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By: Souhardya De and William Budd

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Recent diplomatic developments in the Indo-Pacific, notably the People Republic of China's (PRC) [official condemnation](#) of interactions between Narendra Modi and Lai Ching-te (賴清德) in June, have signaled Chinese discontent concerning the increasingly deepening bilateral ties between India and Taiwan. With the diplomatic outreach under the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP, 民進黨) [New Southbound Policy \(NSP, 新南向政策\)](#) reciprocated by the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) “Act East” approach, the two economies have come closer than ever—with India becoming the hub for [supply chain relocations from China](#), and a [migration and mobility agreement](#) facilitating labor-engagement for Indians in a range of Taiwanese sectors. Despite this, the informal nature of the relationship, and India's traditional posture of non-alignment, raises serious questions about its security commitments.

Broadly speaking, the relevance of the security question must be understood from a two-fold perspective. For Taiwan, with Donald Trump's interpretation of the longstanding US-Taiwan security relationship as [burdensome](#), a re-calibration of the strategic ties by forging close security-specific engagements with pivotal regional poles like India becomes critically important. While the incumbent US administration remains seriously invested in global security engagements, [including in Taiwan](#), the same cannot be expected from Trump's isolationist outlook. With *The Economist's* most recent [electoral analysis](#) indicating growing Republican popularity, it becomes considerably important for Taipei to reassess its stand-alone dependence on American security ties.

Similarly, for India, Taiwanese sovereignty guarantees a key economic partner—provid-

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ing the nation with an [expansive flow of commerce](#) via the Taiwan Strait into northeast Asia. In 2023 alone, Indo-Taiwanese trade stood at [USD \\$8.2 billion, with a growth estimate of 26.6 percent](#). In addition, the whopping [USD \\$22.9 billion and USD \\$27.5 billion](#) trade with Japan and Korea respectively in the last financial year means that India has a vested interest in ensuring the continuation of the free flow of shipping through the South China Sea and along the Taiwan Strait. Any implications of a reunification attempt would adversely affect both India's commercial interests and its economy—setting it back by as much as eight to nine percent of its GDP, [according to a recent Bloomberg estimate](#).

### **Existing Security Arrangements**

Existing Indo-Taiwanese security arrangements are neither robust nor cooperative. While the former's membership in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) hints at an interest in the maintenance of a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, analysts have variously argued that the bloc is [far from a security mechanism](#). Furthermore, India's autonomous stance over the [conflict in Ukraine, and the absence of any formal security alliance with the United States](#), speaks volumes about how member-countries position themselves within the forum. Even though the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)—a logistics exchange deal with the United States—posits a high likelihood for Indian engagement in [cooperating in a contingency](#), such an agreement circles back to Taiwan's defense solely depending on Taiwan's security relationship with the United States. Based on recent rhetoric, some political circles in both Washington and Taipei have become [increasingly skeptical](#) about this relationship.

The absence of any reliable alternative defense frameworks implies a lack of any effective deterrence against an incursion. Especially with the high stakes involved, diversification of regional security engagements is necessary. Recent developments, such as an informal Indian delegation comprising its three [former service-chiefs](#) to the Ketagalan Forum last year, and a [joint military simulation between Indian and Taiwanese think tanks](#)—which this year featured representation from the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR, 國防安全研究院), the Taiwan government's defense think tank—indicate an active Indian interest in the security dynamics in the region. However, much remains to be done in order to create a robust extra-US regional security framework.

### **The Way Ahead**

India's strategic calculus would require any Indo-Taiwanese security engagement to be aligned with India's interests (both its economic trajectories and geopolitical ambitions); to deploy cooperative and bilateral channels to express an assertive anti-reunification stance; and to avoid antagonizing the PRC by any immediate overt refutation of the "One-China Policy." Taiwanese security needs to be seen as vital for an India looking to champion itself as leader of the Global South in the long-term, and its foreign policy priorities must reflect that accordingly.

India's commercial relations with Taiwan need to be seen as a strategic asset. Recent statistics show foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow is expected to [grow eightfold](#), much of it in the electronics and footwear sectors. This is in line with India's interest in a cooperative semiconductor ecosystem, and [builds on its USD \\$10 billion investment](#). The [projected doubling of trade volume](#), coupled with Taipei's [emphasis on integrating economic and security diplomacy](#), makes a case for resuming foreign trade agreement (FTA) negotiations. Such a potential FTA, being commercially aligned, would not be automatically dismissive of the "One-China Policy"—however, it would nonetheless signal [India's role in shaping a supply-chain realignment](#) and cement its vested interests in a long-term collaboration with a *de facto* sovereign Taiwan. This would imply a natural convergence on shared security interests—within the bilateral ties aimed at retention and furtherance of the supply chains and economic ties—that the two countries have developed.

Further assertion of India's support must come from its multilateral and strategic diplomatic engagements in the region. India shares a "special strategic partnership" with South Korea and Japan, making collective responses to any Taiwan-specific concerns possible. As recent as 2023, Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's remarks about [opposing any change of the "status quo" by the PRC](#) led to a diplomatic rift with China. For Japan, the security priority remains clear, especially as Taiwanese sovereignty is approached as a [subject of national survival](#) within its foreign policy circles. Indian interests, as such, are on common ground with its partners in the region and there is need for Taiwanese security to be carefully incorporated into the nations' shared strategic priorities—all the more so, as any PRC-led aggression threatens to cut off India's ties with Japan and Korea as well.

Two fora are of particular interest in advancing India's

Taiwan-specific commitments: the NATO Indo-Pacific 4 (NATO-IP4), of which countries like [Japan, Australia, and Korea, that already share Indo-Pacific engagements with India, are a part](#); and the ASEAN countries, many of whose bilateral ties with India includes a security-specific convergence on PRC aggression. India's recent investments [promised at the Hanoi maritime-security dialogue](#), and its long-standing commitments to [support Manila](#) over Beijing's claims in the South China Sea, are steps in the right direction.

Scholars have considered how any crisis in [Taiwan could intersect with South China Sea disputes](#), compromising the sovereignty and commercial interests of several ASEAN economies as a result. Thus, India needs to actively expand its maritime security investments and strategic partnerships with these economies, prioritizing the question of Taiwan and outlining cooperative commitments to work towards a deterrence less reliant on the United States, as the costs of any aggression are likely to be devastating to all parties concerned. Additionally, in the India-led Global South Summit, the priority accorded to [sustaining favorable geopolitics for developmental projects](#) means there exists a scope for accounting for the Taiwan question and Indo-Pacific security.

In addition to addressing the Taiwan question through NATO and fora within ASEAN, there is also a critical need for the QUAD to form a comprehensive security policy addressing the Taiwan question. India, for one, needs to step up, as [Tokyo](#) and Canberra have been [building bilateral security cooperations with Taiwan](#). For a start, India should seek to bolster its ties by replicating the Australian model that includes engaging Taipei in informal exercises and capacity-building programs, while expanding the scope for technology-specific exchanges. Taiwan's reciprocal outlook, which would support India's position in border disputes with the PRC and call out PRC behavior as violating a rules-based international order, would likely also be favorable to such pursuits. In essence, the QUAD needs to reflect a robust cooperative security mechanism built upon ties its member-nations pursue, thereby providing a shared security architecture for the region.

