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In April, China stunned Taiwan by allegedly pressuring three African states—[Seychelles](#), [Mauritius](#), and [Madagascar](#)—to revoke overflight permission for President Lai Ching-te's (賴清德) planned flight to Eswatini, just [hours before take-off](#). Bloomberg [reported](#) that Taipei attempted to reroute Lai's flight via Europe, but both Germany and the Czech Republic also denied last-minute access. A week later, however, Lai surprised observers by suddenly announcing his arrival in Eswatini for a four-day visit. Consequently, Beijing issued an unusual [condemnation](#) of Eswatini.

Lai's original visit was highly publicized, offering China the opportunity to obstruct it. This time, Taipei and Mbabane kept the rescheduled plan discreet, preserving an "[arrive then announce](#)" strategy. Indeed, the world only learned about it when Lai declared on [X](#) that he had arrived in Eswatini.

For both legs of the journey, Lai used the [official aircraft](#) of Eswatini's King Mswati III: an Airbus A340 [formerly operated](#) by Taiwan's China Airlines, which had been retired in 2015 and sold to the kingdom the following year. He traveled 25,000 kilometers in total and returned to Taiwan after an 84-hour visit. To avoid the airspace of the three countries that had earlier denied him overflight access, Lai undertook a riskier maneuver by flying over a [remote part](#) of the Indian Ocean.

Major Activities in Eswatini

In Eswatini's capital Mbabane, [Lai received a state-level welcome](#) with military honors. Both Eswatini's prime minister and foreign minister met him at the airport.

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Image: Taiwan President Lai Ching-te and Eswatini's King Mswati III walk past well-wishers at Eswatini's International Convention Centre (ICC) on May 3, 2026. (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons / ROC Presidential Office](#))

Lai then joined King Mswati III on the dais at Mandvulo Grand Hall for a ceremony marked by [national anthems](#), a gun salute, a guard of honor, and traditional dances. The ceremony projected an image of a head of state undeterred in his diplomacy with Taiwan's last African partner.

The Taiwanese president presented symbolic [gifts](#) to King Mswati III, including cattle—in line with local custom—a model of an Indigenous fishing boat used by the Tao people of Orchid Island, and a tea set in the shape of Taipei 101, Taiwan's tallest skyscraper.

Lai also visited sites of Taiwan-funded major projects, including the Taiwan Industrial Innovation Park, the newly opened International Convention Center, and the Strategic Oil Reserve project. Both sides signed a [Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters](#) agreement, providing the respective customs authorities with a legal framework to share information and streamline trade procedures, along with a joint communiqué reaffirming the Taiwan-Eswatini diplomatic friendship and pledging to deepen cooperation across economic and political fields.

Lai made no major new announcements regarding aid projects during the visit. Instead, he [urged Taiwanese private companies](#) to expand investment in Eswatini.

Responses to the Visit

Lai's visit, first aborted and then completed, prompted strong responses from various quarters. When the original visit was canceled, the Taiwanese president condemned China's "[coercive actions](#)," using the incident to reinforce that authoritarian regimes pose a threat to international order. Upon completing the visit, he declared that "[the world belongs to everyone](#)," and emphasized that Taiwanese people "have the right to engage with the world." He added that Taiwan completed the trip in accordance with [international law](#) and argued that China's obstruction only illustrated the "[Taiwanese people's firm determination and will to engage with the world](#)."

Taiwanese media [celebrated](#) the visit, portraying it as evidence that Taipei would continue to engage with the world and deepen ties with Mbabane despite external pressure.

[China denied](#) any role in the three African countries' decisions to revoke Taiwan's overflight permission, but [expressed appreciation](#) for their decision to uphold Beijing's "One-China Principle." However, as Lai overcame China's obstruction and ultimately arrived in Eswatini, the episode embarrassed Beijing. China accused Lai of being a "troublemaker" and a "separatist,"

who sneaked into Eswatini in an illegitimate “[stow-away-style escape farce](#),” and characterized him as a “[rat crossing a street](#).” It insisted that the visit “would [always be a losing cause](#)” and that Taiwan remained a part of China with no right to state-to-state relations.

After an initial mild admonishment, Chinese officials adopted [unusually strong language](#) against Mbabane: “Some politicians in Eswatini, kept and fed by Taiwan, have provided space for Taiwan independence forces—this runs counter to the tide of history, and China strongly condemns it.” In response, Eswatini [described](#) these remarks as an infringement on its sovereignty and “deeply unfortunate.” Officials in Mbabane stated that Beijing’s remarks fell short of international standards for a country claiming to be a “[responsible global actor](#).”

The United States, a critical external player in cross-Strait relations, expressed concerns over China’s alleged obstruction of the original visit, terming it an “[intimidation campaign](#).” When Lai successfully completed his visit, a spokesperson for the [US State Department](#) described it as a routine matter that should not be politicized. The spokesperson noted that Lai’s predecessor [Tsai Ing-wen](#) (蔡英文) had traveled to Eswatini in 2018 and 2023. “Taiwan is a trusted and capable partner of the United States and many others, and its relationships around the world provide significant benefits to the citizens of those countries, including Eswatini,” the spokesperson said. Several US national and [state-level lawmakers](#) made similar statements in support of Taiwan.

Meanwhile, responses from Taiwan’s two main opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) and the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP, 民眾黨), were varied. When the original April trip was canceled, the KMT expressed “[regret](#)” over China’s actions. At the same time, it seized the opportunity to [criticize the government](#) for failed diplomacy, referring to the loss of ten Taiwanese allies since the DPP came to power.

The TPP took a more assertive stance. It “[strongly protested and condemned](#)” China’s actions, declaring that they “seriously trample on our sovereignty and interfere in our internal affairs.” The TPP further warned that the Chinese Communist Party’s attempts to “aggressively constrict Taiwan’s diplomatic space and intimidate the Taiwanese people” would only exacerbate tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

Following Lai’s successful visit, the KMT criticized the president for traveling to Eswatini on a chartered plane provided by Taiwan’s African diplomatic ally, express-

ing acute [national security concerns](#). A KMT legislator, Hsu Yu-chen (許宇甄), [stated that](#) “while consolidating diplomatic ties is important and Lai deserves recognition for his efforts, the king’s jet lacks the secure communications equipment of Taiwan’s presidential aircraft, which is equipped with a military-standard encrypted command-and-control system to ensure real-time communication with the Hengshan Military Command Center.”

Beyond partisan criticism, the communications concern raised a substantive operational question: a president traveling 25,000 kilometers without military-grade encrypted links to the Hengshan Military Command Center (Taiwan’s central military command) constituted a genuine command-and-control gap, not merely a political talking point. The [opposition](#) also raised broader concerns about the clandestine nature of the travel, the absence of a long-term strategy to address Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation, and Lai’s focus on his own personal image.

Implications

An Operational Win for Taiwan

The rescheduled visit turned an embarrassing diplomatic incident into an *operational* win for the Lai government. The optics—from the military ceremony, the guard of honor bestowed upon a head of state, national anthems, the joint communiqué, to the signing of a Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters—illustrated that Taiwan has at least one African diplomatic ally willing to resist Beijing’s pressure and forge closer ties.

The visit also allowed Lai to inspect Taiwan-funded projects in Eswatini, highlighting Taiwan’s contributions while inviting private investors to invest in the country. It reinforced a narrative of Taiwan as a tangible development force, rather than simply a partner for the sake of achieving diplomatic recognition.

