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## Shrinking the Strait: How Drone Warfare and Hybrid Tactics are Erasing Taiwan's Strategic Depth

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The 100 mile-wide Taiwan Strait has long served as the ultimate guarantor of Taiwan's security. For decades, the sheer geographic challenge of crossing that barrier has reinforced a sense of strategic insulation. However, the convergence of evolving hybrid warfare tactics and advances in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology is rapidly changing the security environment. Taiwan's experience with [small civilian drone incursions](#) over the island of Kinmen is no longer a localized issue. Instead, it is a preview of an all-island security challenge, as Beijing learns lessons from Moscow's war against Ukraine.

Moscow and Beijing are effectively shrinking the operational geography around their targets by combining hybrid warfare with advanced UAV capabilities. These tactics allow aggressors to project influence deep into interior territory, disrupt critical infrastructure, and force a reallocation of defense resources far from the frontlines. For Taiwan, this means the risk of Chinese drone incursions is no longer confined to the offshore islands but extends directly over military and civilian critical infrastructure on the main island of Taiwan. The implications are clear: Taiwan must recognize that the strategic depth once provided by the Strait is being eroded, and it must urgently enact all-of-Taiwan policies to counter Beijing's encircling strategy before low-cost, high-impact drone incursions become the new normal.

### ***The Technical Asymmetry of UAVs***

The effectiveness of UAVs in the gray zone is rooted in [technical and economic asymmetry](#). There are several elements to this. First, commercially-available quadcopters or fixed-wing drones are difficult to detect and track continuously. Their small radar cross-sections and low-altitude flight paths make them [challenging targets](#) for military radar systems designed to track larger, faster threats. AI-enabled UAVs are [now capable](#) of adapting to en-

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vironments and making unpredictable movements to confuse defenders. It is difficult to distinguish between civilian UAVs, armed UAVs, and decoy UAVs. This operational ambiguity is a core gray zone advantage.

A second significant factor is the economic disparity between utilizing UAVs and employing counter-measures. UAVs such as the Russian “Geran” (adapted and improved from the Iranian “Shahed”) cost somewhere between [USD 50,000-100,000](#), with decoys costing one-fifth of this price. Meanwhile, counter-measures are either capital-intensive (such as the air-to-air AIM-9 missile, costing several hundred thousand dollars) or manpower-intensive (including the use of helicopters, aircraft, and [roving teams of mobile air-defense units](#)). This [cost-exchange ratio](#) drains a defender’s resources and stresses air defense supply chains.

Third, even cheap UAVs are now capable of relatively long-range operations. In the Russia-Ukraine War, the kill zone of low-cost UAVs now extends to roughly [10-20 kilometers from the line of contact](#). This also has implications for gray zone harassment.

### ***UAVs and the End of Geographical Sanctuary***

Europe is now encountering these realities first hand. NATO’s “[frontline states](#)”—like Finland, Poland, and the Baltics—have historically borne the brunt of Russian aggression. Now, even countries far from the frontline are experiencing drone incursions that have challenged their ability to respond. Germany, France, Denmark, Belgium, and Italy have [all experienced](#) UAV harassment [targeting critical infrastructure](#) and [military bases](#) (in addition to the continued harassment of the traditional target states of Poland, Estonia, Romania, and Lithuania).

These incursions are likely being carried out through UAV launches in international waters, courtesy of Russia’s “[ghost fleet](#)” comprised of old tankers with non-transparent ownership. These tankers were originally used to evade sanctions on Russian oil; over the last year, their duties have expanded to [cutting undersea cables](#) and serving as UAV “motherships,” with cheap UAVs now having the capability to cruise through the 12 nautical miles of territorial waters and onto European territory.

Russia appears confident that European nations are hesitant to risk a military confrontation over ambiguous ‘civilian’ vessels. However, as these tankers shift from simple sanctions-evasion to active sabotage, they become legitimate targets for seizure under maritime law. To preempt this, Russia now routinely [deploys](#)

[aircraft](#) and [naval vessels](#) to shadow tankers deemed at-risk of being boarded. These military assets act as a “tactical shield,” using aggressive close-proximity maneuvers to signal that any law-enforcement action against the tanker will be treated as an attack on the Russian military itself.

While these incidents have yet to turn lethal, they have caused significant disruptions such as lengthy [airport closures](#). Shooting down individual UAVs over heavily-populated areas is a risky and costly task, so the initial focus of the Europeans has been to track the UAV motherships. In one [notable incident](#), French naval commandos boarded the *Boracay* tanker off the coast of Saint-Nazaire. This vessel had been sailing near Denmark during a series of drone incursions. The commandos detained the captain and a crew member, both Chinese nationals, for questioning. The captain was later placed under formal investigation for refusing to comply with naval orders, while the other crew member was released.

By combining its pre-existing ghost fleet with UAVs, Russia has been able to impose costs on interior NATO countries. The challenge is not solely a military one. These incidents reveal multiple interconnected gaps in Europe’s ability to credibly challenge these incursions. These gaps are fourfold. There is the question of the *technical* ability to track and shoot down the UAVs (or seize the mothership). There are *organizational* questions regarding who approves and undertakes kinetic action. There is the *legal* question of responsibility when UAVs are shot down over sensitive infrastructure and heavily-populated areas. Finally, there are the *political* costs of engaging in kinetic action against UAVs or motherships that are loitering in international waters.

These gaps point to the plausible deniability problem inherent in the defense against UAVs, which paralyzes action by the defender. There is clear [cross-pollination](#) in tactics between the PRC and Russia. Just as Beijing is [learning technical lessons](#) from the war in Ukraine, Russia has adapted Chinese gray zone harassment methods in the [South China Sea](#) and [Taiwan’s outlying islands](#). Moreover, Russia’s UAV harassment continually tests NATO’s willingness and capability to respond, which gives Beijing valuable data on designing a ladder of escalation in the Pacific.

### ***The PRC’s Adaption of Russian Harassment Methods against Taiwan***

Unlike the Russian strategy of bolder and more rapid risk escalation, the PRC utilizes a more long-term

“choking” strategy in its gray zone warfare. Over the last decade, both the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) escalated their incursions across the Taiwan Strait median line, and now regularly test Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone—all using a similar strategy of [persistent presence in disputed waters](#) and [exhaustion aimed at the Japan Self-Defense Forces](#). However, using manned aircraft to conduct these incursions imposes its own costs on the PLAAF and PLAN, ranging from aircraft engine life to training hours.



*Image: ROC military personnel training with weapons including an anti-UAV jamming gun (undated). (Image source: [RFA / ROC Ministry of Defense](#))*

Thus, the PLAN is also developing specialized UAV launch platforms, also known as drone carriers. The most notable of this type is the [Type 076 Sichuan](#). This vessel redefines what an amphibious assault vessel can do by blending its traditional troop transport role with a new focus on [power projection](#) through unmanned systems. The Type 076, with the lead ship named *Sichuan*, is not an incremental upgrade from the previous [Type 075 Landing Helicopter Dock](#) class. Instead, it is a new class entirely and can be described as a hybrid drone carrier-amphibious assault ship.

This platform is designed to host a diverse air wing that could significantly ease the PRC’s capability to harass Taiwan, particularly on Taiwan’s east coast. The Type 076’s electromagnetic catapults allow for the launch of heavy, high-performance combat drones such as the [Hongdu GJ-11 “Sharp Sword,”](#) an unmanned combat aerial vehicle designed for deep penetration and precision strikes. Beyond high-end combat assets, the vessel’s capacity supports medium-altitude, long-endurance drones such as the [Tengden TB-001 “Twin-Tailed Scorpion,”](#) which has already been utilized in encirclement flights around Taiwan and in the East China Sea to demonstrate a persistent surveillance capability.

