

Now is the Time for the United States to Back Somaliland-Taiwan Ties**Moustafa Ahmad and Sacad Muhumed****The Future of Taiwan-Europe Relations: How a New Trump Administration Could Reshape These Ties****Nina Miholjčić Ivković****How Taiwan's Defense Could Benefit from British Military Concepts****Julian McBride****Breaking Gender Barriers in Taiwan Politics****Hope Ngo****The Geopolitical Costs of Dismantling USAID: Implications for Taiwan and China's Influence****Y. Tony Yang****Now is the Time for the United States to Back Somaliland-Taiwan Ties**

By: Moustafa Ahmad and Sacad Muhumed

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In recent months, several [international](#) and [regional](#) media outlets have reported the incoming Trump Administration's impending recognition of Somaliland. Somaliland is a country in the Horn of Africa that operates as a *de facto* sovereign state, but remains unrecognized internationally. Positioned in the strategic Gulf of Aden, it plays a key role in regional trade and security while maintaining both stability and democratic governance. Accordingly, regional analysts and scholars have examined what this could mean for the Horn of Africa region, Middle Eastern powers—and perhaps most importantly of all, for US-China relations. Against the backdrop of major competition between the United States and China, as well as the unpredictability of the new Trump Administration, some experts are [calling](#) on Washington to reconsider its relations with Africa. Although the United States seeks to advance its strategic interests, a future strategy that relates to African states should consider and engage with the legitimate political and economic aspirations of African people. Somaliland is no exception.

Somaliland held a democratic presidential election in November 2024 that resulted in the defeat of the incumbent president, and the election of the country's sixth leader since reclaiming sovereignty from Somalia in 1991. Having successfully concluded a peaceful transfer of power, the timing couldn't be better for Somaliland. Calls to recognize Somaliland are increasingly gaining in Washington. Somaliland's new president, Abdirahman Irro, has [promised](#) to further boost ties with Taiwan and the United States, while also expanding Somaliland's diplomatic engagement. Meanwhile, the US government has expressed a keen interest in Somaliland's strategic location and supports Irro's administration. The US Ambassador to Somalia Richard Riley, at the inauguration of President Irro, [reassured](#)

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[attendees](#) that the United States would closely work with the new administration, adding that “you have many friends in the international community.” However, in supporting this new administration, US engagement should also focus on promoting Somaliland-Taiwan relations.

Evaluating Current Ties

China will no doubt be a priority for the Trump Administration. This may be seen by the nomination of “China hawks” to several key positions in the State Department, the National Security Council, and the Department of Defense. A recent [op-ed by Mitch McConnell](#), a senator from Kentucky and the former Republican senate leader, highlights that the second Trump Administration should consider meeting Chinese competition in a more globalist way: by emphasizing the role of allies, and expanding and maintaining partnerships to pre-position US forces and the capacity for power projection—including securing bases, access, and over-flight rights for these purposes.

In July 2020, Taiwan and Somaliland forged official relations, based on “[common values and interests](#).” For Somaliland, this meant headway toward the country’s decades-old quest for recognition and an opportunity to attract economic and foreign investments. The move has prompted China and Somalia, who have respectively claimed sovereignty over those countries, to [condemn](#) these diplomatic relations as a violation of “sovereignty and territorial integrity.” However, the White House’s National Security Council, and US government officials, diplomats, and lawmakers have supported these relations ever since. Bashir Goth, Somaliland’s Representative to the United States, has even [stated](#) that Somaliland’s relations with Taiwan have improved Somaliland’s standing in Washington. In 2019, the United States Congress and Senate adopted the *Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act*. The Act, which calls upon the US government to protect Taiwan from any coercion from China, encourages support for Taiwan in strengthening its official diplomatic relationships worldwide. According to Goth, Somaliland officials in Washington and Hargeisa have followed that development with great interest and were inspired by the *TAIPEI Act*

Although the Biden Administration’s willingness to engage with Somaliland was limited through the framework of a “One Somalia” policy, conservative lawmakers in the Congress and the Senate have pushed for deepened engagement with Somaliland based on

three major [factors](#): its strategic positioning in the region, its democratic credentials, and its relationship with Taiwan. Republicans’ [criticism](#) has been that the Democrats have wasted billions in Somalia to no avail, and that Trump’s withdrawal of US troops from Somalia reflects that sentiment.

A defining feature of former Somaliland President Bihi’s foreign policy was the renewed emphasis placed on Somaliland’s strategic position. This was evident during his [visit](#) to Washington in 2022, where he met with Senate and House members—and which resulted in members of Congress introducing several bills calling for the Biden Administration to strengthen diplomatic and security relations with Somaliland. The importance of this relationship has not gone unnoticed by Somaliland officials, nor by Taiwanese diplomats in Somaliland. “Taiwan is the most effective and strongest factor Somaliland has to leverage for better relations with the U.S.,” said the Taiwanese Representative to Somaliland. [1] In response, China’s opposition grew stronger, and Chinese officials condemned as a mistake Somaliland’s decision to deal with Taiwan.

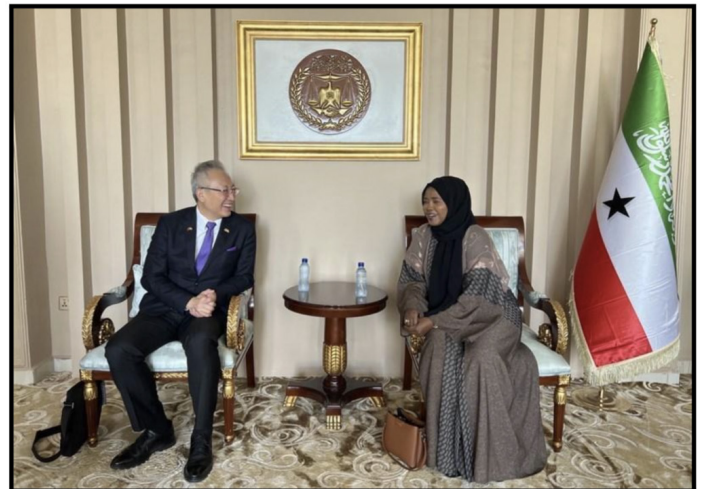


Image: Taiwan Deputy Foreign Minister Francois Wu (left) and Somaliland Deputy Foreign Minister Rhoda Jama Elmi (right) meet in Hargeisa during Wu’s visit to Somaliland for the inauguration of President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi (December 11, 2024). (Image source: [ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Central News Agency](#))

What Should the Second Trump Administration Do?