The Trump-Xi Summit

The Eswatini visit was consequential in that it took place less than two weeks before US President Trump’s state visit to China. Such an episode meant that observers in America could not ignore the intensity of cross-Strait relations. For Beijing, Taiwan is a core issue. In his call with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on April 30, the People’s Republic of China Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) [reiterated](#) that “the Taiwan question bears on China’s core interests and is the biggest risk in China-U.S. relations.” The Trump Administration has adopted a [heightened form](#) of strategic ambiguity. The

US Congress has been introducing an [unprecedented number](#) of Taiwan-related bills, while the administration has approved [major arms sales packages](#) to Taiwan (some of which are delayed). Nonetheless, Trump has still stated that Taiwan's security is "[up to him \[Xi\] what he's going to be doing.](#)"

Secretary of State Rubio has already stated that [Taiwan will be a point of discussion](#) during the Trump-Xi summit. This heightened concerns among some circles in the Taiwanese government that the island might be used as a bargaining chip between the two major powers.

Eswatini's Diplomatic Strategy

It is also important to monitor Eswatini's future policies. While Eswatini publicly reaffirmed its commitment to friendship with Taiwan, analysts have long emphasized that China has applied [direct pressure](#) on the country, even as its business and investment footprint in the kingdom steadily expands. Reports suggest that local businesses and industries are under increasing pressure to engage with [Chinese capital and markets](#).

In May 2023, Eswatini awarded the approximately USD 146 million [Mpakeni Dam](#) construction project to China's state-owned PowerChina (中国电力建设集团有限公司), despite the lack of diplomatic ties between Mbabane and Beijing. Over 40 percent of the work on the dam has now been completed. In 2024, Eswatini also sent a delegation to China seeking investment in the mining sector. Analysts describe this as Beijing's "[long game.](#)"

Analysts have [highlighted](#) landlocked Eswatini's practical challenges in maintaining diplomatic ties with Taiwan—a position that contrasts with the rest of Africa. China is deepening its engagement in Africa through development projects, loans, and economic incentives. A Boston University Global Development Policy Center report on the [Chinese Loans to Africa](#) Database (2000–2024) found that Chinese lenders signed 1,319 loan commitments with 49 African governments and seven regional institutions, totaling about USD 180.87 billion. Starting on May 1, China granted [tariff-free access](#) for two years to its market to 53 African countries with diplomatic ties, excluding Eswatini. This is a significant economic incentive. It was in this context that [Beijing urged](#) Eswatini "to see clearly the general trend of history" and not to "pull chestnuts out of the fire for a handful of 'Taiwan independence' separatists." The extent to which Eswatini can continue to resist mounting economic and political pressure from Beijing, and

pursue diplomacy that runs contrary to the rest of the continent, is hard to predict.

The main point: Taiwan President Lai Ching-te successfully completed a state visit to Eswatini in May 2026, circumventing China's earlier attempt to obstruct his trip. In doing so, Lai turned a diplomatic setback into a win and reaffirmed ties with Taiwan's only diplomatic ally in Africa. The episode drew sharp reactions on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and raised questions about Eswatini's long-term alignment amid growing Chinese economic influence in Africa.

The Reorientation of Middle Powers and Taiwan's Strategic Window in the Indo-Pacific (2026–2030)

By: Nouroz Khan Bijarani

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In this rapidly evolving world, great powers are increasingly dictating terms. This presents middle powers with a stark choice: unite or be marginalized. Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada, neatly [summarized this sentiment](#) during his speech at the January 2026 World Economic Forum: "Middle powers must act together because if we're not at the table, we're on the menu." This statement rings loudly in the Indo-Pacific, with countries such as Japan, Australia, India, and some ASEAN members diversifying partnerships and enhancing self-reliance alongside escalating Sino-US tensions. Because of the fears triggered by the aggression of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, these realignments are giving Taiwan a strategic window between 2026 and 2030 to reorient itself in a changing order. During the coming half-decade, Taipei has an opportunity to capitalize on strategic realignment to expand its economic strength, develop its deterrence power, and establish deeper diplomatic relationships.

Mapping Evolving Strategic Choices and Implications for Taiwan

Although there is [abundant literature](#) to understand the dynamics of bipolarity between Washington and Beijing, a more subtle and polycentric approach is deconstructing the ways middle powers are transforming regional security and economic environments. Indo-Pacific middle powers have sought to balance alliances

with the United States with their own independent capabilities, and to conduct selective engagement with the PRC to hedge against risk. These strategies reflect the understanding that overreliance on a great power is a threat to sovereignty. In the Taiwan context, collaboration with allies forms a distributed support network that signals U.S. commitment through diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation, thereby discouraging coercion without direct escalation.

Japan

One example of shifting strategy is Japan's choice to clearly tie the security of Taiwan to its own national security priorities. At first glance, this statement appears to show Japan moving into closer alignment with the United States. However, its importance lies in Japan's independent framing of Taiwan as a direct national security concern. Tokyo is signaling that a crisis in the Taiwan Strait would [threaten Japan's own economic and strategic interests](#), not just those of the United States. This shifts deterrence from a purely U.S.–China issue to a shared regional stake, reducing the sense that Taiwan's defense depends solely on American action. In this way, Japan is not simply aligning with Washington but helping create a broader network of actors with their own incentives to resist coercion. The [2022 National Security Strategy of Japan](#) focused doctrinally on proactive deterrence and unofficial intelligence exchange with Taiwan. A clearer example of growing [Japan–Taiwan security cooperation](#) is Japan's decision to quietly deepen defense ties, including [appointing a serving government official as its de facto defense attaché in Taiwan](#). Although low-profile, this step signals a gradual normalization of security coordination. It shows that Japan is incrementally expanding practical cooperation with Taiwan while avoiding overt escalation, reinforcing the broader pattern of indirect but strengthening deterrence.

Australia

Australia's strategic alignment is predicated on an intense focus on contingencies regarding Taiwan, under a so-called "[strategy of denial](#)." The [2024 National Defence Strategy of Australia](#) envisions operational preparedness for a high intensity conflict by 2027, encompassing both sea and air domains. Canberra has repeatedly opposed unilateral changes to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and has publicly criticized large-scale People's Liberation Army exercises around Taiwan through [official statements](#), joint declarations with allies, and regional security cooperation. These actions signal Australia's support for stability in the Strait and its willingness to speak out against coercive

behavior. The [AUKUS partnership, consisting of Australia, the UK, and the United States, is aimed at joint development of hypersonic missile and submarine technologies](#). Besides this, Australia's use of P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft near Taiwan also aligns with Taipei's strategic imperative to monitor the PRC's gray zone activities.

India

While maintaining its One-China Policy, India is also trying to strengthen its informal relations with Taiwan. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) focuses on preserving "[free and open](#)" maritime and economic trade routes in the Indo-Pacific. In recent years, the Quad has sought to boost the resilience of the semiconductor supply-chain and leverage the niche competence of Taiwan in this area. Nonetheless, India is constrained from greater direct involvement in Taiwan's defense, due to its preoccupation with border conflicts with the PRC in the Himalayan region. Thus, it emphasizes collaboration with Taiwan in non-traditional security areas, such as supply chain resilience. For example, [Australia has joined Taiwan in semiconductor and critical minerals supply-chain discussions](#) through industry and policy dialogues aimed at reducing dependency on concentrated production hubs. Taiwan has the potential to collaborate with India on security-adjacent industries such as biotechnology, rare-earth minerals, and artificial intelligence (AI).