Perhaps most critical for gray zone coercion is the potential for these ships to serve as command nodes for drone swarms. By launching high volumes of smaller, expendable rotary or fixed-wing UAVs, the PLA can saturate Taiwan’s air defense radars. This capability provides [additional flexibility](#) to Beijing’s arsenal in case of a full-scale attack.



*Image: A model display of a GJ-11 at the 2021 Zhuhai airshow. (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))*

Such capabilities can also be utilized to some extent by the PRC’s paramilitary forces. In recent years, the PRC has ramped up attempts to turn the China Coast Guard (CCG, 中國海警軍) and the People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM, 中國海上民兵) into what resembles a [second](#) and [third](#) navy. The CCG has adapted PLAN Type 054A frigates into its Type 818 “patrol cutters,” shifted naval officers to coast guard service, and is [planning much](#) of its future development along further adaptations of PLAN ships.

In the future, there is therefore the potential that the CCG will secure an adapted version of the Type 076. There have already been rumors as early as that the CCG was interested in this type of capability. The utilization of drone swarms into Taiwan’s territorial waters and airspace under the guise of “law enforcement” operations or “civilian fishing use” would allow Beijing to conduct high-volume harassment and reconnaissance operations at a relatively low cost. Moreover, such operations would likely be deliberately conducted in [conjunction with existing military UAV harassment](#), with a goal to confuse and paralyze Taiwanese responses.

### ***Implications for Taiwan***

To pre-empt this threat, Taiwan must shift from reactive measures to a proactive all-of-society defense strategy with clear response protocols for the public, as well as its political leadership. The primary hurdle is the legal and political paralysis that aggressors weaponize, observed in both the [August 2022 Kinmen UAV incident](#) as well as the European experience in con-

fronting Russian hybrid warfare.

To overcome this, legislative and regulatory actions are required to establish clear rules of engagement. Areas of responsibility, legal authorizations for UAV neutralization, and a clear chain of communication/command must not only be established, but also *practiced*. This is true not only of the military, but also of civil defense organizations.

One major success in countering the PRC's previous drone incursions against Kinmen was Taiwan's willingness to implement a policy change allowing for kinetic action against these platforms, regardless of whether they could be attributed with certainty to the People's Liberation Army. These "civilian" drone incursions into the airspace over the outlying islands were effectively discontinued following the downing of one drone. The success here lies in establishing a credible, active deterrence.

Gray zone activities exploit ambiguity of intent. By treating drone incursions as a relevant, hostile event, Taiwan successfully raised the perceived risk of escalation for Beijing while simultaneously demonstrating that it had the political will to impose consequences.

This will not be a foolproof strategy. Gray zone aggression, particularly at the low-end, is designed to be cheap and thus difficult to deter through cost imposition. The PRC will continue to experiment with new ways of pressuring Taiwan. However, a pre-emptively executed plan of defense will mean that the people of Taiwan will be ready and prepared when the PRC begins using Russian-style harassment tactics in the Pacific.

**The main point:** Advancing UAV technology and hybrid 'mothership' tactics are eroding the Taiwan Strait's role as a geographic buffer, bringing gray-zone threats directly to the main island. Taiwan must urgently adopt a comprehensive defense framework with clear rules of engagement to neutralize these low-cost incursions and deter an encirclement strategy by Beijing.

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## The PLA's "Justice Mission-2025" Exercise Around Taiwan

By: John Dotson

*John Dotson is the director of the Global Taiwan Institute and editor-in-chief of the Global Taiwan Brief.*

### Introduction

On December 29 and 30, People's Republic of China (PRC) military forces carried out a large-scale exercise in the air and ocean areas around Taiwan titled "Justice Mission-2025" (正义使命-2025). As announced at the outset of the exercise by the PLA's Eastern Theater Command (东部战区), the drills would focus on "sea and air combat readiness patrols" (海空战备警巡), "seizing comprehensive superiority" (夺取综合制权), "blockading key ports and territory" (要港要域封控), and "three-dimensional external line deterrence" (外线立体威慑) in the maritime region around Taiwan.

This represented the second major maritime exercise in 2025 [after April's Strait Thunder-2025A (海峡雷霆-2025A) exercise] conducted by forces of the PRC's People's Liberation Army (PLA) around Taiwan. It continued an encirclement and blockade theme that first emerged clearly in the 2023-2024 "Joint Sword" exercises (see previous analyses here, here, and here). It also demonstrated a continuing propaganda-cum-political warfare emphasis in PRC military operations related to Taiwan—as well as an intended deterrent message directed against foreign powers that might render aid to Taiwan in the event of a major crisis.

### Tactical Military Activity in the Exercise

Publicly-available information on the specific operations conducted in the course of the *Justice Mission-2025* exercise is limited. However, the Republic of China (ROC) Ministry of National Defense (MND) provided a press briefing that provided some specifics on exercise activity, in seven identified exercise areas around Taiwan. (See also accompanying graphic below.)

*December 29*

The first day of the exercise saw the heaviest tactical air activity. There were a total of 130 sorties by PLA aircraft (not further delineated by type) directed towards Taiwan; of these, 90 sorties crossed the Taiwan Strait centerline.

A total of 14 PLA Navy ships (not specifically identified by type or name) conducted operations in the vicinity of Taiwan. Of these, 11 ships "entered the adjoining [bordering] zone" (进入邻接区)—a phrase that was not further defined by MND. [1]

A total of 14 PRC Coast Guard ships (also not specifically identified) conducted operations around Taiwan or its outlying islands; of these, 8 ships "entered the adjoining zone."



Image: A PLA Daily article about the "Justice Mission-2025" exercise (dated Dec. 30). The sub-header asserts that: "This Is a Stern Warning to 'Taiwan Independence' Forces and Foreign Interference Forces, and a Just and Necessary Operation to Defend National Sovereignty and Uphold National Unification." (Image source: [Zhongguo Junwang](#))

A total of 4 ships from the "Western Pacific amphibious assault naval formation" (西太平洋兩棲攻擊艦編隊) operated together in an area approximately 85 kilometers (170 li) east/southeast of Taiwan. These ships were not further identified by the MND.

A [PLA publicity article](#) dated December 26 appeared to indicate that the *Yushen*-class (Type 075) amphibious assault ship *Hubei* (湖北) (Hull 34)—the latest ship of the PLAN's newest and largest class of landing helicopter assault (LHA) vessels—was involved in the exercise. The article stated that that "a certain amphibious vessel detachment composed of the *Hubei* and other ships" had deployed for "multidisciplinary combat training."