### ***The China Factor***

Any engagement with Taiwan, however, must consider potential repercussions from the PRC, as a significant trade deficit places India on an unsteady footing. While Indian exports sit at [four percent of total exports](#), in 2023-24 alone Chinese imports amounted to a [15 percent share of India's total of USD \\$680 billion](#). The im-

pact of any cut in exports could adversely affect key Indian industries. This necessitates a review of India's inward FDI priorities to focus on attracting [Chinese FDI with an aim to boost India's global value chain \(GVC\) integration](#) over time, as the Economic Survey has shown. [1] Moreover, such a shift could limit the PRC's capacity for economic coercion.

According to Dr. Liu Cheng-Shan (劉正山) from National Sun Yat-Sen University (NSYSU, 中山大學), since the DPP's objective is gaining recognition for Taiwan, this means that any opportunity for improved relations with a power like India will be actively pursued by the government. [2] How China would respond is of little concern to the DPP, as a security relationship with India is viewed as far more useful for Taiwan's cause than placating a hostile PRC.

Should the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨)—a party [more interested in cross-strait relations](#)—gain popularity in the future, the approach could differ. A KMT government would be unlikely to pursue such a relationship with India, meaning that Indian assertiveness on Taiwanese security is likely to be better reciprocated by the current government. Both the NDA and DPP should, as such, capitalize on their mutual interests and pursue a stepped-up engagement. It is vital that India understands that a positive political environment for security ties with Taiwan outweighs any benefits accrued from an import-specific dependence on the PRC in the long-run, especially given India's long-standing territorial disputes with China.

While overt recognition remains off the table, India's foreign policy must prioritize long-term deterrence by building a favorable extra-US regional security environment. This includes the employment of a range of policy measures: such as integrating the Taiwanese question into India's partnerships and engagements, engaging Taiwanese policy circles both bilaterally and across international fora, and pursuing cooperative-security ties in the interest of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

**The main point:** Amid rising cross-strait tensions and the emergence of US political circles skeptical about security ties with Taipei, it is vital that New Delhi reassesses its approach. Enhancing economic cooperation to promote bilateral convergence on security interests, incorporating the question of Taiwan within diplomatic engagements, and pursuing cooperative security initiatives would effectively position India as a primary arbiter in deterrence by building a favorable regional security architecture. Prioritizing Taiwanese security is



in line with New Delhi's interests in acting as a leader of the Global South, and preventing PRC actions that seek to destabilize India's position in the Indo-Pacific.

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[1] Annual report presented by the Indian Finance Minister prior to the Union Budget, highlighting trajectories and projections of the Indian economy. The report for this year was released in July 2024.

[2] Stated during an in-person interview with William Budd on July 18, 2024.

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## Taiwan Has a “Do-Say” Gap Problem

By: Cathy Fang

*Cathy Fang is a contributing analyst at PLA Tracker and Safe Space, and serves as an editor and podcast host for US-Taiwan Watch.*

Taiwan is stuck in a strategic messaging problem. Despite its determined pursuit of greater self-defense capabilities—improving both the quality and quantity of its men and munitions—the island democracy struggles to tell a compelling story about its efforts. This has led to a paradoxical “do-say” gap, in contrast to the more common “say-do” gap. While the latter often involves lofty words with little action, the former is more subtle: real progress hidden from view. As the threat of conflict evolves from a distant possibility to a near reality, staying quiet is no longer a viable strategy—and silence risks becoming a lethal dagger in maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. Without a clear, consistent, and confident narrative about its self-defense improvements and the success of its reforms, Taiwan risks weakening two key pillars of its security: its own people's will to stand firm and fight, and its allies' commitment to show up and provide support.

### **The Military's Risk-Averse Culture in Information Disclosure**

The Taiwanese military's reluctance to share information is not a novel phenomenon, nor is it unique to Taiwan. However, the armed forces of this island na-

tion carry two distinctive burdens: a legacy of [strained civil-military relations](#) and an insular organizational culture. This heritage has cultivated a mindset among military personnel that is markedly conservative, cautious, and acutely sensitive to risk when it comes to information disclosure.

The specter of unforeseen political ramifications looms large, as does fear that the media will misinterpret or deliberate misdirect public discourse. These are perils the military deems too costly to court. Consider, for instance, the well-intentioned efforts to boost public confidence by releasing footage of troops honing their combat readiness. Such displays have been misconstrued as provocations towards China, while certain unprecedented maneuvers have fallen victim to misinterpretation. For example, this year's [Han Kuang exercises were intended to present “unscripted” rehearsal drills](#). Yet, when civilians captured images of troops in preparatory stages, questions arose about the meaning of “unscripted” in this context.

However, as [Minister of National Defense \(MND\) Spokesperson Sung Li-fang \(孫立方\)](#) explained, “unscripted” doesn't equate to a complete absence of preparation. Rather, it signifies that participating personnel are not privy to specific scenario details beforehand. The proliferation of disinformation campaigns has only served to amplify the intensity and scope of misinterpretation surrounding well-intentioned actions. Consequently, a mentality of “the less trouble, the better” has become an intergenerational legacy within the Taiwanese military establishment.

### **Taiwan's Regression versus China's Progression**

In the realm of visible armaments, China outpaces Taiwan significantly. On the invisible battlefield of information warfare, Taiwan finds itself at an even greater disadvantage—losing ground twice over, as it struggles to keep pace with China's increasingly sophisticated information strategies. In fact, China's proactive campaign in the messaging arena follows a meticulously crafted playbook—the [“three-warfare strategy”](#) (public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare). For the Chinese leadership, wielding the power of discourse is not merely important, but paramount, serving as the linchpin for securing a position of strength at negotiating tables and shaping international perceptions.

[This strategic approach is exemplified by the People's Liberation Army's \(PLA\) keen recognition of social media's pivotal role in modern conflicts and peacetime](#)

[operations](#). The PLA does not shy away from the digital spotlight; instead, it boldly showcases its modernized, disciplined, and combat-ready forces across various platforms. These efforts are designed to captivate domestic audiences, instilling a sense of national pride and confidence, while simultaneously commanding international attention and respect. In stark contrast, Taiwan's military apparatus, hampered by a combination of overcaution and risk aversion, remains largely reactive in its approach to information dissemination. This cautious stance results in a significant shortfall in upholding the "public right to know"—a principle that should be not only cherished, but actively championed in democratic societies. The disparity between China and Taiwan's information strategies reflects a clear divide in their approaches to governance and public engagement.