American diplomats and analysts have argued that Washington should place greater weight on its support for Taiwan and Hargeisa in the Horn of Africa. Both states have continued to hold on to their democratic principles, and have maintained a stable political

environment. “Democracy is our common language, and freedom is our common goal,” said Allen Lou (羅震華), the Taiwan Representative to Somaliland. Further assistance to Somaliland’s democratic institutions, particularly civil society organizations, should be a key element in US support to Somaliland and Taiwan. Lou further added that democracy and freedom constitute the fundamental and common values that connect Taiwan and Somaliland to the international community.

One good start could be establishing an American diplomatic representative office or Institute in Somaliland in Hargeisa, similar to the one it maintains in Taipei. Not only could the United States channel its support and engagement to Somaliland through such an office, but it would also help the United States coordinate better with Somaliland and Taiwan officials in Hargeisa. Furthermore, the United States should encourage Taiwan to provide technical and political support for drilling oil and mineral resources in Somaliland. In 2021, British-owned Genel Energy [partnered](#) with Taiwanese companies to start drilling in Somaliland, but this partnership was subsequently delayed. In testimony to the US Senate Scott Nathan, CEO of the United States International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), [hinted](#) at a willingness to partner with Taiwan in Somaliland to invest in the oil sector. That’s a good start that the Trump Administration can build on—especially since the DFC and Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (TaiwanICDF, 財團法人國際合作發展基金會) have [partnered](#) to enhance private sector investment globally.

Support for economic diversification is another area in which the Trump Administration can support Somaliland and Taiwan. The United States can assist Somaliland in promoting investment in technology, manufacturing, and services. This will build upon the work that Somaliland and Taiwan have been doing regarding technological cooperation. Recently, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the United States have been in talks on how to promote technological cooperation—especially in the field of AI, which the UAE has been keen to develop by partnering with Taiwanese semiconductor chip companies. Although Somaliland lags in this field compared to the UAE, a joint venture with Taiwan could significantly boost Somaliland’s technological advancement.

Utilizing Somaliland’s strategic positioning, not only for security purposes but also for economic development, is crucial. Previously, Somaliland’s Berbera Port received a USD \$440 million investment from the Emirates-owned company DP World, elevating it to one of

the [top-performing](#) ports in East Africa. The upgraded Berbera port facility offers a good opportunity for trilateral engagement between the United States, Somaliland, and Taiwan. Business interests from Taiwan are eager to explore how Berbera can serve as their gateway to the continent. Furthermore, if Taiwan successfully realizes that goal, it could encourage other economic powers—such as [India](#), which has recently maintained good relations with Taiwan—to seek an economic presence in the region.

The Trump Administration’s foreign policy will not be an easy ride. The unpredictability of Washington’s next moves could also stand in the way of further expanding this trilateral relationship. During his campaign, Trump called for Taiwan to pay the United States more for its protection, and accused Taiwan of dominating the semiconductor industry at the expense of the United States. Moreover, increased tensions in the South China Sea, coupled with Ukraine and ongoing crises in the Middle East, might keep Africa off the list of President Trump’s priorities. This is where both Taiwan and Somaliland should lobby the United States to support Taiwan-Somaliland relations.

Somaliland also has to live up to its own commitments. Poor institutions, misplaced policy priorities, and the lack of a comprehensive legal framework have slowed down meaningful engagement with Taiwan. To take advantage of future opportunities, the government in Hargeisa needs to come up with necessary initiatives and policy reforms that can further build upon engagement between Taiwan and Somaliland.

The main point: With Washington’s growing acknowledgment of the strategic importance of both Somaliland and Taiwan, the United States should support enhanced ties between Somaliland and Taiwan—which would benefit both countries’ international engagement, economic development, and diversification.

[1] Authors’ interview with Taiwan Representative to Somaliland Allen Lou.

The Future of Taiwan-Europe Relations: How a New Trump Administration Could Reshape These Ties

By: Nina Miholjčić Ivković

Nina Miholjčić Ivković is a researcher based in Serbia, with a background in political science and international relations.

The question of how a new Trump Administration would affect the European Union's connections with Taiwan hinges on several factors, from the United States' stance on China to Europe's own strategic interests in the region. [1] If we look at Trump's first term and his approach to foreign policy during this time, his administration took a [more confrontational stance toward China](#), which was reflected in its stronger [support for Taiwan](#). This included arms sales, official visits, and a broader endorsement of Taiwan's international presence. However, Europe's approach to Taiwan during Trump's presidency was more cautious, with many European leaders striving to balance their economic and diplomatic relations with China while cautiously supporting Taiwan's democratic system. The European Union's "One China Policy"—which recognizes the government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China—still remains a core tenet, even as it has called for greater space for Taiwan on the international stage.

If a new Trump Administration strengthens US-Taiwan relations, especially given Trump's hardline rhetoric towards China and his "America First" doctrine during his first term, Europe could face a challenging dilemma. It would need to balance support for Taiwan with its economic and diplomatic ties to China, particularly in areas such as trade, technology, and climate change. As the second Trump Administration prepares to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape shaped by the US-China rivalry and the Taiwan issue, Europe is likely to respond cautiously, aiming to safeguard its own interests in the region while managing the growing tension between Washington and Beijing. The extent of Europe's engagement with Taiwan will largely depend on how the geopolitical dynamics unfold, and how both the United States and China position themselves in this high-stakes geopolitical game.