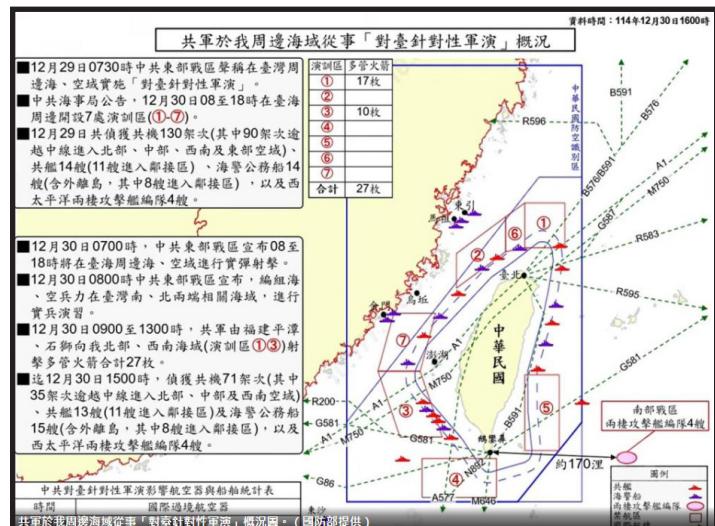


Image: A Taiwan government graphic depicting PLA military activity around Taiwan during the "Justice Mission-2025" exercise conducted on December 29-30. (Image source: [ROC Ministry of National Defense](#))

December 30

Per the MND, PLA exercise activity on the second day was broadly divided into three phases. The first of these occurred in the 0800 (8AM) hour, with live fire drills conducted by naval and air assets in sea areas to both the north and the south of Taiwan.

The second phase, conducted from the 0900 to 1300 hours (9AM to 1PM) consisted of a series of long-range rocket firings from locations in Pingtan (平潭) and Shi-shi (石獅) in Fujian Province (福建省): 17 rockets that impacted in exercise zone #1 (north of Taiwan, and the port of Keelung), and 10 rockets into exercise zone #3 (west/southwest of Taiwan, and the port of Kaohsiung).

The specific firing platforms were not identified, but [likely were PHL-16 / PCL-191 Multiple Rocket Launcher System \(MRLS\)](#) batteries operated by the PLA Ground Force (PLAGF), [capable of firing guided rockets up to 280 kilometers](#).

The MND indicated that a total of [10 rockets landed within the waters of Taiwan's contiguous zone](#)—making them, to date, the closest PLA projectiles to land near Taiwan's coast.

The third phase, commencing in the 1500 (3PM) hour, consisted of tactical air activity and continued naval drills. PLA air activity was significantly reduced on the second day, with a total of 71 sorties by PLA aircraft (not further delineated by type) directed towards Taiwan. Of these, 35 sorties crossed the Taiwan Strait centerline.

A total of 13 PLAN and 15 coast guard vessels (not specifically identified) conducted operations in the vicinity of Taiwan. Of these, 11 PLAN and 8 coast guard vessels “entered the adjoining zone.”

The 4 amphibious ships continued operations to the east/southeast of Taiwan. Per [video on PRC state media](#), some of the personnel on these ships conducted drills involving infantry (possibly PLA Navy Marine Corps or special forces personnel) boarding helicopters for possible simulated raids and/or facilities seizure drills.



Image: PLA footage, from an unspecified platform, reportedly showing impacts of rockets fired into the sea off Taiwan's coast (Dec. 30). (Image source: [PLA Eastern Theater / Zhongguo Junwang](#))



Image: An image from PRC state media of infantry (presumed PLA Navy Marine Corps personnel) boarding helicopters on an amphibious ship for a drill during the December 2025 exercise. (Source: [CCTV](#))

### Political and Propaganda Elements of the Exercise

As is always the case with PLA military exercises around Taiwan, the intended psychological and [political warfare](#) component is a primary factor—one that trumps even the practical military value of the exercise training evolutions. Accordingly, propaganda played a key role in the PRC government messaging surrounding the exercise (although in a less strident tone than observed [earlier in 2025](#)). At the outset of the exercise, the [PLA Eastern Theater Command issued a statement](#) that it represented a “stern warning against ‘Taiwan

independence’ separatist forces and foreign interference forces, [and] is a legitimate and necessary action to defend national sovereignty [and] and uphold national unification” (这是对“台独”分裂势力和外部干涉势力的严重警告，是捍卫国家主权、维护国家统一的正当必要行动).

At the December 29 PRC Foreign Ministry [press conference](#), spokesperson Lin Jian (林剑) linked the exercise with alleged “separatist” actions by the administration of Taiwan President Lai Ching-te (賴清德), as well as the mid-December announcement of the US Government approval of an [\\$11.1 billion USD package of arms sales](#) to Taiwan. Lin stated that:

*The drills are a punitive and deterrent action against separatist forces who seek “Taiwan independence” through military buildup, and a necessary move to safeguard China’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Let me stress that to advance their separatist agenda, the DPP authorities are turning Taiwan into a powder keg. Their massive and desperate arms purchase further reveal [sic] their true nature as provocateurs, saboteurs of peace and war-mongers. Anyone who tries to arm Taiwan to contain China will only embolden the separatists and push the Taiwan Strait closer to the peril of armed conflict.*



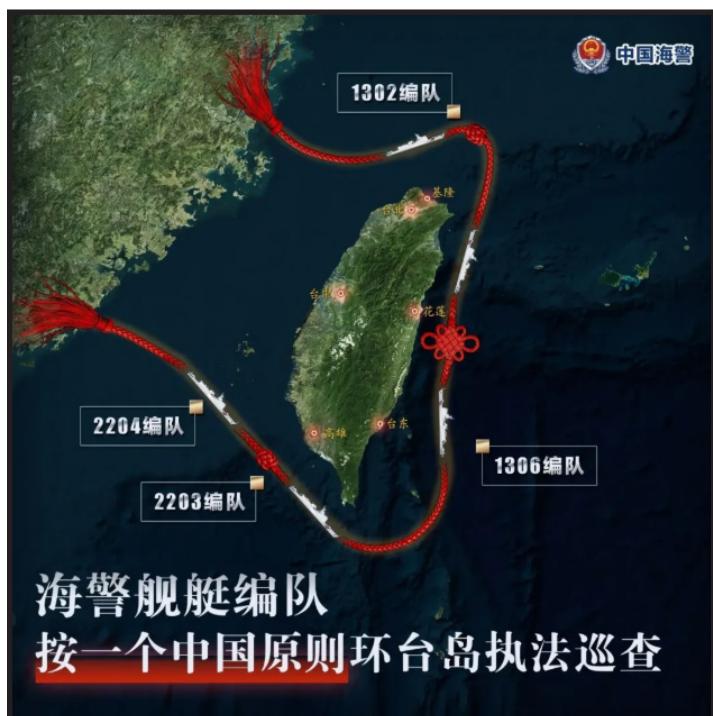
Image: “Taiwan is China’s inherent territory” (台湾是中国的固有领土) —a slogan displayed on a PRC Coast Guard vessel assigned to participate in the “Justice Mission-2025” exercise. (Image source: [CCTV](#))

Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (大陸委員會) (MAC) issued a [December 29 statement](#) that put the exercise in the context of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s “provocative and coercive military actions” against Taiwan, and stated that the exercise:

*[N]ot only seriously threaten[ed] the stability of the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, but also pose[d] a significant challenge to regional security, once again demonstrating that the CCP is the*

*troublemaker undermining peace across the Taiwan Strait [...] [The CCP] speaks of closer ties, yet on the other resorts to military intimidation; on the one hand, it proclaims that “people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one family,” yet on the other turns its military might against Taiwan. This once again demonstrates that the people of Taiwan must harbor no illusions about the CCP.*

Regional governments have expressed concern over the exercise, in measured terms. For example, Japan’s government—which has been on the receiving end of a [hostile PRC diplomatic campaign](#) since early November—[made a statement December 31](#) that the military drills “constitute actions that increase tensions across the Taiwan Strait,” and that “peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait are important for the international community as a whole.” US President Donald Trump [downplayed the significance of the exercise](#), in comments that emphasized a personal relationship with CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping: “Well, I have a great relationship with President Xi, and he hasn’t told me anything about it. I certainly have seen it, but he hasn’t told me anything about it... and I don’t believe he’s going to be doing it.”