While MND's unfamiliarity with strategic messaging may contribute to this disparity, the crux of the issue appears to be a deep-seated unwillingness within Taiwan's military establishment to engage proactively in the information domain. This reluctance is not merely a matter of preference, but a strategic vulnerability that threatens to leave the country at a significant disadvantage in the ongoing battle for hearts and minds. As the information landscape continues to evolve rapidly—with social media and digital platforms playing an increasingly central role in shaping public opinion and international relations—Taiwan's hesitancy to fully engage in this arena could have far-reaching consequences for its security, diplomatic standing, and ability to garner international support in times of crisis.

### ***Preparedness is not Provocation***

Strategic messaging is an art form—a delicate dance of influence that goes beyond mere information sharing. It is a persuasive symphony, guiding audience perceptions toward desired outcomes. At its heart are four key elements: clear transparency, swift real-time communication, focused intent, and action-oriented results. However, Taiwan's efforts to boost capabilities and strengthen island resilience have hit a sour note in this quartet. Despite the fact that some advocates have urged for [Taiwan to take a page from the Philippines' playbook in the South China Sea](#) and counter China's gray zone military maneuvers with a robust information offensive, these calls have found little resonance within Taiwan's MND, which is wary of being cast as the provocateur on the global stage. In this heated debate, it is vital to separate promoting self-defense readiness from aggressive posturing. Taiwan's forc-

es are not gearing up for war; they are preparing for potential conflict while hoping for peace. This ready-to-defend stance strikes a different chord from the naming-and-shaming of adversaries, and offers a more subtle approach in the complex area of cross-strait relations.

### ***Efforts Should Be Turbocharged, Not Merely Doubled***

The launch of the ["Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee"](#) is encouraging, with [strategic communication](#) integrated into six of its categories. This new initiative promises to be an effective channel for highlighting Taiwan's civil-governmental efforts to enhance resilience, potentially addressing the current messaging gap. While this development is undoubtedly positive, Taiwan's defense communication strategy still has room for improvement. [The ROC Defense Mission](#) could also play a crucial role in strengthening Taiwan's self-defense narrative. Defense attachés should broaden their military diplomacy efforts. With increased budgets and staff, attachés could coordinate an extensive network of think tank partnerships, fostering a deeper international understanding of Taiwan's unique security situation.

Leading this intellectual endeavor should be the [Institute for National Defense and Security Research \(INDSR, 國防安全研究院\)](#), a think tank sponsored by the MND. INDSR consistently produces nuanced insights into Taiwan's defense mindset, offering invaluable perspectives on the nation's complex security challenges. These invaluable insights deserve a spotlight on the global stage. Its role should transcend that of a mere echo chamber for the defense ministry; it should function as a resonant, authoritative voice that not only articulates Taiwan's strategic concerns but also provides a nuanced, contextual understanding of the perceived threats from China and the complexities of US commitment to regional stability. In this way, INDSR can serve as an indispensable wellspring of strategic intelligence for US and international think tanks, policymakers, and security analysts. By facilitating the flow of Taiwanese defense perspectives into influential policy-making circles, Taiwan can ensure that its voice is not only heard but also seriously considered in international defense strategy discussions. This proactive approach to sharing the island democracy's unique insights could significantly impact global perceptions and policy formulations regarding regional security dynamics.

### ***Crafted, Precise Messaging Matters***

While strategic messaging often zeroes in on adversaries or competitors, Taiwan's situation is far more intricate and multifaceted, akin to a complex "group chatbox" engaging various stakeholders with diverse interests and perspectives. The complexity and nuance of this dual focus—addressing both internal and external audiences—cannot be overstated or underestimated. For the Taiwanese populace, especially those in the reserve forces who form a crucial backbone of national defense, the messaging must strike a delicate balance between being inspiring and pragmatic. It should not only highlight their indispensable role in safeguarding national security but also address any doubts, concerns, or apprehensions they may harbor about their responsibilities and the potential challenges ahead. This involves far more than a mere call to arms; it necessitates a comprehensive, well-thought-out strategy that encompasses rigorous training programs, allocation of sufficient resources, and clear, transparent communication about the high stakes involved in Taiwan's unique geopolitical position.

On the international front, the messaging directed towards allies and potential supporters needs to be equally compelling but tailored in a distinctly different manner. It is not simply a matter of requesting support or assistance; rather, it is about demonstrating conclusively that Taiwan is a reliable, proactive, and strategically important partner in the region. This means showcasing, with concrete evidence and actions, that Taiwan is taking significant and meaningful steps to bolster its own defense capabilities and infrastructure. By doing so, Taiwan can earn the trust, respect, and willingness of allies to offer their support when needed, creating a network of international backing that serves as a deterrent to potential aggressors. Taiwan's strategic messaging must serve as a sophisticated, multidimensional bridge between fostering internal resilience and cultivating external backing. It must be crafted with the utmost precision and care, ensuring that all parties involved—both domestic and international—fully grasp and appreciate the island's proactive stance, its state of preparedness, and its commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the region.

**The main point:** Taiwan has struggled with a "do-say" gap, where its progress in defense issues is not effectively communicated to its citizens or the international community. This stems partly from Taipei's concern about appearing provocative. To address this, Taipei must prioritize strategic communication, while INDSR

can help integrate Taiwanese perspectives into global policy discussions.

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### **China's Military Exercises Around Taiwan: Trends and Patterns**

By: Amrita Jash

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From May 23-24, 2024, three days after the inauguration of Taiwan's new president William Lai Ching-te (賴清德), China's Eastern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) carried out military drills code-named [\*Joint Sword-2024A\*](#), involving the army, navy, air force, and rocket force. Exercise activity occurred in the Taiwan Strait and around Kinmen, Matsu, Wuqiu, and Dongyin Islands, and [operations were comprised of:](#)

*"[S]ea assaults, land strikes, air defense and anti-submarine [operations] in the airspace and waters to the north and south of Taiwan Island, in a bid to test the multi-domain coordination and joint strike capabilities of the theater command's troops."*

PLA Navy Senior Captain Li Xi, the spokesperson of the Theater Command, [stated](#) that the drills served as a "strong punishment for the separatist acts of 'Taiwan independence' forces and a stern warning against the interference and provocation by external forces."

