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The Lai Administration Vows Renewed Efforts to Combat PRC Espionage And Subversion

By: John Dotson

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The problem of espionage has once again been front-and-center in Taiwan's news headlines during the first quarter of 2025. In January, a startling report from the usually secretive National Security Bureau (NSB, 國家安全局) highlighted the increasing efforts by People's Republic of China (PRC) intelligence and united front organizations to foster subversion throughout Taiwan society, including the efforts to [build a fifth column of saboteurs and assassins](#) by leveraging organized crime groups. This was followed later that month by the [indictment of Kao An-kuo \(高安國\)](#), a retired Republic of China (ROC) Army lieutenant general, and five associated individuals on charges of allegedly forming an "armed organization" for the purpose of conducting sabotage on behalf of PRC forces in the event of an invasion.

Further revelations came in the month of March. On March 12, prosecutors publicly revealed an indictment issued in late 2024, regarding [alleged espionage conducted by two Republic of China Air Force \(ROCAF\) personnel](#). Per the charges, a retired ROCAF major named Shih Chun-cheng (史濬程), who had been recruited by PRC intelligence officers after his retirement, had himself recruited a serving ROCAF airman named Hsu Chan-cheng (許展誠). The classified material allegedly passed by Hsu included data on Taiwan's indigenously-designed *Hsiung Feng-3* (雄風3, HF-3) anti-ship missile, as well as information on the responses made by Taiwan's armed forces to PRC military operations around Taiwan.

An even more startling case saw its conclusion on March 26, when a court in Taipei handed down [prison sentences to four military security personnel](#): Lai Chung-yu (賴重宇), Lee Yu-hsi (黎育璽), and Lin Yu-kai (林裕凱), who served in the 211th Military Police (憲兵) Battalion that guards the presidential office complex; and Chen Wen-hao (陳文豪), who had been assigned to the Ministry of National Defense's Information, Communications and Electronic Force Command (國防部資通電軍指揮部). Allegedly recruited in 2021 and 2022, Lai and Chen recruited the other men, who took pictures of classified documents from their workplaces before passing them on to their contacts for payment.

Espionage conducted by military and other government personnel on behalf of the PRC remains a

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[critical national security problem in Taiwan](#), severely threatening the capacity of Taiwan's government and society to resist the PRC's escalating pressures for annexation. (For a comprehensive overview of this issue, and illustrative case studies, see GTI's recent research report, [Chinese Communist Party Covert Operations Against Taiwan](#).) In the past, this issue has been seemingly downplayed by Taiwan's government (and this author has [himself been critical](#) of the light sentences handed down to spies), perhaps due in part to a reluctance to air dirty laundry in the national security establishment.

However, a platform of policy initiatives unveiled in March indicated an increasing willingness on the part of the government to finally begin acknowledging and engaging more seriously with Taiwan's espionage and united front subversion problem. This platform of proposed measures is summarized in the section below.

President Lai's March 13th Policy Speech

On March 13, following what the president's office described as a "high-level security meeting," Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) made a [major policy speech](#) that promised more rigorous efforts to crack down on PRC-directed espionage and infiltration in Taiwan. In the introduction of the speech, Lai stated that "China has been taking advantage of democratic Taiwan's freedom, diversity, and openness to recruit gangs, the media, commentators, political parties, and even active-duty and retired members of the armed forces and police to carry out actions to divide, destroy, and subvert us from within." Lai further stated that:

"[M]embers of the military, both active-duty and retired, have been bought out by China, sold intelligence, or even organized armed forces with plans to harm their own nation and its citizens. [...] [E]ntertainers [have] willingly followed instructions from Beijing [...] all for the sake of personal career interests. [...] [and] [M]essaging used by Chinese state media to stir up internal opposition in Taiwan [has been] spread by specific channels. There have even been individuals making careers out of helping Chinese state media record united front content, spreading a message that democracy is useless and promoting skepticism toward the United States and the military to sow division and opposition."

Lai concluded that the PRC therefore "satisfie[d] the definition of a 'foreign hostile force'" [境外敵對勢力], per the terms of the [Anti-Infiltration Act \(反滲透法\)](#) passed by the Legislative Yuan in 2019. [1] Lai then laid out a series of proposed measures, in five broad areas: upholding national sovereignty; combatting infiltration and espionage activities in the military; pushing back on efforts to "obscure the national identity" of Taiwan's people; countering united front infiltration into Taiwanese society through [cross-strait exchanges](#); and exposing "[integrated development](#)" [economic incentives](#) used to cultivate Taiwanese businesspeople and



Image: Taiwan President Lai Ching-te making a policy speech on March 13, in which he vowed more stringent measures to combat espionage and united front operations directed at Taiwan by the PRC. (Source: [ROC Presidential Office](#))

young adults.

The 17 Provisions of Lai's Speech

The five areas of concern identified in Lai's speech were in turn subdivided into a series of 17 total action items, as summarized below:

I. Responding to China's Threats to National Sovereignty

(1) The National Security Council (NSC, 國家安全會議) and Ministry of National Defense (國防部, MND) were directed to promote the "Four Pillars of Peace Plan" (和平四大支柱行動方案) action plan to oppose China's efforts to annex Taiwan. [2]

(2) The NSC and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 外交部) were directed to draft an action plan "to convey to the world our national will and broad social consensus in opposing annexation of Taiwan by China and in countering China's efforts to erase Taiwan from the international community and downgrade Taiwan's sovereignty."

II. Responding to Infiltration and Espionage Activities Targeting the Military

(3) The MND was directed to undertake required administration and legislative steps to restore the use of military tribunals to try criminal cases involving active-duty military personnel.

(4) The MND was directed to establish a personnel management system for military judges, military courts, and military prosecutors' offices.