Lessons from the First Trump Term and the Biden Administration

During his first term, Donald Trump pursued a largely [favorable foreign policy toward Taiwan](#). His administration implemented several measures to strengthen bilateral relations, including authorizing substantial arms sales, increasing US Navy patrols in the Taiwan Strait, and dispatching numerous high-ranking officials to engage with Taiwanese leaders. Additionally, shortly after the 2016 election, Trump held a [phone conversation](#) with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), marking the first direct communication between a US president (or president-elect) and a Taiwanese leader since at least 1979. Taiwan also [benefited](#) indirectly from Trump's push for a "trade war" with China, as American companies sought alternatives to Chinese manufacturing.

The first Trump Administration's approach to Taiwan, marked by a more open stance compared to previous administrations, put a greater pressure on the European Union to navigate its relations with both Taiwan and China carefully. During Trump's first term, the European Union navigated a delicate balancing act. While it supported Taiwan in certain areas like international participation (on technical and humanitarian grounds) and engaged with Taiwan on non-political issues, it did so within the context of the EU's own version of "strategic ambiguity," which aimed to avoid provoking China. The European Union's primary concern remained its economic and geopolitical ties to China—and thus, its actions towards Taiwan were measured and designed not to escalate tensions. This nuanced approach allowed the European Union to continue its interactions with Taiwan without directly challenging China's sovereignty claims over the island.

The European Union was more aligned with the United States during the Biden Administration in terms of advocating for Taiwan. However, Europe still maintained a more cautious and diplomatic approach compared to the United States, with a focus on maintaining economic relations with China while supporting Taiwan's interests in a non-confrontational manner. The tone and level of engagement with Taiwan evolved somewhat with changes in US leadership. During Trump's first term, the approach was largely passive; but under Biden, the United States adopted a more active role in supporting Taiwan's democracy and security, while also strongly [condemning](#) China's military provocations against the island.

In 2021, the European Union placed significant emphasis on Taiwan in its [Indo-Pacific strategy](#), recognizing that the use of force in the Taiwan Strait could directly

affect European security and prosperity. Moreover, US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022, which prompted China to conduct large-scale military exercises around the island (*see [here](#) and [here](#)*), played a pivotal role in revitalizing European-Taiwan relations. This development [alerted](#) policymakers in Brussels and across European capitals—prompting them to recognize that the escalating geopolitical tensions between Beijing, Taipei, and Washington could have far-reaching consequences, potentially influencing US-European relations in ways previously unanticipated. However, the European Union remains internally [divided on its stance on Taiwan](#), with certain member states aligning more closely with China, while others stress the importance of supporting Taiwan in its efforts to preserve stability and uphold democratic values. This [inner divergence](#) further complicates the already intricate geopolitical landscape, particularly within the context of the EU-China-Taiwan dynamic, in addition to the influence of US foreign policy.



Image: Then-President Tsai Ing-wen meets with members of the first European Parliament delegation to visit Taiwan (November 4, 2021). The visit was an example of cautious willingness on the part of some European representatives to engage more directly with Taiwan. (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Taiwan-Europe Dynamics in the Second Trump Administration

Trump's unpredictability and unapologetic rhetoric have consistently been a source of frustration for both his critics and allies. As his new term unfolds, the European Union, China, and Taiwan once again find themselves in a complex geopolitical position—one that demands more nuanced strategic planning and a measured response to an increasingly dynamic global landscape. During his first term, Donald Trump said little

about Taiwan; but in the 2024 campaign, he became unexpectedly more vocal and provocative in his statements on Taiwan policy. Trump has publicly voiced his dissatisfaction with Taiwan, asserting that the island has appropriated the United States' "[chip business](#)," and emphasizing that it should bear the financial responsibility for its own [defense](#). Furthermore, when asked if the US military would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, Trump remained notably [ambiguous](#), stating, "If I answer that question, it will put me in a very bad negotiating position." This contrasts significantly with Biden's more clear and direct response. Such [ambiguity](#) is precisely what troubles Europe, which is already grappling with its own internal divisions over the Taiwan issue, as well as security uncertainties stemming from the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

Recent threats by Trump to [impose tariffs](#) on imported chips, pharmaceuticals, and steel in an effort to pressure producers to manufacture them in the United States have caused increased uncertainties and concerns in Taiwan and the broader world. Trump's threat to impose tariffs on Taiwanese semiconductors could insert further complexity into Taiwan-Europe relations by disrupting semiconductor supply chains crucial to European industries. Europe might push back against such tariffs to protect its economic interests, potentially leading to closer trade ties with Taiwan. At the same time, it could create tensions between Europe and the United States, as European nations balance their alliance with the United States against the need for stable access to critical technology. This could also encourage Europe to explore alternatives to both the United States and Taiwan, potentially deepening engagement with China. China, which is working to build its own [semiconductor industry](#), might seek to expand its influence in Europe by offering alternative deals or fostering closer ties through trade agreements, which could weaken the EU-Taiwan connection.

However, it is important to note that Taiwan occupies a [strategically vital position](#), both for regional security and for the defense of critical US interests in the Indo-Pacific. It is also home to the world's largest semiconductor producer, accounting for approximately [90 percent of the globe's most advanced chips](#). A potential Chinese attack or blockade would significantly disrupt semiconductor production, leading to far-reaching economic consequences globally. This is why global and regional powers are closely monitoring the evolving geopolitical dynamics surrounding the island. The United States must also be cautious in altering its poli-

cy toward Taiwan.

Despite Trump's unfavorable rhetoric toward Taiwan, the island's significant geopolitical and geostrategic leverage remains impossible to ignore for the United States. Furthermore, Trump's selections for key administration positions—such as Representative Mike Waltz's nomination for National Security Advisor and Senator Marco Rubio's appointment as Secretary of State, both of whom are staunch China hawks and strong [supporters of Taiwan's defense](#)—suggest that a second Trump term would maintain a firm stance on China. This could further strengthen US-Taiwan relations—or at the very least, sustain the positive trajectory of these relations from his first term and build on the progress made during Biden's administration. Should US-Taiwan relations remain steady, the European Union will likely continue its cautious balancing act, maintaining informal yet supportive relations with Taipei while avoiding direct confrontations with Beijing.