South Korea

In recent years, South Korea has assigned greater importance to the stability of the Taiwan Strait, even if the current President Lee Jae-myung is [less supportive](#) than his predecessor. South Korea's [trilateral relations](#) with the United States and Japan have led to commitments to prevent provocations and to secure sea lines of communication in East Asia. In scenarios involving a US defense of Taiwan, the South Korean military may offer [rear area support](#) to American forces. Meanwhile, Taiwan and South Korea are pursuing cooperation in [shipbuilding](#). Although historical sensitivities with Japan are a hurdle to deeper integration in a US-led security architecture, [partnerships with Taiwan on semiconductor research and development](#) may improve bilateral Korea-Taiwan ties.

ASEAN States

The behavior of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members is varied, with the Philippines playing a leading role in interactions with Taiwan amid [conflict with Beijing](#) over sovereignty in the South China Sea. The Philippines' [defense cooperation](#) and pa-

trols with the United States challenge the PRC's claims, which results in indirect maritime security benefits for Taiwan. Meanwhile, Vietnam seeks [diversification](#) away from the PRC, with better relations with the United States and Japan to strengthen its coast guard capabilities.

Indonesia's neutral foreign policy stance allows it to engage in maritime security cooperation in the Malacca Strait without being seen as formally aligning against any major power, particularly China. In practice, these patrols involve coordination with regional partners such as Malaysia and Singapore under existing trilateral arrangements focused on anti-piracy and maritime safety. At the same time, Indonesia's growing interest in Taiwan's experience reflects increasing concern over undersea cable vulnerabilities, where Taiwan has developed practical expertise in monitoring and rapid repair due to repeated disruptions in its surrounding waters.

Shifting strategies may create strategic windows for Taiwan to enter into previously inaccessible ASEAN frameworks on non-traditional security issues such as public health and disaster relief. One such example is the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), a multilateral security dialogue platform that includes ASEAN members plus external partners such as major Indo-Pacific powers. Taiwan is not a formal member, but shifting regional dynamics and minilateral cooperation patterns create indirect entry points for functional participation through track-two diplomacy and partner engagement.

Plausible Regional Trajectories Through 2030

Given these shifting geopolitical dynamics, there are three possible trajectories for the Indo-Pacific region in the coming half-decade.

First, a trajectory of continued escalation that would bring increased militarization, with the PRC achieving its [stated 2027 goal of readiness](#) for a Taiwan conflict. Under such a scenario, middle powers would react with their own rearmament programs. For instance, [Japan](#) and [Australia](#) would continue to raise defense spending, and India would fortify its [Andaman Command](#). An arms race will accelerate, with heavily focus on [hypersonic missiles](#) and artificial intelligence technologies. Any crisis involving Taiwan could disintegrate security coalitions and could bring about a [ten percent decline](#) in global gross domestic product, due to disruption in semiconductors and energy trade. Disunity within ASEAN, as members side with the PRC or Taiwan and the United States, could terminally damage the grouping.

Second, a trajectory of managed competition envisag-

es stabilization via polycentric mechanisms, including the Quad, AUKUS, and the [ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific](#). Managed competition would be enabled by de-risking strategies and projected regional defense [expenditures](#) of USD 600 billion by 2030. Initiatives to foster "[non-Red](#)" supply chains would reduce countries' vulnerabilities to PRC coercion, although states would have to engage in confidence-building exercises with Beijing to reduce gray zone activities in cyber and [paramilitary](#) domains. Under such a scenario, Taiwan would be integral to technology alliances, even as the island would suffer from strains caused by decoupling in cross-Strait trade.

Third, there is a potential trajectory towards de-escalation. Given confirmed rivalries, the probability of de-escalation may be low. However, a possible truce between the United States and the PRC could place limits on armament. Demographic shifts ([aging populations](#) in Japan and the PRC as well as greater [urbanization](#) in ASEAN nations) could have a restraining impact on militarization by 2030, leading to dialogues on common imperatives.

Practical Entry Points for Taiwan

In order to capitalize on shifting strategic dynamics, there are four strategic areas upon which Taiwan should focus: semiconductor collaboration, maritime domain awareness, non-Red supply chains, and critical mineral partnerships. Through these pathways, Taipei can integrate itself into polycentric Indo-Pacific networks to strengthen deterrence and economic stability. These entry points are anchored in Taiwan's comparative advantages in high-tech production, its geography, diplomatic flexibility, and preexisting alignment with middle powers.

In this first strategic area of semiconductor collaboration, Taiwan can further capitalize on pre-existing frameworks. The [Chip 4 Alliance](#), encompassing the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, has brought about coordination on research and development (R&D), subsidies, and export controls. By 2025, joint ventures in advanced logic and memory chips had already leveraged [Taiwan's dominant global semiconductor position](#), weakening [PRC](#) influence over the industry. Additionally, Taiwan's engagement with allied working groups on artificial intelligence and cybersecurity broadens the scope of its role beyond hardware and into digital governance. Initiatives between Taiwan and India in semiconductor training and intellectual property cooperation aim to strengthen workforce resilience through skills development and diversification of talent pipelines, while also indirectly supporting

cybersecurity capacity in sensitive technology sectors.

Second, maritime domain awareness (MDA) partnerships provide Taiwan with improved intelligence regarding PRC gray zone activities, even without alliance commitments. Australia–Philippines maritime exercises strengthen regional surveillance in the South China Sea, while Taiwan’s limited coast guard and security dialogues indicate emerging, indirect functional linkages rather than formal operational cooperation. Taiwan’s satellite capabilities, such as its [Beyond 5G program](#), will allow Taiwan to share data with its partners in the region, especially in the areas of maritime security, climate monitoring and disaster relief. Under MDA partnerships, Taiwan can work with neighbors such as Vietnam: with the assistance of the United States and Japan, Hanoi is growing its coastal radar [network](#). Such capabilities could complement Taiwan’s desire to secure sea lines of communication in an atmosphere of increasing regional contestation.

Third, the development of non-Red supply chains is essential to Taiwan’s strategic autonomy. By strengthening cooperation with India, Southeast Asia and Australia, Taipei’s [New Southbound Policy](#) (NSP) continues to diversify economic linkages away from the PRC. Taiwan’s investments in [electronics production in India](#), and [energy security arrangements with Australia](#)—Taiwan’s largest supplier of liquefied natural gas—minimize coercive disruptions. In the creation of non-Red supply chains, the interests of Taiwan and partners in the Indo-Pacific clearly converge.

Finally, critical-mineral partnerships elevate Taiwan’s long-term industrial security. Joint ventures with India and Australia in rare earths, lithium, and battery supply chains, supplemented by diversification through Indonesia, anchor Taiwan within the US-led [Mineral Security Partnership](#). Emphasizing sustainable processing and environmental standards separates Taiwan from the refining networks dominated by the PRC.

Collectively, these four entry points can entrench Taiwan in durable and overlapping networks to preserve its centrality in an increasingly fragmented regional order.

The main point: In the next five years, a strategic shift by the middle powers of the Indo-Pacific provides a window for Taiwan to strengthen its technology-security cooperation, maritime domain awareness, supply-chain resilience, and critical minerals domains. Amid Sino-US rivalry, it necessitates agile policies to build resilience and enhance deterrence.

How Taiwan Fared during the 2026 Trump-Xi Summit

By: Cara Bilson and Benjamin Sando

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While economists and trade specialists were watching eagerly for developments emerging from the May 13-15 Trump-Xi summit, other sets of eyes were watching the events with apprehension: policymakers in Taiwan, as well as observers of cross-Strait policy in the broader global community. This article will analyze the developments salient to Taiwan that emerged before, during, and after President Donald Trump’s summit meeting in Beijing with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chairman Xi Jinping.