(5) The MND was directed to propose amendments to the *Criminal Code of the Armed Forces* regarding penalties for expressions of loyalty to the enemy [i.e., the PRC], and to revise the regulations for military personnel and their families receiving retirement benefits [a clear threat to cancel the retirement benefits for retired personnel involved with pro-PRC united front and propaganda efforts].

III. Responding to China's Threats that "Obscure the Nation-

al Identity” of Taiwan’s People

(6) The Ministry of the Interior (MOI, 內政部), Mainland Affairs Council (MAC, 大陸委員會), and other relevant agencies were directed to carry out inspections and management of the official documents (passports, ID cards, permanent residence certificates, etc.) that Taiwanese citizens might apply for in the PRC—especially when the applicants are military personnel or civil servants.

(7) More rigorous national security screening was directed for naturalization of persons from China, Hong Kong, and Macau: (A) PRC nationals applying for permanent residency in Taiwan must relinquish their existing household registration and passport, and may not hold dual identity status; and (B) individuals from Hong Kong or Macau applying for residency or permanent residency in Taiwan must meet “additional provisions for long-term residency to meet practical needs” (*not otherwise defined*).

IV. Responding to United Front Infiltration through Cross-Strait Exchanges

(8) Relevant agencies were directed to “raise public awareness [and] implement various registration systems to reduce the potential for accidents and the risks associated with traveling to China.”

(9) Government agencies were directed to implement a “disclosure system for exchanges with China,” to apply to both local and central government officials, and social welfare non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

(10) Relevant agencies were directed to manage the risks associated with individuals from China engaging in such exchanges: (A) such exchanges are to be “limited to normal cross-strait exchanges and official interactions under the principles of parity and dignity,” with “changes in the cross-strait situation [...] taken into consideration;” and (B) PRC individuals associated with united front activity will be barred from entry.

(11) Cross-strait exchanges (religious, cultural, academic, and education exchanges specifically mentioned) are to be evaluated for “political interference from China and the resulting risks to national security.”

(12) The Executive Yuan was asked to explore measures to better promote Taiwan’s cultural industries, in order to reduce avenues for PRC financial pressure on cultural figures.

(13) Better guidance (*not otherwise defined*) was to be given to Taiwanese entertainers working or performing in China, in order to prevent them from making “statements or act[ing] in ways that endanger national dignity.”

(14) Relevant agencies were directed to develop more effective measures to improve cyber security, and to prevent “cognitive warfare” online.

(15) Relevant agencies were directed to undertake compre-

hensive reviews of administrative measures and laws for enforcement purposes.

V. Responding to “Integrated Development” Incentives to Attract Taiwanese Businesspeople and Youth

(16) The NSC and other government agencies were directed to “carry out strategic structural adjustments to the economic and trade relations between Taiwan and China” in regards to cross-strait trade and investment.

(17) The Ministry of Education, MAC, Ministry of Economic Affairs, and other agencies were directed to “comprehensively strengthen young students’ literacy education on China,” and to promote better avenues for employment and entrepreneurship for young adults.

Conclusions

Taiwan’s dual crisis—both espionage and infiltration of the government, and united front infiltration of society—at the hands of compromised pro-PRC actors is a severe one, and one that calls out for serious and sustained government action. In this light, Lai’s announced series of measures is long overdue—particularly in regards to combatting espionage within the military and civil government, a problem that the government has long treated with kid gloves. The increased attention to this problem, and the harsher sentences more recently imposed by Taiwan’s courts in espionage cases, should hopefully provide a more effective deterrent to military personnel and others who might be tempted by the profitability of treachery.

The other side of the equation—united front penetration in Taiwan’s society—is more complex. It is striking that Lai’s speech devoted so much of its attention (the two sections of “Responding to United Front Infiltration through Cross-Strait Exchanges” and “Responding to ‘Integrated Development,’” with 10 out of 17 proposed measures) to issues that fall broadly within the social and cultural domain. This set of issues will be far trickier, and will involve much more complex discussions regarding the rights of free speech and association held by private citizens—as well as the limits of government authority to regulate these things in the name of national security.

Lai’s proposed series of measures (many of them broad and vague) will require further specifics in order to enact them. Many of the provisions—such as the restoration of military tribunals, and measures to restrict PRC-sponsored cross-strait exchanges—are also certain to be challenged by critics on grounds that they threaten individual rights. It is incumbent on the government to take resolute action to combat the very real problem of PRC subversion—just as it is incumbent on those concerned with civil liberties to take the government to task if they feel it has overstepped its due authority. In this sense, the debates sure to play out in Taiwan will be worth watching in every country attempting to balance, on the one hand, the need for security in the face of authoritarian political warfare—and the rights of the

citizen on the other.

The main point: Following a long series of revelations regarding PRC-directed espionage and united front subversion within Taiwan, in mid-March Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te made a major policy speech that unveiled a series of 17 proposed measures to address these problems. While necessary and long overdue, many of the measures are sure to prompt further debate regarding the boundaries between government authority and the rights of individual citizens.

[1] It has been widely reported in international press that Lai referred to the PRC as a “hostile foreign force”—thereby asserting that China and Taiwan are different countries. Lai's chosen language (“境外敵對勢力”—literally “outside the borders hostile force,” or “external hostile force”)—was actually a bit more ambiguous. The 境外 could be taken to mean foreign, but it could also be taken to mean outside the state borders—e.g., the effective state borders of the ROC.

[2] The “Four Pillars of Peace” plan, as articulated by the Lai Administration, are: strengthened national defense; improved economic security; stable and principled cross-strait leadership; and values-based diplomacy. See: William Lai, “My Plan to Preserve Peace in the Taiwan Strait,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 4, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/my-plan-to-preserve-peace-between-china-and-taiwan-candidate-election-race-war-7046ee00>.

Taiwan is Losing - Will It Fight Back?

