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What Is the Path Forward for Taiwan's Solidarity with Ukraine?

By: James Baron

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

Security analysts, policymakers, and human rights advocates flocked to Taipei in late February 2025, as the city played host to two major conferences—as well as a slew of smaller talks, workshops, and documentary screenings. In the space of a week, the [2025 Halifax International Security Forum](#) (HFX Taipei) and [RightsCon 2025](#) took place in Taiwan's capital. The former event featured hundreds of delegates from over 70 countries, and was sponsored by Robert Tsao, founder of United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC, 聯華電子)—Taiwan's second biggest dedicated semiconductor foundry after Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造股份有限公司), and the world's fourth largest pure-play operation.

Given that, less than two weeks after HFX Taipei, TSMC CEO and chair C.C. Wei (魏哲家) [announced](#) at a joint press conference with US President Donald Trump that the company would be investing a further USD \$1 billion in its Arizona facilities, the backing of Taiwan's chip manufacturing magnates for a security-focused forum makes sense. Along with Tsao, Taiwan President William Lai (賴清德) spoke at the opening ceremony for HFX Taipei, emphasizing that Taiwan's technology advantages were [the "backbone" for its security](#).

Also present were Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Lin Chia-lung (林佳龍) and Minister of National Defense Wellington Koo (顧立雄), as was Halifax International Security Forum President Peter Van Praagh, [who noted](#) that the choice of Taipei for this year's event—the first to be held outside North America—was deliberate, given the threats that Taiwan faces: "Taiwan is a vital democracy whose continued freedom and security is important not only to the people of Taiwan but to the security of the entire world."

At RightsCon 2025, an estimated 3,000-plus participants and attendees gathered for more than 550 sessions across 18 different themes, via formats that included ["fireside chats, hands-on workshops, strategic roundtables, private meetings."](#) Echoing Van Praagh's remarks, Alejandro Mayoral Baños, executive director of Access Now, the event's organizer, said that bringing RightsCon to Taiwan was ["a natural step."](#)

Conversations about Ukraine

With the events held just before the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the issue of parallels and lessons learned inevitably loomed large. The controversial [February 28](#)

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Image: Taiwan President William Lai greets Halifax International Security Forum President Peter Van Praagh at the opening of the 2025 Forum in Taipei (February 20, 2025). (Image source: [ROC Presidential Office](#))

[meeting](#) between Trump and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had yet to take place, but—based on the US president's apparent insistence that Kyiv accept his minerals deal [without specific security guarantees](#)—the implication was clear: Taiwan cannot just sit back and take US support for granted. "Before you expect someone to give you a hand, you need to help yourself," said Tsao at the HFX Taipei opening. This, he stressed, would require unity and understanding across society to combat Chinese hybrid threats to Taiwan—in other words, Taiwan needs to cultivate "[whole-of-society resilience](#)," to use the Lai Administration's concept of civil-government integration.

In this regard, Taiwan and Ukraine have a lot to offer each other in terms of shared experiences. This was emphasized in various speeches and sessions at both [HFX Taipei](#) and [RightsCon](#). It was further exemplified at a series of accompanying events organized by think tanks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and local activists designed to bolster solidarity between the two countries and share best practices.

On a chilly Sunday afternoon, sandwiched between the two main conferences, a demonstration took place outside Russia's representative office in Taipei, organized by Taiwan Stands with Ukraine (TSWU), a Taipei-based group of Ukrainian, Taiwanese, and international volunteers. Activists and media gathered at the site opposite the Taipei International Convention Center where RightsCon would take place the following day—also the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion. Addressing the gathering was Ukrainian journalist Nataliya Gumenyuk, a Ukrainian writer and journalist and cofounder of the [Public Interest Journalist Laboratory \(PIJL\)](#), an NGO that brings together reporters, academics, and researchers to foster dialogue on complex social issues.

Gumenyuk noted that walking the streets of Taipei re-

minded her of the freedoms Ukrainians "share and cherish" in their own now beleaguered cities, and highlighted the shared values between Ukraine and Taiwan: "Our way of life, our democracy, our pluralistic society, our incredible people who know themselves who they want to elect, the various views we have in our country, the way we think about the world, who [our] partners and allies are." Thanking Taiwan for its support, Gumenyuk said the message she had received in Taiwan was "how much we have to defend, how much we have to protect," and how "that should empower us." [1]

Also present at the demonstration was Olena Tregub, a Ukrainian civil society leader, who had responded to Trump's characterization of Zelenskyy as a dictator with a [powerful defense of Ukraine's democracy](#) during a plenary session at HFX Taipei. "From the first minute I landed here in Taipei, I saw how close you are to us Ukrainians," said Tregub, executive director of the Kyiv-based [Independent Anti-Corruption Commission \(NAKO\)](#), which tackles graft in areas critical to Ukraine's defence and national security. "You have freedom here; you have liberty here; you have free speech here; and you have a kind heart. You understand that strongmen, dictators, people who have nuclear weapons ... cannot intimidate you into submission, into becoming what they want you to be." [2]

Taiwan's and Ukraine's Shared Problem of Disinformation

Part of Tregub's work has been focused on [combatting disinformation](#)—a key area of concern for government and civil society in both Ukraine and Taiwan in recent years. At a discussion and documentary screening the evening after the TSWU protest, PIJL cofounder Angelina Kariakina highlighted how Ukraine is attempting to instill public trust in reporting of the war. Her talk introduced [The Reckoning Project](#), a multimedia archive of witness testimonies on Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

Based on experiences of international courts dismissing testimonies recorded by journalists "due to discrepancies between legal and journalistic modes of investigation," the project [aims](#) to document alleged war crimes "according to the methodology that makes them applicable for litigation." To achieve this, the project has cooperated with lawyers and war crime investigators with experience of atrocities in Syria, Chechnya, Rwanda, and Bosnia. Emphasizing that their approach was not to "persuade you [of] anything," Kariakina said that giving a voice to the victims and witnesses of these events was part of the justice process. "It's up to you to decide what to believe in and what kind of idea to have about these terrible events," she said. [3]

Kariakina also spoke about how public access to timely and trustworthy information can be problematic in a war. She gave the example of the city of Mariupol in the occupied territory of Donetsk Oblast—which fell to Russian forces in May 2022 after a nearly three-month siege that saw [at least 8,000 civilians killed](#), over 90 percent of the city's buildings

[damaged or destroyed](#), and an estimated 350,000 people forced to leave their homes. Taking advantage of the power cuts that kept the city blacked out for weeks on end, the occupying Russian forces set up cell phone charging points in vans brought into the city's central square.

