

*a preliminary draft

Distant Thunder: The Russia-Ukraine War and Taiwan

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Abstract

The study intends to explore how Taiwan has reformulated its strategic perspective and reinforced some defense plans on cross-Strait security considering the impact of the Ukraine war, even though some military policy reforms had started during the Tsai Ing-wen era. The research begins with the analysis of several notable features of the Ukraine war. Then, it investigates how the Taiwan government learned from the Ukraine war for external balancing and internal balancing. The research concludes that Taiwan's security relies on the recognition of the interlinkage between Taiwan and the US in external balancing against China's threat and among various domestic variables for internal balancing for a holistic framework of national defense.

Keywords: China, External Balancing, Internal Balancing, Russia, Taiwan, US, Ukraine War

Far in Place and Close in Mind: the Russia-Ukraine War

The Russia-Ukraine War has occurred in the Eastern European theater but has generated several impacts and implications on cross-Strait relations between Taiwan and China. While the analysis of the Ukraine war requires a full examination, several visible features pertinent to Taiwan's defense have caught the attention of Taiwan's defense planners and the island's security allies to reflect and reframe Taiwan's security layout against China's threats.

First, a glimpse of territorial size in comparison indicates that Taiwan is approximately 5.96 percent of Ukraine's territorial size. Moreover, Taiwan's island defense contrasts with Ukraine's vast land mass, which can stretch its strategic depth to use territory to gain time for its security allies to offer help. On the other hand, an invasion plan against Taiwan would require extensive air superiority, a large naval fleet with firepower and transport capability, and amphibious forces to secure beach landing and successive replenishments of forces for victory. However, unlike the Ukraine case for less cumbersome exits, Taiwan's civilians would have to seek maritime and air routes for safe shelters abroad. As noted, in 2024, the EU permitted Ukraine refugees to stay and extended its temporary protection of 4.2 million refugees from Ukraine since the war registered

in the EU with a majority in Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland, until 2026.¹ In this case, the Taiwan-China conflict would be an asymmetric war similar to the Russia-Ukraine war. One major concern for civilians is the limited exit options for civilians during military conflicts.

Second, Ukraine's birth rate of 1.9 children at the end of the Cold War in 1991 had dropped to 1.1 children one decade later. The result was a limited pool of military recruits, men aged 25 and 26, numbering around 467,000 in a 2022 official estimate. Consequently, Ukraine had to lower the age of conscription for military needs. For example, the mounting number of casualties made Zelensky to lower its conscription age from 27 to 25 in 2024 for more conscripts.² Comparatively, Russia's pressure of conscription was less severe in contrast to its opponent. Even so, Putin signed several decrees to reinforce the number of combat forces since February 2022 by 147,000 (Spring 2023), 137,000 (September 2023), and 180,000 (September 2024), respectively, and raised the maximum age of conscription from 27 to 30 in 2024. The recruitment in September 2024 increased Russian armed forces to 2.38 million people, of which 1.5 million claimed be active combat troops. Even so, the size of Russian force is behind China's estimate of 2 million active personnel.³

Meanwhile, each side considered the casualty number as a military secret, though Zelensky claimed in February 2024 that 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed since the war started, in comparison to 180,000 Russian soldiers who have died on the battlefield.⁴ News media have generated various casualty estimates as the war has proceeded.⁵ In August 2023, *The New York Times* estimated that the Ukrainian death toll was close to 70,000 in contrast to 120,000 Russian troops killed then. How to recruit and sustain a sufficient force size for an effective defense against China is a critical issue for Taiwan in expectation of high attrition rate in combat and the decreased number of military conscriptions, affected by low birth rates in recent decades.

Third, Ukraine received military assistance from the US and other Western states individually and collectively through the EU and NATO. US aids to Ukraine, 2022-2024, have reached a total

¹ European Council, "How the EU Helps Refugees from Ukraine," August 30, 2024.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/refugee-inflow-from-ukraine/> (accessed September 22, 2024).