By: Sasha B. Chhabra

Sasha B. Chhabra is a 2025 GTI Scholar and a visiting research fellow at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research in Taipei. His research focuses on new methods and tools for Taiwan to build support around the world through strategic communication. He is a frequent media commentator and columnist, whose work has been published in newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post, and regularly contributes to Taiwanese media, including the Taipei Times and CommonWealth Magazine.

In February, *The Economist* [published](#) the results of a stunning survey of China's diplomatic aggression against Taiwan around the world. The results should serve as a wakeup call to Taipei: as of 2025, a decisive [majority](#) of internationally recognized sovereign states accept China's fiction that Taiwan is a part of its territory. Of these, 70 fully endorse the Chinese regime's threat of war to seize the island nation, including essentially every country in Africa. A majority of the “Global South” now subscribes to Beijing's views—very much shredding the fiction that the Third World will be

“non-aligned” in this century's superpower competition.

The threat posed by this trend in global alignment could not be more dire. This is not a question of esoteric diplomatic phrasing; rather, it is a question of Taiwan's very legitimacy as a nation. China hopes and fully intends to have the entire world believe it has a legitimate right to conquer Taiwan—such that the world will stand by as China swallows up a democratic, sovereign, and independent neighbor, leaving the Taiwanese to suffer the same fate as the Uyghurs and Tibetans.

In the face of such a serious threat, Taiwanese must ask their leaders why they are not doing more to fight back. Taiwan's foreign ministry will protest that they have preserved a dozen “diplomatic allies” and maintain strong “unofficial” relationships with the West but otherwise cannot compete with China's checkbook diplomacy around the world. It is not that these current efforts are insufficient—rather, it indicates that the current strategy has failed.

Taiwan's Excessive Focus on Diplomatic “Allies”

Why has this strategy failed so spectacularly? Burdened by the inertial energy of the Republic of China (ROC) legacy, Taiwan has relied too much on “diplomatic allies”—the few nations, predominantly microstates, with whom Taiwan maintains official diplomatic relations. Despite the foreign ministry's insistence on calling these nations “allies,” Taiwan has little to show for its exorbitant efforts at courting them. Once or twice a year, the UN envoys of Saint Lucia or Tuvalu will mumble out some phrase about the importance of the Republic of China (Taiwan) being allowed to observe meetings of the World Health Assembly—utterances made before a largely indifferent crowd of ambassadors, who have absolutely no intention of giving such messages the slightest of thoughts. Taiwan's diplomats will then dutifully clip these uninspiring messages for social media and declare victory.

Taiwanese officials also claim that maintaining allies in the Pacific and Caribbean is necessary to facilitate “transit visits” whereby the Taiwanese president stops in the United States *en route*. Despite the indignities Taiwanese presidents are routinely forced to suffer on such transits, if such visits really are important to the bilateral relationship with the United States, a transit is not necessary: a [US law passed in 1994](#) unambiguously states that “whenever the President of Taiwan... shall apply to visit the United States... the official shall be admitted to the United States.”

These diplomatic relations are in practice counterproductive, for these “allies” do not actually recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state. When Guatemala's foreign minister visited Taiwan in 2023, he claimed Guatemala would “[always support Taiwan](#)” because it had supported Taiwan since establishing diplomatic relations in 1933. This is complete nonsense, because in 1933 Taiwan was a province of Japan and the Republic of China neither controlled nor even claimed Taiwan. These anachronisms only serve to further China's

goals by promoting the fiction that Taiwan belongs to China, or that Taiwan's people desire to join it.

Taiwan insists on calling these nations "allies," even as it knows full well that it receives little from them in return. In the event of a crisis, the only Palauans coming to Taiwan's defense would be the [500 Palauans serving in the US military](#), who serve under the US flag (alongside their Marshallese cousins), because their countries are functionally overseas territories of the United States. Taiwan, with its globally interconnected economy, powerful passport, and large armed forces, stands as a more credible sovereign state. It is noble for Taiwan to respect its Polynesian brother nations, but to equate Taiwan's sovereignty with microstates who themselves have little functional independence only serves to debase Taiwan's own legitimate claims to sovereignty.

The altruistic argument to supporting such brotherly nations is also diminished by Taiwan's diplomatic partnership with the authoritarian state of Eswatini. Eswatini's king Mswati III [oppresses his own people](#), [kidnaps young girls for forced "marriages,"](#) and [robs his already impoverished countrymen](#). With "allies" such as this, it is no wonder that the entire continent of Africa has soured on Taiwan, whose presidents have turned a blind eye to Eswatini's internal repression in the name of maintaining official relations. Meanwhile, Taiwan's relations with South Africa have reached a near breaking point as South Africa's government seeks to [downgrade ties](#), whereas 30 years ago Nelson Mandela himself made a groundbreaking visit to Taiwan.



Image: Then-President Tsai Ing-wen and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu speak with Eswatini's king Mswati III during a state dinner in Taipei (June 8, 2018). While Taiwan's government has made strides in recent years to promote Taiwan as a member of the global community of democracies, resources directed towards maintaining official diplomatic relationships with an authoritarian state like Eswatini undercut this position. (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Moving Past the Problem of Derecognition

In the face of such an obviously failed strategy, why has Taiwan's diplomacy been burdened by inaction? Insiders frequently point to Taiwan's lack of an internal consensus on key issues of national identity. This excuse belies the stable ROC (Taiwan) "[non-consensus consensus identity](#)" around which both mainstream political camps have coalesced.

The lack of complete derecognition of the ROC has also prevented the precipitation of a crisis moment to propel Taiwan in a new direction. Instead of prompting a new strategy, Taiwan remains paralyzed by dealing with the perennially looming crisis of derecognition, rather than moving past derecognition into a more positive direction.