*Image: A PRC propaganda graphic showing the location of PRC Coast Guard patrols around Taiwan during the exercise, depicting them as a traditional Chinese marriage knot. This continues a longer-term trend in the PRC’s “stalker” propaganda directed towards Taiwan, which attempts to depict menacing PRC actions as being affectionate in nature. (Image source: [Beijing Today](#))*

*age source: [Beijing Today](#))*

The customary [New Year’s address for 2026](#) by CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping, released December 31, made no mention of the exercise. However, Xi did extol the PRC’s move in 2025 to create the [“Commemoration Day of Taiwan’s Restoration”](#) (台湾光复纪念日)—a further narrative effort to link China’s asserted sovereignty over Taiwan with victory in World War II. He also made a standard exhortation that “For cross-Strait compatriots, blood is thicker than water, [and] the historical trend of reunification of the fatherland cannot be stopped!” (两岸同胞血浓于水，祖国统一的历史大势不可阻挡!).

#### ***Conclusion: Distinctive Elements of “Justice Mission-2025”***

There were a number of noteworthy aspects of *Justice Mission-2025*. The first of these is that no PLAN aircraft carrier deployed for the exercise, as has been the case in some other recent major exercises (such as *Joint Sword-2024B* in October 2024, and *Strait Thunder-2025A* in April 2025). (The PLAN carrier *Fujian* [sailed through the Taiwan Strait on December 17](#), but this appeared to be a routine transit to a maintenance facility, and the vessel was not involved in the exercise.) However, based on the numbers reported by Taiwan’s MND, the exercise did feature a high-level of shore-based PLA aviation sorties.

In place of a PLAN aircraft carrier deployment to the east of Taiwan, the PLAN deployed a formation of four amphibious assault ships to the east/southeast of Taiwan. Such vessels possess rotary-wing, but not fixed-wing, aviation assets. Based on the limited information from PRC media, it appears that these ships conducted at least some rudimentary helicopter-borne training for embarked naval infantry personnel, but the specific content of such training is unclear. It is noteworthy, however, to see such training now being conducted by PLAN amphibious forces in the vicinity of Taiwan’s eastern coast.

PRC media also indicated that the exercise featured [simulated strikes on targets in Taiwan](#) by PLA aviation assets (a feature of some of the preceding *Joint Sword* and *Strait Thunder* exercises since 2023), although it is uncertain what the specific targets may have been. Far more provocative were the rocket live-firings into sea areas north and south of Taiwan—a step that is evocative (albeit on a much lesser scale) of the [ballistic missile launches around Taiwan](#) conducted by the PLA in August 2022. The willingness of the PLA to fire live projectiles into Taiwan’s contiguous zone is a signifi-

cannot step forward in its efforts to intimidate Taiwan's population, and in the "boiling the frog" series of graduated moves intended to erode Taiwan's maritime sovereignty.

The *Justice Mission-2025* exercise also continued the [encirclement / blockade theme](#) that has been prominent in the PLA's major exercises since at least the initial *Joint Sword* exercise of April 2023. Accordingly, these exercises have been characterized by naval and coast guard deployments around the periphery of the island, surges of aviation sorties, and occasional long-range rocket firings; but little in the way of significant coordinated activity by ground force amphibious units.

Arguably, the most significant aspect of the exercise was the declaration of exercise zones that were closer to Taiwan's coastline, and which in some cases appeared to cross over into Taiwan's contiguous zone (12-24 nautical miles from the coast). However, it is unclear whether any PLA units actually crossed into the contiguous zone around the main island of Taiwan (a prospect suggested, but not confirmed, by the MND's comment on PLA units that "entered the adjoining zone").

In connection with this, the PRC authorities also displayed a willingness in this exercise to be more disruptive of routine economic and travel activity: the declared exercise areas cut across major civil aviation corridors in Taiwan, and Taiwan's government indicated on December 30 that [941 civil aviation flights had been affected](#), with [media outlets reporting on disrupted flights](#) and anxiety among many passengers.

The *Justice Mission-2025* exercise also shared at least one noteworthy element in common with the large-scale, but unnamed, [western Pacific exercise conducted by the PLA in December 2024](#). The latter exercise appeared to have been intended to send a deterrent message to regional powers that might intervene in a Taiwan military operation (particularly Japan and the United States). While the overall propaganda content of the December 2025 exercise was relatively restrained by PRC standards, the language regarding the most recently-announced series of US arms sales, and the language about "foreign interference forces" acting in tandem with "Taiwan independence separatist forces," appears clearly directed as a warning to the United States and its regional allies. Furthermore, the assertion of "external line deterrence" directed against foreign military forces aligns with the central theme of the December 2024 exercise.

While it is possible that the announcement of the US

arms sales may have had a minor impact on the scheduling of the exercise, one should treat with skepticism the implied assertion that the arms sale prompted this exercise: an exercise of such scale would be planned far in advance, with the CCP leadership perhaps waiting for a political trigger they could invoke as a narrative justification. Such a practice, intended to place the onus on others for the PRC's provocative actions, is a staple of CCP political warfare.

All in all, the *Justice Mission-2025* exercise appears to be broadly consistent, in terms of both military operations and narrative propaganda, with the PLA's other major maritime exercises conducted around Taiwan since 2023. Such exercises serve the dual purpose of asserting CCP narratives regarding its sovereignty claims over Taiwan, while also building up the individual and institutional skill proficiencies that PLA military personnel might bring to bear in an actual conflict. However, with the possible exception of the *Hubei* amphibious surface group deployment, it does not appear that the PLA displayed any noteworthy new proficiencies in this exercise. As always, for both the CCP leadership and their PLA military tool, the political element of such operations is paramount.

**The main point:** PRC military forces conducted another major maritime military exercise around Taiwan at the end of December—the second named major exercise of 2025 directed at Taiwan. The exercise, titled "Justice Mission-2025," followed the encirclement / blockade theme of other major exercises over the past 2-3 years—and was distinguished by high levels of aviation activity, the deployment of more advanced PLA Navy amphibious ships, and declared exercise operating areas that were closer to Taiwan's contiguous zone. The exercise also included a significant political / propaganda component, with messaging directed against "Taiwan separatist forces" and Taiwan's potential foreign allies.

[1] The phrase "entering the adjoining [or 'bordering'] zone" (進入鄰接區) is not clearly defined by the MND. While it is unclear, this might mean approaching or entering Taiwan's contiguous zone: the region recognized under customary maritime law as lying between 12-24 nautical miles from a state's coastline (with territorial waters extending from the coast to 12 nautical miles). The ROC MND often employs such vague (and potentially obfuscating) language in describing PRC military activity, for reasons that are not clear—but which could relate to a desire to preserve collection methods, and/or to sidestep political controversy.

## Somaliland and Taiwan Ties: Key Challenges and Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Cooperation

By: Ahmed Mahdi Hussein

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### Introduction

In recent years, [de facto states](#) have become increasingly active in international diplomacy, challenging the traditional state-centric framework that once restricted meaningful global engagement to fully-recognized sovereign states. The [unofficial diplomatic ties](#) between Somaliland and Taiwan demonstrate this shift toward non-traditional diplomacy, as both states occupy unique positions in the international system as self-determining democracies without official universal recognition.

