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Between Taiwan and the United States: International Standards on Citizenship, Parentage, and Child Protection in Surrogacy

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Jing-Han Chen recently graduated from the University of Edinburgh, where she earned her PhD in July 2023. Her thesis was subsequently awarded the PhD Thesis Prize by the Taiwan Society of International Law. Her PhD research focused on issues surrounding contested citizenship, with a particular emphasis on the case of Tibetan exiles and overseas Taiwanese people. Her research interests include citizenship law, contested citizenship, disputed sovereignty, international law, legal history, legal feminism, immigration, refugees, statelessness, and international private law. She currently works as a tutor of International Law and International Private Law at the University of Edinburgh.

Introduction: Surrogacy Debates in Taiwan and Children's Rights

In 2024, an outspoken advocate for surrogacy, Chen Chao-tzu (陳昭姿), was elected to Taiwan's Legislative Yuan (立法院), thereby drawing greater public attention to the issue. Surrogacy is currently illegal in Taiwan and remains a contentious issue. According to a 2025 study on public health policy, the Taiwanese public holds significant concerns about the legalization of surrogacy and its potential social impact on the rights of women and children. Nonetheless, some Taiwanese individuals continue to travel abroad to countries where commercial surrogacy is permitted and have children through such arrangements.

The Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH), a leading international private law body, defines a surrogacy arrangement as an agreement made before conception between the prospective surrogate mother and the intended parent(s). Under this agreement, the intended parents will become the legal parents and assume care of the child after birth. An International Surrogacy Arrangement (ISA) refers to a situation in which the intended parents and the surrogate mother maintain different habitual residences, and the child is transferred from the state of birth to the state of the intended parents' habitual residence. In this context, the surrogate mothers' rights and welfare of the surrogate children are central to the debates on international surrogacy.

This article explores the rights of surrogate mothers and children. A UNICEF and Child Identity Protection briefing note on safeguarding children's surrogacy rights posits that regardless of the states' legal position on surrogacy, children born through surrogacy should enjoy the same rights as non-surrogate children, without discrimination. In disputes over

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guidelines for protecting children, surrogate mothers' rights are a common concern. This article argues that any surrogacy policy should include thorough discussion of the rights of surrogate mothers and the social impacts of surrogacy.

Surrogacy: Technology and Commercialism

Having children has always been a fundamental aspect of human life. As such, reproduction, and particularly surrogacy, continues to be a source of debates and ethical concerns in Taiwan and worldwide. Two major debates surrounding surrogacy involve reproductive technology, and the contrast between commercial and altruistic surrogacy.

Advances in technology have significantly transformed both reproduction and surrogacy. For instance, the development of assisted reproductive technology has been closely linked to the evolution of surrogacy. This is evident in the shift from traditional to gestational surrogacy. Traditional surrogacy involves a surrogate mother who provides her own eggs, making her the biological mother. However, since the 1990s, gestational surrogacy (where the intended mother or another woman provides the fertilized eggs for the surrogate) has become the mainstream model. By separating the surrogate from biological motherhood, many believe that gestational surrogacy helps to ease ethical concerns and makes the practice more socially acceptable. Still, technological advances have not resolved the ethical debates, such as concerns around the exploitation of disadvantaged women as surrogate mothers.

Debates also focus on different types of surrogacy, namely, altruistic and commercial. There are increasing doubts about whether this binary distinction is always clear-cut. As note: "payment and altruism do not have to be mutually exclusive." This article adopts the definition of commercial surrogacy used by the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, which follows the HCCH: commercial surrogacy includes not only direct payments but also "reimbursements" that go beyond reasonable and itemized expenses directly resulting from the surrogacy arrangement. Some states only allow altruistic surrogacy (usually with strict regulations), such as the United Kingdom, which restricts surrogacy to people with UK permanent residency. In comparison, other states with commercial surrogacy may allow more accessible regulations for intended parents. These accessible international commercial surrogacy arrangements are seen as the solution for many people who live in a state that does not allow surrogacy or that maintains strict surrogacy restrictions, such as Taiwan.

International Surrogacy Arrangements

Since surrogacy is illegal in Taiwan, Taiwanese parents interested in surrogacy have to turn to surrogate mothers from other countries, participating in an international surrogacy arrangement (ISA). Across European countries, legal positions on surrogacy vary greatly, demonstrating that diverse approaches to surrogacy are common in the international community today. By introducing cases from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), this section sheds light on how international courts may approach surrogacy in situations involving both jurisdictions where surrogacy is legal (such as in some US states), and jurisdictions where it is prohibited--like in Taiwan.

An ISA involves parties from different countries, often resulting in conflicts of law due to the diversity of legal systems. Countries worldwide take varied approaches to surrogacy. Even among those that prohibit it, the treatments of ISAs are not consistent. For example, many countries, including France, Spain, Germany, and Switzerland, consider surrogacy illegal. Others, like Ireland, Belgium, and the Czech Republic, have no specific legislation on the matter. The absence of regulation can create legal uncertainty. In such jurisdictions, surrogacy contracts may not be enforceable, and surrogate mothers are typically considered the child's legal guardian, even if they are not the biological mother. If the surrogate has a spouse, that person may also be recognized as a legal parent. Some states, such as the United Kingdom and Portugal, permit altruistic but not commercial surrogacy. In Portugal, surrogacy is also limited to heterosexual couples with a qualifying medical reason.

Cases before the European Court of Human Rights demonstrate that the court assesses parental rights and children's best interests based on the specific legal and factual context. In *Paradiso and Campanelli v. Italy* (2017), Italian authorities refused to recognize the parentage or register the birth certificate of a surrogate child because its intended parents were not the biological ones. The nine-month-old child was subsequently removed and placed in social care. The Grand Chamber of the ECtHR held that there was no violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), regarding respect for private life. By contrast, in *C and E v. France* (2019), the French authorities required the intended mother to complete a second-parent adoption process for a surrogate child, despite the fact that the intended father was the biological parent of the

child. The EctHR considered that the French authorities' requirement was proportionate, noting the average adoption process in France took only four months. Therefore, the court deemed the parents' application alleging a violation of ECHR Article 8 to be ill-founded and declared it to be inadmissible.

Another related case, *K.K. and Others v. Denmark* (2022), concerned Danish authorities' refusal to allow the intended mother to adopt twins born through commercial surrogacy in Ukraine. The children were living with their biological father, who was also the intended mother's partner. The court concluded that the Danish authorities acted within a reasonable public interest in restricting commercial surrogacy, which outweighed the intended mother's private life claim based on Article 8. However, the Court found a violation of the children's Article 8 rights. It ruled that Danish authorities failed to appropriately balance the children's interests, including their legal status and relationship with the intended mother, against societal concerns regarding commercial surrogacy.

In summary, these cases illustrate how the ECtHR navigates between jurisdictions that allow surrogacy and those that prohibit it. Biological ties often serve as a decisive factor in establishing legal parentage. Where authorities deny legal parentage and children's rights are not compromised, the court tends to defer to national authorities. However, the ECtHR does not apply a fully consistent standard in surrogacy cases. It generally respects states' policy discretion on surrogacy and their definitions of public interest, yet it places particular weight on the child's best interests—a concept that remains open to interpretation and can be applied variably across contexts.