² Andrew E. Kramer, Josh Holder, and Lauren Leatherby, "Can Ukraine Find New Soldiers Without Decimating a Whole Generation?" *New York Times*, April 11, 2024.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/04/11/world/europe/ukraine-demographics.html> (accessed September 22, 2024).

³ "Putin Signs Decree on Spring Military Conscription," Reuters, March 31, 2024.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-signs-decree-spring-military-conscription-2024-03-31/> (accessed September 22, 2024). "Putin Orders Russian Army to Become Second Largest after China's at 1.5 Million-strong," Euractiv.com with Reuters, September 17, 2024. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/putin-orders-russian-army-to-become-second-largest-after-chinas-at-1-5-million-strong/> (accessed September 22, 2024).

⁴ "Zelenskiy Says 31,000 Ukrainian Soldiers Killed since Russia Invaded," Reuters, February 25, 2024.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/zelenskiy-says-31000-ukrainian-soldiers-killed-during-russias-invasion-2024-02-25/> (accessed September 22, 2024).

⁵ Helene Cooper, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes, "Troop Deaths and Injuries in Ukraine War Near 500,000, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, August 17, 2023.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/18/us/politics/ukraine-russia-war-casualties.html> (accessed September 22, 2024). "Media Reports Put Russian Military Death Toll At 70,000," Agence France Presse, September 20, 2024. <https://www.barrons.com/articles/media-reports-put-russian-military-death-toll-at-70-000-65550195> (accessed September 22, 2024).

of 174.2 billion covering security, development, and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.⁶ The US State Department's fact sheet went into details with a long list of defense goods, such as Abrams tanks and High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) that the US and allies have offered to help the Ukraine military through Congressional authorizations and emergency Presidential Drawdown Authority.⁷

EU institutions have contributed more than 80 billion in financial contributions. Western countries also have offered military aid to Ukraine individually. Among these aid donors, Germany, United Kingdom, and Denmark have topped others in defense aids with about 20 billion, 10 billion, and 9 billion reported separately by February 2024, though Eastern European and Scandinavian countries gave the most to Ukraine relative to their size of economies in terms of the percentage of 2021 GDP.⁸ The war has brought immense human and material cost and damages. The World Bank estimated in February 2024 that \$486 billion was needed for Ukraine's post-conflict reconstruction effort.⁹

On the Russian side, it has received assistance in various ways, including re-routing trade channels for exports, such as energy supplies, and imports of weapons and dual-use commodities from Russia-friendly countries for war sustainability. A joint study in January 2024 by the Kyiv School of Economics and Yermak-McFaul International Working Group on Russian Sanctions pointed out that Russia has continued to import components for military production despite export controls and sanctions imposed by the West. During the war, Russia has continued to import military-related goods from China.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, both Russia and China have engaged in science and technology cooperation, with Russia benefiting from China's technology prowess, productive capability, and financial resources prior to the Ukraine war.¹¹ The US Treasury Department also cited and sanctioned some Chinese enterprises for shipments to Russia that support its war efforts in Ukraine.

⁶ Special Inspector General for Operation Atlantic Resolve, Promoting Whole of Government Oversight of the U.S. Ukraine Response, "Ukraine Oversight." <https://www.ukraineoversight.gov/Funding/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20is%20by,and%20expended%2C%20according%20to%20USAID> (accessed September 25, 2024).

⁷ Kiel Institute for the World Economy, "Ukraine Support Tracker," <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/> (accessed September 25, 2024); US Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State, "US Security Cooperation with Ukraine," September 6, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine/> (accessed September 25, 2024).

⁸ Jonathan Masters and Will Merrow, "How Much U.S. Aid Is Going to Ukraine?" Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-us-aid-going-ukraine#chapter-title-0-4> (accessed September 25, 2024).

⁹ World Bank, "Updated Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment Released," February 15, 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/02/15/updated-ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-assessment-released> (accessed September 25, 2024).