Historically, [Somaliland](#) located in the Horn of Africa represents a significant case of resilience and self-determination. It gained independence from the United Kingdom on [June 26, 1960](#), only to voluntarily unite with Somalia five days later in pursuit of pan-Somali nationalism. However, years of political marginalization, civil war, and the collapse of the Siad Barre regime later prompted Somaliland to [declare its independence](#) on May 18, 1991. Since then, it has established functioning state institutions, maintained peace and stability, and has conducted multiple free and fair [elections](#)—even as it remains diplomatically unrecognized by all United Nations members except [Israel](#).

Taiwan—officially known as the Republic of China (ROC)—shares a parallel experience of [de facto](#) statehood. After losing the Chinese civil war (1946-1949), the nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-Shek [fled to Taiwan](#), while the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, [中國共產黨](#)) established the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland in 1949. In the intervening years, Taiwan has [built](#) strong government institutions, a thriving democracy, and a [major global economy](#) yet it continues to face diplomatic quarantine due to Beijing's efforts to restrict its international space.

This article explores three key areas: first, the prima-

ry foundation of Somaliland-Taiwan ties, second, the main challenges that threaten the sustainability of Somaliland-Taiwan relations, and finally, key policy recommendations to sustain this cooperation.

### *The Foundation of Somaliland-Taiwan Ties*

Somaliland and Taiwan stand out as remarkable models of [de facto states](#) that have built effective governance systems and resilient political institutions, despite their limited official recognition. In July 2020, Somaliland and Taiwan launched [enhanced relations](#) through a bilateral protocol and the mutual establishment of representative offices at each other's capitals (Hargeisa and Taipei). According to Mohamed Hagi, former Somaliland chief representative to Taiwan, the partnership [is based](#) on the two nations' shared commitment to the common values of democracy, freedom, justice, and the rule of law. Both countries are located in volatile geographical regions the Horn of Africa and the East China Sea while both parties operate outside of [full membership](#) in major international organizations such as the United Nations, which underscores the novelty of their diplomatic engagement.

According to Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, [外交部](#)), [bilateral engagement](#) focuses on areas such as education, public health, fisheries management, agriculture, energy, mining and Information and communication Technology. Somaliland and Taiwan relations [extend beyond](#) ideological alignment. Somaliland seeks economic growth and investment, while Taiwan seeks to increase its influence and access to growing African markets.

Over the past five years, cooperation between Somaliland and Taiwan has produced significant and multidimensional [benefits](#) mainly in the areas of democratic governance, infrastructure development, education, health, and global visibility.

In the health sector, Taiwan has emerged as one of Somaliland's most significant partners in health systems reinforcement. The flagship aspect of this partnership is the USD 22 million [Taiwan Medical Center](#) in Hargeisa, as well as Taiwan's donation of [four ambulances](#) (two to Somaliland's Ministry of Health and two to medical mobility initiatives). Furthermore, Taiwan supplied 150,000 doses of the [MVC COVID-19](#) vaccine and supported the expansion of [digital health information systems](#) through five national hospitals in Somaliland. These interventions significantly improved the nation's emergency response capabilities, pandemic control, and national hospital data management.

In the areas of humanitarian relief and democratic governance, Taiwan has contributed USD 2.5 million in [rehabilitation and humanitarian assistance](#), USD 2 million to support Somaliland's 2024 presidential and political party [elections](#), and USD 500,000 to a [drought relief](#) effort. Moreover, Taiwan government provided USD 550,000 in donations towards rebuilding efforts following the [Waaheen Market Fire](#), one of the most devastating urban disasters in Somaliland history.



*Image: President of Somaliland Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi (fourth from right), accompanied by cabinet ministers and Taiwan's Ambassador Allen Lou (羅震華, third from right) at the ground-breaking ceremony for the Taiwan Medical Center in Hargeisa (Oct. 26, 2025). (Image Source: [Taiwan in Somaliland](#))*

Meanwhile, when it comes to digital infrastructure, the Taiwanese government has allocated a total of USD 1 million for the establishment of the [Somaliland National Data Center](#), which has been critical for modernizing e-government systems. Taiwan also contributed USD 1.85 million—approximately 70 percent of the total cost—to the construction of the “[Taiwan Road](#),” connecting Hargeisa to Egal International Airport. Furthermore, Taiwan provided USD 810,000 as seed funding for the new [Cheetah Conservation Fund's](#) (CCF) Education Center in Somaliland.

In education, Taiwan has offered governmental [scholarships](#) and [fellowships](#) arranged by MOFA, the International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF, 國際合作發展基金會), and the Ministry of Education (MOE, 教育部). Recently, almost [one hundred and eighty](#) Somaliland students have received the above scholarships and fellowships. Many of them have returned to the country and become leaders and managers in Somaliland's government, business, academia and beyond. Also, [security sector](#) scholarships have brought senior Somaliland military officers to the National Defense University (NDU, 國防大學) in Taiwan.

Furthermore, Taiwan has [trained](#) over 1,200 individuals in 56 diverse IT courses through the [Somaliland Innovation Zone](#) (SIZ).

Additionally, Taiwan offers [advanced training programs](#) and exchanges for Somaliland's governmental-level and institutional partners in areas such as agriculture, health, technology and education. Similarly, Somaliland [hosts](#) Taiwanese delegations, investors, technical missions, and tourists to expand development and commercial cooperation. Finally, Somaliland and Taiwan have signed multiple bilateral strategic agreements and MOUs in areas of mutual interest, such as coast guard cooperation.

### **Main Challenges to Somaliland-Taiwan Ties**

#### *The Reactions of Regional and Global Actors*

The responses of regional and global powers to Somaliland-Taiwan relations are complicated and diverse. For example, [Somalia](#) strongly opposes these relations, condemning the partnership as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and a challenge to its “[One-Somalia Policy](#)”. Other neighboring countries such as Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea [maintains cautious neutrality](#) and public silence regarding these relations, in line with both their “One-Somalia” and “One-China” policies.

Globally, China also [strongly opposes](#) Somaliland-Taiwan relations, framing it as a violation of its “[One-China Principle](#)”. China uses diplomatic pressure, such as through lobbying at international fora, to challenge and isolate both Hargeisa and Taipei. On the other hand, the United States [adopts](#) a neutral but generally positive stance towards these ties. Washington plays an indirect yet influential role, supporting initiatives that reinforce democratic governance, economic resilience, and strategic autonomy in both Somaliland and Taiwan.

#### *The Absence of Global Recognition*

The *de facto* independent status of both Somaliland and Taiwan continues to limit their ability to engage in official diplomacy and access multilateral platforms. This lack of international recognition restricts the institutional depth of their bilateral relations. Both Somaliland and Taiwan are excluded from major international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and [African Union](#). This isolation restricts opportunities for broader strategic relations, limits avenues for advancing their interests in international platforms, and reduces their global visibility.

### US-China Rivalry

The [growing strategic rivalry](#) between the United States and China in the Horn of Africa indirectly shapes the outside environment within which the Somaliland and Taiwan partnership operates. China views Taiwan's external relations as challenges not only to its One-China principle but also to China's broader strategic ambitions in the region. For instance Beijing has increased pressure on Somaliland by strengthening relations with Mogadishu and reiterating support for Somalia's "[One Somalia](#)" Policy as a means to isolate Taiwan's engagement in the region, while warning against deeper ties with Taipei that could challenge Beijing's regional footprint near its military base in Djibouti. In this context, neighboring states are cautious about openly supporting Somaliland and Taiwan relations for fear of damaging economic and political ties with China. On the other hand, [US-China competition](#) limits the extent of public external support for these relations. Although the United States roughly supports Taiwan's global engagement and views Somaliland through a strategic lens, it remains neutral about actions that could escalate tensions with China in the geopolitically vital region.