This military drill is an expected outcome of Xi Jinping's (習近平) directives in July 2023—when, while inspecting the Eastern Theater Command, [Xi called for:](#)

*"[V]igilance against potential dangers and all-out efforts to fulfill the duty of combat tasked with theater commands and enhancing the planning of war and combat, strengthening the command system for joint operations, and stepping up training under real combat conditions to raise the forces' capabilities to fight and win."*

Citing an unpublished Taiwanese estimate, [Reuters reported](#) that the People's Republic of China (PRC) spent about USD \$15 billion, or 7 percent of its defense budget, on exercises in the Western Pacific in 2023. This demonstrates that investment in military activities

**Table 1: China's Military Exercises around Taiwan (2018-2024)**

Time	Drill Name (if applicable)	Type of Exercise	Key Features	Context	Strategic Purpose
March 2018	Live-fire drills	Naval and air force; live ammunition	Simulated amphibious landings and blockades	Following the signing of the <i>US Taiwan Travel Act</i> that allowed official visits	Signaled opposition to US-Taiwan relations
July 2019	Joint sea and air drills	Air and sea Maneuvers	Joint air and naval operations near Taiwan	Part of the PLA's annual training cycle	To demonstrate PLA's joint operational capabilities
August 2020	Live-fire exercises	Naval and air force; live ammunition	Simulated attack on Taiwan; missile tests	Heightened US-Taiwan relations during the Trump administration	Psychological pressure on Taiwan
April 2021	Joint landing exercises	Amphibious assault training	Practiced beach landings, and assault operations	Days after the US Navy's transit of the Taiwan Strait	Show of strength and warning to Taiwan and the United States
August 2022	Largest-ever drills	Full-scale military exercise	Simulated blockade, missile launches over Taiwan; and cyber warfare	Response to US Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan	Comprehensive readiness for Taiwan invasion scenario
October 2022	Military training flights	Air force sorties	Multiple fighter jets and bombers circled Taiwan	Ongoing post-Pelosi tensions and US military presence	Intimidation, test Taiwan's air defense
April 2023	"United Sharp Sword"/ "Allied Sword" drills	Multi-branch exercises	Simulated encirclement of Taiwan, missile tests, joint naval and air operations	In response to Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy	To demonstrate the PLA's ability to surround and isolate Taiwan
July 2023	Night time Drills	Air and Naval Drills	Conducted night time combat drills	Increased US military support for Taiwan	Enhance combat readiness, show night-ops capabilities
August 2023	Drills	Air and naval exercise	Combat drills with aircraft, naval ships and land-based missile systems	Response to Vice President Lai Ching-te's visit to the United States	Focused on ship-aircraft coordination to test seizing control of air and sea space, and to test combat capabilities
May 2024	<i>Joint Sword-2024A</i> drills	Full-scale military exercise	Focus on joint precision strikes, missile tests, and drone operations. First time Chinese Coast Guard joined the drills	Response to the inauguration Speech of Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te	Joint sea-air combat readiness, precision strikes, and integrated operations to test real combat capabilities

Source: Compiled by the author



in and around Taiwan is a priority in China's military spending (*as also evident from Table 1, below*). In 2024, the PRC announced an [annual defense budget of \\$1.67 trillion yuan](#) (about USD \$231.36 billion), a 7.2 percent increase from 2023.

### ***Noteworthy Trends in PLA Exercises Around Taiwan***

Given the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP, 民進黨) traditional pro-independence outlook, its political control over Taiwan goes against Beijing's goal of "reunification." In this regard, since the DPP took power in 2016, there have been significant developments in China's military drills around Taiwan. These key trends and patterns are noted below.

#### ***The Frequency and Scale of Military Exercises***

The first key trend is an increase in the frequency and scale of military exercises, as noted (*Table 1, above*). This dramatic increase in the PLA's military exercises has been evident especially since the DPP came to power under Tsai Ing-wen. Beginning in 2018, China conducted military drills around Taiwan with increasing frequency in order to exert pressure on Taiwan's DPP-led government, which China views as being pro-independence. These exercises have served to test the PLA's joint real combat capabilities in the potential operating areas of a future Taiwan crisis.

#### ***The Sophistication of Military Operations***

Second, the depth and sophistication of the PLA's military exercises have increased, combining both military drills and joint exercises. This has involved live fire exercises; the involvement of all branches of the military, as well as a wide variety of military assets for greater jointness, coordination and operational preparedness; and simulating more realistic combat scenarios such as blockade and amphibious assault. For instance, in the [Joint Sword-2024A exercise](#), the China Coast Guard (CCG) practiced joint operations for the first time with the PLA. In the 2022 exercises, even Chinese aircraft carriers, the *Liaoning* and the *Shandong*, were [involved](#)—along with a Type 75 amphibious assault ship, at least one Type 55 cruiser, and several Type 54 frigates and others. As part of the May 2024 exercise, China [deployed](#) 111 aircraft and 46 naval vessels to areas around Taiwan, and 82 Chinese military aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait—with some approaching close to the 24 nautical mile line that Taiwan uses to define its contiguous zone. Platforms such as the J-20 and J-16 fighter jets, Type 052D destroyers, and Dong Feng ballistic missiles were also prominently

featured.

#### ***The Increasing Use of High Technology***

Third, the PLA's exercises have increasingly showcased advancements in military technology—including the use of drones, cyber warfare capabilities, and missile systems—indicating a shift towards modern warfare tactics. For instance, in early August 2024, Taiwan's Ministry of Defense [reported](#) that a total of 31 Chinese military aircraft—including several drones—and 12 Chinese warships were detected operating in and near the Taiwan Strait over a 24 hour period.

#### ***Achieving PLA Narrative Objectives***

Fourth, the military drills and exercises are aimed towards fulfilling key narrative objectives: both as a psychological tactic to intimidate Taiwan, as well as to signal its capabilities to the international community—particularly to the United States and Japan—regarding a potential Taiwan crisis. The PLA's military exercises increasingly coincide with significant political events related to Taiwan, such as visits by foreign dignitaries to Taiwan or statements from Taiwan's government that Beijing views as provocative—to include then-Speaker of the House [Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan](#) in August 2022, or [President Lai's inauguration](#) in May 2024. For instance, in his inauguration speech Lai [called](#) on Beijing to end its "[political and military intimidation against Taiwan](#)" and emphasized that Beijing needs to recognize "the reality of the Republic of China's existence"—statements that were met with Beijing's military response.

### ***Conclusions***

Given the evolving nature of China's military exercises, some analysts [take the view](#) that these exercises by China are aimed at blockading the island, instead of submitting it to a full-scale attack. Due to the heavy cost involved, an all-out war is generally ruled out of Beijing's calculus. Therefore, on one end, these military exercises exemplify China's growing frustration with the lack of progress towards "reunification" on Beijing's terms. On the other end, these military exercises are critical in shaping the dynamics of the Taiwan Strait and influencing the region's geopolitical stability.

As China aims to bolster its claim to Taiwan and to ward off any Western involvement, military exercises are expected to continue in this pattern. What is apparent is that China's military drills surrounding Taiwan follow a pattern that is indicative of a larger strategy



of intimidation and conflict preparedness. These exercises are probably going to change as tensions grow, with a greater focus on contemporary warfare capabilities and coordinated actions amongst various military branches. The geopolitical landscape is still changing, and the effects can be felt across the Taiwan Strait. What is certain is that China's military exercises around Taiwan pose a significant threat to regional peace and stability, as they carry the potential to escalate tensions and increase the risk of accidental conflict.