¹⁰ Bilousova, Olena, Benjamin Hilgensock, Elina Ribakova, Nataliia Shapoval, Anna Vlasyuk, and Vladyslav Vlasiuk, *Challenges of Export Controls Enforcement: How Russia Continues to Import Components for Its Military Production*, Yermak-McFaul International Working Group on Russian Sanctions and Kyiv School of Economics, January 2024. <https://kse.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Challenges-of-Export-Controls-Enforcement.pdf> (accessed March 9, 2024); Julia Payne, "Ukraine Says China is Key Route for Foreign Tech in Russian Weapons," Reuters, September 24, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-says-china-is-key-route-foreign-tech-russian-weapons-2024-09-24/> (accessed September 25, 2024).

¹¹ Sameul Bendett and Elsa B. Kania, "A New Sino-Russian High-Tech Partnership: Authoritarian Innovation in an Era of Great-Power Rivalry," Oct. 1, 2019, *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23074> (accessed October 9, 2024).

Stated differently, the Ukraine war has represented a clash of two ideological and strategic coalitions with US-centered Western democracies on the one side and Russia, China, and anti-US states on the other side. The war has become a testing case to sustain the US capability of maintaining the international order against authoritarian resurgence. Hence, the resolution of the Ukraine war becomes complicated due to the involvement of multiple players and the entanglement of their vested interests in ideological beliefs and geo-political strategic sphere of influence. To Taiwan, the issue is not much of an either-or question about US military assistance to Taiwan in the cross-Strait conflict but rather a matter of the scope, speed, strength, substance, and sustainability of US military support.

Fourth, Ukraine's comparatively weak military hardware vis-à-vis Russia's capability compelled Ukraine to rely on allies for self-defense. Ukrainian options to augment its defensive capability and sustain its war effort included: (1) external balancing by managing alliance politics to win over allies' arms supply and personnel support in training; and (2) internal balancing by boosting its domestic economic capability and building a well-equipped and better trained troop. However, Ukraine feared the possibility of abandonment by allies in its fight to stop Russian aggression at the gate. Allies were concerned about Ukrainian entrapment plots to draw Western allies deeply into the conflict for its goal of recovering territory controlled by Russia. These entrapment efforts included launching attacks on Russian territory, intent to launch long-range missiles into Russia with an intent to expand the scale and scope of conflict, and potentially bringing allies into direct confrontation with Russia.

A prolonged conflict without foreseeable exit options could make elites in electoral democracies worry about long-term budgetary competition between foreign aids and domestic needs. Public support will dwindle when the Ukraine war is perceived as a financial drain and a virtually unwinnable campaign on a battlefield away from home base. As the Pew Survey showed, half of the American public who saw the Russian invasion in 2022 as a "major threat" to the US dropped to 34 percent in 2024. The change of threat perception caused a split evenly among Americans overall in 2024 regarding the US financial and military aid to Ukraine, with 48 percent in support versus 49 in opposition.¹² Likewise, Ukraine's resilient resistance has continued to receive the support of most European countries in 2024, but both Ukraine and Europe have had different views about Ukraine foregoing occupied territory for a feasible peace deal with Russia in exchange for NATO and EU membership with allied support.¹³ Some European states have had doubts about Ukraine's possibility to evict Russian forces from the 20 percent territory occupied in early 2024. In the case of a China-Taiwan scenario, could Taiwan depend on allies in Europe and East Asia for an extensive defense campaign? As Japan proposed to establish an "Asian NATO" recently, will the regional security organization be materialized to include Taiwan? Will Taiwan's request for admission to the Asian regional alliance prompt

¹² Pew Research Center, "War in Ukraine: Wide Partisan Differences on U.S. Responsibility and Support," July 29, 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/07/29/war-in-ukraine-wide-partisan-differences-on-u-s-responsibility-and-support/> (accessed September 26, 2024).

¹³ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, "The Meaning of Sovereignty: Ukrainian and European Views of Russia's War on Ukraine," European Council on Foreign Relations, July 3, 2024. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-meaning-of-sovereignty-ukrainian-and-european-views-of-russias-war-on-ukraine/#the-gulf-between-ukraine-and-europe> (accessed September 26, 2024).

China's attack, like Ukraine's NATO's membership application precipitated the Russian invasion?

