Taiwan during the exercise (53 total reported sorties). The most intensive aviation activity occurred in the boxes designated #1 and #4, bracketing the north and south ends of the Taiwan Strait. (Image source: [ROC MND](#))

Naval Activity

The exact number of PLA vessels involved in the exercise, as revealed in open reporting, was indeterminate. However, on December 9 the [Reuters news agency cited an unnamed Taiwan security official](#) who indicated that the PRC had deployed a total of nearly 90 ships—in a rough ratio of two-thirds naval, one-third coast guard—in a broad ocean area encompassing the vicinity of Taiwan, the vicinity of Japan's Ryukyu Islands, and the East and South China Seas. The number of vessels reported to be operating in the more immediate environs of Taiwan was much smaller—with, for example, the MND reporting that on December 10 there were [“11 PLAN vessels and 8 official ships”](#) (the latter designation likely referring to the PRC Coast Guard) in the waters around Taiwan. The vague data, and the expansive reported operating areas, produce competing ways of interpreting the scale of the exercise. It is also likely that the larger figure of approximately 90 vessels includes ships already deployed

for routine training, who may not have had a significant role to play in an organized exercise scenario. However, if the larger figure of 90 vessels is accepted, this would make the December exercise the largest maritime exercise that the PLA has conducted since the Third Taiwan Crisis of 1996.

The specific deployment areas and operations of these vessels have not been made clear from publicly disclosed information. However, [Lt. Gen. Hsieh further indicated to media](#) that PRC naval forces had been deployed in two maritime “walls”—one around Taiwan, and a second situated outside the “First Island Chain” (extending from the Japanese Ryukyu, to Taiwan, to the northern Philippines). [Lt. Gen. Hsieh opined](#) that that the PRC intended to send a message that “The Taiwan Sea is internal waters, [and] the topic of the Taiwan Sea is for the Chinese Communists to manage” (臺海內水化，臺海議題由中共處理). He further commented that the deployments required vigilance as to whether “training could turn into an exercise, [and] an exercise turn into war” (訓轉演、由演轉戰), and that such PRC operations were intended “to influence and impact surrounding regional countries” (對周邊區域國家的影響與衝擊).

Unusual Aspects of the December Exercise

Many aspects of the December exercise remain unusual by historical PLA standards. Although the exercise did immediately follow President Lai's early December trip to the Pacific islands—and it is a staple of PRC propaganda to depict its coercive military exercises against Taiwan as a necessary reaction to Taiwan provocations—the PRC's public propaganda directed against Taiwan's political leadership was relatively restrained. [5] It is also somewhat unusual (although not unprecedented) that the exercise was not given a public name. Together, this may indicate that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) leadership wished to somewhat downplay the usual confrontational messaging posture surrounding this event.

If so, the reasons for this are not entirely clear. It may be that the CCP leadership decided to adopt a more cautious narrative posture during the transitional phase from the Biden Administration to the second Trump Administration in the United States. [6] It is also possible that the CCP and the PLA are currently preoccupied with ongoing purges in the PLA's senior leadership—to include the recent [sacking of Admiral Miao Hua \(苗華\)](#), director of the Central Military Commission Political Work Department—and wished to avoid unduly provocative messaging at a sensitive time within the PLA. It is also possible that cross-Strait political events, such as the [Shanghai-Taipei City Forum](#) (held in Taipei on December 16-17), may have encouraged the CCP leadership to pursue a less confrontational propaganda posture. Some defense scholars—such as [Su Tzu-yun \(蘇紫雲\)](#), a research fellow at Taipei's Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR), the MND's official think tank—have also speculated that the PRC's quieter posture in relation to the exercise could itself be a form of psycho-

logical pressure, intended to sow uncertainty in Taiwan and the region. However, these possibilities are all speculative.

What is clear is that the December exercise was intended to send a message far beyond Taiwan, to other states in the region. The reported second naval “wall” of ships posted beyond the First Island Chain is likely intended to send a deterrent message in particular to the United States, Japan, and the Philippines (with whom the PRC is engaged in serious [ongoing maritime clashes](#) around Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea). While PRC messaging was relatively muted, this provocative naval deployment provides an implicit warning to Taiwan’s potential allies that the PLA is prepared to deploy maritime assets to fend off any international intervention in the event of a Taiwan crisis. This will make it all the more interesting to observe what the PLA does in any potential *Joint Sword-2025*, or other significant exercise, in the year to come.

The main point: The PLA conducted an unnamed, large-scale naval and aviation exercise in December 2024, operating both in the vicinity of Taiwan, and further eastwards past the “First Island Chain.” This exercise appeared to be largely directed at signaling the PLA’s readiness to fend off any outside intervention in a Taiwan Crisis.

[1] The PRC Coast Guard, though outwardly a law enforcement agency, operates under military authority: it is treated as a component of the PRC’s paramilitary People’s Armed Police, and is subject to the Communist Party Central Military Commission. It functions, for all practical purposes, as an adjunct of the PLA Navy. See: Katsuya Yamamoto, “Concerns about the China Coast Guard Law – the CCG and the People’s Armed Police,” Sasakawa Peace Foundation (Feb. 25, 2021), https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/yamamoto_02.html.