Concluding Remarks

The future of Taiwan-Europe relations under a new Trump Administration is poised to be shaped by a complex interplay of geopolitical factors, including US-China tensions, the European Union's strategic interests, and the evolving role of Taiwan in global security and economic dynamics. While a second Trump term may signal a more confrontational stance towards China, the European Union's position will likely remain cautious, balancing its economic ties with Beijing and its growing support for Taiwan's democratic values. The European Union's approach will continue to be one of geopolitical strategic ambiguity, seeking to safeguard its own interests without exacerbating tensions with China.

However, if Trump's unfavorable rhetoric towards Taiwan translates into official policy, the global semiconductor supply chain—and other critical issues—could come into sharper focus. In such a scenario, Europe might choose to either deepen its engagement with Taiwan or turn to China for enhanced technological relations. Either option would require careful diplomacy, as the European Union navigates the competing pressures from both the United States and China. In any case, the European Union's path forward will demand flexibility and astute decision-making as it responds to the evolving dynamics of US foreign policy and the broader geopolitical landscape.

While the European Union has its own priorities and often pursues policies independent of the United States, the broader geopolitical situation requires

Europe to stay flexible and maintain strong alliances. The European Union considers its close relationship with the United States essential for European security, while China is viewed as both a competitor and a rival. Both nations shape Europe's approach to global diplomacy, including its stance on Taiwan. Ultimately, the European Union is more aligned with the United States than with China, primarily because of shared security interests and values, a dynamic that also shapes its relationship with Taiwan. For this reason, the European Union's stance on Taiwan will likely be influenced by the US approach to the island, especially in situations involving heightened security concerns.

The main point: As Europe considers its approach towards Taiwan in the coming years, it will be influenced by the Trump Administration's approach. If Trump's unfavorable approach toward Taiwan is translated into official US policy, this is likely to push Europe closer to Taiwan or China, and the European Union will have to balance EU-US relations against the need for stable access to critical technology.

[1] "Europe" and the "European Union" are used interchangeably in this article, referring to a unique partnership among 27 European countries, also known as Member States or EU countries.

How Taiwan's Defense Could Benefit from British Military Concepts

By: Julian McBride

Julian McBride is a former US Marine, forensic anthropologist, and independent journalist born in New York.

It is undeniable that Taiwan faces an existential threat from a much larger and militarily superior counterpart across the Strait, the People's Republic of China (PRC). Potentially facing an [offensive by the Chinese military within the next several years](#), Taiwan has been looking for ways to bolster its defense. When considering various methods that Taiwan can use to [defend](#) itself from the authoritarian rule of the PRC, one possibility could be for the Taiwanese military to utilize its small but strong self-defense forces in a lethal doctrine akin to that of the current British military.

Taiwan's Threat Matrix

Over the past several decades, [Taiwan's military has stagnated while the People's Liberation Army \(PLA\) has rapidly grown](#). China, one of the world's top militaries, now has a naval presence and an air force capa-

ble of blocking Taiwan. Beijing also has enough [short and medium-range ballistic missiles](#) to threaten Taipei and the US military in the region. Simultaneously, [China has built man-made islands across Southeast Asia](#), which could also effectively be used as staging points for operations against Taiwan.

Despite [preparing steps for major arms procurements](#) to supplement the country's defense, Taiwan must also consider the changing global landscape. Numerous [large-scale wars and populist movements](#) all threaten allied defense efforts against the looming threat from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨). [Western indecision](#) and turbulence in US politics have left Taipei in a precarious position, as full defense backing by the United States is no longer guaranteed. Nevertheless, potentially using British military doctrine—which emphasizes small-unit, rapid maneuver warfare—can help deter or defend against threats from Beijing.

The British Military Doctrine of Small Unit Precision

Similar to the Republic of China (ROC) Armed Forces, the British military has also [regressed in size and force projection capability](#). Nevertheless, the [British military's high level of mission readiness and professionalism](#) among small unit teams remains vital for both the United Kingdom and the North American Treaty Organization (NATO). The United Kingdom emphasizes several key points regarding its force readiness: maneuver warfare and mission command. Compensating for its lack of sizable land forces, the British military has conducted [tactical research on small-unit dominance in urban warfare settings](#).

The reconstituted 2nd Battalion of the British Army, also known as the Yorkshire Regiment, is [conducting](#) studies on light forces in an urban environment. Additionally, the UK Royal Marines and United States Marine Corps (USMC) are jointly studying the concept of "Next Generation Combat Teams" (NGCT). Adding two [phalanx platoons](#), the ten-member units that make up NGCTs are supplemented by mortars, surface-to-air missiles, artillery support, and various anti-armor weaponry. These NGCTs emphasize thorough and rigorous training. Moreover, NGCT teams are [supplemented by unmanned systems](#), which focus on gathering intelligence, surveillance, targeting, and reconnaissance (commonly known as ISTAR).

The PRC is not only rapidly adapting to advanced warfare but has also constructed the [world's largest naval fleet](#). Monitoring, surveilling, and gathering intelligence on critical targets and chokepoints against

a looming PLA amphibious assault will be a key task for Taipei. Because implementing ISTAR abilities in Taiwan is a top priority for the Taiwanese military, NGCTs would be in line with Taiwan's strategic goals.

Utilizing Small-Unit Leadership

An amphibious landing by the PLA, accompanied by major aerial bombardment, would almost certainly include [decapitation strikes](#) directed against the [ROC armed forces' leadership](#). A countermeasure to such strike plans could be granting greater initiative to lower-echelon units, and enlisted personnel. Giving leeway for decision-making to lower enlisted personnel, such as [non-commissioned officers \(NCOs\)](#), is a critical component of the success of both the British Armed Forces and the US military (particularly the [Marine Corps](#)). The Taiwanese military should better learn to utilize this concept effectively. NCOs are the [backbone of the Marine Corps](#). Corporals and sergeants can [make](#) critical decisions on the battlefield, provide mentorship to platoon-sized elements, and formulate plans as long as the overall objective is completed. Granting freedom for lower-ranking enlisted people to make decisions is a critical way for field commanders to enhance trust and motivate their subordinates.