Surrogate children's interests can be defined in several different legal ways. The UN Special Rapporteur's report on safeguards for the protection of the rights of children born from surrogacy arrangements, as well as the *principles for the protection of the rights of the child born through surrogacy* (Verona Principles), stress the importance of protecting children's dignity, non-discrimination, and other fundamental rights throughout the entire surrogacy process. They highlight that children's rights can be seriously violated in unregulated or poorly regulated surrogacy arrangements, especially in cross-border contexts. According to the aforementioned UNICEF and Child Identity Protection briefing note, while current international human rights law does not provide safeguards in terms of domestic surrogacy or ISAs, it defines the right to identity to include "name, nationality, family relations and access to origins; the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health; and the right to not be sold."

This guideline critically identifies the identity rights as well as the citizenship of the child, and influences the HCCH's discussion on ISAs. It is worth noting that although there are calls for screening procedures for surrogacy on ISAs, these guidelines and principles should not be seen as an endorsement of surrogacy. Rather, they respond to the high risk of violation of human rights through surrogacy procedures. Given the potential risks, these guidelines posit that there should be safeguards for children's rights, including the right to identity. These guidelines have been considered by the HCCH in the discussion regarding a harmonization of different legal systems.

Surrogacy Across Borders: US Practices, Taiwanese Parents, and Legal Challenges

Taiwanese intended parents seeking to engage in international surrogacy arrangements (ISAs) may turn to the United States. In the United States, surrogacy laws vary significantly across states, as there is no federal legislation governing the matter. Even in states where surrogacy is permitted, different restrictions apply. For instance, Michigan requires that at least one party in the arrangement be a resident of the state. In Virginia, pre-birth parentage orders are generally not granted. Meanwhile, in California there is no residency requirement and pre-birth parentage orders are allowed. States like California are therefore particularly popular among international intended parents, including those from Taiwan.

When it comes to the child's legal status, nationality becomes an issue alongside parentage. Following an ISA, the child is usually brought to the intended parents' country—in this example, to Taiwan. Children born in the United States acquire US citizenship at birth, regardless of whether or not pre-birth parentage orders have been issued. Under Taiwan's *Nationality Act*, Taiwanese nationality can be passed on by a parent to a (surrogate-born) child. This means the surrogate child may acquire Taiwanese citizenship. The procedure requires the presentation of the birth certificate, documentation transferring parental rights, and a US passport, followed by the issuance of a permanent resident certificate and entry into the household registration system. However, if the intended parent is unmarried, they will first need to legally establish the parental responsibility and register the child in the household registration system, as the law requires the parent to obtain parental responsibility in the case of a

child born out of wedlock.

Several legal and ethical concerns arise from ISAs in the context of Taiwan. First, as seen in the ECtHR cases covered above, biological connections are usually considered essential for establishing parentage in these cross-border surrogacy cases. In these European cases, similar emphasis is placed on biological ties in determining parental rights. In Taiwan, however, there is no statutory requirement for a biological connection between the surrogate child and the intended parents due to the legal vacuum. This raises the question of how surrogacy differs from adoption—especially given that, unlike adoption, surrogacy does not require a rigorous assessment of the intended parents' caregiving capacity or home environment.

Second, the legal and ethical concerns extend beyond parentage. If the United States were ever to amend its birthright citizenship laws—however unlikely that prospect may seem—the legal status of surrogate children could become precarious. Would they be rendered stateless? Moreover, current commercial surrogacy practices may conflict with children's fundamental rights. Specifically, commercial surrogacy practices could compromise children's rights to identity, knowledge of their origins, and protection from being treated as commodities. In other words, commercial surrogacy risks reducing children to the status of products under a contractual arrangement, and may thus infringe on their intrinsic rights to identity. Taiwan's current legal framework for ISAs therefore may be insufficient to safeguard both the legal and ethical interests of the children involved.

Third, the rights and agency of surrogate mothers, and the associated shift of parental responsibility, are equally crucial. Pre-birth parentage orders, while often favored by intended parents, can undermine the surrogate's legal and ethical protections. International guidelines, including those of the UN Special Rapporteur's report on safeguards for the protection of the rights of children born from surrogacy arrangements, recommend measures to prevent the commodification of children. These include either prohibiting commercial surrogacy in the absence of strict regulation; or ensuring that the surrogate retains legal parentage at birth, that payments are made prior to any child transfer and remain non-refundable except in cases of fraud, and that contracts cannot override the surrogate's health, autonomy, or freedom. Such protective recommendations highlight how current practices–particularly pre-birth parentage orders–may undermine surrogate mothers' rights and raise ethical questions around the commodification of both women and children.

Conclusion

In Taiwan, the absence of specific surrogacy regulation creates a legal vacuum that may require future judicial interpretation. International guidelines and relevant case studies could offer valuable direction in safeguarding the rights of children, surrogate mothers, and all parties involved. The HCCH's *Final Report: The Feasibility of One or More Private International Law Instruments on Legal Parentage* explores the development of protocols on legal parentage from ISAs, aligning them with other forms of parentage such as adoption. Although surrogacy raises distinct legal and ethical questions, the report underscores the need to ensure that surrogacy meets the standards applied to other parentage arrangements. In Taiwan's context, courts may look not only to emerging international standards, but also to domestic principles that reflect local understandings of family, parentage, and child welfare. Greater public discussion is also needed to bring visibility to the concerns surrounding surrogacy, including ethical safeguards, legal uncertainties, and the interests of all those affected.

Surrogacy inevitably raises concerns around commodification—of surrogate bodies or egg donors, and of the potential sale of children. Drawing a clear ethical line is challenging. As shown by case studies from Europe and differing legal frameworks across US states, societies vary in how they approach this complex issue. Ultimately, the decision whether to legalize surrogacy must be accompanied by careful reflection on a society's values. Even without the legalization of surrogacy, clear, enforceable safeguards for both children and individuals acting as surrogates are needed.

The main point: Surrogacy remains a deeply contested human rights issue, one that demands careful value judgements from both authorities and society. Although surrogacy is currently illegal in Taiwan, some Taiwanese individuals pursue international surrogacy arrangements (ISAs), particularly in countries like the United States where commercial surrogacy is permitted. In the absence of domestic legislation, the Taiwanese judiciary should be called upon to address legal uncertainties related to ISAs, even without fully legalizing the process. In doing so, it would be prudent to consider not only international standards and comparative cases but also the values and ethical priorities of Taiwanese society.

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Opportunities for Strengthening EU-Taiwan Relations

By: Peter (Hung-Yao) Chu

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The strategic importance of Taiwan in global supply chains has led the European Union to reassess and adjust its economic strategy toward the island. Since a potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait will not only disrupt global supply chains, but also have a serious impact on the European economy, the EU now regards Taiwan as a like-minded partner in both economic and security matters. Over the past nine years, the EU's stance on Taiwan has evolved from a cautious, economically-centered engagement into a robust, wide-ranging partnership.

Before President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) came into office, the focus was almost exclusively on trade and investment, deliberately kept low-key. However, after President Tsai Ing-wen took office, the EU and Taiwan began to cooperate on high-tech and semiconductor collaboration, coordinate on securing supply chains, engage in regular high-level dialogues, and explore new domains from green energy to digital affairs. This change has been driven by Taiwan's strategic importance to global supply chains and promoting democratic values, as well as Europe's need to de-risk and diversify its economic ties.