[2] For discussion of this, see: John Dotson, *The Chinese Communist Party’s Political Warfare Directed Against Taiwan: Overview and Analysis*, Global Taiwan Institute (May 2024), pp. 11-13, https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/OR_CCP-Political-Warfare.pdf.

[3] US Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2024* (December 2024), p. 124, <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Dec/18/2003615520/-1/-1/0/MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2024.PDF>.

[4] Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense no longer publicly discloses specific data on PLA aircraft types and flight paths around Taiwan, instead identifying general operating areas, and overall numbers of “main fighters” (主戰機) and “auxiliary fighters” (輔戰機). Addressing this issue in mid-December, Defense Minister Wellington Koo (顧立雄) acknowledged the inherent dilemma between, on the one hand, providing greater transparency to the public; and on the other, maintaining the secrecy of collection

sources. See: “Transparency on ADIZ Difficult: Koo,” *Taipei Times* (December 19, 2024), <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2024/12/19/2003828761>. [5] This author has previously expressed skepticism about the CCP’s “carefully planned outbursts of indignation”—manifested as military exercises—over speeches and visits made by Taiwan political leaders. See: John Dotson, “The PLA’s Joint Sword 2024B Exercise: Continuing Political Warfare and Creeping Territorial Encroachment,” *Global Taiwan Brief* (October 30, 2024), <https://globaltaiwan.org/2024/10/the-joint-sword-2024b-exercise/>.

[6] When asked about this specifically, PRC outlets have been studiously vague. At a PRC Foreign Ministry press conference on December 11, an AFP reporter asked whether the “apparent military drills conducted by China this week around [Taiwan] are aimed at drawing a red line ahead of the incoming US presidential administration of Donald Trump.” The spokesperson ducked the question, stating that “I would refer you to the competent Chinese authorities for your specific question. Let me say that the Taiwan question is the first red line that cannot be crossed in China-US relations and this has always been our position. Upholding the one-China principle is the key to ensuring peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. China will firmly safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity.” See: “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning’s Regular Press Conference on December 11, 2024,” PRC Foreign Ministry (December 11, 2024), https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202412/t20241217_11495833.html.

Recruitment of Online Influencers Reveals a New Tactic of China’s United Front

By: Yuchen Lee

Yuchen Lee is a Spring 2025 intern and was a Fall 2024 intern at the Global Taiwan Institute.

In June, Taiwanese YouTuber “Potter King” (陳加晉, Chen Chia-chin) revealed in a video posted to his channel that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) was [sponsoring a group of Taiwanese influencers](#) to travel in China and make videos praising the Chinese government. Following this announcement, it was revealed that several Taiwanese YouTubers had [traveled to Xinjiang in August](#), including one popular vlogger called “Ariel” with an audience of 1.1 million subscribers. Ariel once expressed her support of Hong Kong in a video during the 2019 Anti-Extradition Protests, but the [footage was removed from her YouTube channel](#) without any explanation. Although Ariel denied the trip was funded by any Chinese organization and that she didn’t make any money off of the content she posted about her trip to Xinjiang, [her decision still garnered serious criticism from Taiwanese netizens](#).

In the months since, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (大陸委員會) has [confirmed Potter King's claim and begun investigating the extent of Chinese infiltration](#) into the information space of online influencers. According to Liang Wen-chieh (梁文傑), deputy head of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, although these influencers and celebrities paid for their flights, after they land in China, the host organizations will cover all the expenses they have during their stay. These cases not only aroused public vigilance against China's infiltration in Taiwan, but also illustrated the difficulties of determining the extent to which and how influencers are affected by the CCP.

Paid Junkets and Celebrity Endorsements under the Sponsorship of the "United Front"

Taiwanese YouTubers are being targeted as part of the CCP's "united front work" (統一戰線工作), a term invented by the CCP for influence operations that advance the party's goals. The tactic of recruiting people who have influence to help promote China's positive image is by no means a new thing. [1] For example, the Taiwanese YouTuber "Poppy Lai," who creates content about cosmetic and beauty products, has told the media that she [received an email about business cooperation from a Chinese marketing company](#) two years ago. In that email, the company requested that Poppy speak in favor of China in a relatively objective manner while introducing fashion news or cosmetic products.

Earlier this year, two Taiwanese singers, Ho Yi-chi (何以奇) and Hsieh Ho-hsien (謝和弦), both revealed on social media that they had [received letters from a Beijing-based media company](#). The letters invited them to participate in establishing a political party in Taiwan that would transcend the pan-blue and pan-green camps, to be called the "[Taiwan Embraces Peace Party](#)" (台灣擁和黨). The letters outlined a plan to recruit Taiwanese entertainers and celebrities to be the founding members, and to hold a concert to promote cross-Straits peace and shared Chinese history, with the ultimate goal of [securing at least one mayoral seat and ten city or county councilor seats in the 2026 election](#). According to the letter, entertainers and celebrities could [earn more than ten million NTD \(about USD \\$305,000\) per year and benefit from performance opportunities in China](#) as long as they joined and helped promote the new party. Although the letters seem absurd, it not only unveils the CCP's strategy of utilizing Taiwanese celebrities to influence political dynamics in Taiwan, but also demonstrates a trend in which the CCP is pursuing more diversified and unconventional united front tactics.