As the vehicles also contained televisions broadcasting Russian state networks, this was an obvious ploy to expose people to propaganda. “They were saying that Kyiv is already taken, Ukraine does not exist, blah, blah, blah, and of course, it demoralized people,” says Kariakina. “But at the same time, we witnessed a huge growth in messenger news—Telegram is the number one.” While people have become wary that the medium may have been compromised, it remains “the first source” of information for many Ukrainians.

Analysts in Taiwan have previously noted that the more secure Telegram and Signal, which feature the best encryption, enjoy [low market penetration](#) in Taiwan. Meanwhile, China-developed apps such as TikTok and WeChat have more [than five million users each](#) as of 2024. Both apps are heavily monitored by the Chinese authorities, leading Taiwan's security experts to [express concerns](#) over information flow, particularly in the event of an invasion by China's People's Liberation Army. For this reason, [some analysts](#) recommend Taiwan's authorities pay more attention to low-tech communication channels, such as radio. “Even people under occupation in Ukraine could get [radio broadcasts], so it's important to bear in mind that you might have to go back to these practices from many years ago.”



Image: Taiwan Vice-President Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭美琴) (center right), Vice Premier Cheng Li-chun (鄭麗君) (center left), and other attendees at RightsCon 2025, held in Taipei in February. (Image source: [ROC Foreign Ministry](#))

Shared Practices for Democratic Resilience

But perhaps the standout event, in terms of practical value, was a workshop on Taiwan-Ukraine shared best practices for democratic resilience organized by the PIJL and hosted at the [Czech Hub](#) in Taipei. This space for discussion and implementation of joint semi-governmental projects

was co-founded in 2023 by the Czech-Taiwanese Business Chamber and the European Values Center for Security Policy, which in 2022 became the only European think tank with a permanent presence in Taiwan. Offering their experiences were representatives from Taiwanese and Ukrainian CSOs and NGOs, think tanks, civil defense organizations, and independent media. Participants from the Department of International Collaboration under Taiwan's Ministry of Digital Affairs were also involved.

Ukraine's constitutionally [mandated and reasonable](#) suspension of elections during martial law—which was the basis of Trump's “dictator” claim—was discussed, as were [restrictions on](#) and [challenges to](#) reporting, which has sometimes seen Ukrainian journalists at loggerheads with the government. Given Taiwan's own history with suppression of free speech and government propaganda during the 40-year martial law period under the Chinese Nationalist Party's authoritarian rule, such issues have [particular resonance for Taiwanese](#).

In handling its own “Ukrainian moment,” Taiwanese might face a dilemma regarding the roles of civil society and government, said Raymond Sung (宋承恩), vice president of The Prospect Foundation (遠景基金會), a government-affiliated think tank focused on Taiwan's foreign policy. “People have to choose whether we can organize ourselves as citizens in civil societies and how and whether we strengthen our defence forces to protect ourselves or opt for a stronger government state,” said Sung. [4]

Despite myriad positive developments across the week's events, the issue of the Trump Administration's pivot away from support for Ukraine and the dismantling of USAID cast a shadow. Following the Trump-Zelenskyy debacle, which came the day after the best practices workshop, Taiwanese and Ukrainian experts and officials offered their thoughts on what the rift might portend, given Taiwan's traditional alignment with Washington.

While declining to comment directly on the Trump Administration's potential influence on Taiwan's official policy, [Chen Kuang-ting](#) (陳冠廷)—a legislator with the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, as well as the CEO of [Taiwan NextGen Foundation](#), a non-profit that has focused on Taiwan's soft power—called for unity among democracies in support of Ukraine. “We cannot have division among our partners; we cannot undermine these allies and coalitions,” said Chen. “We are for international law; we are for international order; and we are for the idea that a state cannot initiate a war without just cause.” Regarding nongovernmental ties, Chen also expressed concern. “How Washington's policy influences [Taiwan's] NGOs is hard to say,” he says. “But I would say it definitely has implications.” [5]

Makarovych agrees, “we don't hear a very loud statement from Taiwan about Ukraine right now [following the February 28 Trump-Zelenskyy meeting],” she says. Such caution is understandable, “because they need to understand how political changes can influence their security and their part-

nership with the United States.” However, she notes that MOFA has already published a statement on continued support for Ukraine. “I think that this is the most important point in this matter,” she said.

As for CSOs and NGOs, Makarovych fears for smaller initiatives, which provide vital links to communities that larger, international organizations cannot always reach alone. “Without proper funding of smaller NGOs working on information or bigger infrastructure projects, we face a really dangerous situation, not only in Ukraine but worldwide.” [6]

Despite these potential obstacles, participants in the events in Taipei over the course of the week were encouraged, both by the spirit of solidarity between Taiwan and Ukraine and the focus on practical measures for safeguarding democracy against authoritarian aggression. While official policy will inevitably be influenced by developments in Washington, Taipei understands that Ukraine’s fate has implications for Taiwan. As such, it should continue its steadfast support for Kyiv.

The main point: The 2025 Halifax International Security Forum, and RightsCon 2025 international conference, were both held in Taipei in February 2025. In addition to these two international forums, a series of smaller events provided opportunities for participants—particularly those from Ukraine and Taiwan—to discuss their experiences of resisting authoritarian pressure, and to share best practices for building democratic resilience.

[1] Part of a speech delivered at Taiwan Stands With Ukraine event in Taipei, February 23, 2025.

[2] Part of a speech delivered at Taiwan Stands With Ukraine event in Taipei, February 23, 2025.

[3] Part of a discussion introducing the work of the Public Interest Journalism Lab at Daybreak café and event space in Taipei, February 24, 2025.

[4] Part of a discussion at a workshop Ukraine-Taiwan shared best practices for democratic resilience at Czech Hub in Taipei, February 27, 2025.

[5] Online interview conducted March 5, 2025.

[6] Online interview conducted March 5, 2025.

Taiwan and “Peace Through Strength”

By: Eric Chan

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Taiwan President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) has often brought up the concept of “peace through strength” (“和平源於力量”) as a central pillar of his administration, highlighting this in his [inaugural speech](#) of May 20, 2024. This phrase is identical to that used by the Trump Administration. On the surface, this promises a [relatively smooth transition](#) in US-Taiwan relations from the Biden Administration, which [deepened](#) relations with Taipei (albeit [rather cautiously](#)). However, the [events of the last month with respect to Ukraine](#) have given better insight into both President Trump’s worldview and his priorities.

President Lai’s and President Trump’s definition of peace through strength are not the same, and baseline assumptions of Trump’s foreign policy from the first administration need to re-evaluated—including the definition of *peace through strength*. This must be accounted for as Taiwan navigates a far more unpredictable security environment—this time, generated in part by Taiwan’s primary security partner. This article will address the respective definitions of peace through strength as offered by the two governments, and assess their implications for Taiwan.