Pre-Summit Developments

Ahead of the Trump-Xi summit, there were signs that a [USD 14 billion arms sale to Taiwan](#)—announced in January 2026 but later delayed by the White House—would be on the negotiating table. President Trump’s pre-summit interviews suggested that the US leader was receptive to CCP Chairman Xi Jinping’s [objections](#) to the arms package, and potentially willing to depart from longstanding American declaratory policy. In an [interview](#) with *Bloomberg* on May 11 (two days in advance of his trip to China), Trump was asked by a reporter whether the United States should still be selling Taiwan weapons. Trump responded by saying he would “have that discussion with President Xi.” This response was an unexpected break from the messaging of previous US administrations.

Historically, Washington has refrained from discussing arms sales to Taiwan with Beijing. This policy was declared in 1982, under the [Six Assurances](#) to Taiwan. The second of these assurances was the statement that the United States “has not agreed to consult with the PRC on arms sales to Taiwan.” While the Six Assurances remain declaratory policy—rather than a [stipulation](#) of American law—they have been an anchor of US-Taiwan policy since the Reagan Administration. Trump’s willingness to discuss arms transfers with Xi thus marked a distinct departure from this policy.

At a May 13 press briefing, CCP State Council Taiwan Affairs Office Spokeswoman Zhang Han (張晗) [commented](#): “We firmly oppose the US engaging in any form of military ties with China’s Taiwan region, and firmly op-

pose the US selling weapons to China's Taiwan region. This position is consistent and unequivocal." The US government did not formally respond, which could be interpreted as an additional example of deference to CCP objectives regarding US arms sales to Taiwan.

The Great Hall and Beyond

Regardless of pre-meeting posturing, the Trump-Xi summit itself did not result in official changes to the status quo of cross-strait policies. After the primary meeting of officials in the Great Hall of the People concluded on the morning of May 14, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (中华人民共和国外交部) provided a [readout](#) that cited Chairman Xi's emphasis that the "Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-U.S. relations." The readout declared that if cross-strait policy is not handled properly, "the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, putting the entire relationship in great jeopardy." In spite of the veiled yet [well-worn](#) threats issued by the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the US version of the readout [did not mention](#) Taiwan at all. Furthermore, Trump Administration officials made a concerted effort during the summit to emphasize that US policy had not changed. After the morning summit talks on May 14, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio [told NBC News](#) that "US policy on the issue of Taiwan is unchanged as of today, and as of the meeting that we had here today."

The Summit Aftermath

The summit wound down with [vague promises](#) of business deals between American companies and Chinese counterparts. Overall, the summit was interpreted more as a [show of pageantry](#) than a turning point in Taiwan policy.

This sentiment shifted somewhat after Trump participated in an [interview](#) on Saturday, May 16, with *Fox News*. When asked whether he would advance arms sales to Taiwan, Trump stated that "It depends on China. It's a very good negotiating chip for us, frankly." The statement raised concerns that Trump was intending to continue his delay on arms sales to Taiwan even after his summit with Xi Jinping.

However, Trump tempered those remarks by saying in the same interview that "Nothing has changed" between the United States and Taiwan. Indeed, some comments that Trump made after the summit may have shifted the scales back in Taiwan's favor. Responding to a reporter's question aboard Air Force One, Trump [stated](#) "I have to speak to the person that right now is, you know, you know who he is, that's running Taiwan"—presumably a reference to Taiwan's Presi-

dent Lai Ching-te. Trump's suggestion of a conversation with President Lai was not immediately taken at face value. However, on May 20, Trump doubled down on this sentiment. When a reporter asked if he had plans to call President Lai of Taiwan, he responded by [saying](#) "Well, I'll speak to him. I speak to everybody." If Trump does carry through on his plan to call Lai, it would constitute the [first instance](#) that a sitting US president has spoken with a Taiwanese leader since 1979. (Trump [pushed the envelope](#) of US-Taiwan policy by accepting a call from then-President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, after he had been elected president. However, Trump was not a sitting US president at that time).

On the one hand, Trump has become the first president to openly entertain conversation on arms sales to Taiwan with Beijing. On the other, he has suggested multiple times that he will speak to the President of a country that Washington itself does not formally recognize. Simply put, the Xi-Trump summit underlines Trump's unpredictability and the risk of taking his words at face value. Instead, greater clarity can be found from the other Trump Administration officials. On Monday, May 18, US Ambassador to China David Perdue sought to [provide](#) further clarity: "President Trump made it very clear that we are not changing the American policy on Taiwan." The administration appears keen to signal that although the summit was shrouded in unconventional rhetoric, the underlying principles of America's policy towards Taiwan remain the same.

Reactions to the Xi-Trump Summit in Taiwan

While President Trump may not have intended for his discussion of arms sales to be read as a shift in US policy, it was nonetheless treated seriously in Taiwan. Following Trump's *Fox News* interview, the three major political parties in Taiwan delivered statements reacting to the impression that the American president had criticized the Lai government. The manner in which these statements were delivered—and the language used—gives an indication of varying intended audiences, ranging from Taiwan, to China and the United States.

When President Trump made his [second indication](#) that he would like to talk directly with President Lai on Wednesday, May 20, he offered a pathway for the Taiwanese president to regain face after the difficult events around the summit. If Trump and Lai do conduct the first bilateral call between sitting US and Taiwanese presidents since 1979, a challenging week might offer a novel benefit for Taipei.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨)

On Sunday, May 17, one day after Trump's *Fox News* interview, Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te issued a [statement](#) on his official Facebook account, responding to concerns triggered during the Trump-Xi summit and its aftermath. Written in Mandarin Chinese, Lai's statement was strident and made the explicit case that US policy towards Taiwan was unchanged. He sought to contradict Trump's perceived criticisms of his cross-strait policies by arguing that "Taiwan is the maintainer of the status quo of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the wider region" (台灣是台海及區域和平穩定現狀的維護者). Lai deflected blame for a change in the status quo across the Strait, stating that "China is the real source of regional instability and changes in the status quo" (中國才是區域不穩定及改變現狀的根源). Of note, Lai's use of vocabulary [favored](#) by American strategists, such as "First Island Chain" (第一島鏈) and "Indo-Pacific region" (印太地區), indicates that Lai's statement was not only directed towards the Taiwanese people, but also towards Washington.

In a separate statement, Taiwan's Deputy Foreign Minister Chen Ming-chi (陳明祺) [admitted](#) that Trump's comments on *Fox News* had "caused some unnecessary concern" in Taipei. Chen also seized on Trump's suggestion to "speak to the person that's ... running Taiwan" by proposing a direct call between the US president and Lai. Lai himself [echoed](#) an interest in a bilateral call. Following Trump's second statement on May 20 that he would speak to the Taiwanese president, [speculation](#) mounted that the US president might really break precedent and conduct a call. As of writing, the Lai Administration had not issued a public response to Trump's words.

Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨)

The Kuomintang was vocal throughout the Trump-Xi summit. The outspoken KMT chair, Cheng Li-wun (鄭麗文), [stated](#) before the summit that if Trump publicly opposed Taiwan independence, this would "completely align with the KMT's position" (完全合乎國民黨的立場). The vice chair of the KMT, Chang Rong-gong (張榮恭) then capitalized on the *Fox News* interview by [asserting](#) that Trump's remarks constituted "the most serious admonishment of a Taiwanese ruler by a US president" (美国总统对台湾执政者最严厉、最明确的警告) in 20 years. Though Chang's statement was [picked up](#) by Taiwanese media, he curiously [published](#) it first in a Hong Kong-based media outlet using simplified Chinese characters. In the article, Chang employed phrases more often used by the CCP than Taiwanese people, such as "leaning on the United States to secretly pursue independence" (倚美谋独) and the "Lai Ching-te authorities" (赖清德当局). Chang's choice of

publisher, and his use of phrases popular only with Chinese policymakers, suggests that the KMT intended for this statement to be received not only by Taiwanese audiences, but also by PRC ones.