**The main point:** Since the Democratic Progressive Party took power in Taiwan under Tsai Ing-wen, China has increasingly combined its aggressive rhetoric with ramped-up military exercises around the Taiwan Strait, with Chinese vessels operating increasingly close to the island. These drills involve live-fire exercises, air sorties, naval deployments, and ballistic missile launches. China's military drills exhibit a clear trend of being "frequent, intense, large-scale and multi-domain" in nature—with a twin objective of demonstrating China's ability to blockade and isolate the island, and expressing Beijing's displeasure with any perceived moves towards Taiwan's independence.

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## Wasted Ammunition in the Fight against Chinese Disinformation

By: Ben Levine

*Ben Levine is a program assistant at the Global Taiwan Institute.*

In September, the Inspector General of the US Department of Defense (DoD) released a report, "[Evaluation of the DoD's Tracking and Accountability of Presidential Drawdown Equipment Provided to Taiwan](#)," which analyzed the implementation of the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), a mechanism used to expedite the transfer of US military aid to foreign allies. While this [tool has been instrumental in getting US military equipment to Ukraine](#) to aid in its fight against Russian aggression, this report highlights several shortcomings in the PDA process over the past year. In 2023, President Joseph Biden [authorized up to USD \\$345 million in US military equipment to be transferred to Taiwan](#) under PDA authority. With the People's Liberation Army (PLA) [actively altering the status quo](#) in the Taiwan Strait, more care and oversight are urgently needed to ensure that PDA shipments to Taiwan are timely, effective, and—most importantly—capable of strengthening its defense posture.

## What is the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA)?

The Presidential Drawdown Authority [allows the US president to pull military equipment \(as aid\) from US stocks to send to foreign countries](#). In each fiscal year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), there is usually a set amount of money that is budgeted for the president to use under PDA authority. For example, for Fiscal Year 2023, Congress authorized for the president to [draw down up to USD \\$1 billion specifically for Taiwan](#). [July 2023 was the first instance](#) of the Biden Administration using that funding to send military aid to Taiwan.

## How Does Military Aid Get to Taiwan under PDA?

The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) plays a central role in executing the Presidential Drawdown (PD) by issuing the Presidential Drawdown Execution Order (PD EXORD). A [PD EXORD](#) is an official directive that initiates the process of transferring military equipment or services from US government stocks to foreign governments without requiring congressional approval, typically for emergency purposes. As noted in a figure from the report, the overall process relies on the coordination of several government agencies (*see Figure 1 below*). First, the DSCA monitors all actions related to the PD. Following the directive, the US military services provide the necessary weapons and equipment from existing stocks, which are delivered to a point of embarkation (POE) for onward movement. The United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) is responsible for transporting the equipment via air or sea from the US POE to the point of delivery (POD) in the destination country. In the Asia-Pacific region, United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) manages security cooperation relationships and oversees the area of operations. Additionally, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) handles all transactions and relations between the US government and Taiwan regarding the delivery and implementation of the PD.

## Findings of the Report

The [report on the PDA process for Taiwan](#) highlights several key issues related to the accountability, quality control, and logistics of military equipment transfers. One of the primary findings is that the DoD's procedures for tracking and managing equipment deliveries were inadequate or nonexistent. Over 340 pallets of equipment suffered water damage at Travis Air Force Base due to poor storage conditions and inefficient airlift scheduling. The report underscores the need for better coordination between the DSCA and military

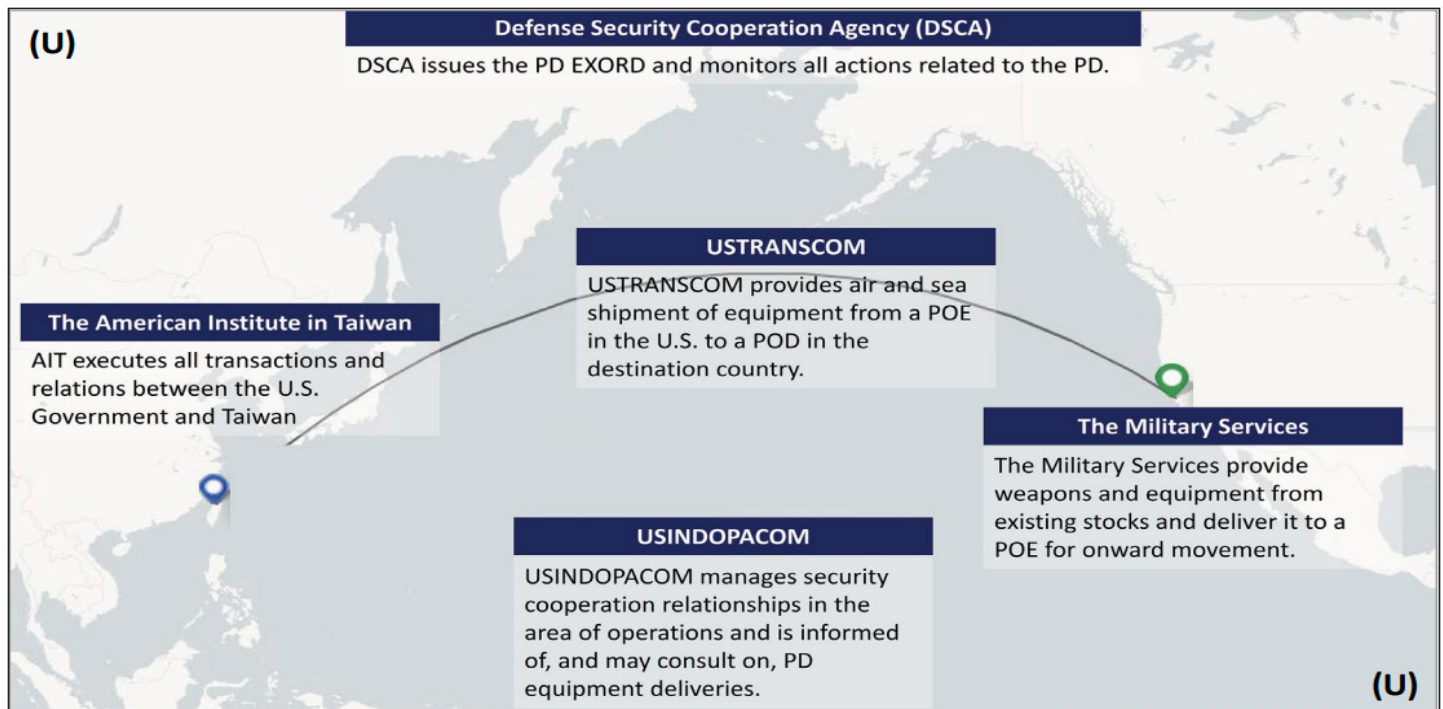


Figure 1: How Military Aid under PDA Gets to Taiwan (Figure source: [DoD Inspector General Report](#))

services to avoid delays and ensure proper handling of equipment.