Additionally, the case of Chung Ming-hsuan (鍾明軒), a Taiwanese YouTuber who is characterized by his non-binary gender expression, possibly illustrates one of the CCP's united front operation successes. Chung was originally regarded as a pro-Taiwanese influencer, supported democratic values, and [once filmed a video with former President Tsai Ing-wen \(蔡英文\) before the 2020 presidential election](#). Starting from this year, Chung released several vlogs recording

合作流程和进度安排

- 1、第一阶段实施步骤：
 - 1 由北京慈光影视传媒有限公司（以下简称：“北京慈光”）与合作艺人（范畴包含：演员、歌手、新闻主播、节目主持人、模特和网红）指定的一家台湾有限公司（以下简称：“合作企业”）签订知识产权共享协议书。由北京慈光法定代表人通过微信，告知一个VIP邮箱用户名和登陆密码，以及下载文件的解锁密码，然后由合作艺人自行登陆VIP邮箱下载《构建新型两岸关系》。
 - 2 由合作艺人最迟在2024年6月21日，在其本人蓝勾徽章认证的脸上发表《构建新型两岸关系》。除此之外，合作艺人还需在发表《构建新型两岸关系》的当天，在其本人蓝勾徽章认证的脸上转载以合作企业的名义具名发表的《关于发起成立台湾拥和党并举办“拥和就捐10000！”专项活动的公告》。
 - 3 一旦所征召的台湾拥和党创党党员能够达到《政党法》所规定的100人门槛，合作企业需要立即启动筹备召开台湾拥和党成立大会事宜。
 - 4 台湾拥和党成立大会应选在2024年7月20日以前召开，并需在召开成立大会之后的三日内完成向台湾主管机构提交相关文件，正式办理台湾拥和党登记事宜。
 - 5 由合作艺人担任台湾拥和党副主席，合作企业的董事长和总经理担任台湾拥和党中央执行会常务委员。

Image: The letter from a Beijing-based media company, Beijing Ci-guang Media Co., Ltd. (北京慈光影视传媒有限公司), states its plan to establish a political party in Taiwan. (Source: [Ho Yi-chi Facebook post](#))

his visits to China in which he not only introduced local attractions and praised the high level of public safety in major Chinese cities, but also mentioned that ["you can talk about politics freely here."](#) His content attracted a lot of criticism for whitewashing the CCP's authoritarian governance. Facing massive condemnation, Chung chose to ignore his critics and continued creating videos about China. The People Republic of China's (PRC) Taiwan Affairs Office (國務院台灣事務辦公室) positively responded to Chung's controversy in a press conference, and stated that ["Taiwanese youth should follow Chung Ming-hsuan and visit mainland China often."](#)

In December 2024, an anti-CCP influencer who uses the name "Pa Chiung" (八炯) released [a two-part documentary on YouTube regarding the CCP's united front work](#), garnering more than 4 million views in total. Through interviewing a Taiwanese rapper, Chen Po-yuan (陳柏源), who once received guidance from the CCP in order to promote his music work in the PRC, the documentary revealed several new tactics the CCP is using to sway public opinion in Taiwan. For example, the PRC established "[Taiwanese Youth Entrepreneurship Parks \(台青創業園\)](#)" in many cities such as Xiamen (Fujian Province), providing Taiwanese businessmen resources like offices, venture capital, and media promotion to run their own businesses. Similar organizations also recruit artists and online influencers and offer them training programs. Moreover, the documentary alleged that there are Taiwanese playing as intermediaries who assist in the CCP's united front work. These intermediaries [receive large financial support and even obtain PRC IDs while keeping their Taiwanese IDs](#).



Image: Pa Chiung (right) and Chen Po-yuan (left) interviewed by local media regarding the viral documentary they made to reveal the CCP's united front work. (Source: [CNA photo Dec. 8, 2024](#))

CCP Goals in Recruiting Taiwan Influencers

With such celebrity endorsements, the PRC seeks to deflect unfavorable foreign narratives and whitewash negative perceptions of it, mostly through highlighting non-political areas like tourism and public safety. The CCP is adopting a more [localized, youth-targeted and softer approach](#), compared to its other tactics like gray-zone intimidation or legal coercion. Furthermore, it has reached out to influencers who were originally pro-independence or supportive of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨), such as Ariel and Chung Ming-hsuan, to be its [local collaborators](#).

A challenge for verifying collaboration between CCP-backed organizations and Taiwanese influencers is that it is difficult to find business contracts or receipts that can prove the influencers really get paid for their content by the CCP. Those influencers creating content praising China can always claim that they do so voluntarily, and that they have nothing to do with the CCP or any Chinese-related sponsorship. Moreover, accusations that are made without evidence could [create public resentment against government policies and broadly pro-Taiwan groups](#) for unfairly censoring pro-PRC opinions and violating their freedom of speech.