Talking the Talk

For Lai, peace through strength is not solely a national security concept. It is a concept of communication, primarily to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨). Taiwan and the CCP used to have multiple modes of communication. The first of these was via official state channels between Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (大陸委員會) and the PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO, 國務院台灣事務辦公室). The second major mechanism was the use of party-to-party channels: largely between the Kuomintang (KMT, 中國國民黨) and the CCP’s Taiwan Work Office (中共中央台灣工作辦公室) (which like many CCP institutions was staffed by the same personnel as the state institution). Finally, back-channel communications via intermediaries were employed, such as Taiwanese businessmen residing in the PRC.

Under CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平), the CCP has chosen to view President Lai’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) as a completely illegitimate entity. Since 2016, the CCP [has cut off all three channels of communication](#). Beijing views communication as leverage and a reward; thus, party-to-party communications with the CCP-deemed “legitimate” KMT have continued in an on-and-off fashion, [dependent on both internal-KMT politics as well as the CCP’s views of the usefulness of the KMT](#) as a political influence tool.

Thus, for Lai, “peace through strength” is the sole communicative policy against a CCP determined to use [escalation of gray-zone warfare](#) as a means of demonstrating Xi’s will. At its core, Lai’s messaging is meant to show that: first, that Taiwan will not be coerced into submission, but will strengthen its own defenses accordingly; and second, Taiwan will not

unilaterally change the status quo. (After all, the quote is not “independence through strength.”) Taiwanese responses to gray-zone coercion—despite the [escalating costs](#)—should be seen through this lens of communication.

Finally, Lai’s “peace through strength” is also meant to communicate to the United States that Taiwan will continue to invest in its own defense, in response to [years](#) of American criticism over Taiwan’s relatively low defense spending. However, the utility of this phrase is waning, in regards to both China and the United States.

Walking the Walk

PRC gray-zone coercion against Taiwan has been [well-covered](#), yet their sheer scale and continuous application means that Taiwan’s counter-strategy of [boosting transparency over such malign actions](#) has not been very successful. Moreover, Beijing is increasingly waging a global diplomatic offensive that seeks not just to undermine Taiwan’s sovereignty, but to get other nations to support [unification by “all means”](#).

In the meantime, the PLA continues to develop additional options for forced unification, including options for a “quasi-military” quarantine, a military blockade, and an all-out invasion from a “cold start” (through invasion preparations similar to an exercise). These levers of coercion each demand different responses and capabilities—the costs of which the far larger PLA can absorb, while forcing the far smaller Taiwanese military to prioritize. In recent years, Taiwan’s military has wisely chosen to prioritize improving readiness against the most dangerous scenario, a rapid all-out invasion. Yet this prioritization means that the responses against the other options remain weak—which is an invitation to additional PLA pressure. For “peace through strength” to be credible to Xi, Taiwan’s military and whole-of-society defense efforts have to demonstrably provide effective resistance in all three scenarios.

Renewing the credibility of “peace through strength” now also applies to Taiwanese messaging to the United States, as well. Under the Biden Administration, Taiwan could be confident in expanded American assistance due to its position as a democratic “front-line state,” as well as the Administration’s professed [“lessons learned” from the failures of the Obama Administration](#) in dealing with the PRC. As a result, there was relatively little change from the Taiwan-friendly policies of the first Trump Administration. In many ways, the policy continuity within US national security and diplomatic institutions, and Taiwan’s solid Congressional bipartisan support, hid the [skeptical attitude](#) that President Trump himself has had with Taiwan.

In this current administration, President Trump has essentially “unshackled” himself from the national security institutionalists. Previous Taiwan-friendly advisors such as John Bolton and Mike Pompeo are no longer within the Trump circle. Moreover, with President Trump’s leadership con-

solidation over the Republican Party, he no longer feels the need to consult with party elders or to nominate someone that they would view as a “steady hand.” Instead, he has directly picked out the high-ranking members of the administration himself, starting with the vice president, the secretary of state, and the secretary of defense.

The consequences of this consolidation are now clear. In the first Trump Administration, the national security bureaucracy could, [in conjunction with Congress, quietly shape or influence policy](#). Staffers could even get away with occasional [corrections and delays](#) over what they considered ill-considered or brash orders. Now, the entire bureaucracy is expected to not just rapidly comply with orders, but to [loudly advocate](#) for them. This has immediate and significant implications for Taiwan.

First, Taiwanese leadership should recognize that the Trump Administration’s *peace through strength* policy does not just apply to adversaries. The administration’s actions against Canada, Denmark, Panama—and most revealingly, Ukraine—demonstrate that the administration will readily apply pressure against allies and partners it assesses as weak. Weakness is determined by factors such as unity, defense spending, Trump’s personal feelings about the leadership, and economic strength. Ukrainian President Zelensky made the mistake of thinking that the administration’s *peace through strength* policy meant that the [US would re-double support for Ukraine to demonstrate strength globally](#). Instead, President Trump repeatedly mentioned that [Zelensky “has no cards” and was reliant on American aid for leverage](#) against Russia, indicating that Trump viewed Ukrainian weakness as a liability for the United States. Alternatively, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has played her hand in a far better fashion, [winning grudging respect for her toughness](#)—and thereby establishing a working relationship with President Trump, despite the threats of economic coercion.

Thus, Taiwanese strength and will to fight must be demonstrated in explicit terms for all parties involved. This goes beyond the standard discussion of Taiwanese defense spending as a proportion of GDP (which in any case should be at least equal to that of the US 3.4 percent, even if the [10 percent figure advocated by Elbridge Colby is unrealistic](#)). This also means that Taiwanese military personnel shortfalls [must be treated as a serious crisis](#) as opposed to an endemic problem; that [all-of-society defensive efforts should no longer be a bottom-up effort](#); and that the [phase-out of nuclear power be urgently stopped](#) and reversed.

Second, Taiwan cannot take continued American defense assistance for granted, and such assistance should be treated as “feast or famine.” As Ukraine has found, previous understandings and historical US bipartisan support does not amount to much with the current US administration. This means that Taiwan needs to re-double its efforts, push for defense reforms, and stockpile critical materiel while enjoying the “feast”—while at the same time, quietly drafting

emergency plans for a sustainable defense if there is a cut-off in assistance. This concept draws upon the experience of the Ukraine war: through 2023 and 2024, the Ukrainian military often treated US/Western-provided deep-strike munitions as an inexhaustible resource—even when the US repeatedly told the Ukrainians that, political considerations aside, there were only a limited number available. As a result, Ukraine has now [reportedly run out of US-provided deep-strike munitions](#); worse yet, the use of these munitions was a way for Ukrainian political leadership to [dodge difficult political decisions of their own about mobilization](#), even as military experts warned the Ukrainians that long-range capabilities could not make up for lack of personnel on the front-line.