[Potentially facing](#) the largest amphibious assault in history, lower-ranking enlisted personnel will face fears and self-doubts. To keep officers' spirits up and reassure their subordinates that they will be beside them, it will be important for officers to set the tempo. Restricting officers' freedom also could have disastrous effects—as [seen recently in Syria](#) when the Baathist army rapidly collapsed due to minimal care and motivation on the part of its officers, and a lack of general leadership within the Assad regime.

In the case of a potential PLA amphibious invasion, [Taiwan's punishing terrain and various choke points](#) across the country could work in the ROC military's favor, as NCOs can lead [asymmetrical attacks](#) that fulfill mission objectives. In addition to orders from generals, field officers can also employ command and control. In short, employment of the American and British [NCO doctrine](#) will be instrumental for the island's defense. Suppose, for example, that a decapitation strike on command and control were to take place: in that case, NCOs and senior enlisted and field officers could take the lead in defending Taipei until allied forces arrive.

Applying the British Military Doctrine in Taiwan

[The current number of Taiwan's active-duty military](#) service members is around 169,000 to 180,000 person-

nel. The country has compulsory military conscription, and the All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency (國防部全民防衛動員署) allows the Taiwanese government to mobilize (at least in theory) up to two million reservists. The proposed British doctrine of [NGCT teams](#), which emphasizes urban and asymmetric warfare, could be instrumental to Taipei's defense. Moreover, the United Kingdom's [doctrine on island defense](#)—which builds on prior experiences in World War II and the [Falklands War](#)—emphasizes key terrain, mobilizing air defense and air forces, and maximizing localized military and civilian defense.

The PLA would look to both [employ a naval blockade and quickly force a capitulation](#)—striking key infrastructure, energy grids, and command and control centers across Taiwan. Accordingly, essential points from the British doctrine on island defense that Taiwan can utilize to bolster its defense [include](#) combined arms operations, deterrence through air defense, anti-ship missiles, and hampering the Chinese navy's freedom of movement near the Taiwanese coastline. With faster and more mobile teams, the ROC military can wage an [asymmetrical war](#) against a PLA blockade and invasion.



Image: Soldiers of the Royal Yorkshire Regiment (British Army 2nd Regiment) conducting field training (undated photo). This regiment has played a leading role in the British military's development of the "Next Generation Combat Team" concept. (Image source: [Royal Yorkshire Regiment](#))

The primary focus of Taiwan's military should be to show Beijing that the [risks will outweigh the rewards](#) in any invasion. Based on this, a [counter-landing doctrine](#) should be implemented. Due to Taiwan's proximity to the PRC, an immediate strategy of holding while

waiting for allied support to arrive will be critical. In a [January 2023 War on the Rocks article](#), Marine Corps infantry and regional affairs officer Zach Ota stated that "a joint, multinational counter-landing doctrine provides a foundation for developing and integrating the defense capabilities of key militaries across the Western Pacific."

What Taiwan Could Also Utilize for Defense

In supplementing Taiwan's defense with more advanced Western weapons systems, Taipei will also need a major defense procurement bolster—which is currently already being planned, as Taiwan reportedly has aspirational [plans to purchase](#) an Aegis destroyer, 400 Patriot missiles, and several dozen F-35s. Nevertheless, the F-35 could remain in perpetual backlog as to not inflame tensions between Beijing and Washington. Anticipating one of the largest amphibious and aerial assaults in modern warfare, Taiwan's main priority in defense procurements should be anti-ship missiles, [surface-to-air missiles](#), and long-range rockets to strike key naval bases on the mainland.

Nevertheless, Taipei will be at a major disadvantage—not from its size and strength compared to China, but due to [decades of international isolationism](#). After the loss of international recognition, the PRC has expanded not only diplomatic and trade relations, but also military exercises with other nations. Beijing's officer corps and intelligence apparatus have the luxury of [co-operating in defense and surveillance with other countries](#) such as Russia, which is deeply engaged in a major conventional war of its own.

Meanwhile, Taipei's officers have international contacts primarily with [small numbers of American advisors](#). In order for Taiwanese field commanders to gain partnerships and experience on what to expect in a modern conflict, the officer corps will need greater exposure to military exercises in multiple foreign countries. Nevertheless, due to the diplomatic pressure exerted by the CCP, most countries will not accept such a proposal by Taipei, and much-needed lobbying will be needed by the United States to help the ROC engage in [enhanced defense exercises and partnerships](#).

In the meantime, drone warfare, particularly involving [first-person view \(FPV\)](#) and [fiber optics](#) drones, are at the forefront of casualties in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Taiwan should take [lessons from Ukrainian drone production](#) and follow the designs of America's and Britain's anti-drone countermeasures.

The ROC Armed Forces more than ever must reinvig-

orate their defensive doctrine while simultaneously reconstituting units to meet the challenges posed by China. In an ever-changing environment of radically changing geopolitical landscapes, deterrence matters now more than ever.

The main point: Small unit tactical concepts, which emphasize the role of non-commissioned officers, and island defense doctrine developed by the British military could both be highly beneficial to Taiwan's defense. By emphasizing key terrain, asymmetrical warfare, small-unit leadership, counter-landing operations, and air defense, Taiwan could show China that the costs of an invasion or blockade will far outweigh any reward.

Breaking Gender Barriers in Taiwan Politics

By: Hope Ngo

Hope Ngo has worked for over two decades as a journalist covering regional politics and business for organizations including Bloomberg Television, CNN International, and NBC Asia.