There is nothing to be feared from derecognition: instead, Taiwan can only gain from putting to bed the myth of "one China" kept alive by the competition in recognition between the PRC and ROC. This was a propagandistic narrative developed by the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) when it colonized Taiwan without the consent of its people, pushing a global narrative of competition between the ROC and PRC for "one China" that linked Taiwan with China—a neighboring country of which Taiwan has never been a part.

This battle was won decisively by the Chinese Communist Party half a century ago, and maintaining the fiction invented by two Leninist authoritarian parties with imperial designs is no way for Taiwan to win hearts and minds around the world. By shedding itself of these narratives, Taiwan can tell its true story: that of a tiny but valiant island once again resisting the many empires who have tried to control it over the centuries.

Taiwan must pursue a new strategic diplomacy focused on its own national interests and begin to treat its so-called "allies" the same as any country. Taiwanese foreign policy must be "Taiwan First"—focused narrowly on achieving specific gains for Taiwan's survival and the advancement of Taiwanese interests. Critical to effectuating this new foreign policy will be advancing its message globally on modern platforms and media, rather than trying to play byzantine diplomatic games of inside baseball.

Taiwan needs to focus more on understanding the peoples and politics of its true allies: the United States and other democratic countries in East Asia and Europe. Taiwan's reliance on elite capture has left it vulnerable on all fronts. Elite capture served as a stabilizer in a time when China was weak and less aggressive, but it has now backfired spectacularly as new leaders are bought off in the Solomon Islands, elections are won and lost in Latin America, and new populist currents drive American politics.

Taiwan's failed foreign policies have left its politicians panicked by the return of Trump, as they find that their strategy of cultivating bygone Republican political figures from the neoconservative wing such as Mike Pompeo and Nikki Haley has left them with few allies in the second Trump Adminis-

tration. Similarly, heaping hundreds of thousands of dollars on the United Kingdom's shortest ever serving prime minister (and erstwhile pro-China lobbyist) Liz Truss has only resulted in the indignity of Britain preventing former President Tsai Ing-wen from entering the country.

Taiwan has already lost its diplomatic "allies," but now runs the serious risk of alienation from its actual allies. Without a new strategy designed to reach outside the failed thinking of the neocon and liberal internationalist think tank community whose influence is in its modern nadir, Taiwan is slowly conceding the fight before the first shot has been fired.

The main point: Taiwan is rapidly losing support around the globe and must strategically focus its foreign policy efforts on building genuine support among true allies through public campaigns—rather than diplomatic jockeying to maintain official recognition with a dwindling number of small states.

The Metamorphosis of Kizuna: Increasing Japan-Taiwan Cooperation in the Maritime and Space Domains

By: Cathy Fang

Cathy Fang is an editor and podcast host at US-Taiwan Watch. She previously served as a policy analyst at the Project 2049 Institute. Her professional experience includes positions as a legislative assistant at Taiwan's Legislative Yuan, and as a research assistant at the Institute of International Relations, National Cheng-chi University (NCCU).

Kizuna (bond), a concept as delicate as cherry blossoms yet as unyielding as Mount Fuji, beautifully embodies the spirit of Japan-Taiwan relations. This profound connection, forged in adversity and nurtured by mutual support, is woven with threads of shared experiences, empathy, resilience, and unspoken understanding. However, in the evolving landscape of geopolitics, this delicate fabric of *kizuna* now requires the steadfast reinforcement of a *katana* (the curved sword employed by Japanese samurai).

The rules-based international order, especially in the maritime sphere, faces unprecedented threats. Japan and Taiwan, both maritime nations, are [committed to upholding the free and open Indo-Pacific](#). Both understand that security and prosperity hinge on maritime safety and vigilance. Both also recognize that maintaining consistency and stability in the open waters demands proactive engagement from geopolitically-aligned nations. However, despite their aligned goals and shared aspirations, Taiwan lingers on the periphery of Japan's collaborative radar, with joint security initiatives remaining frustratingly sparse.

[Japan's "One-China Policy"](#) walks a diplomatic tightrope, acknowledging Beijing's stance while carefully navigating regional security challenges. This nuanced approach, rooted in the historical Potsdam Proclamation, is the main—but not only—obstacle to strong security collaboration with Taiwan at the governmental level. Tokyo, keenly aware of potential geopolitical ripples, acts with extreme caution. It meticulously avoids any action that might provoke Beijing or give Beijing a reason for retaliation. However, this delicate balancing act often takes precedence over the urgent need for strategic dialogue and cooperation with Taipei on critical security issues. As Beijing increasingly interprets any interaction with Taipei as tacit support for the island's independence, these carefully drawn lines in the sand are rapidly eroding, rendering Japan's cautious stance increasingly precarious and unsustainable.

Increasing Concerns in the Space and Maritime Domains

Japan finds itself confronting a paradox: its greatest security challenge, [as per official documents](#), is the very nation it seeks to appease. China's maritime forces—comprising the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), Chinese Coast Guard (CCG), and maritime militia—[have been probing the waters around the disputed Senkaku Islands with increasing boldness and frequency](#). Simultaneously, in the space domain, China's satellite capabilities are rapidly expanding in both scale and sophistication, reinforcing the importance of space as a critical domain in modern warfare. [The recent space-related amendment to Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty](#), crafted during the July 2024 US-Japan Security Consultative Committee ("2+2"), highlights Japan's growing concerns about space security.

In an era of heightened geopolitical tensions, individual national efforts have become inadequate. The persistent presence of the CCG around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, along with their bold maneuvers in the Taiwan Strait and East China Sea, has severely strained Taipei and Tokyo's resources, leaving their leaders facing complex decisions. Compounding this diplomatic crisis, [Chinese illegal, unreported, and unregulated \(IUU\) fishing fleets increasingly encroach upon coastal waters](#), threatening the livelihoods of seaside communities. This multifaceted challenge not only undermines Japan's sovereignty and economic stability but also jeopardizes Taiwan's international standing and administrative legitimacy. As these issues grow more intense and diverse by the day, the isolated strategies of the past have become outdated. The message is clear: a new approach to cooperation isn't just beneficial—it is pressing.