Political Divisions and Distrust of the Government

As Taiwanese people debate over whether Taiwanese influencers should visit and promote China, two significant risks are the island's growing political divisions, and distrust towards the government. Opponents of the ruling DPP government criticize those who condemn or boycott visitors to China as violating individual freedoms. They criticize the government's [Five National Security Amendments \(國安五法\)](#) and the [Anti-Infiltration Act \(反滲透法\)](#), which aim at preventing China from infiltrating and interfering in Taiwanese society, on the alleged grounds of creating an atmosphere in which people cannot express any words in favor of China. There is even a popular saying on social media that jokingly describes the DPP as [Taiwan's version of the Communist Party](#).

However, when we look at [the polling conducted by the Mainland Affairs Council](#) regarding public opinion on the *Anti-Infiltration Act*, 65 percent of Taiwanese acknowledge the increasing united front operations, infiltration, and intervention by the CCP in Taiwanese society. Over 80 percent support the government's use of legal instruments to prevent infiltration action, with 50.5 percent agreeing on strengthening the effect and scope of the *Anti-Infiltration Act*. The contradiction between the polling data and the media content is likely related to Chinese information manipulation. Partnering with Taiwanese actors or media outlets, the CCP [creates and spreads content that criticizes Taiwan's elected government and its institutions in the media environment](#). Such disinformation echoes an original voice from the anti-DPP constituents, intensifies their sentiment, and then exacerbates the quarrel in Taiwan's public sphere.

According to Toshi Yoshihara, a GTI advisor and an expert in CCP strategic and military affairs, one of the intentions of China's united front actions is to ["sow divisions within the political systems of competitors in order to weaken them or tie them down."](#) The CCP leverages these disinformation operations, through [fake accounts and local collaborators](#), not only to exacerbate discord in Taiwanese society but also to create a strong distrust of the Taiwanese government among Taiwanese citizens. Such polarization and lack of confidence in government serve to lower Taiwanese people's confidence in democratic institutions, as well as to [hinder the formation of whole-of-society resilience against Chinese threats](#).

Simply put, as it faces increasingly stronger legal and societal barriers in Taiwan against Chinese malign information operations, the PRC is utilizing a ["Taiwanese-leading-Taiwanese"](#) approach to circumvent these barriers and undermine Taiwan's resilience.

Domestic Efforts and a Multilateral Approach Integrated in the Indo-Pacific

Considering that billions of dollars are invested in the UFWD every year, the asymmetry of resources and costs across the Strait makes it difficult for Taiwan to fight against Chinese disinformation campaigns and defend its democratic institutions. Therefore, two key areas should receive greater investment in order to bridge this gap. First of all, the Taiwanese government and civil society groups should integrate existing efforts and resources to enhance the research and communication regarding Chinese political warfare. The establishment of the [Cognitive Warfare Research Center \(認知戰研究中心\)](#) and [Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee \(全社會防衛韌性委員會\)](#) are great steps forward for the Taiwanese government. Civil groups like Doublethink Lab and Kuma Academy have accomplished many projects that have advanced public awareness of the PRC threats. However, given the amount of disinformation in Taiwan's public sphere, more concrete evidence is needed to shed light on contact between Chinese companies and Taiwanese influencers, or records of remittance from the

CCP to Taiwanese celebrities, to show the Taiwanese public the importance of these initiatives.

Second, multilateral security alliances in the Indo-Pacific, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) or AUKUS, should incorporate Taiwan to jointly counter the united front work by the CCP. A report from RAND suggests that [the “free and open Indo-Pacific” concept is an ideal vessel to frame this messaging](#) because it illustrates a common vision for most countries in the region. The vitality and innovation of Taiwan’s civil community, as well as its experience in addressing PRC disinformation, would contribute to the alliance when developing information operation (IO) strategies—while countries like the United States and Japan could provide the policy framework and research resources that Taiwan lacks. Moreover, this multilateral approach would perform better than more limited US-Taiwan bilateral cooperation. An overemphasis on US leadership may fall into the PRC’s narrative trap that attempts to promote [America Skepticism Theory \(疑美論\)](#) in Taiwan’s public sphere.

The main point: The CCP is enticing Taiwanese influencers to create pro-China content aimed at whitewashing its authoritarian governance and aggression toward Taiwan, exemplifying its new “Taiwanese-leading-Taiwanese” approach within its united front strategy. United front efforts not only amplify favorable narratives about China but also sow discord within Taiwanese society, undermining Taiwan’s democracy. To counter China’s political warfare, Taiwan must strengthen domestic research and communication initiatives while advocating for the inclusion of multilateral organizations in the Indo-Pacific to foster regional resilience against Chinese influence campaigns.

[1] For a fuller discussion of the concept of united front work, see: John Dotson, *The Chinese Communist Party’s Political Warfare Directed Against Taiwan: Overview and Analysis*. (Global Taiwan Institute, May 2024), pp. 14-16. https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/OR_CCP-Political-Warfare.pdf.