Issues Surrounding the Quota System in Local Taiwan Government

Days before the second session of the 11th Legislative Yuan (立法院) came to a close, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) lawmaker Fan Yun (范雲) drew attention to the role of women in Taiwan politics when she [called upon both women's groups and fellow legislators to enact changes](#) to Taiwan's *Local Government Act* (地方制度法). The request was that the legislature's Internal Administration Committee (內政委員會)—which is tasked with monitoring administration policies of the legislative and executive bodies—propose amendments that would raise the existing male-to-female ratio within municipal elected bodies from 1:4 to 1:3. ([Article 33 of the Act](#) currently calls for a woman representative or councilor for every four seats in special municipalities, counties, cities, and townships, but no clear formula if there are fewer than four seats.)

The *Act*, which was last amended in 1999, was forward-thinking at the time. However, as Fan Yun pointed out, the law didn't guarantee the presence of women in smaller municipal or local councils which hold fewer elected seats, and this has translated into all-male representation in local governments. [Radio Taiwan Inter-](#)

[national reports](#) that as many as 40 constituencies in 135 council districts have no women in office. Because of this, amendments to the *Act* would bring a better gender balance to Taiwan's governing bodies—one that is already reflected among representatives from Taiwan's urban centers.

Kaohsiung City Councillor Cherry Tang (湯詠瑜) has commented that, "The quota system has been instrumental in securing the presence and representation of female voices in politics over time, [and] I think it has led to a significant increase in female representation. For example, [and] according to my understanding, in the central level, Legislative Yuan, women currently make up around 40 percent of the members... I think these figures reflect the positive impact of [the] quota system in paving the way for women to participate actively in [the] decision making process." [1]

That a gender divide exists between male and female politicians here in Taiwan might come as a surprise—even to those who follow Taiwan politics closely. After all, Taiwan did have Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), who served two terms as president from 2016 to 2024. Its electorate has also chosen two women to serve as vice president: Annette Lu Hsiu-lien (呂秀蓮) from 2000-2004, and Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭美琴), elected in 2024. Further, as of January 2024, [47 out of 113 elected members in parliament—or about 41.59 percent—are women](#). Hsiao has since [called for that figure to rise to 50 percent](#).

The gender ratios as seen in Taiwan's so-called "six municipalities" is also commendable. According to the [Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics](#), women vying for seats in council elections held in Taipei, New Taipei City, Taoyuan, Taichung, Tainan and Kaohsiung bagged just under 40 percent of the total number of seats up for grabs in 2022. So, if the story of women in politics could be told through a paint-by-numbers picture, Taiwan would easily outperform many countries around the world—including the United States, and Taiwan's Asian neighbors [Japan and South Korea](#).

Such participation is not without historical precedent. The political stage for Taiwan's aspiring women politicians [was set more than a century ago in 1946](#), when the [Republic of China \(ROC\) Constitution was first promulgated in Nanking](#). The document spelled out the role women were expected to play in the new government: they were granted equal rights under [Article 7](#), and guaranteed a percentage of elected seats at the national and county levels. This endeavor resulted in

201 women achieving election to the ROC's first National Assembly, and 82 to the Legislative Yuan. These numbers were relatively small, given that the National Assembly had more than 3000 seats and the Legislative Yuan had 760—but as pointed out by writer Li-min Hsueh, an associate research fellow at the Chung-Hwa Institution for Economic Research (中華經濟研究院), “It was a remarkable record compared with the achievements of women in Western countries [during] the same period.”

The constitution alone can't be given full credit for the credible participation of women in politics. Subsequent laws passed in modern day Taiwan—including 1999's *Local Government Act* and the implementation of a Taiwan version of the United Nations' *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) in 2007—were ways to ensure that women could continue to participate in the electoral process.

The quota system has its critics, but women politicians say now is not the time to talk about it, particularly since there is already a lack of representation at the city and county levels: some media reports say just [901 out of 3,048 of municipal seats—or about 29.6 percent—are occupied by women](#). Within the foreign service, which has no quotas, the [Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States](#) has pointed out that even with a gender ratio of 53.1 percent male to 46.9 percent female among diplomats, “91 out of 110 overseas missions are headed by male diplomats, showing that the vast majority of the top jobs continue to be dominated by men.”

As stated by JhuCin Rita Jhang (張竹琴), adjunct assistant professor in the Global Health Program at National Taiwan University (國立臺灣大學), “The quota system has been demonstrably effective in increasing women's political participation. For example, [the] legislature's National At-Large and Overseas Compatriots Constituency has a quota requirement of no less than 50 percent of women, which [has] propelled women's representation to reach 41.6 percent. In the Special Municipality Multi-Member District elections, the gender quota stipulates that there has to be at least 1 woman in every 4 seats, [and] women's representation reached a historical high of 39.79 percent. In contrast, cabinet positions without quota requirements show only 23.5 percent female representation—though this is historically high, it remains far below women's proportion of the population.” [2]

Jhang, who unsuccessfully ran for a parliamentary seat

in 2020 as a member of the Green Party (台灣綠黨), added: “Critics often present false dichotomies, suggesting quotas undermine merit-based selection or discriminate against men. However, these arguments ignore both women's capabilities and the need for government to reflect the population it serves. The quota system addresses long-standing structural barriers that have historically limited women's access to political positions.” [3]



Image: Faces of women in Taiwan politics: From left to right, Legislative Yuan members Chang Chia-chun (KMT), Chen Pei-yu (DPP), and Mạc Ngọc Trân (Mai Yu-zhen) (TPP) at a bipartisan press event (May 16, 2024). (Source: [Legislative Yuan / Wikimedia Commons](#))

Cultural Attitudes and Enduring Forms of Informal Discrimination

Even though legislation has paved the way for women to take an active role in the political process, it has not kept women politicians at all levels from experiencing micro-aggressions and outright discrimination. Former President Tsai was relentlessly [trolled by political rivals](#) during her campaign and throughout her two terms for being unmarried and childless.