Taiwan and the EU: Mutual Recognition of Interdependence

When former President Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016, she shifted Taiwan's economic policy towards active engagement with like-minded partners around the world—including the EU. This contrasted with the policies of her predecessor, former President Ma Ying-Jeou (馬英九), who focused more on cross-Strait relations. Moreover, after experiencing the shortage of semiconductors during the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU has also recognized Taiwan's importance as an economic partner.

Accompanying Taiwan's shift, the EU's official stance has moved from passive neutrality to an active recognition of Taiwan's significance to Europe's economic and security interests. In his address to the European Parliament in September 2022, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell declared that, "to preserve peace, stability, and the status quo in the Taiwan strait is key, not just for the security and prosperity of the region, but also for ours." This statement marked a departure from the EU's traditionally cautious stance, which for decades emphasized adherence to the "One-China" policy and avoided direct commentary on cross-Strait issues. Previously, the EU confined its engagement with Taiwan largely to economic and cultural exchanges, maintaining strategic ambiguity toward East Asia security affairs. However, as tensions in Taiwan Strait have intensified and Russia's invasion of Ukraine reshaped European security thinking, Brussels has increasingly articulated a clear strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific. Reflecting this shift, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, echoed in an address in 2023 that "peace and stability in Taiwan Strait are indispensable to the prosperity of the region and global security."

Enhancement of EU-Taiwan Economic Relations

Accompanying Taiwanese President Tsai's shift in policy and the EU's growing recognition of Taiwan as an economic partner, the EU and Taiwan have worked closely on semiconductor cooperation and actively engaged in various dialogues to strengthen economic cooperation over recent years.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on global supply chains first alerted the EU to the vulnerability of its high-tech industries. In particular, the European automobile industry suffered major economic damage as a consequence of the ensuing shortage of chips. When pandemic lockdowns eased and demand for cars bounced back, many European companies found that they could not deliver new vehicles to the market because they were at the back of the queue when it came to global semiconductor supply. Given that Taiwan ranks first in market share for semiconductor products—producing 60 percent of the world's chips overall, and over 90 percent of the most advanced ones—it is thus an indispensable trading partner for both the EU and the world. Furthermore, due to the increasing competition and demand for electric vehicles, the EU will only require more advanced chips in the future—which currently are largely produced by Taiwan's Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造公司) and United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC, 聯華電子). Therefore, after realizing the importance of securing a stable semiconductor supply chain, the EU started to build up closer economic cooperation with Taiwan.

This economic necessity has precipitated closer relations between the EU and Taiwan. In 2021, the Europe-

an Parliament published the first stand-alone report on Taiwan, raising key concerns about security and economic cooperation with Taiwan as a like-minded partner. The report, titled *EU-Taiwan political relations and cooperation*, recommended the European Commission to intensify bilateral relations and pursue a comprehensive partnership with Taiwan under the guidance of the EU's One-China Policy. In 2023, both sides co-hosted the first minister-level EU-Taiwan Trade and Investment Dialogue (TID). Previous dialogues were held at the deputy minister level on the Taiwan side and the deputy director-general level on the EU side. Thus, the upgrading of dialogue to the ministerial level represents a major step in the enhancement of EU-Taiwan economic relations.

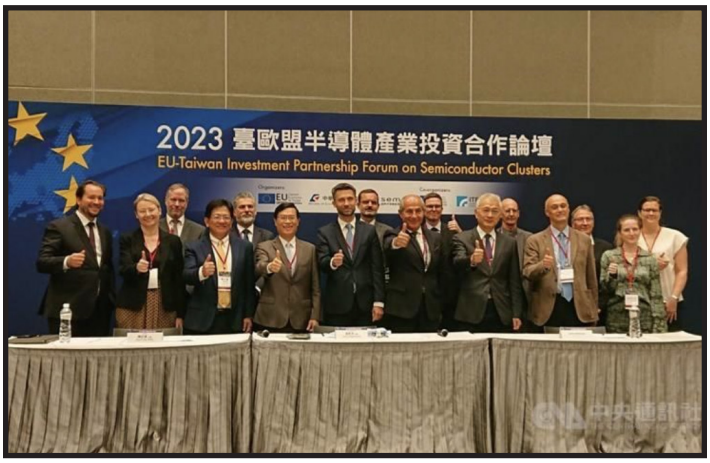

Image: In 2023, Taiwan and EU representatives held the EU-Taiwan Investment Partnership Forum on Semiconductor Clusters. (Image source: Taiwan Overseas Community Affairs Council)

The EU's passage of the 2023 *European Chips Act* also enhances the resilience of critical supply chains by establishing legal and financial tools that facilitate cooperation with key partners like Taiwan. Semiconductors are essential inputs for automobiles, telecommunications, defense systems, energy infrastructure, which means that chip availability is critical to EU economic security. Through mechanisms such as joint supply chain monitoring, early-warning systems, and strategic partnerships, the European Chip Act enables structured collaboration with Taiwan to address semiconductor disruptions. The *European Chip Act* sets up a monitoring and crisis-response system that works with Taiwan to anticipate and mitigate chip shortages. This cooperative early-warning framework directly involves Taiwan's authorities and industry in sharing information to monitor semiconductor supply chains and prevent disruption. The Act also supports joint research under the Chips Joint Undertaking and incentivizes foreign investment on semiconductor production in Europe. EU officials have pointed to areas like sub 1-nanometer and open-source hardware (RISC-V) as domains where Europe will partner with Taiwan's industry to overcome technological roadblocks. For instance, under the name of European Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, TSMC, Infineo, Bosch, and NXP plan to collaborate on building a EUR 10 billion (USD 10.6 billion) chip facility in Germany. Backed by *Chips Act* subsidies, the collaboration aims to boost Europe's capacity in making chips for cars. In addition, TSMC is also establishing a European Union Design Center (EUDC) in Munich that will open in the third quarter of 2025. In September 2025, TSMC partnered with Technical University of Munich (TUM) to establish an AI-chip R&D unit in Bavaria, furthering the Munich site's role in European semiconductor design and talent development. These actions and mechanisms will integrate Taiwan's advanced semiconductor capabilities into Europe's resilience of critical supply chains, reducing EU's vulnerability for semiconductor shortage and boosting the EU's capability on semiconductor research and production. As the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leye said: "[This collaboration] is an endorsement for Europe as a global innovation powerhouse."

In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed Europe's dependence on external semiconductor suppliers, particularly its impact on the EU's automobile industry. This shock catalyzed a reassessment of Taiwan's strategic role in global supply chains, especially given Taiwan's dominance in advanced chip manufacturing. As a result, the EU has deepened economic cooperation with Taiwan, culminating in a series of policy and institutional developments. These include the European Parliament's first stand-alone report on Taiwan in 2021, the upgrade of the EU-Taiwan Trade and Investment Dialogue to the ministerial level in 2023, and financial framework for partnering with strategic partners like Taiwan on joint supply chain monitoring, early-warning systems, advanced semiconductor research, and investment incentives. Additionally, these frameworks and actions have led to the construction of TSMC's EUR 10 billion (USD 10.6 billion) chip facility in Germany and the establishment of a European Union Design Center and AI R&D unit in Munich. Therefore, these steps mark a structural enhancement in EU-Taiwan economic relations, embedding Taiwan's semiconductor capacity into Europe's broader strategy for technological resilience and supply chain security.