At the same time, Ukraine's Starlink deployment should serve as a wake-up call for Taiwan and Japan. Taiwan and Japan need to develop similar backup systems using low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites, which have proven valuable in enhancing communication resilience when conventional systems fail. The fragility of undersea cables, often [severed by Chinese vessels](#) even in peacetime, combined with [Japan's reliance on Taiwan-adjacent networks](#), underscores

the urgent need for robust, unassailable communication channels. Communication systems, as the “eyes and ears” of military hardware that enable sensing and targeting, rely on the seamless integration of sea cables, base stations, and geostationary satellites. In the event of war, maintaining communication within and beyond Taiwan is crucial for sustaining operations and mobilization. These critical components must work in perfect synchrony to facilitate efficient information exchange, command dissemination, and the coordination of international aid during times of conflict.

Taiwan Creates “Space” for Cooperation

To position itself optimally for modern warfare, Taiwan has increasingly focused on space technology as a key asset. The Taiwan Space Agency (TASA, 國家太空中心) and the Ministry of Digital Affairs (MODA, 數位發展部) have spearheaded this initiative, supported by industrial groups like the [Taiwan LEO Satellite Industry Alliance](#) (TLEOSIA, 台灣低軌衛星產業聯誼會). A significant milestone was achieved in July when [MODA announced complete low and medium Earth orbit satellite signal coverage for Taiwan and its outlying islands](#). This network ensures that the island’s military can maintain communications, even if ground-based systems fail during a conflict. Concurrently, TASA is guiding Taiwan’s journey towards self-reliance in LEO satellite technology. Taiwan’s “National Space Technology Development Long-term (B5G) Plan,” launched in 2019, marks the third phase of this initiative. With a substantial investment of [NTD \\$25.1 billion \(USD \\$836.8 million\) over a decade, plus an additional NTD \\$40 billion \(USD \\$1.25 billion\)](#), Taiwan aims to accelerate its space program. Key objectives include developing low-orbit communication satellites, establishing a national launch site, and nurturing local talent—an ambitious space endeavor indeed.

Wu Jong-shin (吳宗信), TASA’s visionary director-general, has painted a picture of a future where Taiwan’s prized industries—cutting-edge semiconductor chips and a robust ICT ecosystem—will converge to revolutionize the LEO satellite bus. This key spacecraft component, which includes essential systems from power to navigation, is set to become smaller, sleeker, and much more efficient. [1] While the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) may boast a decade of experience and [a budget](#) that dwarfs that of TASA, Taiwan’s strategic prowess in this burgeoning orbit sector sets the stage for potential collaborations between Taiwan and Japan—a partnership that would leverage both countries’ technological strengths.

A Dual-Function Cooperation Architecture

Leveraging the distinct strengths of both Japan and Taiwan to fortify robust maritime and space domain cooperation is essential. The oft-quoted phrase “[Taiwan’s contingency is Japan’s contingency](#)” underscores Tokyo’s imperative for a versatile cooperative framework. By marrying economic and security interests with situational flexibility, such a “dual-function” paradigm serves multiple purposes: fortifying



Image: An image of Camano Island in the state of Washington (USA), taken by the Japan and Taiwan jointly-developed “ONboard Globe-Looking And Imaging Satellite” (ONGLAISAT), launched in 2024. The ONGLAISAT program is an example of the increasing cooperation by Japan and Taiwan in the space domain. (Image source: [CNA / Taiwan Space Agency](#))

security, bolstering economic stability, and safeguarding citizen welfare. Like a masterfully crafted *katana*, this approach embodies both elegance in peacetime and readiness for potential challenges.

Enhancing Coast Guard and LEO Cooperation Programs

A dynamic cooperative model that is seamlessly adaptable to both peace and conflict, akin to an “on-off switch,” is urgently needed between Japan and Taiwan. Beyond enhancing shared security and prosperity, maritime and aerospace ventures introduce a crucial deterrent factor to Chinese aggression. By establishing a cooperative framework for real-time information sharing, the two states’ shared agility to respond swiftly and effectively to emergencies is fortified, creating a stronger defense against potential security threats. Moreover, these two areas are less provocative than some other areas of security cooperation, while still maintaining the potential to ignite economic growth, drive innovation in maritime and space technologies, attract investments, generate employment, and foster technological advancement.

The confluence of these factors underscores the critical imperative of elevating coast guard and LEO satellite cooperation to the agenda. Two compelling reasons exist to prioritize these initiatives on the cooperative’s agenda. First, while joint efforts in coast guard activities and LEO satellites are in progress, they lack momentum. In coast guard collaboration, [formal steps have been taken: memoranda of understanding \(MOUs\)](#) have been signed and personnel assigned. However, these measures have not yet been implemented as practical on-site training or joint exercises. As of now, cooperation between the frontline personnel in both nations has been limited to humanitarian crisis communica-

tions and paper drills. Still, given that these areas of cooperation already have an established foundation, advancing upon agreed-upon cooperation is more feasible when compared to starting from scratch in other domains.

Second, in light of Tokyo's current position on cooperation with Taipei—and Tokyo's reluctance to do anything that might provoke Beijing—fortifying partnerships with Taiwan in less sensitive, yet dual-purpose domains is a viable strategy. Collaboration on coast guard operations and low earth orbit (LEO) satellites aligns strategically, with both countries sharing an interest in developing [Maritime Domain Awareness \(MDA\) and Space Domain Awareness \(SDA\)](#). Therefore, these identified areas not only enhance mutual defense capabilities, but also contribute to humanitarian efforts and drive technological advancements for both nations.