Taiwan's military cannot afford to make the same mistake. While American assistance is still given, Taiwan must actively seek to leverage that assistance to develop sustainable solutions against *technically difficult* (capability) problems, as opposed to *resource difficult* (capacity) problems. An example of this is the question of where Taiwan's military should focus its efforts: against an all-out invasion or a blockade? It made sense to focus against an all-out invasion first: if Taiwan cannot survive a rapid invasion, there is no point in countering a blockade. Indeed, in the last few years, Taiwan has made significant progress [shoring up its capacities](#) to resist an invasion. Yet of the two (intertwined) scenarios, countering a blockade is more technically difficult: unlike an invasion, where the enemy would be rushing into the teeth of Taiwan's defenses, countering a blockade involves finding, fixing, and finishing a mobile enemy. This is a capability issue that cannot be solved simply by recruiting more soldiers or lengthening the period of training. Thus, while the feast is available, Taiwan should begin prioritizing with her American partners to improve anti-blockade capabilities such as target acquisition and littoral strike—even as Taiwan continues the work of capacity-building against an invasion.

In 2021, I wrote that US-Taiwan security cooperation should be coordinated in a way that was realistic and respectful of the concerns of both sides; that Taiwan [could not be expected to undergo revolutionary military reform](#) absent a major shock. It is gratifying to see that many of the [smaller-bore methods I recommended](#) have indeed been executed, including closer operational planning and the extension of Foreign Military Financing. However, Taiwan has now seen not just one, but two major shocks: the all-out invasion of Ukraine, and the United States withholding support for the Ukrainian partner fighting that war. Taiwan must work harder and smarter than ever to ensure that the US-Taiwan partnership holds—and for *peace through strength* to be taken seriously by all sides.

The main point: President Lai's administration has invoked a posture of "peace through strength," seeking to deter the PRC with the support of like-minded democratic states. However, Taiwan's government needs to recognize the fundamental shift in US attitudes under the second Trump Ad-

ministration, and adopt more vigorous policies to ensure that Taiwan can demonstrate peace through strength by itself.

Countering China's Subsea Cable Sabotage

By: Gahon Chia-Hung Chiang

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China's Gray-Zone Warfare and the Vulnerability of Subsea Cables

China's illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive (ICAD) activities pose a mounting threat to global democracies, with [subsea cable sabotage](#) emerging as a particularly alarming tactic. These fiber-optic cables, which carry over [99 percent](#) of global internet traffic, form the backbone of modern communication networks—underpinning economic transactions, defense coordination, and digital infrastructure. Disruptions to subsea cables can have far-reaching consequences: these incidents can paralyze financial markets, hinder government operations, and limit access to critical intelligence. As Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), has [emphasized](#), securing these cables is a geopolitical imperative, not just a technical challenge. Without robust protective measures for undersea communications infrastructure, democracies risk falling victim to another destructive form of Beijing's strategic interference.

Taiwan as a Testing Ground

The Taiwan Strait has become a key battleground for China's gray zone tactics, where Beijing frequently conducts low-intensity but persistent hostilities to test Taiwan's resilience. Between January and February 2025, Taiwan experienced four incidents of submarine cable disruptions—three domestic and one international.

In early 2025, the *Xingshun 39* (興順39), a Tanzania-flagged vessel controlled by a Chinese entity, deliberately severed subsea cables near Keelung, disrupting Taiwan's external communications. Investigations revealed that this ship had [previously operated under the alias *Shunxing 39*](#) while registered in Cameroon—an intentional ruse to avoid detection by maritime authorities.

Just weeks later, in late February 2025 another incident occurred when the *Hongtai 58* (宏泰58)—a Togolese-registered cargo vessel suspected of having a Chinese crew—severed Taiwan's third subsea cable linking Taiwan and Penghu.

Date	Cable	Reason
January 3, 2025	Trans Pacific Express Cable System	Suspect vessel sabotage: <i>Xingshun 39</i>
January 15, 2025	Taiwan-Matsu No. 3	natural deterioration
January 22, 2025; February 16, 2025 (full outage)	Taiwan-Matsu No. 2	natural deterioration
February 25, 2025	Taiwan-Penghu No. 3	Suspect vessel sabotage: <i>Hongtai 58</i>

Table 1: Incidents of submarine cable disruptions near Taiwan between January and February 2025. (Source: Created by author.)

A closer examination of its voyage history exposed a troubling pattern: the vessel had frequently changed its name and registration, previously operating under the names *Hongtai 168* and *Jinlong 389*, while cycling through maritime registries in Andorra and Tanzania. This systematic identity manipulation suggests a calculated effort to obscure ownership, evade responsibility and establish a flexible “maritime shadow warrior” network.

These were not isolated incidents, but rather part of a troubling persistent pattern. According to Chunghwa Telecom, in 2023 cables connecting Taiwan and the Matsu Islands—Taiwan’s off-shore islands near China—were severed 12 times, resulting in repair costs of NTD \$96.4 million (USD \$2.9 million). [1] While China has consistently denied involvement, the pattern of [repeated cable disruptions](#), which align with its strategy of leveraging civilian assets for military purposes, suggests a concerted effort to degrade Taiwan’s ability to maintain stable digital infrastructure.

The European Front: China’s Disruptions in the Baltic Sea

China’s subsea sabotage tactics extend beyond the Indo-Pacific. In November 2024, two major subsea cables—one connecting Finland and Germany, and another linking Sweden and Lithuania—were damaged within 24 hours of each other. A Chinese bulk carrier, the *Yipeng 3* (伊鵬-3), was later discovered operating suspiciously close to both damaged sites. Joint investigations by Danish, German, and Swedish maritime authorities found physical evidence of tampering, raising concerns that Beijing is employing [similar gray-zone tactics in both Pacific and European waters](#).

The Baltic Sea is a critical communication hub for transatlantic fiber-optic cables, supporting NATO’s defense network, financial transactions, and regional security coordination. By targeting these essential lifelines, China is not merely conducting espionage—it is actively testing Europe’s response mechanisms and exploiting weaknesses in international maritime law. If left unchecked, such actions could erode trust in digital security, weaken NATO’s strategic cohesion, and set a dangerous precedent for future cyber-physical hybrid attacks.

Why China Targets Subsea Cables: Strategic Objectives

China’s sabotage of subsea cables serves multiple strategic purposes. First, it tests the resilience of targeted nations, probing their ability to respond to hybrid threats. Taiwan’s repeated cable disruptions have exposed shortcomings in its emergency response and maritime monitoring systems. While the government has taken steps over the past two years to establish a more structured mechanism for detecting and addressing these incidents, gaps remain in enforcement and coordination. Similarly, NATO’s response to the Baltic Sea incidents has highlighted the broader challenges that democracies face in securing shared maritime infrastructure, where jurisdictional complexities and bureaucratic constraints often delay effective countermeasures.