Enhancement of EU-Taiwan Diplomatic Relations

Diplomatic relations between the EU and Taiwan have also made substantial progress in recent years. This

recent enhancement is driven not only by Taiwan's status as a crucial technology supplier to Europe, but also by growing concerns over China's increasingly assertive actions that challenge the rules-based order. The EU has become more cautious about its relationship with China, particularly as Beijing's pro-Kremlin stance during the war in Ukraine raised concerns regarding China's reliability as a partner. For instance, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, cautioned that "how China continues to interact with Putin's war will be a determining factor for EU-China relations going forward." Moreover, she noted that China has become a "formidable actor in the global information and cyber-space" and vowed the EU "will be very vigilant against any form of influence operations and cyber-attacks in Europe."

In 2023, Taiwan's former Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) visited Brussels and various European capitals. During his term in office, Wu made two high-level visits to Europe and visited several European countries. In return, EU representatives have frequently visited Taiwan, further solidifying ties. Taiwan has also expanded its diplomatic presence, exemplified by the opening of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2021. Notably, in 2021—for the first time in history—the EU sent an official delegation to Taipei to meet with former President Tsai to discuss disinformation and cybersecurity issues. In 2022, the Vice President of the European Parliament visited Taiwan and met with former President Tsai, marking another milestone in bilateral relations. In 2025, the EU parliament sent a delegation of the Special Committee on the European Democracy Shield to meet President Lai to discuss disinformation, hybrid threats, and Taiwan's "whole-of-society" approach to countering foreign interference.

In 2025, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung (林佳龍) undertook a series of significant diplomatic visits to Europe, advancing a strategy of so-called "integrated diplomacy" by leveraging both technological strength and cultural assets to deepen multidimensional cooperation with European partners. Integrated diplomacy denotes an approach that transcends conventional political and security paradigms by incorporating economic, technological, cultural, and value dimensions to forge resilient international networks—aligning with Taiwan's international image as being committed to democracy, peace, and prosperity.

Taiwan's leading position in the global semiconductor sector, especially in automotive chip production and advanced manufacturing, has made it a pivotal partner for Europe's supply chain restructuring and technological sovereignty efforts. In Brno, Czech Republic, Minister Lin visited a center for advanced chip design and AI research to bolster the potential for Taiwan-Czech technological collaboration. At the Warsaw Security Forum, Minister Lin introduced the concept of a "democratic supply chain," highlighting the TSMC-led joint venture with the German government and European firms as tangible evidence of Taiwan–EU economic and security integration. Taiwan's Lieutenant General Hsieh Jih-sheng (謝日升), deputy chief of the Ministry of National Defense's Office of the Deputy Chief of General Staff for Intelligence, attended the Warsaw Security Forum as well. A senior Taiwanese general's appearance in full uniform at a high-profile security forum in Poland signals closer security exchanges between Taipei and Warsaw, and reflects Europe's growing concern over China's military ambitions. This signals a shift toward more open Taiwan–EU security cooperation and shows European countries' autonomy to engage with Taiwan.

As part of Taiwan's cultural diplomacy, Minister Lin participated in the 2025 European Taiwan Culture Year events, attending the performance in Rome and the East Meets West concert in Vienna, highlighting Taiwan's vibrant, democratic, and innovative culture while deepening connections with European society. Technology, culture, and value work as three pillars for Taiwan's integrated diplomacy, enabling Taiwan to be recognized not only as an economic and security partner, but also as a reliable member in the international community.

During the visit, Lin held intensive meetings with numerous senior European political figures, including Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Markéta Pekarová Adamová; Italian Senate Vice President Gian Marco Centinaio and Taiwan Friendship Association chair Lucio Malan; Austrian Parliament Vice President Harald Dossi; as well as Polish Senate Vice President Michał Kamiński, French Senator Hélène Conway-Mouret, Estonian MP Marko Mihkelson, and Ukrainian MP Oleksiy Goncharenko. These senior-level engagements reflect Taiwan's growing political traction in Europe and establish a structural basis for deepening cooperation in trade, technology, and security.

Policy Recommendations

To further strengthen Taiwan-EU relations, the author recommends that the two sides pursue flexible diplomacy to advance economic cooperation. The Taiwanese government has adapted to its unique interna-

tional status by implementing so-called "amphibious diplomacy," which involves formal diplomacy with its diplomatic allies, as well as diplomacy in the grey area between formal and informal engagement, enabling interactions with non-diplomatic allies such as the United States and European countries. Therefore, the EU and Taiwan should continue to capitalize on this model of amphibious diplomacy to ink a bilateral trade agreement to strengthen EU-Taiwan collaboration on semiconductors.

In particular, the acute shortage of automotive chips during COVID-19 pandemic exposed Europe's dependence on external suppliers and revealed its vulnerabilities in high-tech manufacturing. This disruption—which was especially harmful to Europe's automobile industry—underscored the strategic necessity of developing resilient semiconductor supply chains. While the *European Chip Act* has laid out an important legal framework, the EU should also seek to reinforce semiconductor collaboration with Taiwan through formalized economic agreements. For instance, the EU and Taiwan could settle on a comprehensive economic partnership agreement akin to the US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade. Such an agreement would not only institutionalize semiconductor cooperation from a holistic policy perspective, but would also contribute to the EU's broader goal of enhancing its economic security in an era of geopolitical uncertainty.

The main point: Since 2016, EU-Taiwan relations have developed positively via cooperation on semiconductors and closer diplomatic engagement. These growing ties reflect not only Taiwan's importance as a semiconductor supplier but also concerns regarding China's aggressive actions that challenge the rule-based order. The EU and Taiwan should deepen their collaboration by advancing a bilateral trade agreement under the model of amphibious diplomacy.

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Orchestrating the Exit: US-Japan-Philippines Cooperation in a Taiwan NEO

By: David Dichoso

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As cross-Strait tensions become more complex, a budding trilateral security partnership between the United States, Japan, and the Philippines has emerged. Since the April 2024 US-Japan-Philippines trilateral summit, these three partners have deepened defense cooperation through joint Indo-Pacific exercises. For instance, this past May, the trilateral partners successfully conducted the first-ever humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR) table-top exercise during the Philippines' annual exercises, Balikatan. Moreover, they established a Multinational Coordination Center (MNCC) in response to a simulated typhoon hitting northern Philippines, which required multilateral cooperation to streamline operations, logistics, and planning. This achievement not only showcases the capability of trilateral coordination in HADR operations but could also serve as a framework to support a multinational noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) of Taiwan.

The Emergence of US-Japan-Philippines Trilateral Cooperation

Until now, no public commitments by the partners have been made regarding a multinational force (MNF) NEO strategy for Taiwan. However, there has been strategic alignment regarding the grave importance of Taiwan's security. Japan has ramped up its efforts to prepare for evacuation scenarios off its Sakishima islands in the Okinawa prefecture. Additionally, after Japan's 2022 National Defense Strategy identified the Taiwan Strait as a direct security concern and reaffirmed Japan's commitment to international cooperation on global challenges, peripheral islands like Yonaguni are now being militarized as part of a territorial defense strategy. Overall, Japan is placing greater emphasis on crisis response and deterrence, with evacuation frameworks reportedly under development.

Similarly, Representatives of the Philippines' Armed Forces have publicly stated that they are prepared to evacuate Filipinos from Taiwan in the event of war with China. With the Bashi Channel only separating northern Luzon from Taiwan's southern city of Kaohsiung by about 190 nautical miles, Manila has established a Coast Guard station on the island of Itbayat and has increased military exercises with partners throughout the region, including quadrilateral cooperation during humanitarian civic assistance activities and multilateral maritime cooperative activities with the United States, Japan, and Australia. These efforts display a deepening of regional security ties and ongoing efforts of force preparation and mobilization for the Philippines.