### Limited Trade and Economic Connectivity

Bilateral economic relations remain constrained by structural obstacles such as [inadequate direct transport](#) corridors, [limited infrastructure](#) in Somaliland, and [poor financial linkages](#). These challenges decrease the potential for robust trade, investment, and private sector partnerships between Somaliland and Taiwan.

### Key Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Somaliland-Taiwan Cooperation

1. Somaliland and Taiwan can mitigate diplomatic isolation by joining regional dialogues as an observer such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) forums, African Union policy dialogues, the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) and also democracy oriented platforms such as the Copenhagen Democracy Summit. This dialogue will enhance public diplomacy and engage bilateral cooperation with states that advocate democracy and development.
2. Both parties should maintain balanced neutrality and focus on their common development goals rather than geopolitical alliances vis-à-vis the United States and China.
3. Both sides should collaborate on high impact, quality-driven programs that differentiate Taiwan's aid

approach from that of China.

4. Somaliland and Taiwan should establish a trade enhancement framework and logistics corridor that will reinforce connectivity, reorganize the movement of goods, and increase market access.
5. Somaliland and Taiwan academics and scholars should expand joint research, policy studies, and academic relations focused on governance, diplomacy, and development to expand intellectual connectivity.
6. Both parties should engage supportive international partners and compatible states such as the United States, Japan and European democracies to support technical agendas, economic development and broader global visibility.
7. Somaliland and Taiwan should enhance media cooperation and increase coverage of bilateral programs and success stories, while combatting misinformation.
8. Civil society leaders, youth groups and digital influencers in both governments should play a vital role in enhancing bilateral ties, deepening public diplomacy, and promoting international visibility.

**The main point:** Over the past five years, Somaliland-Taiwan relations have revealed how two *de facto* states and democracies can leverage pragmatic relations to expand their global positions in spite of diplomatic pressure. Sustaining this cooperation requires aligning strategic priorities, resisting external isolation, and institutionalizing long-term policy mechanisms.

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### When Threats Tell You Who They Are, Believe Them: Lessons for Taiwan from Israel

By: Ann E. Kowalewski

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In November 2025, Taiwan's foreign minister [commented](#) that the island aims to deepen cooperation with Israel. Both Israel and Taiwan [have called](#) for Taipei to learn from the Middle Eastern country's security apparatus, particularly regarding the ways in which Israel's large reserve force and intense military training have protected the small democracy in a threatening

security landscape. As Israel reckons with the tragic events of October 7th and [assesses](#) how it failed to predict and deter Hamas' deadly attacks, Taiwan can draw from the lessons learned. Hopefully, knowledge from Israel's failure can galvanize Taiwanese society into action and paint a more realistic early warning picture of the threat Taiwan faces from the People's Republic of China (PRC).

### **No Information Gap**

When a surprise attack happens, a common assumption is that the incident occurred because the government in question lacked information about the threat. Indeed, after the October 7th attacks, both Israeli and US intelligence analysts were [surprised](#) at the relative ease through which Hamas was able to build up its assault force, construct an elaborate underground tunnel network, and breach Israeli territory.

Yet, Israel's internal security and counterintelligence service, Shin Bet, has since [conducted](#) its own investigation into the various failures that led to the attacks. Most notably, the report records policymakers' lack of urgency towards the threat, a misunderstanding of Hamas' intent, and overconfidence in Israel's own border security as the main reasons for the surprise. Importantly, none of these issues relate to a lack of information. Instead, the conclusions point to a failure to take at face-value the information available regarding Hamas' war preparations.

### **A Failure of Assumptions**

Prior to 2023, much of Israel's security establishment [operated](#) under an assumption that now reads as catastrophic: Hamas was a fragmented resistance force that was bogged down in its own governance issues in Gaza and lacked an appetite for all-out war.

October 7th shattered that illusion. What Israel encountered that morning was not a disorganized militia but a fully-formed army—one with an [adaptable](#) leadership structure, covert communications [systems](#), pre-positioned weapons, and a vast underground infrastructure [designed](#) for sustained conflict. The scale of planning and preparation was incompatible with the image Israel had allowed itself to accept.

Yet this was not incongruent with the intelligence Israel had [collected](#) about Hamas, or even the publicly-available information about Hamas' [planning](#). Israeli military intelligence officials have told me that Israel had the names and phone numbers of every Hamas operative who crossed into Israel that day. Others have corroborated [public reporting](#) by telling me that Israeli

authorities have tracked millions of US dollars flowing into Gaza. They had monitored Hamas' growing arsenal, its training [exercises](#) on mock Israeli settlements, and even public statements by Hamas officials [calling for confrontation](#) and [lauding](#) the group's tunnel network.

It is thus evident that the surprise of October 7th was not the result of a lack of information about Hamas' preparations and intent, but rather Israel's inability to shift its own assumptions about Hamas. Prior to 2023, Israeli commanders and policymakers insisted that Hamas did not want a full-blown war. Israeli policymakers and intelligence officials followed a logic that felt intuitive: Hamas was a resistance force that wanted a better life for those in Gaza, and war does not make Gazans' lives better. Moreover, Israeli military leadership appeared to believe that their armed forces were strong enough that Hamas would never dare trigger an open confrontation.

But, Israel's military and political leadership overlooked Hamas' [deep belief](#) that a life under the thumb of Israel is no life at all, and Hamas' extremist ideology that death through war brings rewards in the afterlife. Israel's overconfidence left little possibility to imagine a scenario in which Hamas's will to fight outweighed its desire to live, or its fear of Israel's strength.

In other words, Israel assumed Hamas would make the same risk calculation that the Israelis would have. They were wrong, and paid dearly by belatedly understanding that deterrence is only as strong as the enemy's assumptions—not yours.

### **Lessons for Taiwan**

If there is a global audience that should study the failures of Israel's defense planning, it is Taiwan and those that are invested in the island's security. Israel's faulty assumptions prior to October 2023 included the belief that Hamas did not want a full-blown war, that Hamas prioritized life in Gaza, and that Hamas' military build-up and arsenal were not indicators of a true intent to attack. Taiwan's policymakers would do well to rid themselves of their own faulty assumptions about the PRC and heed the lessons below.

#### **1. When an adversary shows you who they are, believe them.**

Like Israel, many [Taiwanese](#) people and certain international [observers](#) are still reluctant to assume that China will truly go to war with Taiwan. However, the PRC's rhetoric, military build-up and exercises, and societal planning signal the very opposite.

PRC officials have been explicit—sometimes blunt—about their intentions toward Taiwan. These officials have clearly stated they “[absolutely will not rule out use of force](#)” on Taiwan and Xi himself has said he is willing to use “[all means necessary](#)” to annex Taiwan. Additionally, China’s military buildup, increasingly sophisticated [exercises](#) around the island, and exercises targeting mock-ups of the [Taiwanese presidential palace](#) and the [city of Taipei](#) all demonstrate the PLA’s preparations to attack Taiwan *specifically*.

China is also preparing its society to tolerate a conflict over Taiwan, and planning for the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP, 中國共產黨) administrative control over the island of Taiwan. Take, for example, state- and province-level [planning](#) for conflict scenarios, legal changes [criminalizing](#) those that identify as Taiwanese, and state-affiliated [media](#) and public universities [proposing](#) plans for Taiwan’s governance. Dismissing these datapoints because they conflict with what Taiwanese society wants to believe means repeating Israel’s mistake.