Second, cutting subsea cables disrupts global information-sharing, financial transactions, and military coordination, which weakens the ability of democratic nations to respond effectively to geopolitical crises. By interfering with digital lifelines, Beijing can amplify political instability and economic uncertainty without firing a single shot.

Third, these acts allow Beijing to pursue its geopolitical goals through gray zone warfare, while denying responsibility under seemingly ambiguous circumstances.

Unlike acts of overt military aggression, covert attacks on subsea infrastructure provide plausible deniability, making it difficult for affected states to justify immediate retaliatory measures.



Image: Taiwan Coast Guard personnel prepare to conduct a boarding of the merchant vessel *Hongtai 58*, suspected of damaging an undersea cable between Taiwan and Penghu (Feb. 25, 2025). (Image source: [ROC Coast Guard / CNA](#))

Taiwan’s Measures to Improve Undersea Cable Security

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, Taiwan has taken decisive steps to enhance subsea cable security through legislative, technological, and enforcement measures. In 2023, the National Communications Commission (NCC, 國家通訊傳播委員會) amended the *Telecommunications Management Act* (電信管理法) to [increase the penalties and fines for damaging communications infrastructure](#). In 2024, the Ministry of Digital Affairs (MODA, 數位發展部) [designated](#) 10 domestic submarine cables—including the Taiwan-Mat-

su subsea cable—as critical infrastructure, ensuring heightened security measures and government oversight.

Technological advancements have also played a key role in Taiwan's strategy. The Submarine Cable Automatic Warning System (SAWS, 自動示警系統), which has been deployed on the Taiwan-Matsu cables and other select international subsea cables, [automatically sends](#) alerts to nearby ships and warns them not to drop anchor.

Following the *Xingshun 39* incident, Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA, 海洋委員會海巡署) [pledged during a session in the Legislative Yuan](#) to implement stricter port state control (PSC) inspections on foreign vessels registered under flag states with a history of false entry declarations. If such vessels enter Taiwan's 24-nautical-mile contiguous zone, approach restricted waters near Taiwan's outlying islands close to China, or enter the SAWS warning zone, authorities can board the ship under the *Coast Guard Act* (海岸巡防法) to verify its Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) and Automatic Identification System (AIS) for potential violations.

Strengthening Subsea Cable Security: Policy Recommendations

Taiwan's recent success in reducing cable disruptions through SAWS and Coast Guard patrols should serve as a model for other vulnerable regions. However, to counter these evolving threats, Taiwan and like-minded democracies must continue investing in proactive defenses, international cooperation, and legal deterrents.

First, Taiwan should expand SAWS installations to additional undersea cables beyond Taiwan-Matsu in order to further increase situational awareness and rapid response capabilities. At the same time, governments must also expedite the establishment of a Coast Guard Aviation Branch (海巡署航空分署), and procure additional unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to improve and enhance surveillance capabilities.

Second, international participation is essential. Taiwan should actively pursue greater collaboration with submarine cable operators and intelligence-sharing networks. In addition to leveraging the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF, 全球合作暨訓練架構), a key step in this effort would be to expedite Chunghwa Telecom's participation in the International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC), which works closely with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) to establish global security standards. Since ICPC membership is not limited to recognized sovereign states, Chunghwa Telecom's involvement would create valuable opportunities to exchange best practices, strengthen international cooperation, and advocate for more robust multilateral protection mechanisms.

Lastly, legal and diplomatic responses must be strengthened. Taiwan should enact legislation to establish "restricted zones" (限制區) that prohibit vessels from dropping anchors in sensitive areas, thereby protecting submarine

cables. Moreover, Taiwan's democratic partners should continue efforts to classify intentional cable sabotage as a violation of international law, and to impose economic and diplomatic penalties on responsible actors. The United Nations and regional security alliances like NATO must take collective action to deter future gray-zone operations targeting global subsea infrastructure.

Conclusion: Defending the Digital Lifelines of Democracy

The protection of subsea cables is a national security priority. Amid repeated harassment of its subsea cables, Taiwan has steadfastly bolstered its security measures, reduced the risk of disruptions and enhanced the resilience of its digital infrastructure. This progress has been driven by coordinated legislative, technological, and enforcement efforts aimed at safeguarding these critical assets. Taiwan's recent infrastructure designations and proactive defense measures reflect a strategic shift toward enhanced maritime security.

However, as China continues to employ covert disruption tactics, democracies cannot afford complacency. To effectively counter these threats, Taiwan and its allies must prioritize resilience, intelligence-sharing, and multilateral coordination. Protecting these vital communication lifelines is essential to upholding a free and open international order. Failure to act will only embolden China to escalate its coercive tactics, further threatening global stability and digital sovereignty.

The main point: To counter Chinese gray zone tactics that target Taiwan's subsea cables, Taipei needs to expand its implementation of the Submarine Cable Automatic Warning System and expedite the establishment of a Coast Guard Aviation Branch. At the same time, considering that similar cable-cutting incidents have occurred in the Baltic Sea, Taiwan should pursue greater collaboration with submarine cable operators and intelligence-sharing networks.

[1] Repairing undersea cables is a complex process, which requires a waiting period for repair ships and may also encounter additional delays due to maritime conditions and weather. This leaves Taiwan's communications infrastructure particularly vulnerable to persistent disruptions.

Patience and Perserverance: Lessons from Lithuania's Engagement with Taiwan

By: Elzė Pinelytė

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In current discussions about China's economic statecraft, Lithuania's experience with Chinese economic coercion frequently [serves](#) as a prime example, providing valuable lessons for countries that may face similar coercive tactics from Beijing or other countries in the future. However, less attention has been devoted to the lessons that can be gained from the evolving relationship between Lithuania and Taiwan that has grown closer during the 2020-2024 tenure of Lithuania's center-right coalition government.

This development can be seen as a broader contribution to the efforts made by the European Union (EU) to de-risk from China, and to prioritize diversification through partnerships—particularly with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region such as South Korea and Japan. This focus is set to intensify with the return of US President Donald Trump, whose protectionist and isolationist policies have already begun to [strain transatlantic relations](#). Consequently, the EU needs to rely more on partnerships beyond the United States in order to address the economic security and competitiveness challenges posed by Beijing.

In this context, Lithuania's engagement with Taiwan provides valuable lessons into forging sustainable and prudent relationships with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region. While these partnerships present cultural and economic opportunities that could alleviate some of the costs associated with reducing dependency on China, they also underscore the necessity of meticulously assessing the inherent challenges involved.