Bring Kizuna into Reality

In its latest [National Security Strategy](#), Japan paints a stark picture: “We live in the world of a historical inflection point and in the face of the most severe and complex security environment since the end of WWII.” This clarion call demands not just acknowledgement, but a symphony of action. Tokyo and Taipei must weave a tapestry of cooperation in times of peace, lest they be forced to hastily stitch together alliances in the crucible of crisis. The time has come to exchange whispers of prevention, rather than shouts of preparation.

The main point: Despite aligned security goals between Taiwan and Japan, Tokyo's reluctance to take actions that might provoke Beijing limits potential cooperation. Because joint efforts on coast guard activities and LEO satellite development are areas in which Taiwan and Japan already have signed MOUs—and because both serve the dual purpose of contributing to humanitarian efforts and enhancing technological advancements—this could be a potentially less sensitive way to cooperate and should be prioritized by Taiwan and Japan.

[1] Author's interview with TASA's director-general in July 2024.

Taiwan's Soft Power: Winning the World Through Students

By: Mitchell Gallagher

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“What is soft power? It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies.”

— Joseph S. Nye Jr., [Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics](#)

Soft power is not built in government offices or shaped by press releases. It grows in the real world, in the experiences people have and the stories they share. The most influential countries do not force their way into global consciousness—they make others want to be part of their story. The United States did not force-feed the world Hollywood or the Ivy League—instead, people bought into those dreams on their own. France did not need a state campaign to convince people that its food, fashion, and art were worth admiration. South Korea did not make K-pop a global sensation through political strategy; instead, it exploded because people genuinely loved it. The key is making people want to be part of the story.

Taiwan may be locked out of most diplomatic circles, but it has all the tools necessary to define its own narrative: a working democracy, a cutting-edge economy, and a cultural identity blending tradition with modern creativity. Such ingredients can attract the world's attention on their own terms. Yet, one of Taiwan's strongest but most underutilized soft power assets is its international student body, thousands of students who come to Taiwan each year and leave with stories that shape its global image. They are all living proof of Taiwan's openness, innovation, and global reach. Given the right platform, they could be Taiwan's most valuable voices.

Every year, [130,000 students](#) choose Taiwan as their destination—not because they have to, but because they want to. Some come for a world-class education and to avoid a lifetime of debt. Others see Taiwan as a launchpad for their careers, a place where innovation flourishes and opportunities are growing. But for many, Taiwan offers something even more rare in the region: a society where ideas are debated freely, academic inquiry is not restricted, and a person's future is not dictated by the state's control.

For students from countries where political censorship is the norm, where the press is muzzled, or where questioning authority is a risk, Taiwan can feel like stepping into another world. They see democracy in action as a lived reality, with open debate, free speech, and pluralism holding truth to power. And when students leave Taiwan, they take their experiences, changed perceptions, and their stories with them. They go back home carrying a perception of Taiwan not defined by headlines or government accounts—but by what they saw with their own eyes.

But Taiwan is not yet making the most of this. If properly cultivated, the international student body can be a powerful organic soft power network Taiwan has at its disposal—one to counter misinformation, mold perceptions, and intro-



Image: International students at National Taiwan University (undated). (Image source: [National Taiwan University](#))

duce Taiwan to parts of the world that know little about it.

Taiwan as an Alternative to China's Heavy-Handedness

China has spent billions trying to improve its image: [funding Confucius Institutes](#), [expanding state-controlled media](#), and [bankrolling infrastructure projects](#) to win over foreign governments. Yet despite these efforts, Beijing's reputation has not shifted as expected. Influence through economic pressure, political deals, and scripted messaging only works to a point. Loyalty bought or pressured is not loyalty at all—it is obligation, and people recognize that.

Instead of letting culture and ideas speak for themselves, China pushes hard to manipulate narratives. But soft power grows naturally when people are drawn to a country's values, lifestyle, or achievements. The more China censors criticism and demands deference, the more it distances itself from the audiences it wants to reach. By contrast, Taiwan offers an alternative—where openness, honest exchange, and real human experiences foster connections in a way no amount of money or state direction could.

Students are choosing Taiwan because they are seeking what Beijing cannot offer. They want an education where politics does not dictate curriculums, a place where they can speak freely, and an environment where their future is not shaped by government messaging. Taiwan's universities give them that space. [As China's academic institutions are increasingly influenced by state ideology](#), Taiwan encourages students to think for themselves, question ideas, and engage in debates that would be off-limits elsewhere. For many, this is the first time they have been in a system where knowledge is not filtered or dictated.

That exposure leaves a lasting impression. When students return home, they take their degrees with them—but most importantly, their experiences as well. They talk about what they saw, how they were treated, and what life in Taiwan was genuinely like. Personal stories, shared in conversations, on social media, and in professional cir-

cles, affect perceptions in a way no government announcement ever could.

A Democracy That Works

Taiwan may be a young democracy, but it is [one of the strongest and most functional in the world](#).

- [The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index ranks Taiwan 10th globally](#), above the United States, Japan, and South Korea.
- [Taiwan is first in Asia for press freedom](#), a distinction that carries weight in a region where independent journalism is increasingly under threat.
- Taiwan has a stable and competitive electoral system, where leadership changes hands through elections, not force.

For many overseas students, especially those from countries with limited democracy, Taiwan is a real-world example of what an accountable, open, and participatory government looks like. They see [protests that are not crushed](#), [journalists who can challenge authority](#), and leaders accountable to the public.

Beyond governance, Taiwan excels in technology, innovation, and global industries, [producing over 90 percent of the world's advanced semiconductors](#), an achievement that ensures its place in global supply chains. It is making [massive strides in renewable energy](#)—notably offshore wind—thereby positioning itself as a leader in sustainable development. And its [digital democracy initiatives, such as participatory platforms like vTaiwan](#), allow for public engagement in policy decisions—something fascinating for students from countries where government transparency is non-existent.