Fifth, the advancement of digital technology has appeared in the increase of using drones by both sides in warfare. With its advantages in lowering human casualty, small size in transport, varied flight trajectories, easy operationality, rapid technological adaptation in time frame, and greater return on investment on the battlefield, drones have been employed extensively for C⁴ISR in the Ukraine war. Drones help both sides for offensive purposes, though they might be vulnerable to countermeasures in drone warfare.¹⁴ In 2024, Ukraine planned to build one million drones as part of its battle plan.¹⁵ Correspondingly, Russia, in Putin's words, had received 140,000 drones in 2023 and planned to roll out this number tenfold in 2024.¹⁶

Cyber operations also have played a role in legitimizing the war effort. Russia employed cyber tactics to destabilize and coerce Ukraine as early as the 2013-14 pro-EU Maidan Revolution to discredit political opponents and disrupt network operations. Likewise, Ukraine has used cyber offensives to present positive images and frame issues for a just war to arouse the fighting spirit in its relentless campaign against Russia. Cyber warfare has been used to undermine the regular function of infrastructure in transportation and energy supply, government operation, and information transmission to skew public perception and downgrade public will to fight.¹⁷ It is like China's deliberate cyber-attacks on Taiwan by paralyzing government websites as part of the campaign against US House Speaker Pelosi's Taiwan visit in 2022. Russian hackers also crashed Taiwan's government agencies and financial institutions after President Lai made a remark that China should challenge Russia's unjust occupation of 600,000 square kilometers of territories in Manchuria in the 1858 Treaty of *Aigun* (*Aihui*, *Aihun*) on September 1, 2024.¹⁸

Sixth, US policy toward Ukraine was broadly defined on the following considerations: (1) the support of Ukraine is an extension of upholding of democratic alliance against the threat against autocratic threats, such as Russia in the Ukraine war; (2) supporting Ukraine reinforced US offshore balancing against Russia and weakened Russia's power and status; (3) supporting Ukraine signals US commitment to NATO members' security to mitigate Russian threat against European members; (4) supporting Ukraine was tantamount to the US commitment to defending Taiwan. However, US security commitment to Ukraine and strategic consideration should take Russia's nuclear policy into consideration.

In its 2020 nuclear policy, Russia claimed that it would use nuclear weapons against any country using "nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy." Russia broadened the use of

¹⁴ Marc D. DeVore, "'No End of a Lesson': Observations from the First High-Intensity Drone War," *Defense & Security Analysis* 39, no. 2, 263-266.

¹⁵ Keith Button, "The New Drone War." *Aerospace America* 62, no. 4, April 2024, 30.

¹⁶ "Exclusive: Russia Has Secret War Drones Project in China, Intel Sources Say," Reuters, September 25, 2024. https://www.alliancebernstein.com/us/en-us/investments/solutions/municipal-bond-investments.html?seg=18&mid=ad:usr:ptarmigan:395885921:216228881&utm_source=Reuters&utm_medium=a&utm_campaign=970x250_SmartMuni-V1&dclid=CMnculqv44gDFWshiAkdHFcPRA (accessed September 27, 2024).

¹⁷ Tom Burt, "The Fact of Modern Hybrid Warfare," *Digital Front Lines*, Fall 2023, 14-15.

¹⁸ Lim Hui Jie, "Pro-Russian Hackers Reportedly Crashed Taiwan Stock Exchange Website on Thursday, Local Media Reports," September 13, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/13/pro-russian-hackers-crash-taiwan-stock-exchange-website-local-media-reports-.html> (accessed September 29, 2024).

nuclear weapons in response to conventional attacks in “situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation.”¹⁹ Stated differently, the US non-involvement in troop deployment and the denial of Ukraine’s use of long-range missiles to attack Russian territory have prevented Russia from exercising the nuclear option. Will the US take a similar position when the China-Taiwan conflict reaches a critical moment, as the Truman administration’s White Paper in 1949 exemplified?