Another critical finding was the delivery of unserviceable or damaged equipment to Taiwan. Items such as wet and moldy body armor and expired ammunition were received, largely because the units in the United States that were responsible for the shipments failed to follow proper packaging and shipping standards. This raised concerns about the US military's preparedness and attention to quality when supplying vital defense materials to allies, particularly during times of heightened geopolitical tension.

The damaged and improperly packaged equipment caused significant financial and operational strain for both the United States and Taiwan. Additionally, [the report noted that the Taiwanese government and US agencies had to spend additional resources](#) to remediate or replace the faulty items, resulting in extra costs that could have been avoided with better logistical planning and quality control. Moreover, the delivery of non-mission-capable equipment risks undermining Taiwan's confidence in US defense support, which could have broader implications for security cooperation in the region.

In response to these issues, the [report recommended several corrective actions](#). It urged the DSCA to collaborate more closely with military services to improve the

scheduling of shipments and ensure that equipment is properly checked before being transported. Enhanced pre-shipment quality controls were emphasized, especially in cases where US personnel would not be present to supervise the delivery. The report also highlighted the importance of maintaining trust and reliability in US-Taiwan defense relations, which are vital in the context of growing regional security challenges.

Overall, the findings call for better oversight, improved logistical operations, and a commitment to providing Taiwan with the high-quality defense equipment it needs to maintain its security, particularly as tensions with China escalate. The report highlights not only the technical failures in equipment delivery but also the broader strategic risks posed by lapses in US defense cooperation practices.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

In order to improve the delivery of military aid to Taiwan under the PDA, the DoD should conduct a final quality check on all equipment before it reaches Taiwan. Currently, [there is no standardized process](#) for ensuring the condition of military aid before it is handed over to Taiwan's MND. This oversight is problematic because damaged or unserviceable equipment, such as expired ammunition and moldy body armor, was delivered in the most recent PD shipment. A final quality assurance check would ensure that all items are

mission-ready, up to standards, and capable of being immediately integrated into Taiwan's military. Without this critical step, there is a risk that Taiwan could receive equipment that is not only useless but also costly and time-consuming to replace—thereby undermining the entire purpose of the aid package. Instituting a mandatory, final quality control procedure would greatly enhance the reliability of and allies' trust in US military assistance.

The absence of DoD or AIT representatives on the ground during the handover of military aid is another significant concern. Potentially due to the unique unofficial relationship between the United States and Taiwan, no US personnel are physically present in Taiwan when PDA shipments are transferred. Instead, [non-US contractors are responsible for delivering the equipment to Taiwan's MND](#), creating a gap in oversight and accountability. Having US representatives, whether from the DoD or AIT, involved in the handover would ensure that the equipment is delivered in good condition. Additionally, this would provide the US government with a clearer understanding of the on-the-ground conditions in Taiwan and allow for more immediate feedback on the quality of assistance provided. Given Taiwan's strategic importance to US interests, it is essential to ensure that US oversight does not stop once the equipment leaves American shores.

Another crucial step in improving the Presidential Drawdown process for Taiwan is the establishment of clear logistical requirements tailored to Taiwan's needs. Currently, [there is no comprehensive logistics plan specific to Taiwan's PDA shipments](#), which has contributed to delays, equipment damage, and poor storage conditions. For such a critical Indo-Pacific ally, the DoD should develop logistical protocols for handling military aid deliveries—from initial shipment to final handover. These protocols should include guidance on storage, transportation conditions, and packaging standards, particularly for sensitive or perishable equipment like ammunition or body armor. Clear logistical requirements would help mitigate the risk of damage during transit and ensure that Taiwan receives equipment in the condition intended, boosting both the efficacy of the aid and Taiwan's confidence in US support.

Additionally, it is important for the president to fully utilize the budget set by Congress for the PDA as allocated in the NDAA. The budget cap established for Taiwan's military aid should be fully utilized to ensure that Taiwan is equipped to defend itself, particularly

in the face of increasing military pressure from China. Underutilizing this budget not only leaves Taiwan at a strategic disadvantage but also sends a weak signal about the US commitment to its defense. If all available PDA resources are used, Taiwan can benefit from a comprehensive aid package that covers all of its pressing defense needs, from equipment and weapons to logistics support and training. Fully exercising the PDA budget would reinforce Taiwan's preparedness and deter potential aggressors.

One unresolved issue is whether the United States can make good on its promises, and provide replacements when faulty or damaged equipment is delivered under the PDA—without the president having to authorize additional spending from the FY23 PDA allocation. If Taiwan receives equipment that is not up to standard, it is unclear whether the same items can be re-sent without needing to dip further into the authorized budget. Establishing a clear policy on this would be beneficial, as it would allow the United States to correct mistakes without additional financial strain on both its PDA allocations and Taiwan's MND. This would also ensure that Taiwan receives what it is promised without enduring lengthy delays while budgetary approval is sought for replacement items.

### ***Impacts on Growing American Skepticism in Taiwan***

Chinese disinformation in Taiwan, such as [American Skepticism Theory](#) (疑美論), is [already negatively impacting Taiwanese public opinion](#) in regards to whether or not the United States will come to Taiwan's defense if China invades. This narrative asserts that America is not to be trusted as an ally; that the United States only uses Taiwan as a bargaining chip in its relationship with China; and that the United States ultimately will abandon Taiwan when it suits its interests. In February 2023, Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation (台灣民意教育基金會) [conducted a poll asking Taiwanese citizens their confidence in US intervention if China invaded Taiwan](#). A plurality, 46.5 percent, of those polled do not believe that the United States would come to aid Taiwan, while 42.8 percent believe that the United States would help Taiwan. This represents significant uncertainty within the Taiwanese public regarding the United States and its role in deterring China.

[Doublethink Lab's report on Taiwanese attitudes after the 2024 Taiwanese election](#) showcases the polarization in Taiwanese society regarding "American Skepticism Theory." The study revealed that 61.58 percent of respondents who use Chinese social media agree more with the statement "The United States is not a



trustworthy ally and only wants to exploit and drain Taiwan” (see Figure 2). Two other questions that are influenced by Chinese information operations (question 27 and 28) also show a majority of respondents expressing anti-American viewpoints. In addition, polarization is not just limited to what social media platform one uses. Across a variety of questions (see Fig-

ure 3), supporters of the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) are more likely to exhibit anti-American opinions. The United States has become a partisan issue in Taiwan, with supporters of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) generally displaying more pro-American viewpoints, as contrasted with more anti-US attitudes among self-identified supporters of the KMT. As the