Taiwan People's Party (TPP, 民眾黨)

Reflecting their position as a watchdog of Taiwan's traditional politicians, the Taiwan People's Party issued the most analytically-dense statements regarding the Trump-Xi summit. TPP Chair Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) [questioned](#) whether Trump's willingness to negotiate with China over Taiwan arms sales constituted a break with the Six Assurances. He urged Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交部) to ask the American Institute in Taiwan—the *de facto* US embassy—whether this policy had changed. The former TPP chair, Ko Wen-je (柯文哲), [accused](#) President Lai of "redefining Taiwan independence" (重新定義台灣獨立) in a way that "increases polarization among the Taiwanese people" (加劇了台灣民眾的分裂).

Interpreting the US Hold on Arms Sales to Taiwan

While President Trump's comments dissuading Taiwan from declaring independence may provide temporary embarrassment to President Lai, they will not have a sustained impact on the ruling DPP government's strategy. There is no evidence that President Lai plans to declare independence. The majority of DPP voters [oppose](#) such action. Therefore, President Trump's comments on Taiwan independence will only serve to embarrass Lai in the short-term, and send a message to Beijing that Trump is not deaf to PRC talking points regarding Taiwan. Meanwhile, Trump's statements that he is interested in a bilateral call with President Lai offer the Taiwanese president a chance to offset the embarrassment caused by the *Fox News* interview. The summit's impacts on Lai's political standing are therefore mixed.

Of greater importance is Trump's [statement](#) that he will hold arms sales to Taiwan in "abeyance" and that his decision "depends on China." Early this year, [reports emerged](#) that the Trump Administration had held up an arms package to Taiwan—with a value around USD 14 billion—as a cooperative gesture to Beijing in advance of his summit with Xi Jinping. Many [hoped](#) that after the Trump-Xi summit, the US government would quickly approve the arms package and assuage concerns regarding America's commitment to Taiwan. By reiterating his hold on new arms sales to Taiwan in his Saturday *Fox News* interview, the US president has only stoked these concerns. However, given that President Trump has often issued [contradictory statements](#)

about his policies, and has revised his actions *ad hoc* after announcement, there remain two possible interpretations of his decision to hold back the arms sale to Taiwan.

Arms Sales to Taiwan are a Genuine Bargaining Chip in Negotiations with China

Under this interpretation, President Trump is taken literally. Trump intends to condition arms sales to Taiwan on Beijing's future behavior. While it is possible that the US president will tie arms sales to Beijing's policies specifically towards Taiwan—such as a pause on [large-scale exercises](#) around the island—it is more likely that Trump would look out for PRC concessions on bilateral trade issues, such as additional commitments to buy American goods. If this interpretation is correct, observers should expect to see unilateral concessions from Beijing reciprocating the existing arms sales pause. Even if the PRC does not issue public concessions, an extended pause in arms sales after this summit might still indicate that President Trump is holding out for a *quid pro quo* from China. If further arms sales are not approved within one to two months, this would lend credence to the idea that Trump is serious about using them as a bargaining chip.

Trump's Statements Regarding Arms Sales are Merely a Short-Term Messaging Strategy

Under this interpretation, President Trump does not really intend to negotiate with Beijing over arms sales to Taiwan, and has only held up the package in order to smooth negotiations with Xi Jinping over other bilateral issues, such as [trade and technology](#). If this interpretation is correct, we should expect the White House to approve the arms sales in the near future, such as within 1-2 months. Such a course of events would mean that President Trump intended to signal to Xi Jinping that US support for Taiwan is not unconditional to the point that Washington would support every Taipei policy, such as a declaration of independence (even if such a policy was [never planned](#)). However, if President Trump carries through with a bilateral call with President Lai, the United States could reverse the de-escalatory effect of Trump's previous comments that poured cold water on Taiwanese independence.

The main point: US President Donald Trump issued mixed messages during his May 2026 summit with CCP Chairman Xi Jinping. While statements made by Trump during and after the summit could be interpreted as criticism towards President Lai Ching-te's cross-strait policies, the US president's stated interest in a direct call with Lai might deliver a face-saving opportuni-

ty. Nonetheless, Trump's insistence on delaying arms sales to Taiwan after the summit could represent a more drastic shift in America's cross-strait policy.

Challenges Threatening Taiwan's LGBTQ+ Rights Progress

By: Phan Van Tim and Huynh Tam Sang

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Since the legalization of same-sex marriage in May 2019, Taiwan has made strides to cement its reputation as a regional leader on LGBTQ+ rights, notably through subsequent reforms to the [legal frameworks](#) protecting same-sex couples. In terms of public attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community, a [new survey](#) released by the Taiwan Equality Campaign (彩虹平權大平台) revealed that support for same-sex marriage in 2026 remains [unchanged](#) from the [previous year](#), at 54.3 percent; while other surveyed categories, including adoption, transnational same-sex marriage, and gender equality education, saw remarkable increase in public support.

Despite this progress, Taiwan's LGBTQ+ movement continues to face headwinds, including the growing hostility toward gender equality globally manifested in [political repression](#) targeting LGBTQ+ people, and internal divisions among the Taiwanese LGBTQ+ community. These challenges risk derailing [social](#) and legislative progress on LGBTQ+ rights and undermining the country's hard-won democratic values.

Mounting Hostility Towards LGBTQ+ Communities

A global [resurgence](#) of far-right mobilizations has bolstered resistance to LGBTQ+ movements worldwide. Under the guise of fighting "gender ideology," right-wing populist leaders, conservative parties, illiberal and authoritarian regimes, and religious movements have attempted to [rescind existing laws and policies protecting same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights, roll back critical education about gender and sexuality, and weaken social organizations advocating for the human rights of LGBTQ+ people](#). Moreover, movements led by both state and non-state actors—those obsessed with

the mandate of defending traditional “family values”—have formed new transnational [coalitions](#) to reshape international gender norms by altering the language of equal rights policy and creating multilateral forums for norm-building ([such as](#) the Political Network for Values and the Group of Friends of the Family) to advance their interests and ideology.

Meanwhile, global support for LGBTQ+ rights has dropped slightly. The [2025 edition of the 26-country Ipsos LGBTQ+ Pride Report](#) showed reduced support for several LGBTQ+ rights issues. Support for same-sex marriage declined from 74 percent in 2021 to 69 percent in 2025, while support for same-sex couples having the same adoption rights as heterosexual couples fell from 64 percent to 59 percent over the same period. More troubling, homophobic attitudes appear to be rising in Western societies, which have long presented themselves as champions of democracy, progressive values, and LGBTQ+ rights. According to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a UK-based think-tank dedicated to safeguarding human rights, LGBTQ+ individuals have been increasingly [exposed](#) to hate-motivated violence, online harms, and censorship of LGBTQ+ content, including books and online resources.