The United States, however, would likely be the lead nation in any MNF NEO strategy during a Taiwan contingency, given its long-standing security treaties with both Japan and the Philippines. As the Department of the Army's Multinational Operations Doctrine states, a lead nation can streamline command and control (C2)

by integrating liaison and staff augmentation from coalition partners to fill capability gaps and ensure unity of effort. In Taiwan's case, if the trilateral partners all consent to launch an MNF NEO, the United States is the best candidate for the role, as its military footprint spans Japan, the Philippines, and the entire Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, the United States already conducts regional MNF NEO training during Thailand's Operation Cobra Gold and simulates a NEO from South Korea to Japan during its Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise. As the United States is deeply integrated into the region through bilateral alliances, it is best positioned to initiate, synchronize, and lead trilateral NEO planning.

With trilateral HADR efforts already underway and the implementation of ratified agreements such as the US–US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) and the Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement, the US-Japan-Philippines trilateral partnership now presents ideal conditions for deeper integration by establishing the necessary legal frameworks. Given the logistical similarities and institutional overlap between HADR and NEO, existing trilateral HADR frameworks offer a practical foundation for developing a credible MNF NEO strategy. By institutionalizing inter-agency communication frameworks, expanding trilateral infrastructure access, and leveraging Track-2 mechanisms to engage Taiwan's whole-of-society resilience networks, the partners can effectively rehearse a credible MNF NEO strategy for a Taiwan contingency scenario. Although this evolution would require further policy formalization and sustained diplomatic backing from all sides, existing cooperation between the three countries provides a foundation for what a possible MNF NEO strategy could look like.

Prior US–Allied Emergency Response Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Throughout history, the United States has been a staunch supporter of both the Philippines and Japan during crises, effectively and rapidly mobilizing forward-deployed military units to help local authorities. During Operation TOMODACHI, in response to Japan's 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, the US-Japan alliance established a joint task force integrating naval, air, and logistical assets under a unified command-and-control (C2) network that streamlined communication and relief operations. US forces quickly mobilized across Japan, delivering daily necessities and medical aid, clearing debris from critical infrastructures, and jointly participating in efforts with the Japanese in evacuating displaced Japanese locals.

The United States has also demonstrated a similar rapid resolve for the Philippines. Earlier this year, US Forces participating in Resolute Force Pacific 2025 were diverted from exercise efforts in Misawa, Japan, to conduct real-world disaster response operations at the northern tip of Luzon, the main island of the Philippines. As part of the US response, the 353rd Special Operations Wing rapidly deployed CV-22 Ospreys, medical personnel, security forces, and special tactics teams within hours, transporting food packs to flooded local communities.

Overall, Operation TOMODACHI and this year's Resolute Force Pacific are examples of credibility in the United States' commitment to the security of Japan and the Philippines. Beyond demonstrating the positive results of bilateral alliance coordination during these natural disasters, these events underscore that the Philippines and Japan value US military support beyond traditional force projection and commitment signaling. Furthermore, as these three partners continue to align strategically, they can build off of the tangible results achieved through military HADR efforts to prepare a trilateral NEO strategy for a Taiwan contingency.

Challenges of NEO in Taiwan

Despite the strategic alignment of Taiwan and its importance for their own national security, the nascent trilateral US, Japan, and the Philippines relationship has remained ambiguous on their response to a contingency scenario. Although NEO planning has remained abstract, China's escalating pressure keeps potential NEO scenarios relevant. Last year's CSIS *ChinaPower* report examined potential Chinese blockade methodologies, highlighting that China could incorporate politically calculated kinetic pauses in offensive operations that would facilitate NEOs in Taiwan within pre-determined time constraints. However, this option is not pre-determined or conclusive, and planners for NEO strategies can not expect its implementation with absolute certainty. Furthermore, given the geographical limitations of the theater, US forces must establish mechanisms for rapid response. In his article "States of Denial: Sensibly Defending Taiwan," Matthew F. Cancian notes that US operations heavily depend on the permissions of Japan, the Philippines, and other nations, and formal allies may even hesitate to authorize preemptive action. Political delays that inhibit force mobilization will restrict operations within Taiwan's archipelago. [1] Therefore, if the United States decides to be the lead nation in an MNF NEO, it will have to address bureaucratic and geopolitical limitations that impair its opera-

tional capabilities surrounding Taiwan.

Image: Armed Forces of the Philippines, Japan Self-Defense Forces service members, and US government officials work in groups during a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Tabletop Exercise in support of Exercise Balikatan 25 at Camp Aguinaldo (Image source: United States Army)

Policy Recommendations for Trilateral NEO coordination:

From now on, the partners must seek to institutionalize trilateral HADR operations and incorporate MNF NEO training within their existing military exercises. By implementing NEO requirements in trilateral training outlined in US doctrine, such as evacuee processing concepts, control center operations, and the use of systems such as the Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations Tracking System (NTS), the partners can standardize communication protocols and rehearse operations under an integrated C2 network that streamlines decision-making from top to bottom. This will enable trilateral military representatives to coordinate effectively with civilian authorities and ensure that delegated responsibilities are conducted by the appropriate agencies, limiting bottlenecks in the execution of orders.

Secondly, the partners must maximize their expanded access in the region neighboring Taiwan and pre-position humanitarian and evacuation infrastructure across Northern Luzon's EDCA bases and Japan's Self-Defense Force's (JSDF) bases in the Sakishima Islands. Given that US forces can continue to access these bases during temporary operations, Japan and the Philippines must parallel these deployments. Earlier this month, Japan and the Philippines held their first bilateral exercise, *Doshin-Bayanihan 5-25*, under their recently implemented RAA. This exercise displayed deployments of both Japanese and Philippines C-130 aircraft for HADR efforts in Cebu, Philippines. Although this was a monumental step displaying the progress of Japan and the Philippines bilateral cooperation, these operations need to be exercised closer to Taiwan in Northern Luzon and on the Sakishima Islands. Since these bases offer convenient access to the Bashi Channel and Taiwan's eastern coast, their potential usage during an MNF NEO would be multi-dimensional—serving as vital refueling and staging areas for tactical airlift and rotary wing assets. The United States, Japan, and the Philippines must cooperate to make sure that reciprocal access is guaranteed to these sites, so that they gain more operational flexibility for the deployment of forces and repatriation of evacuees.

Finally, the US–Japan–Philippines authorities must consider implementing Track-2 mechanisms to engage Taiwan's *whole-of-society resilience networks*—specifically local emergency-management institutions, civil-society organizations, and NGOs—to enhance MNF NEO preparedness on the island. In July, grassroots volunteer groups in Taiwan—dubbed the "shovel superheroes" (鏟子超人)—rapidly mobilized to Hualien to support earthquake relief efforts. State-linked enterprises, such as the Taiwan Railway Corporation, collaborated with civic groups to expand ground support, demonstrating Taiwan's robust public–private cooperation during crises. This same sense of unity and resilience has been institutionalized in Taiwan's annual *Han Kuang* (漢光演習) exercises, through Urban Resilience drills, which this year coordinated mass-evacuation rehearsals, urban-warfare simulations, and civilian emergency-response training. By leveraging Taiwan's Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF), which facilitates collaboration between Taiwan, the United States, Japan, and other regional partners, Taipei can strengthen coordination mechanisms for humanitarian and disaster response. Integrating NEO planning into the GCTF's existing HADR-focused framework would further enhance regional preparedness and interoperability. Expanding the GCTF in this way would further operationalize Taiwan's *All-Out Defense Mobilization* framework. Such collaboration would not only improve the partnership's interoperability but also reduce operational friction during a Taiwan contingency.