Former DPP Lawmaker Karen Yu (余宛如), who was in the Legislative Yuan between 2016 and 2020, said that she'd often heard derogatory remarks from older male colleagues and voters while she was in office. Yu said: “when they think that I'm not that easy to persua[de] or easygoing, they usually call me ‘little girl’, and [I was] looked down upon. Even when I was a director in the municipal city government, usually elder people will think that ‘Oh, you are you a secretary, or just a specialist’ instead of ‘Oh, you are [the] director’ [and I could] easily be ignored.” [4]

Even Cynthia Wu (吳欣盈), also a former lawmaker and Taiwan People's Party (民眾黨) vice presidential candidate in the 2024 elections, has struggled to overcome gender stereotypes. "When I announced my vice president candidacy, the funny thing was, [the press] asked me, 'What does your dad think? What [does] your uncle think? And did you talk to them yet?' [...]. And I thought, well, actually, this is the same question you asked me when I became a legislator. 'Did you talk to your grandpa? Did you talk to your uncle? Did you talk to your dad?' Like, you know, how old am I, do I need permission to step out the door? So, it seems perfectly normal to ask those things. So, I think the society definitely has a bias where they cast more doubt on women." [5]

"Discrimination comes in different forms, some subtle and some blatant. The more blatant one would be saying women cannot be a good anything because she's bound to be a mother, and the more subtle one would be to attribute your accomplishments to your appearance, despite [packaging] it as a compliment, undermining women's actual competence and hard work," Jhang said. [6]

To women politicians like Rita Jhang and Cherry Tang, fixing the gender imbalance means more than just tweaking gender ratios. "While policy measures are essential for ensuring women's political participation, they must be complemented by educational initiatives and broader social change. Given men's current dominance in political spheres, their active recognition of gender imbalances and support for women's participation is crucial. This approach benefits not just women but strengthens democratic representation overall," Jhang said. [7]

Tang added: "Policy plays a crucial role in driving change and ensuring equal opportunities in the process of political participation. I think financial support and campaign funding—also the time flexibility and the public exposure to the constituents, as well as proper regulation—are necessary to create an environment where everyone, regardless of gender, can participate in public affairs and political campaigns equitably." [8]

The lack of representation of women at local levels of government may come as a surprise, particularly since it is happening in country that elected Tsai Ing-wen to two terms as president. But while Taiwan recognises the critical role women play in both government and civil society, certain sectors still cannot move beyond their patriarchal roots—and this is a situation that continues to be prevalent across so much of East Asia today. It is up to policymakers across all genders to

continue strengthening and reinforcing political participation for women—so that Taiwan's political reality continues to match the perception that it is a strong global champion for gender equality, both as a society and as a government.

The main point: While Taiwan has been lauded for its high proportion of women in politics, female lawmakers still face discrimination and women are not adequately represented in smaller municipal or local councils that have fewer than four seats. Proposed changes to the *Local Government Act*, which would further help support women's participation, would raise the existing male to female ratio within municipal elected bodies from 1:4 to 1:3.

[1] Interview with author, January 17, 2025.

[2] Interview with author, January 22, 2025.

[3] Interview with author, January 22, 2025.

[4] Interview with author, March 7, 2024.

[5] Interview with author, January 29, 2024.

[6] Interview with author, January 22, 2025.

[7] Interview with author, January 22, 2025.

[8] Interview with author, January 17, 2025.

The Geopolitical Costs of Dismantling USAID: Implications for Taiwan and China's Influence

By: Y. Tony Yang

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The abrupt dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development ([USAID](#)) represents a profound strategic misstep—one with far-reaching consequences not just for global development, but for the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. While much of the conversation around USAID's shutdown has focused on humanitarian concerns, the geopolitical ramifications are just as significant—if not more so.

USAID has long been a crucial component of US foreign policy, advancing not only humanitarian aid but also America's strategic interests worldwide. Its sudden dissolution hands China an opportunity to expand its global influence, particularly in regions where the

United States has maintained an edge through development partnerships. Nowhere is this more consequential than in Taiwan, where USAID has played a quiet but vital role in sustaining Taipei's fragile network of diplomatic allies. By eliminating this tool, Washington is weakening Taiwan's international standing and opening the door for Beijing to further isolate Taipei on the world stage.

USAID as a Strategic Counterweight to China

For decades, USAID has served as a bulwark against China's expanding geopolitical ambitions. While Beijing has poured over USD \$1 trillion into its [Belt and Road Initiative](#) (BRI, formerly known as "One Belt, One Road," 一帶一路), USAID has offered an alternative model of development: one that prioritizes good governance, economic sustainability, and human rights rather than debt dependency and political coercion. This distinction has been particularly important in regions where China's influence is growing—including Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands.

A key difference between USAID and China's BRI is in the nature of their investments. USAID has historically worked through grants and partnerships with local organizations to build long-term capacity. In contrast, China's BRI has primarily focused on large-scale infrastructure projects, many of which have been criticized for their predatory lending practices. Countries such as [Sri Lanka](#) and [Zambia](#) have found themselves trapped in debt due to opaque financing deals with China, leading to situations where Beijing has leveraged this economic dependency for political concessions.

By shutting down USAID, the United States is removing a major counterweight to this influence, effectively ceding the field to China. Analysts have warned that Beijing is seizing this opportunity to expand its soft power in regions where USAID previously provided assistance, with profound implications for Taiwan's international standing.

The Taiwan-USAID Partnership: A Vital but Now Jeopardized Alliance

Taiwan's survival as an independent entity on the global stage has depended not just on military deterrence but also on diplomatic partnerships. With China aggressively pressuring governments to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, Taiwan has relied on alliances built through economic and humanitarian assistance. USAID has been an indispensable partner in this effort.

In 2022, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) [signed](#) a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to expand cooperation on international development. This agreement designated USAID and Taiwan's International Cooperation and Development Fund (TaiwanICDF, 財團法人國際合作發展基金會) as the lead agencies in joint development projects, targeting areas such as humanitarian assistance, economic development, and climate resilience.