President Donald Trump’s return to office in January 2025 has fueled an uptick in hateful rhetoric towards the LGBTQ+ community in the United States. Trump’s broad [attacks](#) on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as well as on transgender individuals, has had far-reaching ramifications for global LGBTQ+ activism. Upon returning to the White House, the Trump Administration has implemented a [wave](#) of executive orders, policy initiatives, and rhetoric targeting the LGBTQ+ community in order to root out “[gender ideology extremism](#),” rendering LGBTQ+ people—especially transgender individuals—with fewer legal protections, while emboldening prejudice and legitimising [discrimination](#) against this marginalized communities in the United States. In an apparent [departure](#) from American leadership in advancing human rights and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people as a cornerstone of US diplomacy, [the Trump Administration](#) has eliminated foreign assistance programs and dismantled the US Agency for International Development (USAID), withdrawn from the United Nations Human Rights Council, and ended US support for LGBTQ+ rights at the United Nations and Organization of American States, which may leave Taiwan without a vocal supporter for its international inclusion.

The absence of US leadership and [the spread of an “anti-gender movement”](#) have posed significant [challenges](#) to LGBTQ+ people and their allies around the world,

jeopardizing hard-won progress toward gender equity and inclusion. Washington’s retreat from supporting LGBTQ+ rights has also caused civil society groups and organizations dedicated to gender equality—particularly in developing countries—to [lose critical financial and human resources, and put LGBTQ+ people at risk of violence, discrimination, and disruption of life-saving healthcare programs](#). The global rise of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments contributes to global [democratic backsliding](#) by undercutting the liberal commitment to human rights, as well as democratic norms and institutions.

While the closure of USAID is unlikely to directly affect Taiwan’s LGBTQ+ movement—given that USAID [funding](#) to Taiwan has been relatively limited in recent years, and has mainly focused on [disaster response and capacity-building](#)—the Trump Administration’s campaign against LGBTQ+ rights has raised concerns about Taiwan’s transnational advocacy networks, especially those [connected to the United States](#). As part of a broader effort to crack down on progressive organizations under the banner of [counterterrorism](#), for instance, the Trump Administration’s vow to launch [investigations](#) into the Open Society Foundations (OSF)—established by billionaire George Soros to promote liberal democracy and human rights around the world—may put Taiwan’s civil rights groups at risk of losing critical sources of funding. This is because many Taiwanese nonprofit organizations advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, such as the Taiwan Equality Movement and the Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association, have [received](#) donations worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from the OSF.

Divisions Within Taiwan’s LGBTQ+ Community

Emerging internal divisions within Taiwan’s LGBTQ+ community regarding transgender rights and sexual rights issues also endanger civil society advocacy efforts. In the days leading up to the Taiwan LGBTQ+ Pride Parade in October 2025, [controversy](#) erupted after Belle Chiu, an employee of the Taiwan Rainbow Civil Action Association (臺灣彩虹公民行動協會, TWRCOA) and organizer of Taiwan Pride, posted on social media that she was “against pedophilia, against legal gender change without surgery, against surrogacy, [and] against psychological gender identity.” Both her post, which ironically stood in opposition to last year’s Pride theme of promoting [gender-friendly policies](#), and the sluggish [response](#) issued by TWRCOA, sparked widespread outrage within Taiwan’s LGBTQ+ community.

While some individuals called for a boycott of the 2025 Taiwan Pride, [multiple LGBTQ+ groups](#), such as the In-



Image: Participants in Taipei's 2018 Pride Parade march past the area of Taipei Main Station (Oct. 27, 2018). (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

tersex, Transgender and Transsexual People Care Association (台灣性別不明關懷協會, ISTSCare), the Taiwan Relationships Education Association (台灣情感教育協會, TREA), BDSM Taiwan (皮繩愉虐邦) and Kaohsiung Pride, issued statements demanding TWRCAA's clarification over the controversy, and calling for unity and respect for others. The Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights (台灣伴侶權益推動聯盟, TAP-CPR), [stated](#) that the comment was unlikely to be an isolated occurrence, but rather reflected long-standing internal disagreements within the TWRCAA over transgender rights at a time when the transgender community is gaining greater visibility.

Sexual rights associated with the [6 Colors Manifesto](#) (六色宣言) also became a source of dissension among Taiwan's LGBTQ+ community. The manifesto, issued in 2008, used the design of the rainbow flag to represent LGBTQ+ rights issues, with the "red procession" portion of the manifesto representing issues of sexual rights and sexual autonomy. The TWRCAA has sought to revise the red procession, claiming that it has led to misunderstandings and false accusations propagated by anti-LGBTQ+ rights groups, including that the manifesto supports the sexual exploitation of children. Yet, other LGBTQ+ and sex rights groups, including the

[Taiwan Gender Queer Rights Advocacy Alliance](#) (社團法人台灣酷兒權益推動聯盟, TGQRAA), [Hand Angel](#) (手天使), and the [Taiwan Sex Industry and Workers' Rights Association](#) (台灣性產業勞動者權益推動協會, TSIWRA) have condemned the TWRCAA's decision as succumbing to public pressure, and urged domestic LGBTQ+ advocacy groups to pursue broader dialogue and strengthened education on sexual rights.

Navigating Challenges to LGBTQ+ Rights in Taiwan

On the domestic front, [anti-LGBTQ+ groups](#), such as the Taiwan Solidarity Union (now known as Taiwan Solidarity Party, 台聯黨), the No Self ID Taiwan (NDISTW), the Taiwan Parents Protect Women and Children Association (台灣家長守護婦幼權益協會, TPPWCA), and the Taiwan Women's Association (臺灣女性協會, TWA), have been antagonistic toward efforts to uphold LGBTQ+ rights, [especially transgender rights](#). Trump's return to the US presidency has empowered organizations associated with the anti-LGBTQ+ movement. For example, TSP chairperson Chou Ni-an (周倪安) [invoked](#) Trump's "[revolution of common sense](#)," under which the US recognizes only two biological sexes, male and female, in calling for Taiwanese politicians to adopt the same position and reconsider

what she described as Taiwan's excessively left-leaning approach. With substantial resources and grassroots movements, these groups pose challenges for liberal progress based on their populist campaigns, and exploit divisions over LGBTQ+ issues for their advantage. [The results of a 2018 referendum](#), in which same-sex marriage and gender equality education were rejected, serves as a lesson on how anti-LGBTQ+ groups can mobilize support by stoking fear of the collapse of traditional values among the public.

Failure to take action to raise public awareness of LGBTQ+ rights issues would lead to a setback for Taiwan as a leader on human rights issues in Asia, as the Taiwan Equality Campaign aptly pointed out when referring to declining level of public support for the LGBTQ+ community in [2025](#). Hence, the Taiwanese government should take the lead in advancing true marriage equality and social inclusion. For instance, the Lai Ching-te (賴清德) Administration should amend the [Assisted Reproduction Act](#) to allow the use of assisted reproduction for single women and same-sex female couples. This act, which is limited to married heterosexual couples, has been a source of controversy among members of the public and lawmakers due to [the government's insistent stance](#) on and partisan divisions over the expansion of the use of assisted reproductive technologies and the legalization of surrogacy. Furthermore, given the rise of anti-transgender movements, [a comprehensive anti-discrimination law](#) should be put forward in order to provide protection for vulnerable groups.

As global democracy is threatened by [rising authoritarianism](#), and anti-LGBTQ+ movements are rising, Taiwan should leverage its position as a well-established democracy to reinforce its democratic resilience and advocate for minority rights at the global level. The Taiwanese government should be as committed to advancing LGBTQ+ rights abroad as well as at home, turning rhetoric into concrete policy. Achieving this goal requires the active participation and intellectual resources of the government, civil society groups working for human rights, and policy think tanks.