Conclusion

The emergence of the US–Japan–Philippines Trilateral Security partnership provides a strong institutional foundation for developing a coordinated MNF NEO strategy in the event of a Taiwan contingency. With the threat of a Chinese maneuver to capture Taiwan contingency continuing to evolve, the trilateral partnership can fill the tactical gaps where states unilaterally cannot. With expanding legal frameworks that facilitate deeper military engagement, HADR operations should serve a dual purpose—advancing preparedness

for NEOs. By expanding base accessibility and fostering Track-2 dialogue with Taiwan, the partners can signal a sustained humanitarian commitment that bolsters Taiwan's resilience and enhances regional stability.

The main point: The emergence of a US–Japan–Philippines trilateral security partnership offers a strong foundation to transform humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) cooperation into a multinational force noncombatant evacuation operation (MNF NEO) framework for a Taiwan contingency. By institutionalizing HADR-based coordination, expanding reciprocal base access in Northern Luzon and the Sakishima Islands for all three partners, and leveraging Track-2 mechanisms such as Taiwan's Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF), the partners can operationalize a credible NEO strategy for the region. Strengthening this trilateral strategic alignment would not only enhance preparedness for a Taiwan contingency but also reinforce collective humanitarian resilience across the Indo-Pacific.

[1] Matthew F. Cancian, "States of Denial: Sensibly Defending Taiwan," *Survival* 67, no. 2 (2025): 133–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2025.2481778

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The Legacy of Tsai Ing-wen's Technology Policies: The Two Flagship Plans

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Technology is a source of a nation's power. In 2023, *Global Finance* ranked the Republic of China (Taiwan) third in the world in technological advancement, behind South Korea and the United States. Yet, Taiwan was not always at the leading edge of global technological development. According to Professor of Economics Peter C.Y. Chow at City University of New York, former President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) came into office in 2016 in a period of economic slowdown for Taiwan, which had begun in the mid-1990s and accelerated during the 2008 global financial crisis. During that period, the rise of China had pushed Taiwan to the margins of international economic activity and excluded it from much of international economic deliberation. In this unfavorable global economic environment, the Tsai Administration sought to revitalize Taiwan's economy through advanced technology.

In her first inaugural address on May 20, 2016, Tsai framed the promotion of national industries as part of Taiwan's "New Model for Economic Development." She stated: "We will prioritize our plans to promote five major innovative industries, with the goal of reshaping Taiwan's global competitiveness." These sectors—biomedicine, green energy technology, smart machinery, national defense, and the Asia Silicon Valley—are all high-tech industries. Tsai's government later included two additional industries—the new agriculture and the circular economies—in the plan, which became the *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan* (5+2產業創新計畫). In Tsai's second term, she introduced her second flagship plan, the *Six Core Strategic Industries* (六大戰略產業), which also incorporated burgeoning sectors such as cybersecurity. In executing these two initiatives, the Tsai Administration left an indelible mark on Taiwan's thriving high-technology industries.

How are Taiwan's Technology Policies Formed?

According to the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC, 國家科學及技術委員會), Taiwan's technology policies are mainly formulated through four mechanisms: 1) the Executive Yuan's (行政院) major policies and programs; 2) resolutions of the Executive Yuan's Board of Science and Technology (BOST, 行政院國家科學技術發展委員會); 3) the "National Science and Technology Conference," held every four years by the NSTC; and 4) the planning and implementation by all ministries and councils according to their functions as defined by law.

These mechanisms were codified under the *Fundamental Science and Technology Act* (科學技術基本法), enacted on January 20, 1999—which serves as the legal basis for technology policy formulation. According to Article 1 of the Act, the fundamental guidelines and principles for the government in promoting scientific and technological development are to 1) to raise the standards of science and technology, 2) maintain economic development, 3) strengthen ecological preservation, 4) improve public well-being, 5) boost national competitiveness, and 6) promote the sustainable development of human society. On the whole, the Act focused on developing talents in science and technology fields in tandem with humanities and social science—through assistance to public schools, institutes and enterprises, the formulation of the *National Science and Technology Plan,* and the development of scientific and technological personnel. One strength of the Act lay in its focus on ecological preservation. However, it had shortcomings when it came to the promotion of public-private partnerships, which also play a key role in technological development.

On September 8, 2016, the Tsai Administration approved the *Asia Silicon Valley Development Plan* (2016-2020) (亞洲·矽谷計畫) as a way to connect Taiwan with high-tech research and development (R&D) communities worldwide, including attracting and retaining bright talent to build a comprehensive innovative start-up ecosystem. The plan called for the establishment of an innovative R&D center, as well as the promotion of connections with Silicon Valley and other innovation communities. Taiwan's technology R&D spending as a ratio of gross domestic product (GDP) reached new records during the first term of the Tsai Administration, rising from 3.09 percent in 2016 to 3.63 percent in 2020. The private sectors contributed the most to this increase—providing 71.3 percent of total R&D spending in 2020. This statistic reveals the critical partnership between private business and the government in shaping Taiwan's technology capacity.

The 5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan

Unlike current President Lai Ching-te (賴清德)'s *the Five Trusted Industry Sectors Promotion Plan* (五大信賴產業推動方案), which emphasizes an indispensable and trusted technological partner of democracies around the world, the *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan*, as the flagship program of the Tsai government, aimed to develop the human capacity of Taiwan's innovation-related private sectors. The *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan* contains four major strategic components that were to: 1) foster interdisciplinary talent in the digital economy, 2) reinforce technical expert training mechanisms for industries, 3) diversify career paths to invigorate the cultivation of high-caliber scientific research professionals, and 4) recruit and retain international top talent. Put succinctly, the plan focused on revitalizing expert training mechanisms and enhancing individual talent, including talent from abroad. According to a 2017/2018 ManpowerGroup Talent Shortage Survey, the job vacancies in Taiwan that were the hardest to recruit for were sales representatives, followed by engineers and IT technicians. Therefore, with a growing pool of technology talent, Taiwan could better respond to the challenges of these talent shortages in Taiwanese industries.

Under the *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan*, the Executive Yuan also initiated the *Smart Machinery Development Plan* (智慧機械產業推動方案規劃) on July 21, 2016 to upgrade Taiwan's machinery industry. The program utilizes the potential of Industry 4.0 technologies—cloud computing, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), and smart robots. Under these circumstances, the BOST and the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST, 科學技術部) set a goal for the *National Science and Technology Development Plan* (2017-2020) (國家科學技術發展計畫) to transition Taiwan towards an innovation economy. [1]

Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA, 經濟部) elaborated on the *Smart Machinery Development Plan* in a 2017 white paper, titled *Taiwan Key Innovative Industry—Smart Machinery*. The paper outlined three areas through which to promote Taiwan's innovative industries: 1) smart machinery technology, 2) cultivating talent for the smart machinery industry, and 3) the smart machinery industry promotion program. In the first area, core and application technologies of smart machinery would be developed in line with the promotion of Industry 4.0 technologies. In the second area, the Taiwanese government would earmark an estimated USD 70 million investment in the Central Taiwan Science Park and the Southern Taiwan Science Park, to build an intelligent self-manufacturing site, cultivate new enterprises, and train professional researchers. In the third area, the Executive Yuan would approve the establishment of a Smart Machinery Industry Promotion Office, a Smart Machinery Development Center at Shuinan Smart City in Taichung, and a Smart Machinery Industrial Park at Fengzhou in Taichung City to help build up an ecosystem for the smart machinery industry.