Don’t Overlook APEC’s Usefulness to Taiwan

By: Benjamin Sando and Owen Maireni Daniel Sanchez

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While many may not have noticed Lin Hsin-yi (林信義), the chairman of Taiwan’s government-backed investment fund Taiwan Capital, [standing on](#) the dais at the November 2024 APEC Summit in Peru alongside world leaders such as Joe Biden, Xi Jinping (習近平), and Justin Trudeau, his pres-

ence remained remarkable for many Taiwan watchers. Lin was not attending the summit as a private stakeholder, but rather as Taiwan’s [official representative](#) to the organization—known by the full (but seemingly rather incomplete) name of [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation](#) (APEC).

Students of Taiwan’s diplomacy may be further surprised to see [divisions](#) within APEC, wherein Taiwan and People’s Republic of China (PRC) delegates hold equal status with identical bureaucratic powers. The unique diplomatic opportunities bestowed by APEC have led Taiwan’s former president Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) to [describe](#) the organization as “Taiwan’s most important international platform.” Indeed, in a world where Taipei is steadily losing official diplomatic partners, APEC stands as an organization where Taiwan is able to officially engage with foreign governments with only cosmetic restrictions (such as a requirement to participate under the title “Chinese Taipei”). Given its objective of supporting Taiwan’s internationalization, the United States should throw its weight behind APEC, and expand its budget and status to facilitate Taiwan’s multilateral diplomacy.



Image: Taiwan’s representative to the 2024 APEC summit, Lin Hsin-yi, exchanges greetings with US President Joe Biden (foreground) and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (background) at the APEC Summit in Lima, Peru in November 2024. (Image source: [ROC OCAC](#))

What is APEC?

Readers will be forgiven for not knowing what APEC is. The organization seems to hover behind a more familiar set of regional groupings like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) (CPTPP). At its core, APEC runs like a “model UN” in which members [propose and vote on](#) small projects to enhance economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. These projects are aimed at promoting technical capacity in areas such as environmental safety, human capital, public health, and internet technology (IT). APEC members—which refer to themselves as “economies”

rather than “countries”—recruit diplomatic allies to endorse their proposed projects in order to pass the minimum threshold of co-sponsorships needed for approval. Projects can last for one or several years and are accessible by all APEC economies, while the eleven developing economies in the grouping are afforded greater access. Project funding is drawn from voluntary donations by member economies and members can self-fund projects to increase the likelihood of approval.

In addition to capacity-building projects, APEC aims to foster high-level diplomatic exchanges between members. APEC [stages several](#) ministerial-level Senior Official Meetings (SOMs) and one executive-level summit each year. Taiwan is able to dispatch its economic minister to the SOMs, but its president is [restricted from](#) attending the annual summit. For this reason, Taiwan sends a delegate such as Lin Hsin-yi instead.

While the activities of APEC may strike the reader as prosaic, the organization is steadily granting Taiwan opportunities to deepen government-to-government connections with Asia-Pacific countries, even as Beijing’s pressure [suffocates its diplomacy](#) in the region.

Taiwan’s APEC Accession

Taiwan’s accession to APEC in 1991 did not come easily. In a [China Quarterly article](#), Ming-chin Monique Chu describes how lobbying by Taiwanese elites, opposition from APEC members and non-members, and mediated negotiations complicated the effort. Taiwan’s private and public sector both had an interest in APEC accession, and lobbying efforts from the Taiwanese business sector were evident before APEC’s establishment in November 1989. A notable contributor to this effort was C.F. Koo (辜振甫), a business leader and the Deputy International President of the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC)—a non-governmental organization of business groups in Asia. In April 1989, Koo met with the Australian envoy to the PBEC, Richard Woolcott, to propose Taiwan’s membership in the fledgling APEC. Woolcott pursued the idea, and in May that year, the Australian foreign minister, Gareth Evans, officially expressed support for the simultaneous accession of the “three Chinas” (the Republic of China [Taiwan], the PRC, and Hong Kong). Unsurprisingly, the PRC strongly opposed Taiwan and Hong Kong joining APEC, stressing that APEC members should only be sovereign nations. However, some ASEAN members in APEC were conversely opposed to the accession of the PRC without Taiwan and Hong Kong, fearing that China’s voice would overpower them. The United States preferred to defer the complex accession question, and focused instead on preserving the non-political nature of APEC in its early stages.

Although the three Chinas [were not admitted](#) to the inaugural 1989 meeting of APEC, Taiwanese elites continued to lobby for membership. Because Taipei was part of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council that supported APEC’s formation, it received “association status” at the inaugural

SOM. Koo was formally invited to APEC’s opening banquet, where he lobbied Australian prime minister Richard Hawke and the Singapore APEC representative for Taiwan’s membership. The second APEC SOM in July 1990 concluded with a breakthrough consensus that the simultaneous accession of the three Chinas to APEC should begin as soon as possible.