Lithuanian-Taiwanese Relations: The State of Play

When China [launched a coercion campaign](#) in late 2021 following the opening of the Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius, Taiwan stood firm in its support for Lithuania, particularly in agricultural trade and technology. At the outset of the bilateral crisis, Taiwan took measures to mitigate the effects of China's actions by [purchasing](#) goods blocked by Chinese customs and [facilitating](#) permits for Lithuanian agricultural and food products. In 2023, Taiwan and Lithuania solidified their collaboration by [signing](#) a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Agriculture, leading to the establishment of the Taiwan-Lithuania Agricultural Working Group, which convened twice. That same year, Lithuania's Leafood and Taiwan's YesHealth [inaugurated](#) the largest vertical vegetable farm in Europe, reinforcing their commitment to innovation in agriculture.

Taiwan also advanced its technological partnership with Lithuania by [launching](#) a USD \$200 million investment fund

to bolster the semiconductor, laser, and biotechnology sectors. Additionally, a USD \$1 billion credit program was [instituted](#) to foster collaborations between Taiwanese and Lithuanian enterprises. In late 2024, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung (林佳龍) led a delegation to the Drone Industry Business Forum in Vilnius, where two MOUs were [signed](#) to enhance cooperation in the unmanned aerial vehicle sector. These initiatives yielded tangible successes: including a [USD \\$14 million](#) deal between Teltonika IoT Group and Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), and a [USD \\$10 million](#) investment from Taiwan Capital in the Lithuanian fintech powerhouse TransferGo.

Beyond technological cooperation, Lithuania and Taiwan—democracies that have been significantly impacted by foreign disinformation campaigns—are deepening their collaboration in countering information manipulation and enhancing societal resilience. Under the leadership of Lithuania's Vice-Chancellor and head of the National Crisis Management Centre (NKVC), Vilmantas Vitkauskas, a Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) delegation [visited](#) Taiwan to engage in strategic discussions on counter-disinformation practices. The delegation, composed of representatives from government institutions, academia, and NGOs, engaged in high-level exchanges with Taiwanese counterparts, exploring avenues for deeper cooperation in strategic communication and disinformation resilience. Lithuania expressed its readiness to assist Taiwan in developing a comprehensive disinformation counteraction system based on its own successful model. The delegation also encouraged stronger cooperation between Lithuanian NGOs and commercial sector companies with their Taiwanese counterparts, fostering broader engagement beyond government institutions.

As of this writing, Lithuania's newly elected government, led by the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP), has assumed office. Prime Minister Gintautas Paluckas has expressed the necessity of normalizing diplomatic relations with Beijing, which entails restoring ambassadorial-level representation in both capitals. He has also [advocated](#) for retaining the current name of the Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius, arguing that a name change would not necessarily lead to improved relations with China. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Kęstutys Budrys has [emphasized](#) the importance of establishing a fully operational embassy in China while firmly asserting that Beijing should not expect any political concessions from Lithuania. This statement signals Vilnius's intention to maintain established relations with Taiwan as they currently stand.

The government's program includes a [commitment](#) to enhancing economic and cultural ties with Taiwan while promoting unity within the EU and transatlantic partners in shaping relations with China. While these priorities for the next four years are promising, they risk becoming mere aspirations locked in a standstill mode if the lessons from Lithuania's previous engagement with Taiwan are not thor-



Image: Lithuanian Parliament Speaker Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen offering a toast at a press event at the Legislative Yuan during a visit to Taiwan (October 23, 2023). (Image source: [ROC Legislative Yuan](#))

oughly analyzed and integrated into future collaborations—not only with Taiwan, but also with other smaller powers in the Indo-Pacific region.

Lessons from Lithuania's Experience with Taiwan:

1. Informed patience

The strengthened economic ties with Taiwan have created a sense of impatience among Lithuanian citizens, business decision-makers, and certain government officials, many of whom were anticipating immediate results. For example, Asta Skaisgirytė, the chief foreign policy adviser to President Gitanas Nausėda, has [expressed](#) disappointment regarding Taiwanese investments, highlighting that the significant amounts promised by Taiwan have not materialized as rapidly or extensively as Lithuania had anticipated. This sentiment of frustration has been echoed by Lithuanian businesses, as well. Kęstutis Černeckas, a member of the Vilnius Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Crafts, [noted](#) that exports to Taiwan experienced only a marginal increase in 2023: rising by just USD \$1.6 million in the first quarter compared to the same period in 2022.

These criticisms provide some valuable lessons for the European governments. It is crucial to acknowledge that managing economic transitions can take decades to yield tangible benefits—and patience is particularly important when dealing with Asian cultures such as that of Taiwan, where interpersonal relationships are foundational and require time and trust to develop. Paulius Lukauskas, head of the Lithuanian Trade Representative Office in Taipei, has echoed this sentiment, [emphasizing](#) that while he recognizes the immense potential for Lithuania to strengthen ties with Taiwan, the desired outcomes will not emerge overnight. Thus, patience must serve as the guiding principle during this transitional period.

However, patience simultaneously requires concerted political efforts. Governments must skillfully manage public ex-

pectations and avoid making grandiose promises about the potential outcomes of enhanced economic ties. To achieve this, they should accurately assess the strengths and weaknesses inherent in both sides. Lukauskas [noted](#) that Lithuania and Taiwan, as small powers, face limitations—Lithuania has limited export capabilities, while Taiwan represents a relatively modest consumer market. Nevertheless, he pointed out that their strengths lie in technological cooperation, particularly in projects related to semiconductors and lasers.

Therefore, by clearly articulating strengths and weaknesses, governments can provide citizens and other stakeholders with a realistic perspective on the timeline and nature of progress, ultimately cultivating an informed patience. Without it, citizens and stakeholders may place undue pressure on their governments to deliver immediate results, while opposition leaders might exploit perceptions of minimal progress by promising more favorable outcomes.

2. Steadfast perseverance

Although Taiwanese investments have not materialized as quickly or extensively as Lithuania had hoped, and despite facing internal pressures, Lithuania has been committed to safeguarding and enhancing its established ties with Taiwan, including maintaining its representative office and retaining its official name. This commitment underscores the importance of perseverance, particularly amidst Beijing's [increased and concerted efforts](#) to undermine Taiwanese confidence through disinformation campaigns disseminated by Taiwanese media outlets with pro-Beijing affiliations.