	Major information channel (Multiple choice- up to three)	Facebook	YouTube	LINE	TV	Chinese social media platforms (PRC social media) (TikTok+Wechat+Xiaohongshu)
<b>Narratives</b>						
Q27. Some people say, 'The United States is not trustworthy and only wants to exploit and drain Taiwan.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	48.27%	46.77%	49.19%	50.66%	38.42%
	More agree	51.73%	53.23%	50.81%	49.34%	61.58%
Q28. Some people say, 'The United States uses Taiwan to provoke China and attempts to push Taiwan into war.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	61.58%	57.75%	59.35%	60.77%	41.16%
	More agree	38.42%	42.25%	40.65%	39.23%	58.84%
Q29. Some people say, 'If PRC were to use force to attack Taiwan, the United States would definitely not send military assistance to Taiwan.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	60.62%	53.17%	53.47%	57.02%	39.55%
	More agree	39.38%	46.83%	46.53%	42.98%	60.45%
Q30. Some people say, 'The ruling party's defense policy is to use young people as sacrificial lamb.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	67.59%	66.90%	61.31%	65.07%	49.84%
	More agree	32.41%	33.10%	38.69%	34.93%	50.16%
Q31. Some people say, 'In terms of strengthening the determination of the entire population to resist enemy aggression, the current Taiwan government lacks actions and preparations in defense.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	42.61%	31.13%	35.29%	42.94%	36.77%
	More agree	57.39%	68.87%	64.71%	57.06%	63.23%

Figure 2: Chinese Disinformation Effects on the Taiwanese Public (1) (Figure source: Doublethink Lab, “2024 Taiwan Election: The Increasing Polarization of Taiwanese Politics — Reinforcement of Conspiracy Narratives and Cognitive Biases”)

Majority	Supporting party	DPP	KMT	TPP	Other parties	Not supporting any political party
<b>Narratives</b>						
Q29. Some people say, 'If PRC were to use force to attack Taiwan, the United States would definitely not send military assistance to Taiwan.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	85.93%	25.98%	44.00%	83.14%	50.01%
	More agree	14.07%	74.02%	56.00%	16.86%	49.99%
Q30. Some people say, 'The ruling party's defense policy is to use young people as sacrificial lamb.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	95.99%	23.88%	49.38%	87.58%	63.42%
	More agree	4.01%	76.12%	50.62%	12.42%	36.58%
Q31. Some people say, 'In terms of strengthening the determination of the entire population to resist enemy aggression, the current Taiwan government lacks actions and preparations in defense.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	63.88%	28.73%	22.87%	54.08%	32.30%
	More agree	36.12%	71.27%	77.13%	45.92%	67.70%
Q32. Some people say, 'As long as there is communication and interaction with the PRC, there is a possibility of helping the PRC unify Taiwan.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement?	More disagree	57.92%	80.56%	81.21%	60.99%	81.21%
	More agree	42.08%	19.44%	18.79%	39.01%	18.79%

Figure 3: Chinese Disinformation Effects on the Taiwanese Public (2) (Figure source: Doublethink Lab, “2024 Taiwan Election: The Increasing Polarization of Taiwanese Politics — Reinforcement of Conspiracy Narratives and Cognitive Biases”)

KMT now has [effective control of the Legislative Yuan](#) (LY, 立法院), the United States needs to seriously improve its military support to Taiwan in order to bolster bipartisan support and strengthen Taiwan's defense capabilities. By addressing logistical challenges and enhancing oversight, the United States can reinforce its role as a dependable ally, thereby helping to mitigate the partisan divide in Taiwanese politics.

US military weapons and equipment purchased by Taiwan are [already facing backlogs](#), and PDA usage was supposed to be a quick way of addressing this issue. If the United States fails to remedy this situation promptly, [it may inadvertently validate Chinese propaganda](#), fueling skepticism in Taiwan about American support—while also affecting US taxpayers, whose resources are being wasted. Once clear and established guidelines for the transportation of PDA equipment to Taiwan are in place, these recent issues can be addressed, reducing the risk of future incidents and helping to restore confidence in the US commitment to Taiwan's defense. Such improvements are essential not only for Taiwan's security but also for maintaining the credibility of US military aid in the eyes of both Taiwanese citizens and the American public.

**The main point:** From November 2023 to March 2024, DoD failed to implement quality control measures for the Biden Administration's July 2023 decision to use PDA to send military aid to Taiwan. As a result, this led to a large portion of the shipments being unusable by Taiwan's MND. Such missteps by the United States increase anti-American sentiments in Taiwan by feeding into Chinese propaganda about the narrative that the United States isn't a credible ally. Addressing these issues is key to providing Taiwan with a credible deterrent against Chinese aggression.

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## Can the Kuomintang Rise Again?

By: Li Zhekai

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In recent years, the Kuomintang Party (KMT, 國民黨) has faced continuous setbacks on Taiwan's political stage—especially in regards to its dwindling support among younger voters, sparking widespread discussions about its future. Once a dominant force in the island's politics, the KMT now faces significant challenges. From the [leadership switch](#) just before the 2016

election (from Hung Hsiu-chu [洪秀柱] to Eric Chu [朱立倫]), to the 2020 "[Han Wave](#)" (Han Kuo-yu [韓國瑜]), and the [unsuccessful "Blue-White Coalition" in 2024](#) (between Hou Yu-ih [侯友宜] and Ko Wen-je [柯文哲]), three consecutive election losses are no coincidence. Before Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) victory in 2016, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) had seen only one president, Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁). So why, after Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration, has the KMT been unable to reclaim the presidency?

Over time, the "[natural Taiwanese generation](#)" has become a major demographic in Taiwan. The KMT has struggled to address issues that resonate with the younger generation, such as social equity, environmental protection, and multiculturalism. [High housing prices and employment pressure are common concerns among young people](#), but the KMT has failed to propose practical solutions, leading to widespread disappointment and anxiety. In contrast, the DPP has more successfully attracted the attention of young people by emphasizing progressive and social justice issues, and effectively conveying its core messages through social media. And, in the 2024 elections, the emerging Taiwan People's Party (民眾黨) proved itself highly successful in [engaging youth support](#).

The KMT's policies are often seen as lacking innovation and flexibility, failing to adapt to rapidly changing societal needs and values—and thereby resulting in a gradual loss of competitiveness among younger voters. Moreover, the KMT's traditional image and conservative stance have hindered its ability to [address issues such as multiculturalism and gender equality](#), further weakening its influence among young voters and making it difficult to compete with the DPP.

Since relocating to Taiwan in 1949, the KMT has undergone a significant transformation, yet many of its internal challenges have persisted. The party, once a dominant force on the mainland, has struggled to adapt to its new environment. The move to Taiwan marked the beginning of an era in which the KMT, despite establishing a centralized and authoritarian government, was continuously plagued by internal factionalism and the dominance of various cliques, much as it had been on the mainland. This factionalism, combined with the KMT's inability to evolve beyond its rigid, hierarchical structures, has contributed to its current image issues. In the eyes of much of the public, the KMT remains entrenched in outdated views, often appearing detached and arrogant. One recent example could be observed in this past year's election campaign, during which Hou's vice-presidential candidate Jaw Shaw-kong (趙

少康), [repeatedly oversimplified the hardships faced by Taiwanese youth](#), further reinforcing the stereotype of the KMT as a “selfish elite party” among young voters.