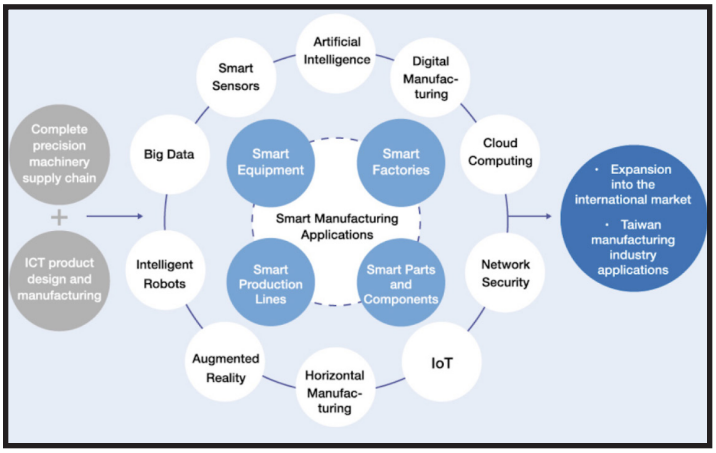

Image: A diagram depicting how Taiwan under the Tsai Administration planned to develop its smart machinery industry as part of the Smart Machinery Development Plan. *(Image Source: Taiwan MOEA)*

The Six Core Strategic Industries

During Tsai's second term, the Executive Yuan introduced the *Six Core Strategic Industries*—an initiative founded on the *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan*. The initiative, introduced on December 10, 2020, targeted six industries: 1) digital technology, 2) cybersecurity, 3)

medical technology and precision health, 4) green and renewable energy, 5) national defense and strategic industries, and 6) strategic stockpile industries. Although the *Six Core Strategic Industries* initiative was released in the wake of COVID-19 and against the backdrop of a massively escalating trade war between the United States and China, it aimed to primarily address the growing sophistication of cyber threats facing Taiwan and the shortage of skilled cybersecurity professionals in Taiwan. This interest in cybersecurity was not new—Tsai had first articulated the principle that cybersecurity is inseparable from national security in 2019. This was emphasized again in Tsai's second inaugural speech of May 2020, when she stated: "We are going to develop a cybersecurity industry that can integrate with 5G, digital transformation, and our national security. We will strive to create cybersecurity systems and an industrial chain that can protect our country and earn the world's trust." Thus, unlike the *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan*, the subsequent *Six Core Strategic Industries* focused on enhancing Taiwan's national security—particularly through cybersecurity—rather than merely boosting technology-driven economic growth.

However, Taiwan still faced challenges when it came to talent shortages. The National Science and Technology Development Plan (2021-2024) stated that: "Taiwan still has a shortage of cybersecurity talent and there is still plenty of room for improvement in terms of R&D capacity to cybersecurity." To support the development of national cybersecurity solutions in line with the *Six Core Strategic Industries*, the Ministry of Digital Affairs (MODA, 數位發展部) organized the CYBERSEC conference in May 2023—which was later repeated in 2024 and 2025. In 2024, Tsai stated that CYBERSEC 2024 would "promote exchanges and inspire more cooperation among the academic, public and private sectors from home and abroad to strengthen the global cybersecurity network." According to MODA, CYBERSEC is the largest cybersecurity exhibition in the Asia-Pacific region, with 48 cybersecurity companies showcasing their products and services at the 2023 conference. Overall, CYBERSEC was an effort by the Taiwanese government to facilitate regional cooperation and exchange on cybersecurity issues, while also attracting talent across the Asia-Pacific region to Taiwan's cybersecurity industry.

A New Era of Technological Development

A 2023 statement by the National Development Council (NDC, 國家發展委員會) lauded the success of the *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan*, noting that the annual revenue of several of the industries—including the Internet of Things and biotechnology sectors—had surpassed NTD 1 trillion (USD 33 billion). This output underscores the success of Taiwan's technological development initiatives.

The Tsai Administration's two flagship plans, the *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan* (2016) and *the Six Core Strategic Industries* (2020), harnessed advanced technology as a national advantage in an effort to ward off economic slowdown. The plans sought to take Taiwan's high-tech R&D global, support human capital, wield industry 4.0 technologies, establish smart machinery development centers, and promote cybersecurity. Capitalizing on private investment, the Tsai Administration launched a new era of advancement in Taiwan's high technology sectors.

However, Taiwan's labor shortages were not solved through these two flagship plans and Tsai's new era of technological development was unsuccessful in growing new talent in the high-tech industries. Despite her efforts in advancing international top talent through the Asia Silicon Valley, the smart machinery industry, and CYBERSEC, the number of those talents who are interested in coming to Taiwan remains small. The economic slowdown will by no means be staved off unless there is a surge in the pool of technology talent. Accordingly, Lai's *Five Trusted Industry Sectors Promotion Plan* should greatly prioritize labor shortages along with the value of democracy.

The main point: Former President Tsai Ing-wen came into office in a period of economic slowdown that had begun in the 1990s, leading her to reshape Taiwan's national competitiveness using advanced technologies. Tsai outlined two significant plans: the *5+2 Industrial Innovation Plan* and the *Six Core Strategic Industries*, which significantly emphasized human capital and the burgeoning cybersecurity sector. Still, future technology policies should continue to prioritize labor shortages to counter an economic slowdown.

[1] On July 27, 2022, the Ministry of Science and Technology was reorganized as a ministry-level council named the National Science and Technology Council.

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Europe Must Learn from Taiwan to Counter Russia's Gray Zone Threats

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Frequent flyers through Europe are used to the occasional flight delay. Overloaded airports and carefully calibrated low-cost models mean that even slight disruptions can wreak havoc across the continent—with IT faults, power failures, and even extreme weather all causing mass delays and cancellations in recent years. Yet, in September this year, travelers in Copenhagen and Oslo experienced a novel form of disruption: large drones detected nearby the airports caused closures and flights to be grounded. Suspicion soon turned to Russia, and in particular, toward several nearby shadow-fleet linked vessels that could have served as launchpads.

For Europe, disruption is the new normal. While war rages in Ukraine, the rest of the continent has been subjected to an onslaught of "gray zone" or "sub-threshold" attacks from Russia—operations that stop short of open conflict but strike at critical vulnerabilities. These have ranged from recent cyberattacks that attempted to cut off an entire city's water supply, to waves of arson incidents and sabotage of undersea cables. From London to Warsaw, European policymakers are not only scrambling for a response, but are even struggling to find the right words to describe this new reality to their citizens. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's characterization of Europe as "not at war ... but no longer at peace" demonstrates how traditional policy thinking struggles to encapsulate the new reality of gray zone conflict.