**2. Never project your own intent onto an adversary.** Taiwanese and US analysts and pundits commonly reference the cost of war on China’s [economy](#) as an [indicator](#) that Beijing does not really intend to invade. This analysis may be driven by the emphasis that both Taiwan and the United States place on maintaining their own economic strength.

Yet, we have witnessed time and time again that Beijing is willing to shoulder economic costs in pursuit of its political aims. This includes its own [damaging economic policy](#) to maintain [political control](#) over industry; domestic policies [cracking down](#) on foreign influence that drive out overseas investors; and [economic coercion](#) that ultimately [scares businesses](#) away from China and [hurts](#) Chinese firms.

China’s strategic decoupling from parts of the global economy is not an *ad hoc* policy—rather, it is a plan illustrated by PRC economic strategy [documents](#), investment in its [own supply chains](#), and CCP rhetoric that Chinese companies are an “[important force to carry out the major decisions and deployments of the Party Central Committee](#).” This demonstrates PRC intent to [isolate its economy](#) from external shocks such as sanctions or retaliation, or disruptions to global trade routes, both of which it might face if it were to move on Taiwan. All of this points to Beijing’s willingness to shoulder economic costs if it sees the political outcomes as necessary.

While the threat of being cut off from the global economy may factor strongly into a theoretical calculus by

Taiwan as to whether the PRC would conduct a military intervention, Beijing may not share the same priorities. Ultimately, Beijing will weigh whether the political necessity of annexing Taiwan is worth the economic cost. Like Israel, Taiwan should not assume the enemy will make the same calculus that it would. To project Taiwan’s desire for peace and global economic stability onto Beijing’s decision-making risks clouding the evidence already in plain view: that the PRC is building the military capability and preparing for the economic consequences of war.

### 3. A bottom-up, decentralized response can save a nation.

Lastly, Taiwan can learn not just from how the Oct 7th attacks happened, but how Israel responded in the early hours. Hamas sent thousands of fighters into Israel, wave after wave. Israel’s initial responders often numbered in merely the tens or hundreds. Yet, by the [end of the day](#), Israel had [deployed](#) a formidable defense that drove back the attackers and declared war.

No doubt this response was facilitated by Israel’s long-standing conscription policies and military training. But training and mobilization are two different undertakings. Israeli citizens mobilized quickly without a central command or central communication. Reserve soldiers and Israeli citizens [shared stories](#) about how they first learned about the attacks through WhatsApp groups and local community message boards, and sprang into action. Israeli citizens shared information about Hamas fighters’ whereabouts online, identified local first response groups, and drove to their reserve command units without being officially called up for duty.

In certain places, such as the [Nova music festival grounds](#), first responders arrived within hours with little or no knowledge about Hamas’ coordinated attack or the horrific massacre that was occurring, hearing only that “something was happening.” Army intelligence officers told me that it took the country’s military around three days to map the full scope of Hamas’s penetration and military coordination. Even so, it took only six hours for Israeli society to mount a formidable, improvised first line of civilian defense.

For Taiwan, which faces a numerically-superior adversary with the capacity to overwhelm early defense lines, this lesson matters profoundly. A fast, decentralized, self-directed response can blunt even a large, well-coordinated surprise attack.

#### ***The Warning Is There—If It Is Heeded***

Incorporating these lessons does not guarantee that Taiwan will prevail in a conflict scenario with the PRC,

nor will it necessarily deter an attack from the PRC. Indeed, Taiwan faces a very different kind of adversary than Israel does, and Taiwan has unique geographic challenges that Beijing must overcome if it were to use force against the island. But ignoring these lessons guarantees Taiwan's vulnerability.

Israel learned, at enormous human cost, that an enemy can broadcast its intentions in plain sight and still not be believed. Taiwan cannot afford that luxury. Preparedness starts with accepting that an adversary's declarations, capabilities, and preparations are not rhetorical theater—they are data. And when a threat tells you who they are, the most dangerous mistake is to think they are speaking figuratively, or to project your own intent onto the adversary. What happened to Israel on October 7th should be a clear warning sign for Taiwanese society. China is planning to annex Taiwan, and without taking PRC preparations at face-value or building a bottom-up defense, Taiwan is vulnerable to a surprise attack.

**The main point:** While Taiwan faces a very different challenge than Israel does, it can still learn from Israel's failed assumptions about Hamas. It is a grave mistake to assume China would make the same risk calculation that Taiwan or the United States would, and ignore China's capability, rhetoric, and actions.

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## Taiwan's Coast Guard and White Hull Diplomacy

By: Jordan Laramore

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Taiwan's leading maritime law enforcement agency is the Coast Guard Administration (海洋委員會海巡署), or simply the CGA. The CGA has a handful of responsibilities that are typical of most other coast guards: including maritime public security, search and rescue, protection of fishing rights, and marine conservation. Since the administration of former President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), the CGA has undergone modernization and expansion. This policy has continued with the strong support of President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) and Taiwan's Ocean Affairs Council (海洋委員會), which

has sought an additional NTD 29.56 billion (USD 973.55 million) under a special budget. Proposed in September 2025, the new budget would help fund the construction of 40 domestically-produced patrol vessels.

The special budget is part of the CGA's plan, first announced in 2018, to build 141 new vessels by 2027 in order to safeguard Taipei's maritime rights and interests. However, maritime crime does not respect borders, and the CGA often must deal with transnational crime—and this is where "white hull diplomacy" comes into play. "White hull diplomacy" is the use of coast guard vessels (the "white hulls") for maritime presence and influence. It can emphasize collaboration or it can take on a more confrontational nature. With the CGA currently undergoing modernization, the opportunity for Taipei to expand its diplomatic footprint using "white hull diplomacy" is ideal. By expanding cooperation with other maritime law enforcement agencies Taipei can more effectively combat maritime crime and address the growing challenge of gray zone operations in the maritime domain.



*Image: A modern CGA Anping-class offshore patrol vessel docked in Kaohsiung, Taiwan (Image Source: Author's photo to)*

### Maritime States under Increasing PRC Pressure

The CGA's modernization seeks to enhance its capabilities to better meet its core responsibilities, with a primary focus on enhancing the CGA's ability to counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) gray zone operations. Gray zone tactics fall into an ambiguous zone be-

tween war and peace: they are activities that are more aggressive than routine state-to-state interactions, but remain below the threshold of open warfare. Increased [Chinese military drills around Taiwan](#), regular ADIZ (Air Defense Identification Zone) violations, and [encirclements](#) of Taiwan with naval vessels are examples of Chinese gray zone activities employed against the island. As gray zone operations grow in frequency, the CGA has become indispensable for Taipei as it seeks to resist ongoing pressure from Beijing.

Taiwan is not the only nation that is facing the growing challenge of China's gray zone operations—the Philippines has long faced the same tactics. Manila has almost daily encounters with the China Coast Guard (CCG, 中國海警局) and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN, 中國人民解放軍海軍). Chinese ships have [rammed and harassed numerous Philippine](#) vessels in the disputed waters around the Spratly Islands. In one case near Scarborough Shoal, the aggressive maneuvers of Chinese vessels resulted in a [collision between a PLAN warship and a smaller CCG vessel](#), leaving the smaller CCG vessel severely damaged.