Regarding cross-Straits relations, the KMT’s stance, which has long centered around promoting closer ties with mainland China under the “One China, Different Interpretations” (一中各表) position—an ambiguous formula that allows for the coexistence of both the PRC and the ROC—has long been considered its core policy. However, amid a changing international landscape, this position has come under increasing scrutiny. The KMT is widely perceived as failing to adequately address the Taiwanese people’s concerns about security and democracy, especially in terms of balancing relations with mainland China. [Younger voters generally hold a skeptical attitude toward China](#), making the KMT’s traditional stance seem outdated. Compared to the DPP’s more assertive position on cross-Straits issues and its greater association with support for Taiwan’s independence, the KMT’s advocacy of the “One China, Different Interpretations” position appears increasingly less appealing.

In early April of this year, Ma Ying-jeou [visited mainland China](#), emphasizing that his trip was a journey of peace and friendship, aiming to promote cross-Straits exchanges and prevent war. However, local Taiwanese organizations urged him not to become a “[historical criminal](#)”—reflecting broader concerns that Ma’s visit might serve as a propaganda opportunity for the PRC government, rather than just a gesture of goodwill. Even a former president like Ma, who has been out of office for eight years with no official or party position,

can still provoke significant public discontent in Taiwan when engaging with Beijing. This indicates that slogans like “promoting cross-Straits exchanges” may hold limited appeal for the younger generation in Taiwan.

The KMT’s predicament is not just a policy issue, but also involves its image and capabilities for organizational mobilization. While the KMT holds considerable influence in local government and retains strong traditional networks, its grassroots mobilization on modern communication platforms, such as the internet and social media, is relatively weak compared to the DPP. This makes it difficult for the KMT to effectively convey its policy proposals to a broader electorate, especially younger voters. The party’s image is seen as too conservative, lacking youthful and diverse representation. This situation poses a significant challenge for the KMT in attracting younger voters. Compared to the DPP, the KMT’s content on social media lacks innovation, and fails to resonate widely.

Additionally, the KMT’s organizational structure is relatively traditional, and its decision-making process often lacks flexibility, leading to slow responses to rapidly changing political environments. For example, during the 2019 protests in Hong Kong, the KMT hesitated to take a clear stance on the pro-democracy movement. In contrast, the DPP quickly voiced its support, aligning with the public’s growing concerns about China’s influence in the region. This hesitation reflected the KMT’s cautious approach due to its longstanding stance on cross-Straits relations, but it ultimately caused the party to lose ground among voters who were looking for a stronger response. Similarly, in the 2020 legislative elections, younger candidates within the KMT expressed frustration over the leadership’s reluctance to support more progressive policies, such as same-sex marriage and environmental protection. The generational gap within the party has made it difficult for younger voices to be adequately represented in high-level decision-making, further alienating young voters. This slow and conservative approach has contributed to the perception that the KMT is out of touch with the diverse values and demands of the new era.

### **Possible New Ways Forward for the KMT**

To improve this situation, the KMT needs comprehensive reforms in terms of both image and strategy. First, it should strengthen its influence on online platforms by cultivating young opinion leaders and using multimedia formats like short videos, live streams, and interactive content to engage with voters and expand its



*Image: KMT Chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫) (center) appears with young adults recruited as part of the “KMT Successor Project” (KMT 接班人計畫), which is intended to recruit newer members into the party (September 5, 2024). In recent years, the party has struggled to attract support from younger voters. (Image source: [KMT website](#))*



outreach. Second, the party needs to establish more open and inclusive mechanisms to attract members from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints to participate in decision-making. For example, creating youth advisory councils or issue-specific task forces could help present a more modern and diverse image. Finally, the KMT needs to strengthen connections with communities and grassroots organizations through concrete actions, such as developing local economic programs, supporting affordable housing initiatives, and offering community services in underrepresented areas. These specific actions would be crucial to regaining voters' trust and support.

Furthermore, the KMT must address its internal challenges by reforming its decision-making processes to be more inclusive and responsive. This involves creating channels for younger members to contribute meaningfully to the party's work and overall direction, ensuring that their voices are heard and valued in high-level discussions. Such reforms would not only help the KMT to appear more modern and dynamic but also to tap into the fresh perspectives that are necessary for the party to remain relevant in Taiwan's fast-changing political landscape.

The KMT should also reconsider its stance on cross-Straits relations, acknowledging the shifting attitudes of the Taiwanese electorate, especially the skepticism toward China among younger voters. By adopting a more nuanced approach that balances the need for security with the desire for peaceful relations, the KMT can better align with public sentiment. This might involve emphasizing Taiwan's autonomy and democracy while exploring new frameworks for cross-Straits engagement that resonate with the broader population.

Finally, strengthening connections with communities and grassroots organizations through concrete actions and policy initiatives is crucial to regain voters' trust and support. Whether the KMT can regain its footing depends on its ability to deeply analyse the current political landscape and undertake necessary reforms. As the election has shown, the public will not turn to the KMT merely because they are disappointed with the DPP. First, the KMT must seriously reflect on its policies and image and find new ways to connect with young people. Additionally, strengthening grassroots mobilization and the use of modern communication channels is critical. The KMT needs to demonstrate greater flexibility and adaptability in several key areas.

First, the party must innovate its policy platform, moving beyond traditional positions on cross-Straits relations

to address contemporary issues like climate change, digital transformation, gender equality, and economic inequality, which resonate with younger generations. Second, the KMT must modernize its communication strategies by becoming more active and creative on social media, engaging in discussions, hosting live Q&A sessions, and running innovative campaigns to connect with younger voters in a more informal and accessible manner.

Third, empowering younger members is vital. The KMT should establish leadership pathways for younger voices, including mentorship programs and appointing younger individuals to senior decision-making roles, which would reflect the party's commitment to evolving. In terms of organizational structure, the KMT needs to decentralize decision-making and empower local branches to address the specific needs of their communities more autonomously, which would enhance grassroots mobilization. Bridging the generational gap is also important: promoting internal dialogue between senior leadership and younger members will ensure that the party's policies reflect a more diverse spectrum of views.

Additionally, the KMT must demonstrate responsive and transparent leadership, being proactive in addressing criticism, hosting town halls, and fostering two-way communication with the public. Facing these challenges, the KMT needs to show that it is not rigidly tied to past approaches but is open to reform. Taiwan's increasingly diverse political landscape not only challenges the KMT's policy-making, but also its organizational structure and culture. Only through deep reflection and adjustment can the KMT reestablish its position in future political contests. In this era of uncertainty, the KMT has the opportunity to redefine its role. The key lies in how the party seizes this opportunity, and undergoes profound changes to meet the political demands and societal expectations of the new era.

**The main point:** The Kuomintang's (KMT) continued decline stems from its inability to resonate with Taiwan's younger generation, and to adapt to a rapidly changing political landscape. To regain its former influence, the KMT must undergo significant reforms in both policy and image, aligning itself with the values and demands of modern Taiwanese society.