Taiwan's success is a compelling story, one that deserves a wider audience. And what is the best way to spread that story? Let those who have lived it tell it.

Why International Students Choose Taiwan

Studying abroad is a leap of faith. Students leave their families, their support systems, and their familiar environments in search of something better. When making that decision, they weigh multiple factors: including affordability, safety, quality of education, and cultural experience. Taiwan offers all of them.

- [Tuition is affordable](#), significantly lower than in the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia.
- [The cost of living is reasonable](#), with inexpensive housing, public transport, and healthcare.
- [Taiwan is one of the safest places in the world](#), a major draw for students and their families.

- It is a hub for travel, allowing students to explore other parts of Asia during their studies.

Taiwan is welcoming. International students integrate into society, participate in festivals, and engage freely with local communities. Unlike in some countries, they are not monitored or treated with suspicion. That environment matters, and it shapes how students view Taiwan long after they leave.

What Taiwan's Universities Can Do

For Taiwan's universities, embracing soft power is about national reputation as well as building long-term global networks. But to work, universities need to take active steps to support and amplify student voices. The following steps could help:

- Creating mentorship programs that pair overseas students with domestic peers, helping them integrate more easily into Taiwan society.
- Developing digital storytelling workshops where students learn to document and share their experiences through blogs, videos, and social media.
- Hosting alumni networking events to keep former students connected to Taiwan, both socially and professionally.
- Encouraging cross-border collaborations between Taiwanese universities and international institutions.

Recent initiatives—for instance, the [US-Taiwan Education Initiative](#) and new partnerships with institutions like Arizona State University, Middlebury College, and the University of Washington—demonstrate how these collaborations are already gaining momentum. These examples ranging from Mandarin centers across the US to joint programs on semi-conductors, highlight what can be built upon and scaled up further.

Incentivized measures will give students the means to better share experiences in an authentic, unfiltered way.

The Power of Shared Experiences

Soft power grows through real interactions and lived experiences. Taiwan's international students are natural ambassadors, carrying Taiwan's story into parts of the world where its name is regularly misunderstood or ignored. By investing in these students, as storytellers and future advocates, Taiwan can build an influence that is lasting, credible, and impossible to erase. The Japanese [JET Program](#) offers an exemplary model of how a state may convert [educational exchanges into enduring geopolitical goodwill](#). Through personal contact and shared experience, soft power is not proclaimed—rather, it is cultivated, gently, organically, and lastingly. Taiwan might similarly mobilize its international students as emissaries of its story and spirit.

The main point: Real power is earned, not seized. Taiwan has already begun earning it through the people it welcomes. Now, it must empower them to share their experiences and amplify Taiwan's voice globally.

Tthe Brink of the Abyss: How the United States Should Answer China's "Taiwan Question"

By: Major Nicholas Stockdale

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Introduction

The debate is over—the United States and People's Republic of China (PRC) have entered a "[new cold war](#)," as noted by renowned scholars Hal Brands and John Lewis Gaddis in 2021. If the new cold war were to turn hot, Taiwan would be the "[most dangerous flashpoint](#)." In 2012, Xi Jinping (習近平), the newly-appointed general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨), declared his goal to achieve the "Chinese Dream," which requires "[in-disputable](#)" Chinese control of Taiwan by 2049 (the 100th anniversary of the CCP's rule in mainland China). However, the timeline may be even nearer: in 2023, CIA Director William Burns said the United States knew "[as a matter of intelligence](#)" that Xi had instructed the People's Liberation Army (PLA, 中國人民解放軍) to be ready by 2027 for a successful invasion of Taiwan.

China's range of actions will be largely dictated by the United States and Taiwan itself. CCP policies cite *external factors* as the primary element shaping the circumstances surrounding Taiwan. In its 2019 white paper, [China's National Defense in the New Era](#), China condemned the "interference of external forces" working towards Taiwan's independence. While claiming to adhere to peaceful reunification, the paper stated the CCP will "never allow the secession of any part of its territory by anyone, any organization or any political party by any means at any time;" and that "the PLA will resolutely defeat anyone attempting to separate Taiwan from China and safeguard national unity at all costs." China doubled-down in 2022, explicitly accusing the United States of contradicting the "[One-China Principle](#)" (OCP, 一個中國原則), and reaffirming its readiness to "[respond with the use of force](#)." There is no harder redline in CCP policy than its stance on Taiwan.

War is not inevitable, though. China has a range of actions before it, and US strategy must guide China away from a catastrophic end that could "[plunge Taiwan into the abyss](#)," and potentially drag the United States and China into war.

Steering China away from conflict demands a comprehensive approach to the Taiwan situation that balances *deterrence*, *containment*, and *constructive engagement*. By successfully integrating a strategy composed of these three elements, the United States can curb Chinese aggression, foster stability in the Indo-Pacific region, and uphold international norms and principles.

Developing a New Theoretical Framework

External forces may inadvertently cross China's redline, triggering a conflict. China follows a slow-burning *compellence* strategy, seeking to coerce Taiwan into the fold. When military theorist and Nobel laureate Thomas Schelling coined the term *compellence*, he contrasted it with *deterrence*. Per Schelling's definition, *compellence* involves "initiating an action ... that can cease, or become harmless, only if the opponent responds." [1] China has a range of actions it can take, and it will dial up the pressure or turn it down depending on how the United States and Taiwan respond. Schelling cautions, however, that *compellence* begs the questions not just of "when," but also "where, what, and how much." [2] China has answered the "when" (2049), the "where" (Taiwan), and the "what" (the PRC's "One-China Policy"), but fails to answer the "how much." At what point an action would trigger a Chinese response is ambiguous.