Meanwhile, the small island states of Oceania are facing the challenge of how to deal with illegal Chinese fishing in their exclusive economic zones. PRC fishing fleets have been sighted across the Pacific, from Taiwan to the [Galápagos Islands](#) of Ecuador—some 10,000 miles (16,000 km) from China. These illegal fishing fleets are [often attended](#) by elements of Chinese Maritime Militia (中國海上民兵), a paramilitary force including modified fishing vessels that has been used extensively to conduct gray zone operations. Taiwanese media has reported that the [CCG has also escorted fishing vessels operating illegally](#) in the contested waters of the South China Sea. This indicates that illegal fishing operations likely have PRC state backing. Though they are not always a feature of China's gray zone operations, these illegal fishing activities pose a threat [not only to the environment](#) and protected aquatic life, but also to the [sovereignty of nations](#). [Illegal fishing](#) jeopardizes national sovereignty by damaging food and economic security, it also threatens port and maritime security, because criminal organizations may use similar trade routes for trafficking people and illegal goods.

The states that struggle the most to meet the challenges of illegal PRC fishing are the small Pacific island nations. For example, [Palau](#) and the Marshall Islands have had run-ins with illegal fishing vessels from China—the latter of which [joined the Port State Measures Agreement](#) (PSMA) in 2024 in response. The [PSMA](#) seeks to

deter illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing by preventing vessels engaged in IUU fishing from using ports and landing their catches. It should be noted that Palau and the Marshall Islands also maintain [official diplomatic relations](#) with the Republic of China (Taiwan) instead of the People's Republic of China (two of only 12 states to do so). This renders these nations more ready targets for Chinese coercion. However, even island nations that are diplomatic allies with Beijing, like [Vanuatu](#), have arrested illegal Chinese fishermen.

### ***White Hull Diplomacy***

Like the United States Coast Guard (USCG), Taiwan's Coast Guard [can be used in times of war](#) to augment the navy. However, Taiwan's CGA is fundamentally a law enforcement agency, and this law enforcement role means that the CGA can conduct bilateral and multilateral operations in a more discreet manner than the Republic of China Navy. This "[white hull diplomacy](#)," or "coast guard diplomacy," employs coast guard vessels ("white hulls") as an alternative to naval warships ("gray hulls") for maritime patrols and law enforcement, and offers a less escalatory way to assert sovereignty and promote stability. White hull diplomacy emphasizes cooperation and the maritime rule of law over military force. In this realm, Taiwan can become a leader in countering not just PRC gray zone activities, but also illegal fishing and transnational maritime crime.

Taiwan has already signed numerous coast guard cooperation agreements with other states. Taiwan has inked such agreements with its three diplomatic allies in the Pacific: [Palau](#), the [Marshall Islands](#), and [Tuvalu](#). These partnerships focus on the exchange of personnel for visiting and training, maritime search and rescue, fisheries law enforcement, and cooperation in combating transnational crime. As part of the cooperation between Taiwan and these island nations, Taipei has donated or transferred patrol vessels. In 2021, Palau received [two coastal multi-purpose boats](#), and [has expressed interest](#) in more joint patrols with Taiwan. Two years later, the then-Taiwanese Ambassador to the Marshall Islands, Steve C.C. Hsia (夏立言), [donated an official vehicle to the Marshall Islands](#) Marine Resources Authority. In 2024, Tuvalu [received two donated patrol boats](#) from Taiwan.

Notably, the CGA also signed a [cooperation agreement with Somaliland](#) in 2025. [Somaliland](#) is an internationally-unrecognized state in the Horn of Africa. Taiwan and Somaliland [established unofficial diplomatic rela-](#)

tions in 2020, and the coast guard agreement between the two states illustrates Taiwan's willingness to cooperate with actors beyond the Pacific. The cooperation agreement will bring about greater collaboration on training, maritime exercises, and mutual visits by official personnel. During the [announcement ceremony](#), President Lai Ching-te called for deeper bilateral partnerships between Taiwan and Somaliland to "demonstrate the resilience of democratic alliances."

Taiwan has also made an effort to expand coast guard cooperation with Japan, the United States, and the Philippines. The CGA and the Japan Coast Guard have moved to [normalize joint coast guard training](#), with Taipei and Tokyo boosting their cooperation in response to the PRC's coercive activities in the East and South China Seas. Meanwhile, the CGA continues to closely work with the USCG—with the two sides [signing a memorandum of understanding \(MOU\)](#) in 2021 to establish a Coast Guard Working Group. The most recent *National Defense Authorization Act*, signed into law by President Donald Trump in December 2025, includes [authorization for up to USD 1 billion \(NTD 31 billion\)](#) for the Taiwan Security Cooperation Initiative, and directs the US Department of Defense to develop a plan for enhanced joint coast guard training.

This show of support from Japan and the United States is important in the absence of official diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Law enforcement agreements are less politically-sensitive than military agreements, and help underscore Taiwan's status as a responsible global partner. Meanwhile, in December 2025, it was reported that Taiwan and the Philippines held a meeting in Manila to discuss [potential areas of cooperation](#) between the Philippine Coast Guard and Taiwan's CGA. Taiwan's "white hull diplomacy" is steadily growing—but there is more yet to be done.

### Policy Recommendations

For "white hull diplomacy" to thrive, Taiwan must continue to be an active global partner. Therefore, using the CGA to support diplomatic allies and partners in their maritime law enforcement efforts is paramount. Taiwan can expand its maritime diplomatic presence and build goodwill through the following measures:

1. Increasing the number of coast guard joint patrols and personnel exchanges with its existing partners. Successful recent initiatives include the recent [Taiwan-Palau joint maritime rescue drill](#) and the [Goodwill and Training Mission](#) with Palau. Similar activities should be conducted across the region

with Taiwan's current diplomatic allies and partners, both large and small. Maintaining strong relations with current partners helps to build a solid base for the CGA to expand collaboration with other nations.

2. Focusing on providing maritime patrol vessels to partners in need across the region. Taiwan has already donated small patrol vessels to Palau and Tuvalu, but more can be done. As the CGA is modernizing, it has [decommissioned several older ships](#). These older vessels can be modernized and refitted with the eventual goal of donating them to friendly nations.

Alternatively, Taiwan could design a class of ships specifically for donation to regional partners, much like Australia's [Pacific Maritime Security Program](#) (PMSP) and its *Guardian*-class patrol boats. The PMSP is "a comprehensive package of capability, infrastructure, sustainment, training and coordination designed to increase national and regional maritime security for 16 partner nations." By designing and building ships, Taiwan can support its domestic shipbuilding, assist in training foreign personnel on the new vessels, and improve the maritime law enforcement capacity of regional partners.

1. Establishing coast guard agreements and MOUs with new partners across the Indo-Pacific. Taipei can build a network of agreements that protect the environment, fight criminal activity, protect sovereignty, and assist nations in profound ways. Taiwan can share its expertise in countering illegal fishing and its expansive knowledge of PRC gray zone activities, with the additional benefit of constructing lasting relations with international maritime law enforcement figures and organizations.

By building a network of partners, Taiwan can support other nations in their efforts to combat illegal fishing and, in some cases, push back against Chinese gray zone tactics. "White hull diplomacy" is an important tool to advance Taiwan's diplomatic objectives, and can illustrate that Taiwan is a reliable partner and a responsible nation that respects international law. Expanding collaborative efforts with like-minded allies and partners will support Taiwan's diplomatic efforts more subtly and practically.

**The main point:** As Chinese maritime gray zone tactics grow in number and scope, and as illegal fishing and transnational crime continue to pose a global challenge, Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration is at the

frontline. Taiwan is not alone in facing these challenges and should expand its “white hull diplomacy” of coast guard cooperation with partner nations. These efforts can challenge transnational crime, confront Chinese gray zone operations, and showcase Taiwan’s role as a responsible partner that respects international law.

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