A notable illustration of this is the *China Times*, a subsidiary of the *Want Want China Times Group*, which produces content that favors Beijing while suppressing critical coverage. Following the government elections in Lithuania in late 2024, several articles appeared in the *China Times* suggesting that Lithuania was dissatisfied with Taiwan's progress in fulfilling its investment commitments. One of the articles [lamented](#) a perceived gap between the "Taiwan price" and the expected "Taiwan value," insinuating that Lithuania might be the first to distance itself from Taiwan. Additionally, the piece speculated that the return of Trump to office—with a focus on economic pragmatism, combined with the significant economic distress Europe is experiencing due to the unfolding consequences of "Biden's Russia-Ukraine conflict"—could prompt Lithuania to adopt a "price-negate" stance toward Taiwan. Overall, these articles [paint](#) a potentially precarious picture for Taiwan in its international relations, suggesting that the United States and European nations, including Lithuania, may increasingly prioritize economic considerations over values in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Such messaging in media outlets accessible to Taiwanese citizens significantly amplifies Beijing's cognitive warfare against Taiwan. It belittles and discredits Taiwan's partners and fosters a narrative that instills doubt and mistrust—sug-

gesting that Taiwan's partners are unreliable, and merely exploiting Taiwan for their own interests. To counter such disinformation and to showcase perseverance, the European governments could intensify cooperation with Taiwanese state institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the areas of strategic communication and counter-disinformation.

A notable instance of such cooperation is the recent [visit](#) by a Lithuanian delegation specializing in combating foreign information manipulation and interference, which took place earlier this year. This visit aimed to fortify Taiwanese institutions and NGOs, equipping them to better withstand disinformation and assisting in the development of a counter-disinformation framework inspired by the Lithuanian model. Although Taiwan currently lacks a systematic approach to countering disinformation, a process that may take years to establish, visits like that of the Lithuanian delegation exemplify the perseverance necessary to bolster confidence among Taiwanese citizens.

3. Mutual status building

As small powers, Lithuania and Taiwan share a common interest in overcoming the limitations associated with their size and enhancing their influence in international relations (IR). One effective strategy for achieving this is through status-seeking, which [entails](#) actions aimed at maintaining or improving one's standing in the global arena. Viewed in this context, the cooperation between Lithuania and Taiwan serves as a significant source of mutual status enhancement. This often overlooked lesson offers valuable insights for smaller powers seeking to mitigate their size-related weaknesses and amplify their international standing.

While Lithuania excels in laser manufacturing, Taiwan is a leader in semiconductor production. Through technological collaboration in these fields, both countries have been increasing their competitiveness in global markets. This partnership has indeed enabled them to shift their status from being perceived as "small" to being recognized as "smart" players capable of making significant contributions to the international community.

At the same time, Lithuania and Taiwan have defied the conventional stereotype that small powers are helpless pawns in global politics with little agency. Instead, they demonstrate that they are deliberate agents capable of leveraging their power and resources to effect change. Furthermore, their ability to exercise agency challenges China's [dismissive](#) attitude towards small states, countering the notion that they are merely instruments in a larger US plot against China.

Overall, the partnership between Lithuania and Taiwan underscores how smaller powers can collaboratively elevate their standing in the international realm. By embracing their roles as capable agents in their respective areas of expertise, they successfully redefine traditional narratives surrounding small powers and establish themselves as signif-

icant contributors to global affairs.

4. Proactive diversification

The final lesson emphasizes the importance of proactively exploring alternative markets and investment sources beyond Taiwan. Lukauskas [cautioned](#) that Lithuania should not rely exclusively on Taiwan for success in high-tech development—particularly in sectors like semiconductors—advising against the idea of "putting all the eggs in the Taiwanese basket." In a similar context, Joseph Wu (吳釗燮), Taiwan's former foreign minister, [aimed](#) to manage Lithuania's expectations regarding semiconductors by asserting that it is unrealistic for a single European country to serve as the focal point of the entire semiconductor supply chain.

These statements underscore the vastness of supply chains—including the supply chain for semiconductors, which requires contributions from multiple countries and regions to operate effectively. Consequently, European governments should prioritize diversified approaches and collaborate with various nations rather than expecting one source to fulfill all roles within the supply chain.

More Reliance on Partnerships

What should the EU member states make of this package of lessons from Lithuania's engagement with Taiwan? The straightforward answer is more reliance on partnerships, as protectionist measures from the US intensify and China remains entrenched in its export-led industrial model. The increase in tariffs by US President Donald Trump will further redirect a portion of Chinese exports towards the European Union, posing a severe risk to European industries. In light of these challenges, the European Union must take decisive action to protect its economic security and competitiveness.

On the defensive side, the European Union needs to implement and enhance the existing trade defense mechanisms to counter the influx of Chinese imports. On the offensive front, it is essential for the European Union to prioritize the development of robust partnerships beyond its borders (and beyond the United States), particularly with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Lessons from Lithuania's engagement with Taiwan can serve as a lighthouse for the EU member states, offering a framework for establishing sustainable and lasting relationships characterized by informed patience, steadfast perseverance, mutual status building, and proactive diversification.

While individual European governments may opt to adopt or adapt these lessons to align with their specific strategies and preferences, the overarching goal is clear: more reliance on partnerships is crucial for the EU's economic security and competitiveness as it navigates the rising tide of protectionism from the United States and China's structural economic slowdown.

The main point: As the European Union braces itself to protect against rising protectionism from the United States and escalating trade tensions with China, Lithuania's experience

in its engagement with Taiwan provides valuable lessons. Informed patience, steadfast perseverance, mutual status building, and proactive diversification can guide the European Union in establishing strong and sustainable partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, ultimately enhancing its economic security and competitiveness.

Justice or Diplomacy? Taiwan's Death Penalty Dilemma and Its Global Fallout

By: Tang Meng Kit

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January 16, 2025 marked a significant shift in Taiwan's stance on capital punishment. On that day, [Taiwan resumed capital punishment](#) after a five-year moratorium, executing Huang Lin-kai (黃麟凱)—an inmate who had been sentenced to death for the rape and murder of his ex-girlfriend, and the murder of her mother, in New Taipei City in October 2013. Following the exhaustion of legal appeals, his execution by gunshot was approved by the Ministry of Justice.

The execution prompted immediate condemnation from several countries, notably the [European Union, Australia, and Canada](#), all of which are staunchly opposed to the death penalty. The [European Union issued a formal condemnation](#), calling for a global moratorium on executions and eventually the abolition of the death penalty. Australia urged Taiwan to halt executions and adhere to international human rights standards, while Canada echoed similar sentiments, pushing Taiwan to reconsider its position.

These countries, committed to human rights, argue that capital punishment violates human dignity, carries the risk of wrongful executions, and has no proven deterrent effect. While they criticize Taiwan's decision, they must also navigate Taiwan's complex diplomatic position—particularly in the context of its limited formal international recognition due to China's opposition. Thus, while promoting human rights, they balance this with Taiwan's strategic importance, especially in terms of security and economic relations.