In a curious twist, Taiwan and the United States [nominated a South Korean diplomat](#), Lee See-young, to mediate accession negotiations between Taipei and Beijing. At the time, South Korea maintained official diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan). Meanwhile, Beijing was eager to enhance diplomatic relations with Seoul under its first democratically-elected president, Roh Tae-woo. After nine rounds of indirect negotiations between the various capitals, Lee secured a settlement whereupon Taiwan would accede to APEC alongside the PRC in 1991. Taiwan agreed to employ the title of “Chinese Taipei,” an arrangement known as the “Olympic model.”

Taiwan’s Use of APEC

After its accession in 1991, Taiwan was slow to capitalize on the opportunities provided by APEC. Alan Yen, Executive Secretary of the APEC Institute of Innovation & Education Development (IIED)—a Taiwanese research institute devoted to expanding Taiwan’s educational initiatives within APEC—relayed to these authors that Taiwan dispatched senior officials to APEC meetings but rarely proposed its own events in the years after the 1991 accession. Though Taipei overlooked opportunities to organize APEC events bringing member economy officials to Taiwan, it nonetheless initiated one of the most lauded projects in APEC history. In 2004, Taipei proposed the [APEC Digital Opportunity Center](#) project, and began dispatching IT professionals to developing economies within APEC to promote digital connectivity. The project was extended for ten years and boosted digital connectivity in economies [without strong IT infrastructures](#), such as Papua New Guinea. In an interview with these authors, Robert Wang, the US State Department senior official for APEC from 2012-2014, described the APEC Digital Opportunity Center as a boon for Taiwan’s diplomatic relations with APEC economies—and a project Taiwan could not have executed outside of the APEC framework.

In the mid-2010s, Taipei began to recognize that APEC events—smaller projects convening delegates from member economies for multi-day discussions—could serve as excellent conduits for the promotion of people-to-people ties between Taiwan and member economies. Alan Yen has described how Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) began dedicating more funding for APEC events in the late 2010s. By the early 2020s, Taiwan was organizing more APEC-affiliated events each year than any other APEC economy (between 20 and 30). These events draw government officials and influential private sector actors from APEC economies to Taiwan. APEC has also afforded Taipei the opportunity to press its case for inclusion in more consequen-

tial frameworks such as the CPTPP. Given that the economic officials dispatched to APEC events are generally the same as those attending CPTPP summits, APEC has offered Taiwanese officials the [chance to directly press](#) their Asia-Pacific counterparts to support Taiwan's accession to the CPTPP.

As Taiwan began actively employing APEC for its internationalization, efforts by the PRC to suppress Taiwan grew. Yen relayed several instances when PRC representatives in APEC sought to stymie Taiwan's participation. In 2019, the PRC intervened to remove event speakers from Taiwan at an APEC event organized by the South Korean government in Seoul. Beijing threatened to use its veto authority under APEC if the event proceeded with Taiwanese speakers. The South Korean organizers caved. Yen revealed another instance where Beijing sought to classify Taiwan under the People's Republic of China in an APEC report on regional employment; Yen was able to overturn this move by dredging up official APEC statistics which listed the economies separately. In the 2024 cycle of APEC, Peru was designated to [host](#) the yearly leaders' summit. Lima maintains close relations with Beijing, and regular communication dropped off between Yen's team and the Peruvian representatives of APEC. The PRC also pushes back on the United States' engagement with Taiwan through APEC: for example, Robert Wang, former US State Department Senior Official for APEC, revealed that PRC officials would frequently protest his APEC-related visits to Taiwan during bilateral meetings.



Image: Taiwan's representative to the 2024 APEC summit, Lin Hsin-yi, holds a press conference during the APEC Summit in Lima, Peru in November 2024. (Image source: [ROC OCAC](#))

How Does Taiwan Navigate PRC Pressure under APEC?

It is tempting to assume that China's membership of APEC renders the grouping a less than ideal conduit for Taiwan's internationalization. After all, China's proximity to Taiwan in the APEC bureaucracy may grant Beijing the power to stymie Taipei's work. However, the funding adjudication processes for APEC blunt this kind of pressure. Under APEC, economies voluntarily donate to [sub funds](#) that support projects. Representatives from APEC economies are then

assigned as [judges](#) in the sub funds to which their home country donates. Taiwan thus directs its project applications towards the sub funds to which it [regularly donates](#). In doing so, Taiwan avoids hostile PRC judges.

According to Yen, Beijing also avoids submitting to sub-funds staffed by Taiwanese judges for the same reason. While the PRC can veto projects, it must use this ability sparingly as it reflects poorly on Beijing to repeatedly oppose beneficial projects endorsed and approved through the consensus-driven APEC structure. Most importantly, Beijing fears that Taipei will exercise its own veto power to hamper the PRC's project proposals. This serves as a rare example where equal procedural power deters Beijing's suppression of Taiwan.

Taiwan is well-versed in Beijing's methods of diplomatic suppression. According to Yen of IIED, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has distributed a "bible" of case studies of Beijing's tactics, which APEC representatives use to counter each new instance of PRC repression.