In navigating this shadowy theatre of conflict, Europe would do well to look eastward—not to Moscow, but to Taipei. Taiwan has endured relentless gray zone pressure from China and has developed a sophisticated toolkit to counter it. Much like Russia, Beijing's gray zone strategy aims to maximize coercive pressure on Taiwan while minimizing its ability to respond. This has played out with near daily military incursions into Taiwan's Air-Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), complex information manipulation campaigns, and a deluge of malicious cyber-activity, such that Taiwan is now the target for over 55 percent of all cyber-attacks in the Asia-Pacific region. Europe, now facing a similar barrage of threats, can draw practical lessons from Taiwan's hard-earned experience.

Undersea Sabotage

Consider the case of suspected sabotage attacks against critical undersea infrastructure. Suspicious breakages in the Baltic Sea have mirrored those around Taiwan. Between October 2023 and December 2024, a series of vessels with Russian or Chinese links—the *Newnew Polar Bear, Yi Peng 3,* and *Eagle S*—damaged key regional energy and communications cables including the Balticconnector, FEC-1, and C-Lion1. Just weeks later, in January 2025, the Hong Kong-owned *Xingshun 39* struck the TPE Cable System inside Taiwan's territorial waters. A similar case followed in February 2025, when the *Hong Tai 58* severed Taiwan's TPKM3 cable. Across these cases, the gray zone tactics look remarkably similar. Ships dragged anchors for long distances, a malfunction that the crew could hardly have ignored. Vessels also made irregular, zig-zag movements directly over known cable routes, movements inconsistent with normal commercial navigation, while also often disabling tracking systems or switching identities mid-voyage.

Yet, while the sabotage threat is similar, Europe's response has lagged noticeably behind Taiwan's. Undersea cable sabotage exploits significant loopholes in international maritime law, which severely constrain the ability of governments to hold suspected saboteurs accountable. In Finland, a long awaited case against the aforementioned *Eagle S* collapsed after a Finnish court ruled that, since the cable damage took place in international waters, it had no jurisdiction over the issue. Contrast this with Taiwan, which has successfully sentenced the crew of the *Hongtai 58* to three years in prison for damaging Taiwan's *TPKM3* communication cable in February 2025—sending a strong signal to future would-be saboteurs. To further strengthen deterrence, the Taiwanese government is proposing a raft of seven legislative amendments to add to its response toolkit, ranging from new powers to seize vessels and equipment, to tougher penalties for those damaging undersea infrastructure and a clamp down on "dark-fleet" vessels' evading detection by disabling AIS transponders. Meanwhile, the EU's ambitious *Action Plan on Cable Security* is still only at the risk assessment and mapping stage—more than 8 months after it was first announced.

Lessons from Taiwan

Taiwan's experience points to three critical lessons for Europe.

First, resisting gray zone warfare requires whole-of-government coordination. Taiwan has recognized that responding to gray zone threats cannot be left to the military alone. Coordination with civilian departments is essential, both for effective response and to avoid

escalation. Taiwan's extensive experience with earthquakes and typhoons also means that it has developed a strong eco-system of government agencies and volunteer groups that can mobilize quickly and effectively—though, as the recent case of flooding in Hualien demonstrates, communication between central and local authorities still needs improvement.

In the case of undersea cables, Taiwan's inter-agency coordination is already bearing fruit. Rapid communication between Taiwan's telecommunications providers, coast guard and other government agencies enabled the pursuit and interdiction of the *Hong Tai 58,* without which the successful prosecution for undersea cable damage would have been impossible.

Secondly, technology matters. Taiwan is investing heavily in its ability to monitor and respond to gray zone threats. Its Legislative Yuan (立法院) has recently approved the purchase of new sea-borne drones to enhance maritime domain awareness. At the same time, Taiwan is considering adopting satellite hosted synthetic aperture radar (SAR) technologies to better track China's so-called "dark-fleet" of vessels that disable their transponders. By contrast, European systems remain focused on conventional threats like military vessels—it is far easier to spot a Russian warship than a suspicious cargo ship among the 7,600 vessels crossing the North Sea each day. Yet, these conspicuous targets are rarely the perpetrators of gray zone sabotage. In this context, AI-driven technologies to collect and analyze big datasets are fast becoming as important as weaponry in defending against these threats.

Thirdly, resilience requires a "whole-of-society" approach. Some of the most innovative solutions are found in the private sector and among civil society organizations. Taiwan's new "whole-of-society resilience" program aims to bring together stakeholders from across different sectors of government, industry, and civil society to discuss how to best bolster defense. One such example is in countering foreign informational manipulation and interference (FIMI), where a number of Taiwanese civil society groups have developed innovative approaches. The nonprofit Cofacts has developed an open-source, citizen-driven fact-checking platform that aims to combat disinformation and fake news, while the Taiwan Information Environment Research Center (IORG, 台灣資訊環境研究中心) works with schools to develop media literacy skills among children and young people. These initiatives not only empower citizens, but also lighten the load on government agencies. Equipping the public to understand and prepare for gray zone threats also helps avoid mass panic when things go wrong. For example, businesses which maintain back-up data systems will be much better equipped if major undersea cable sabotage causes slowdowns in cloud servers.

Mounting Urgency

As Russia intensifies its gray zone warfare, Europe cannot afford complacency. Cooperation with Taiwan is pivotal to mounting an effective response. While the sensitivities of the various "One-China" policies held by European governments may limit military cooperation with Taiwan, there is ample scope for civilian collaboration. Dialogue between coast guard administrations could cover a range of issues, from tackling illegal fishing to protecting undersea cables—all of which could develop capabilities useful in a gray zone or conflict scenario. Similarly, cyber security, disaster response, and public health could each be a topic for exchange between relevant government departments, all of which ultimately serve to bolster both Europe and Taiwan's resilience. Such exchange could happen on a bilateral basis, or as part of Taiwan's Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF), which already provides an established platform for European governments to engage with Taiwan. Several European countries have already taken part in a number of GCTF forums on issues such as Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) and supply chain resilience However, such cooperation need not be limited to government exchange. Charities, non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups often play an important role in disaster response—as illustrated by tens of thousands of "shovel superheroes" (鏟子超人) who volunteered for recovery efforts following severe flooding in Taiwan's Hualien province.

Alarming signs of deepening Russia-China coordination further underscores the urgency of meaningful cooperation between Europe and Taiwan. The suspicious activities of a number of Chinese vessels in the Baltic Sea and the presence of Russian vessels in the Taiwan Strait are just some of the indications that China and Russia may be coordinating in each other's gray zone attacks. Beijing and Moscow have a shared objective in weakening NATO and stopping its perceived eastward expansion, while Chinese officials have openly stated that they seek an end to the war in Ukraine that is favorable to Russia. These shared interests form the backdrop to a deepening strategic partnership between Russia and China, which encompasses large volumes of trade between the two countries, China's supply

of dual-use goods for Russia's war efforts in Ukraine, and an uptick in joint military drills across the globe. As China's role in sustaining and assisting Russia's hybrid warfare in Europe grows, policymakers across the continent would do well to draw from Taiwan's deep expertise. By listening to Taiwan and learning from its experience, Europe can build the resilience needed to preserve peace and prosperity in an increasingly dangerous world.

The main point: As Europe faces an onslaught of hybrid threats from Russia, it should look to Taiwan as a model and partner. From protecting undersea cables to countering foreign information manipulation and interference, Taiwan is leading the way in defending against a range of gray zone operations. Taking a whole-of-society approach—engaging government, businesses and civil society—is critical to success.

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