Domestic Justifications for Resuming Capital Punishment

Taiwan's resumption of capital punishment was largely influenced by public demand for justice, particularly in high-profile criminal cases. Surveys consistently show strong domestic support for the death penalty, particularly for crimes involving extreme violence. A [May 2024 poll](#) revealed that 80 percent of respondents favored capital punishment for serious offenses, and [over 80 percent opposed its abolition](#).

This [public sentiment](#) played a key role in the government's decision, as it sought to demonstrate a firm commitment to justice and to maintain public confidence in the legal system. Despite a [de facto moratorium](#) on executions in recent years, Taiwan's legal framework still permits capital punishment for severe crimes. Huang's execution followed Taiwan's [established legal process](#), reinforcing the government's stance on law and order.

Taiwan's Soft Power Strategy

Taiwan has crafted a strategic soft power approach, positioning itself as a democratic, high-tech, and humanitarian-focused nation. Despite limited formal international recognition due to China's opposition, Taiwan has leveraged soft power to enhance its global influence and counter diplomatic isolation.

Taiwan promotes itself as a [model democracy](#) in the Indo-Pacific, contrasting its commitment to civil liberties and human rights with China's authoritarianism. It uses cultural initiatives—such as [traditional Chinese art, Taiwanese pop culture, and food](#)—to build international goodwill, especially in regions where its culture is less known. A global leader in technology, Taiwan excels in [semiconductor manufacturing](#), with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造股份有限公司) playing a central role in the global supply chain. Taiwan's technological expertise and innovation boost its economic influence, strengthening ties with the US, Japan, and Europe.

Taiwan has effectively leveraged its [humanitarian aid and disaster relief](#) efforts as a key element of its soft power, despite limited resources. By supporting countries like Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, and Syria, Taiwan has enhanced its international reputation, particularly in Southeast Asia, where it faces diplomatic challenges. This goodwill has facilitated humanitarian diplomacy and cultural exchanges. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan was [praised](#) for its swift response and provided essential medical supplies to various nations, further solidifying its image as a responsible global player. Through these initiatives, Taiwan has reinforced its soft power and commitment to public health and humanitarian values.

The Impact on Taiwan's International Relations and Soft Power Strategy

Taiwan's decision to resume capital punishment with the execution of Huang Lin-kai in January 2025 is likely to have moderate diplomatic consequences, particularly with democratic allies who prioritize human rights. The European Union, Australia, and Canada have condemned the execution, calling for Taiwan to reconsider its stance. Despite this, Taiwan's strategic importance in security and economics means that criticism is unlikely to lead to sanctions or major diplomatic fallout.

However, this move risks damaging Taiwan's image as a democratic, rights-respecting society, undermining its cred-



Image: Demonstrators opposing the execution of Huang Lin-kai protest outside the Taipei Detention Center (January 16, 2025). (Image source: [CNA](#))

ibility in human rights advocacy, especially with international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Given its strategic role, Taiwan's relationships with key partners such as the United States, Japan, and the European Union should remain stable in the short term, but the execution could weaken its soft power and moral authority.

In the Asia-Pacific, reactions will likely be muted—though countries like South Korea and Japan, which have moved away from the death penalty, may exert soft pressure. Over time, Taiwan may face challenges balancing domestic policies with international expectations. While security and economic ties should hold, Taiwan's democratic image may suffer, requiring a renewed focus on human rights to maintain its global standing.

Policy Recommendations

To mitigate the potential damage to its international reputation while addressing domestic concerns, Taiwan should consider the following strategies:

Initiate Public Debate: Taiwan should launch a nationwide dialogue on the death penalty, engaging civil society, academic experts, and international human rights organizations. Such a debate can help educate the public on alternatives to capital punishment and provide a platform for discussing long-term reforms. Transparency in these discussions would demonstrate Taiwan's commitment to democratic processes and human rights.

Enhance Judicial Transparency: Taiwan's government must ensure that its judicial processes are transparent, fair, and adhere to the highest standards of justice. Establishing an independent commission to review death penalty cases can help prevent wrongful executions and reinforce public trust in the legal system. Such measures would address international concerns about human rights violations while maintaining domestic confidence.

Explore Alternatives to Capital Punishment: Investing in

restorative justice programs, rehabilitation initiatives, and life imprisonment without parole as viable alternatives can reduce the reliance on capital punishment. These measures would align Taiwan more closely with international human rights standards, while addressing public demands for justice and deterrence.

Strengthen International Dialogue: Taiwan should proactively engage with international human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and the United Nations Human Rights Council. By participating in global forums and sharing its progress toward reducing reliance on capital punishment, Taiwan can signal its commitment to aligning with democratic norms and human rights values.

Leverage Diplomatic Channels: Taiwan's diplomatic missions should emphasize its unique geopolitical position and its commitment to democratic principles. While acknowledging international concerns about the death penalty, Taiwan can highlight its progress in other human rights areas—such as gender equality, press freedom, and LGBTQ+ rights—to maintain its democratic image.

Expand Soft Power Initiatives: Taiwan can mitigate the potential damage to its soft power by redoubling efforts in humanitarian aid, cultural diplomacy, and technological innovation. For instance, increasing Taiwan's contributions to global disaster relief efforts and promoting its technological expertise in renewable energy can help offset criticism related to human rights.

Establish a Timeline for Reforms: Setting a clear timeline for reevaluating the use of capital punishment could provide a roadmap for progress. This timeline could include steps such as a temporary suspension of executions, comprehensive reviews of sentencing policies, and incremental legal reforms. Such a timeline would demonstrate Taiwan's commitment to aligning its policies with democratic values, while managing domestic expectations.

Conclusion

The reinstatement of capital punishment in Taiwan signifies a significant change in its legal and human rights framework, reflecting domestic support for the death penalty for serious crimes. However, this decision has drawn criticism from international allies advocating for human rights and abolition. As Taiwan seeks to enhance its global standing, it faces the challenge of reconciling domestic policies with its democratic ideals and foreign relations.

Taiwan faces increasing pressure from internal groups and global allies to reconsider the death penalty. As it seeks greater international recognition amid the challenge of Chinese pressure, Taiwan must balance its internal security needs with its commitment to human rights and democracy. This will be difficult as it navigates relationships with democratic partners opposed to capital punishment, and as it seeks to balance domestic demands for justice and deter-

rence.

The main point: Taiwan's resumption of capital punishment has sparked significant international backlash, particularly from the European Union, Australia, and Canada, which oppose the death penalty on human rights grounds. While the execution reflects domestic support for capital punishment in severe cases, it threatens Taiwan's international reputation as a proponent of democratic values and human rights. This decision may complicate diplomatic relations with democratic partners prioritizing human rights, although Taiwan's strategic importance in security and technology may mitigate some effects. As Taiwan seeks greater global recognition, it will face pressure to reconsider its stance on capital punishment, while balancing domestic policies and international expectations.