APEC: Overlooked by Washington

US State Department officials express a [stated objective](#) of promoting Taiwan's internalization through multilateral frameworks based on capacity-building. However, they generally overlook the potential for APEC to fulfill this objective. In recent years, Washington has stood up a new multilateral framework called the [Global Cooperation and Training Framework](#) (GCTF). The organization, authorized by the US Congress, places Taiwan at the heart of a small grouping of like-minded allies and partners. Members meet irregularly in Taiwan and elsewhere and share best practices in governance issues. However, a glance at the [homepage](#) of the GCTF's website indicates an emphasis on many of the same subject areas of APEC.

All five formal GCTF members are already in APEC. Washington must exert its diplomatic muscle to encourage new states to participate, as the organization is viewed as a direct counter to Beijing's suppression of Taiwan. It is unlikely that any of the so-called "swing states" in the Asia-Pacific will join the GCTF, and the authors wonder why Washington seeks to reinvent the wheel regarding technical capacity-building in the Asia-Pacific. The GCTF certainly offers greater leeway to explore topics sensitive to Beijing—such as [disinformation](#) and [civil defense](#) (and referring to Taiwan by its preferred name)—yet Washington's time and money might be better spent maximizing Taiwan's international engagement in a climate where it must embrace unique yet potent arrangements such as APEC.

The budget of APEC is [currently minuscule](#), and though APEC is founded on consensus among its members, Washington should work with regional allies to raise contributions to the grouping and thus grant Taiwan greater resources to internationalize itself through an organization already tailored to withstand PRC pressure.

The main point: APEC is Taiwan's most consequential multi-lateral forum and tailored to withstand PRC coercion. In the past decade, Taiwan has dramatically increased its activity in the grouping and now employs APEC to bring government officials from Asia-Pacific economies to Taiwan. Meanwhile, Taiwan has learned how to blunt PRC pressure in the organization. The United States should prioritize APEC as a conduit for Taiwan's internationalization and raise contributions to its modest budget.

Building a Regional NGO Hub in Taiwan

By: Robert Wang

Robert Wang is a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and a member of the Global Taiwan Institute's advisory board

Over the past decade, the United States and Taiwan have begun working together to improve governance and bolster democracies in Asia. In 2015, they launched the Global Cooperation Training Framework (GCTF) as "a platform to utilize Taiwan's strengths and expertise to address global issues of mutual concern" and provide training programs for officials and experts from countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Since then, the GCTF has held over 80 international workshops across a broad range of subjects, including public health, law enforcement cooperation, women empowerment, e-commerce, energy efficiency, cybersecurity, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and media literacy. Japan (2019), Australia (2021) and Canada (2023) have also joined as full partners of the GCTF.

In 2021, Taiwan was invited by the Biden Administration to join the US-initiated "Summit for Democracy." Under the "Summit Pillar: Defending Against Authoritarianism," Taiwan committed "to foster a more open and enabling environment" and "to act as a regional hub for international civil society." In advancing this effort, Taiwan has facilitated the establishment and operation of regional offices in Taiwan by several international human rights non-governmental organizations (NGO)—including Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders, and Freedom House, as well as US NGOs such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI).

Additionally, in 2023, the Taiwan Alliance in International Development (Taiwan AID) launched an NGO Fellowship Program, jointly funded by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), to provide training for young NGO professionals from South and Southeast Asia to enable regional NGOs to more effectively tackle problems of inequality and human rights in their own countries. During the first week of the program, Taiwan AID—a coalition of more than 30 Taiwan NGOs—held a workshop inviting experts from Taiwan NGOs to speak on subjects related to project management, fundraising, and

advocacy. Following this, each fellow was placed in a host Taiwan NGO according to their own specialization for another three weeks.

In this pilot program, the ten fellows (selected from a list of 172 applicants) came from NGOs that pursue efforts in a range of areas: to include assisting remote villages in building sustainable agricultural systems and educational facilities, providing vocational training for persons with disabilities, menstrual hygiene management training for adolescent girls, and advocacy work for the rights of women and those suffering from HIV/AIDS. In this process, the program also sought to build connections between Taiwan and regional NGOs as well as to help create a support network among NGOs in Asia.



Image: Recipients of grants through the NGO Fellowship Program, jointly funded by the American Institute in Taiwan and Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pose with the flags of their countries in a group photo (September 30, 2024). AIT Deputy Director Jeremy Cornforth and MOFA Vice Minister Remus Li-Kuo Chen (陳立國) are also present in the photo (back row, middle). (Source: Author's photo)

2024 Taiwan NGO Fellowship Program

Upon completion of the 2023 program, Taiwan AID reported that the fellows "expressed a sense of fulfillment and inspiration" from their experience in Taiwan, and "all fellows and host organizations believed that the NGO Fellowship Program should continue in the future." During the workshop, the fellows also had the opportunity to visit the Office of the President, AIT, and the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF), and came away impressed by the close cooperation between the government and civil society organizations (CSO) and the role of CSOs in the democratization process of Taiwan. They expressed surprise that Taiwan NGOs are able to raise funds internally without having to rely on resources from the United Nations and other international organizations. Based on this positive feedback, Taiwan AID was able not only to obtain funding from AIT and MOFA but also from a major Taiwan NPO (Ming Yi Foundation, 明怡基金會) to continue the program.