To prevent an inadvertent misstep, the United States must focus on *deterrence* and *constructive engagement*. *Deterrence* is the opposite side to *compellence* on the coercion coin, while *constructive engagement* is best suited when the relationship is "primarily based on differences in ideology." [3] US and China national interests are at odds, but not diametrically opposed. The CCP's interest in "rejuvenation"—a vision that includes "solving the Taiwan question"—requires defeating Taiwan's "[de jure independence](#)." Pursuit of independence, it states, "[will plunge Taiwan into the abyss and bring nothing but disaster to the island](#)." By contrast, [US policy](#) calls for "maintaining peace and stability" in Taiwan, and supporting the capacity of both Taiwan and the United States to defend against "force or coercion." However, US policy has avoided endorsing an independent Taiwan, insisting that the United States "[opposes any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side](#)."

Maintaining the status quo is inherently a deterrent strategy. While directly opposing compellent actions from China, less confrontational policy leaves room for constructive engagement. In essence, the United States must *deter* China from military and economic hard power coercion, while seeking *constructive engagement* on diplomatic areas of agreement.

The third prong of US strategy, *containment*, must guide the other two. *Deterrence* and *constructive engagement* threaten punishment for compellent actions and reward cooperation; however, as the 2049 horizon comes closer, the incentives will grow for China to take a harder stance towards achieving its end state. *Deterrence* will be forced to play an outsized role, pushing all parties closer to the brink—either

by escalating the threat of punishment or until the redline is crossed, forcing a catastrophic outcome. Therefore, US strategy must be to keep China's goal of reunification close enough that China does not feel the urgency to regain control—but far enough away that Taiwan does not actually slip under China's control. This three-pronged strategy in the long-term will shape Chinese actions in a direction more aligned with the current international order.

Practical Applications

Deterrence remains the cornerstone of US military strategy. While the US Navy has historically exercised dominant presence in the Western Pacific, China's navy now surpasses the size of not just the Indo-Pacific Fleet, but the entire US Navy. This is particularly concerning for *deterrence* when [numerical advantage is a profound indicator of naval success](#). In the air domain, technological superiority often wins over mass—but again, [China's modernization of the PLA Air Force has eroded deterrence](#), achieving parity in air superiority with the United States in 2017. To maintain credible *deterrence*, the United States must rely on coalition-building—especially in the maritime domain—through exercises like Malabar, and by expanding participation beyond Quad and AUKUS to regional strategic partners like Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In the skies, the United States should accelerate the deployment of advanced systems like the Next-Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) platform, the B-21 bomber, and the Collaborative Combat Aircraft; as well as refining operational concepts, like [Agile Combat Employment \(ACE\)](#), for the means of reaching and surviving in theater.

Such concepts also benefit from cooperation with allies and partners, by increasing shared basing of assets around the region. For all these weapons and defense systems, coalitions and posturing, *deterrence* by punishment does not need to be acted upon in order to be credible. Simply knowing NGAD air assets are in the US arsenal and able to reach PLA targets, and knowing that an attack on Taiwan means war with the United States, Japan, and others, all affect China's calculus for a first strike. A credible military presence in the Indo-Pacific signals US resolve while maintaining the status quo, avoiding direct provocation.

The military effort should not dominate America's foreign policy, however; and if an escalation to violent force occurs, *constructive engagement* has already failed. Neither wants a war, and [both agree on the need to compete responsibly](#). In the 2023 Biden-Xi summit in San Francisco, the two leaders [converged](#) on issues of fentanyl distribution, the risks of artificial intelligence, and the need for military-to-military communication. Moreover, Washington believes [shared challenges](#) like climate change, biodefense, and food insecurity are areas of cooperation with Beijing. Focusing on these common interests can "[sow the seeds of political change](#)" to overcome ideological differences.

The United States must maneuver diplomatically to contain both China's narratives and its coercive pressure. Contain-

ment [aims to prevent](#) a state from seeking to “extend its borders and spheres of influence” or to “change the existing international order” in a way “contemptuous of international norms.” All diplomatic maneuvers require bilateral or multilateral action, and the actions here are no exception. Many states benefit from the status quo. Japan, South Korea, and especially Taiwan have vested interests in “[combining to check the ambitions of another state](#).” China, Russia, and North Korea “[share a deep hostility](#)” towards Japan, with Taiwan acting as a buffer. Tokyo recently qualified the Taiwan Strait as “[a matter of life and death](#)” for Japan. Similarly, South Korea’s ever-present interest in regional security now far outweighs its economic interest in China. When realizing that its manufacturing value chain is tied predominantly to Taiwan, the peninsula state has [far less stake in China’s economy](#) than previously assumed. Instead, [South Korea’s primary interests](#) are maintaining the international order and rule of law. These risks to US allies converge with interests in Taiwan, and make a multinational defense treaty in the region possible. Other security dialogues like the Quad, which bring in India and Australia, tip political, military, and economic advantages firmly into the status quo camp.

Conclusion

The devastation of a great power war between the United States and China could be greater than any the world has ever seen, and the Taiwan Strait is increasingly the most dangerous tinderbox for this potential conflict. In light of Xi’s 2049 benchmark, China’s patience with the Taiwan status quo may be running out. A three-pronged strategy of deterrence, constructive engagement, and containment provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the Taiwan challenge. While deterrence prevents immediate aggression, constructive engagement fosters long-term cooperation, and containment shapes China’s behavior to align more closely with international norms. In the words of Gaddis, “opposites held in mind simultaneously, thus, are ‘the strategist’s keys to victory.’” [4]

The main point: As China’s self-imposed deadline for achieving the “Chinese Dream”—which requires “[indisputable](#)” Chinese control of Taiwan—approaches, the United States needs to pursue a three-pronged strategy of deterrence, constructive engagement, and containment. Integrating these three opposing prongs into a cohesive strategy can avoid conflict through 2049, allowing a new normal to be reached—one without redlines and the opportunity to widen *détente* in the US-China relationship.

[4] John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2018), 83.

[1] Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 72.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, 80.