Taiwan now has greater potential for human rights exchanges and collaboration with like-minded democracies, particularly European partners, since they are all devoted to promoting and safeguarding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Taiwan and the European Union, for example, hold annual [Human Rights Consultations](#) in which both sides exchange views on human rights developments, policy initiatives, and

plan joint actions. In countries where LGBTQ+ populations are facing institutional discrimination, stigma, and criminalization—especially in the Global South—Taiwan should distribute financial resources to LGBTQ+ organizations on-the-ground, and engage in track-two diplomacy to share experiences in advancing LGBTQ+ rights.

Additionally, Taiwan should [collaborate](#) with non-governmental organizations and corporations to develop grassroots initiatives to promote equal rights. The Taiwanese government should share its experiences of calibrating laws and policies that help advance LGBTQ+ rights with its existing diplomatic allies. By doing so, Taiwan can strengthen people-to-people ties and expand its international foothold. However, Taiwan should recognize that much of the [Global South](#) remains less accepting of the LGBTQ+ community and some countries still criminalize same-sex conduct. Therefore, Taiwan should [adopt](#) a nuanced and pragmatic approach to promoting LGBTQ+ rights, one that advances rights-based principles while minimizing the risk of backlash from regimes that frame LGBTQ+ advocacy as ideological interference.

By incorporating LGBTQ+ rights into its values-based diplomacy, Taiwan could forge ties with other like-minded partners in supporting LGBTQ+ rights and combating global democratic repression, highlighting the spirit of "Taiwan Can Help." In doing so, Taiwan can reinforce its identity as a progressive democracy that treasures liberal rights protections and freedoms of all individuals in society.

The main point: Taiwan's leading status on LGBTQ+ rights now faces pressure from three headwinds: a global resurgence of anti-LGBTQ+ movements and growing internal divisions within Taiwan's LGBTQ+ community. To bolster its international standing, Taiwan must strengthen domestic consensus, promote comprehensive anti-discrimination protections, and incorporate LGBTQ+ rights into its values-based diplomacy.

A Cost Too High to Protect the Sky? Lessons for Taiwan from the Wars in Ukraine and Iran

By: Oskar Stievenart

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Image: Ukrainian security personnel inspect a Russian Geran drone (modeled on the Iranian Shahed drone) in Vinnytsia Oblast, Ukraine (March 2024). (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons / Ukraine National Police](#))

ic Affairs from the faculty of the International Master Program in Asia-Pacific Affairs (IMAPA) and specializes in security studies.

Winning through Cost Attrition

Since September 2022, Russia has been [actively launching](#) Iranian-designed Shahed-136 loitering unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). Moscow has since [domesticated its production](#) (naming its own Shahed drones “Geran-2”), intended to overwhelm Ukraine’s air-defense network and counter the supply of Patriot systems provided by the United States and other key ally states. However, a single Patriot missile costs around USD 3-4 million. Compared to the USD 20,000-50,000 production cost of a Shahed, this presents a clear 100:1 ratio in favor of Russia. [1] This prompted Ukraine to develop its [own brand-new](#) GPS-guided loitering UAV titled “The Sting”, costing only USD 2,000 per unit, balancing the unfavorable economic attrition tug-of-war.

In Iran, Washington was [unable to adequately counter](#) the launch of several ballistic missiles and Shahed drones targeting American bases or civilian infrastructures. The conflict has pressured the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia to [seek purchas-](#)

[es of Ukraine’s low-cost interceptor drones](#) rather than the US Patriot system. Moreover, on March 27, 2026, the American Prince Sultan Airbase based in Saudi Arabia was targeted by Iran, damaging a [USD 270 million](#) E-3 Sentry AWACS radar aircraft. Thus, Tehran was able to [assert pressure](#) on the US ability to monitor and detect future threats from Iran at a relatively low cost.

Both Ukraine and Iran have shown that cheap loitering UAVs have significantly shifted the dynamics of warfare. Taiwan has not been idle throughout the two major conflicts, closely observing the evolution of drone warfare, and reviewing its own existing defense strategy accordingly. Taiwan has planned production of indigenous unmanned surface vehicles (USV) – notably [the Sea Shark](#) (海鯊), the [Kuai Chi](#) (快奇), and the [Endeavor Manta](#) maritime drones – to address the asymmetric challenge it faces from the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) much larger naval fleet. [Drawing inspiration](#) from Ukraine’s use of naval drones, Taipei seeks to counter the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)’s overwhelming advantage through a similar attritional strategy.

Funding the Correct War

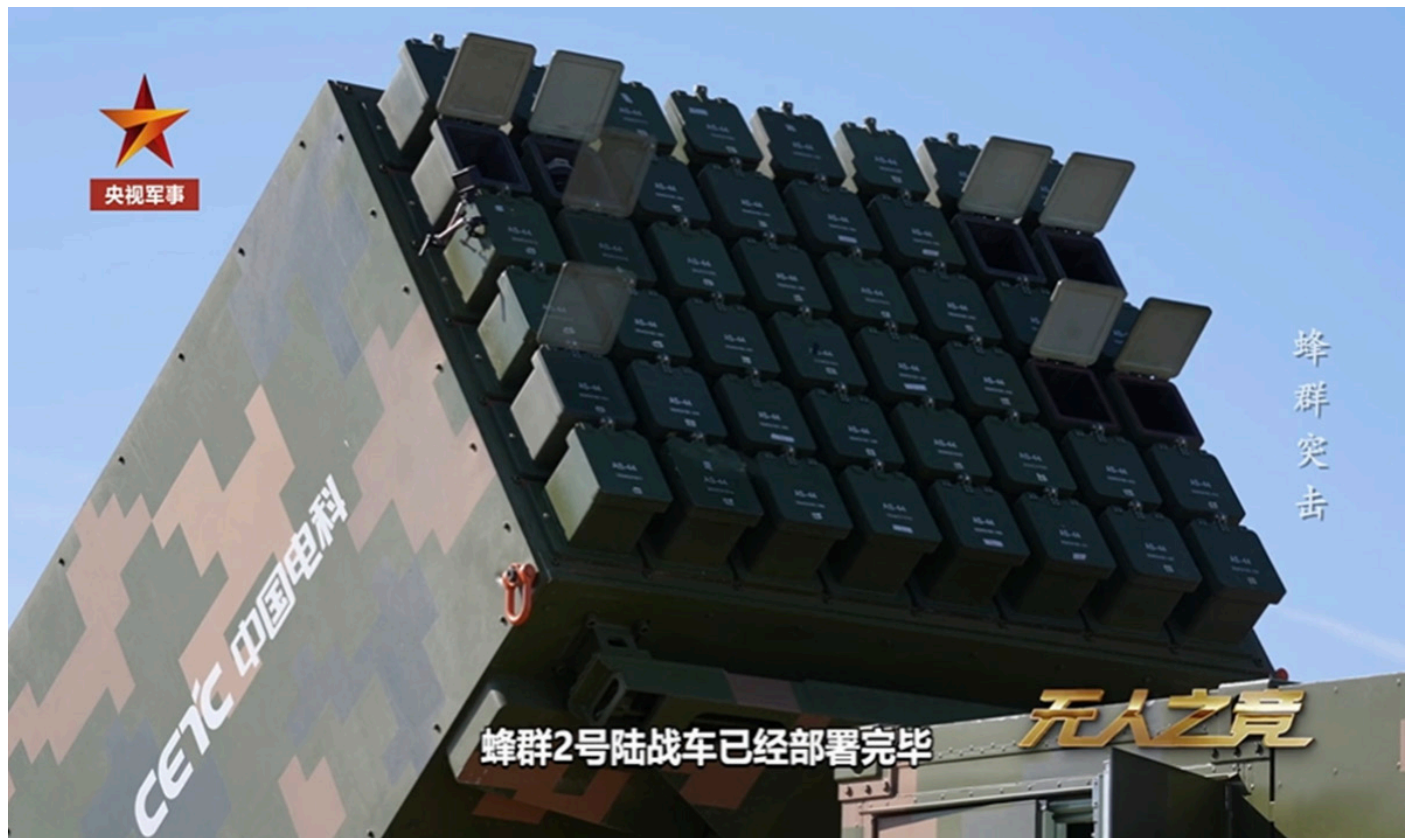


Image: China's Atlas drone swarm operations system (Swarm-2) in a demonstration video published by CCTV. (Image Source: [Global Times](#))