In 2024, Taiwan AID thus expanded its NGO Fellowship Program beyond South and Southeast Asia to invite applicants

from NGOs in Mongolia, Japan and Korea. In total, Taiwan AID reported that it received 1,372 applications (up from 172 the previous year) and increased the number of selected applicants from 10 to 15 fellows. Moreover, the number of Taiwan host NGOs doubled from 10 to 20, so that most of the fellows were able to be placed in more than one Taiwan NGO during the last three weeks of their training in Taiwan.

With the increase in the number of host NGOs, Taiwan AID was also able to expand significantly the breadth of societal issues covered in its program. In 2024, the Taiwan host NGOs included those that focus on a range of social causes:

- Providing services to people with disabilities, or people suffering from HIV/AIDS or substance abuse;
- Promoting child welfare through services and advocacy;
- Fighting gender-based violence and protecting women's rights;
- Supporting marriage equality and the LGBTQ community;
- Advancing environmental conservation;
- Providing vocational skills to migrant workers in Taiwan;
- Advocating for penal reform and an end to the death penalty.

Many of these Taiwan NGOs have also extended their presence abroad. In 2023, the Garden of Hope Foundation—focused on combatting gender-based violence—organized the “Asian Conference of Women’s Shelters” to train professionals to address new forms of violence through technology to ensure digital safety for women. It was invited in 2024 to join the Asia-Pacific Advisory Committee for the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women. The Foundation for Women’s Rights Promotion and Development has served as a think tank for Taiwan’s participation in APEC women’s economic issues and the international NGO Committee on the Status of Women Forum (NGO CSW). Others have also set up branch offices in the region. One-Forty—an NGO providing vocational education to migrant workers in Taiwan—is currently planning to set up offices in the Philippines and Indonesia to continue to assist returning migrant workers in their own countries.

The feedback from the 2024 fellows have also been very positive. Upon returning to her country in November, for example, one of the fellows engaged in advocacy work supporting indigenous peoples in Thailand published an online post highlighting the value of platforms like Taiwan AID that “support NGO exchanges, broaden perspectives, foster connections, and provide new approaches for complex issues.” She noted that “one significant difference between Taiwan and Thailand (and many developing countries in South and Southeast Asia) that contributes to the success of these initiatives is the political will from the government.” Finally, she stressed the value of diversity among peoples that “nur-

tures empathy, helping me see the world with compassion and curiosity rather than judgement,” and which “enables us to connect meaningfully, support one another’s rights and build societies where every individual feels seen, respected, and valued.”

Looking Ahead: Challenges and Opportunities

Based on the feedback from the past two years, it appears that Taiwan AID has indeed been very successful in its initial effort to build a regional NGO training center in Taiwan and to help create an NGO support network that will contribute to strengthening the foundation of civil societies in the region. If this NGO Fellowship Program is continued, and perhaps even expanded further, in the years ahead, there will eventually be hundreds of NGO activists who will have benefited from their experience in Taiwan and who will form the core of a network connecting and fostering collaboration among NGOs in the region.

Nonetheless, this effort will continue to face many challenges in the years ahead. It is now very clear from the number of applicants in 2024 that there is immense demand for such a program in the region. The most immediate challenge that Taiwan AID faces is the fact that it needs to seek funding each year to be able to continue its work, especially if the program is to be expanded to meet the growing demand. This process requires a great deal of time and effort each year, with a high degree of uncertainty that delays preparation for the program itself. It is thus important that Taiwan AID find sponsors who are willing to fund the program on a multi-year basis to address this issue.

Moreover, Taiwan AID will need to begin thinking about different ways to expand the program to meet the growing demand from the region. It could consider increasing the number of selected fellows perhaps by organizing more than one class each year in order to keep each class smaller and more manageable for itself as well as for the host NGOs. It will also need to do more follow-up work to maintain regular contact with program alumni over the years in order to build and sustain a support network that will continue to generate collaboration among the NGOs in the region. All of this will of course require additional funding to allow Taiwan AID to increase its staff and other resources to manage an expanding program.

Finally, as Taiwan eventually develops into a regional NGO hub in Asia, Taiwan AID might want to consider inviting US and other foreign NGOs to become involved in the program as lecturers or even as host organizations (at their offices in Taiwan) where some fellows could be placed. Doing so would expand the perspective and scope of expertise offered by the program as well as create opportunities for Taiwan to use this regional hub to further collaboration with international NGOs. As Taiwan committed under the “Summit Pillar: Defending Against Authoritarianism,” such a regional hub would help “to foster a more open and enabling environment” and “act as a regional hub for international

civil society.”

The main point: Over the past two years, with the support of AIT and MOFA as well as local NGOs, a Taiwan NGO alliance has successfully initiated a Fellowship Program to provide training for young NGO activists in the region and to create an NGO support network in Asia. It is important that this program be continued and expanded in order to strengthen civil societies and bolster democracies in the region.