One of the most critical programs under this partnership has been USAID's engagement in the Pacific, a region where Taiwan maintains some of its last remaining diplomatic allies. Under the Pacific American Fund, [Taiwan contributed USD \\$600,000](#) to a joint initiative supporting local civil society organizations, helping Pacific Island nations develop climate resilience and economic sustainability. The abrupt end of USAID funding puts these efforts in jeopardy, making it easier for Beijing to offer financial incentives in exchange for diplomatic recognition.

Similarly, USAID and TaiwanICDF have [collaborated](#) on a joint initiative in Paraguay, one of Taiwan's few remaining allies in Latin America. This program focused on strengthening micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), a crucial element in Paraguay's economic development strategy. Without USAID, Paraguay and other Taiwanese allies may be forced to turn to China, which has aggressively sought to lure them away with promises of massive infrastructure investments and access to its market.



Image: NGO representatives from South Africa, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland appear with Liao An-ding, secretary general of Taiwan's Council of Agriculture (center right), and Grace Lih-Fang Lin, deputy director of the Agriculture and Food Agency, at an event promoting Taiwan's food aid programs in Africa (November 17, 2016). (Image source: [ROC Ministry of Agriculture](#))

China's Soft Power Expansion: A Direct Threat to Taiwan

Even before the USAID shutdown, China had been aggressively expanding its influence worldwide through a combination of economic incentives, political coercion, and strategic investments. The Belt and Road Initiative has been a key tool in this strategy, with China investing in high-profile infrastructure projects that serve as both economic assets and symbols of its growing dominance.

One notable example is the [Sinamalé Bridge](#) in the Maldives, a project funded by China under the BRI. This bridge, which connects the capital Malé with its surrounding islands, is emblematic of Beijing's approach: high-visibility projects that create a perception of benevolence while simultaneously indebting the recipient governments. Similar projects have been undertaken in countries such as [Kenya](#), where the Chinese-funded Standard Gauge Railway has raised concerns about debt sustainability, and Pakistan, where the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has given Beijing unprecedented economic and political leverage.

In Latin America, China has increasingly used economic diplomacy to pressure governments to sever ties with Taiwan. In 2018, El Salvador, which had been a long-time Taiwanese ally, abruptly [switched](#) diplomatic recognition to Beijing after China offered billions in infrastructure investments. The Dominican Republic and Panama made similar moves, and Paraguay is now under intense pressure to do the same.

With USAID now absent from the scene, China's ability to expand its influence in these regions will only accelerate. Developing nations that might have previously resisted Beijing's overtures due to US support may now have little choice but to accept China's terms. This not only strengthens China's position, but also weakens Taiwan's ability to sustain its few remaining alliances.

The Erosion of Taiwan's Diplomatic Space

Taiwan's diplomatic isolation has long been a key objective of Beijing's foreign policy. Since 2016, China has successfully persuaded many countries to switch recognition from Taipei to Beijing, [shrinking Taiwan's network of official allies to just 11](#). Many of these shifts have come as a direct result of Beijing's ability to offer economic incentives that Taiwan, lacking the financial resources of China, simply cannot match.

USAID's shutdown accelerates this trend. Countries that have historically benefitted from US development assistance may now be more willing to consider China's

offers, particularly if they are struggling economically. Without USAID as a counterweight, Taiwan's ability to maintain diplomatic relationships will become increasingly difficult.

The situation is especially dire in the Pacific, where the United States, Australia, and Taiwan have worked together to counter Chinese influence. The Solomon Islands, once a strong supporter of Taiwan, [switched](#) recognition to Beijing in 2019 after China promised extensive infrastructure investments. Since then, Beijing has worked aggressively to expand its influence in the region, signing a secret security pact with the Solomon Islands in 2022 that alarmed both Washington and Canberra.

With USAID now dismantled, similar shifts could occur among Taiwan's other allies in the Pacific, including Palau, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands. These nations have been targeted by Beijing's diplomatic overtures—and without sustained US engagement, they may eventually follow the Solomon Islands' path.

A Blow to US Credibility and Influence

Beyond its impact on Taiwan, the USAID shutdown undermines Washington's credibility as a reliable global partner. Countries that have relied on US assistance now face uncertainty about whether they can trust American commitments.

This loss of credibility has broader implications for US foreign policy. Allies and partners who see the United States abruptly withdrawing from development initiatives may question Washington's reliability in other areas, including security commitments. In the Indo-Pacific, where the United States is seeking to build alliances to counter China's military expansion, this erosion of trust could have long-term consequences.

Meanwhile, China is actively exploiting this situation to present itself as a more stable and predictable global leader. By stepping in to fill the void left by USAID, Beijing is not only strengthening its ties with developing nations but also reinforcing the narrative that the United States is an unreliable partner.

Conclusion: A Strategic Blunder That Must Be Reversed

The decision to dismantle USAID is a short-sighted and strategically damaging move that will have long-term consequences for US global influence, Taiwan's diplomatic survival, and China's geopolitical ambitions. By withdrawing this critical tool of soft power, Washington is not only abandoning its allies but also giving Beijing an unparalleled opportunity to expand its reach.

If the United States is serious about countering China's influence and supporting Taiwan, reversing this policy should be a top priority. Restoring USAID's full capacity is not just about maintaining America's moral leadership—it is about preserving the geopolitical balance of power in a world where democracy and authoritarianism are increasingly at odds. At stake is not just Taiwan's future but the stability of the entire Indo-Pacific region.

The main point: The shutdown of USAID is a strategic misstep that weakens Taiwan's international standing while strengthening China's global influence. USAID has played a vital role in supporting Taiwan's diplomatic allies through development aid, countering China's economic coercion. Without it, Beijing is poised to expand its Belt and Road Initiative, luring Taiwan's remaining allies with financial incentives. Taiwan's partnerships, such as joint programs with USAID in Paraguay and the Pacific, are now at risk. The United States' withdrawal diminishes credibility and cedes ground to China, making it imperative to restore USAID's role in sustaining Taiwan's diplomatic space and countering authoritarian expansion.