Given the PRC's immense material and manpower advantage over Taiwan, the Executive Yuan (行政院) introduced in late 2025 a supplementary defense budget of [TWD 1.25 trillion](#) (approximately USD 40 billion). As [stated](#) by President Lai Ching-te (賴清德), it included the objective of increasing Taiwan's defense budget to five percent of its GDP by 2030. Although the decision was welcomed by Washington, critics [cited](#) a lack of focus on securing cost-effective capabilities in favor of highly advanced equipment. Taipei's planned "[T-Dome](#)" strategy – which is a multilayered air-defense network [inspired](#) by Israel's Iron Dome – could face a [critical vulnerability](#) if China adopts a similar drone-swarm strategy. Even with this backdrop, Taiwan's drone program [remains problematic](#), mostly covered by promises but little result.

Taiwan's cheapest air-defense system is the domestically produced Sky Bow (*Tien Kung*, 天弓). Yet a single *Tien Kung-2* or *Tien Kung-3* missile costs around [USD 600,000](#). In 2025, Taiwan produced [around 100 Tien Kung-3](#) missiles. The US-supplied Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) comprises a sizable portion of Taiwan's anti-air arsenal, with a planned [reserve of](#)

[500](#) missiles. However, at a cost of [USD 3.7 million](#) per missile, it lacks the cost-effectiveness to address a hypothetical Chinese drone swarm strategy. With the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force possessing an [estimated total](#) of 2,000 ballistic missiles and hundreds of land-attack cruise missiles, China can already strain Taiwan's limited arsenal.

Moreover, Israel's Iron Dome proved to be out of alignment with the reality of its stockpile: The "Twelve-Day War" in 2025 forced the US to expend [25 percent](#) of its interceptor missiles. In Taiwan, the limited reserve of missiles means that it will likely be selective in intercepting incoming Chinese projectiles. China has [already flirted](#) with the concept of a drone swarm to overwhelm Taiwan's air defenses, [using AI](#) to bypass electronic warfare systems. It has also flexed its newly developed [Atlas drone swarm operations system](#), allegedly capable of deploying 48 drones and coordinating 96 drones simultaneously from a single vehicle.

Adopting Ukraine's Playbook

Ukraine has had to adapt to the rapidly evolving battlefield landscape, with a key concern that its partners

may fail to adequately supply its dwindling arsenal. Moscow's recent [intensification](#) of its winter energy strikes was likely emboldened by the [reduction](#) of Patriot missile shipments from the United States under the Trump Administration. Additionally, the continuous, extensive deployment of Geran-2 drones has further strained Kyiv's ability to counter incoming projectiles, leading to [considerable damage](#) to its energy infrastructure and nationwide blackouts.

China's immense domestic industry suggests it will face few challenges in copying Russia's and Iran's drone swarm doctrine. China-based SZ DJI Technology Co., Ltd. (DJI, 深圳市大疆創新科技有限公司) alone accounts for more than half of the world's commercial drone production, reaching 78.8 percent of the global share since 2019. [2] If required, China's civilian industries could be relied on to produce [one billion](#) weaponized drones annually, a task that would require less than [one percent](#) of the PRC's assembly capacity. Taiwan must rapidly enhance its drone sector amid such an asymmetric race. As of 2026, Taiwan [produced approximately](#) 10,000 units per year and [aims](#) for an annual production rate of 180,000 by 2028, a figure that presents a daunting reality. Another problem with China's dominance in the drone market is that Taiwan will also be forced to [source components](#) domestically or from alternative partners.

Defense via Procurement and Diplomacy

While Taiwan could secure critical lessons from the conflicts in Iran and Ukraine, it too can adopt essential solutions. Ukraine's recent low-cost interceptor drones have shown [promising results](#), and Taiwan's [existing technology industry](#) allows it to lay the groundwork for extensive domestic production of similar capabilities. Furthermore, Taipei can also be supplied by foreign partners, as exemplified by the [US recent supply](#) of 291 Altius 600M Switchblade loitering drones.

For many years, Taiwan has based its defense doctrine on the ["porcupine strategy"](#) (刺蝟戰略), focusing on deterrence through denial by ensuring that a Chinese invasion of the island would prove too costly. A recent report by the [Center for a New American Security](#) proposed enhancing Taiwan's preexisting porcupine defense strategy by adopting the "Hellscape" doctrine, which calls for a high concentration of disposable aerial and maritime drones across the Strait to deter a Chinese amphibious assault. Likewise, steps have been taken to expand Taiwan's domestic drone production, but the [challenge](#) in acquiring components outside of China ("non-red") has hampered progress. This chal-

lenge largely stems from rising costs, with Taiwanese-made drones costing [25 percent more](#) than those produced by DJI.

Taiwan has also deepened its partnerships with [key international actors](#), such as Japan and the Philippines in Asia, as well as Germany, Poland, and the Baltic states. The announcement of a ["drone diplomacy"](#) initiative on October 22, 2025, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 外交部) paved the way [towards greater multilateral cooperation](#) with foreign states to procure and export drones for civilian and military uses. However, closer bilateral agreements with key nations such as Ukraine may provide a better groundwork due to Ukraine's expertise in drone warfare. The Ukrainian IRON Cluster, a collaborative hub comprising over [200 firms](#) in developing unmanned systems, was [invited](#) by the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA, 經濟部) to visit on June 18, 2026, an invitation that symbolized a clear mutual willingness to collaborate. Nevertheless, official dialogues remain closed.

[Track II diplomacy](#), or diplomacy through unofficial and non-state dialogues, is therefore the most feasible option for Taipei to establish crucial supply links and to acquire additional knowledge. The [signing of the MOU](#) at the 2025 International Defense Industry Exhibition (MSPO) by Poland, Ukraine, and Taiwan established a third-way link with Ukraine for drone development and research. This success signaled that Taiwan can maintain ties with foreign agencies despite its current limited recognition, while the already established partnership with the [United States](#) can continue to serve as a core source of additional components.

The main point: With the rapid dominance of loitering drones, funding in Taiwan's defense should not be allocated solely to sophisticated weaponry but also to lower-tier capabilities to effectively enhance the island's porcupine strategy against a much larger China. Whilst Taipei should further intensify its indigenous production to meet the required quota for a hypothetical war against Beijing, it should also continue to pursue cooperation with relevant foreign partners to accelerate development towards a more resilient shield based on cost imposition and a steady lifeline.

[1] Pokorny, Laszlo. 2026. *The Economics of Asymmetric Attrition: A Quantitative Analysis of Low-Cost Drone Warfare in the Ukraine and Iranian Shahed Programs* (2022-2026). New Jersey: ICL Institute. doi:10.5281/zenodo.18919501.

[2] Chen, Jin. 2023. "Platform Strategies of the Chi-

nese Commercial Drone Manufacturer: A Theoretical and Empirical Study of Ecosystem Development." *International Relations and Diplomacy* 11 (4): 145-160. doi:10.17265/2328-2134/2023.04.001.