Seventh, China’s general reaction to the Ukraine war has been ambiguous, though leaning toward Russia, in its dealing with both belligerent parties. China’s pledge to support Russia “without limit” on February 4, 2022, in a joint declaration naturally caused some ripple effects inside China when the Ukraine war started. Still, Russia’s invasion challenged China’s fundamental claims of territorial sovereignty, non-intervention principles, UN Charter articles, and support of non-hegemonic states. Yet Russia has been China’s close associate in a “chain ganging” strategy to jointly ward off US security pressures. On the other hand, Ukraine is an important country to China’s BRI gateway state (e.g., Beijing’s loan portfolio in Ukraine is approximately \$7 billion, the bulk of it destined for infrastructure projects by 2019) and sources of military R&D. The China-Russia-Ukraine triangle has created a policy dilemma for China. The result has been to keep distance with either side in the war. Should China officially support Ukraine as part of China’s “anti-hegemony and anti-imperialism” proclamations, it would potentially put China in an awkward position in its handling of the Taiwan issue with the analogy of “Russia/China, Ukraine/Taiwan.” After all, Russia’s claim of Ukraine as a part of its sphere of influence and historical territorial domain days before the war is like China’s claim of Taiwan as a part of its historical territory. However, in China’s view, Russia’s invasion into Ukraine violated the UN Charter provisions on territorial integrity, and Ukraine resistance constituted its self-defense right in the post-1945 international law.

Thus, it is not surprising to read China’s position paper in 2023 about the Ukraine war, calling both conflicting parties to dialogues for gradual de-escalation of conflicts, urging all parties to abandon the Cold War mentality, ending unilateral sanctions, and opposing any use of nuclear weapons and attacks on nuclear power plants.²⁰ China’s Minister of the International Liaison Department, Liu Jianchao, in a talk at the Council on Foreign Relations on January 9, 2024, confirmed that China upholds the principles of territorial sovereignty and integrity in the context of the war in Ukraine. But China fully understood that “the security concern [of Russia] must also be very well addressed.” Therefore, “there should be a balance of addressing all the concerns of all the countries in the world.”²¹ Even so, China’s realism approach toward Russia superseded its normative sympathy with Ukrainian suffering. Additionally, China had

¹⁹ Shannon Bugos, “Russia Releases Nuclear Deterrence Policy,” *Arms Control Today*, July/August 2020. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-07/news/russia-releases-nuclear-deterrence-policy> (accessed September 30, 2024).

²⁰ Hartnett, Andrew, Sierra Janik, and Jonathan Ray with contributions from Rachael Burton and Ryan Mangefrida, “China’s Paper on Ukraine and Next Steps for Xi’s Global Security Initiative,” *Issue Brief*, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 7, 2023. https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/Chinas_Paper_on_Ukraine_and_Next_Steps_for_Xis_Global_Security_Initiative.pdf (accessed March 9, 2024).

²¹ Jianchao Liu, “The Future of China and China-U.S. Relations: A Conversation with Liu Jianchao,” Council on Foreign Relations, January 9, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/event/future-china-and-china-us-relations-conversation-liu-jianchao> (accessed March 9, 2024).

persistently defined the Taiwan issue as a domestic issue for territorial integrity and requested foreign powers to abide by the non-intervention principle in the Taiwan issue.

Lessons Unpacked for Taiwan

When the Ukraine war broke out, Taiwan's contentious relations with China, like Ukraine's pre-war interactions with Russia, immediately caught the attention of Taiwan's defense planners to learn from the Ukraine war experiences for security preparation against China's threats. As Taliaferro explained the support of major powers in a regional conflict, it is essential for political leaders of a belligerent party to process information and calibrate a policy for external balancing and internal balancing to ensure national security against an adversary's challenge.²² Taiwan reacted to the development of the Ukraine conflict in cooperation with alliance partners and the consolidation of internal actors for defense readiness.

External balancing in arms transfer and defensive cooperation with security partners

The US strategic paradigm shift from a friendly "engagement" mode with China to a competitive "containment" mode with a series of trade sanctions, tariff hikes, tech bans, and security postures in 2017 was surely welcomed by Taiwan's independence-leaning DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) government. Bilateral military exchanges, joint training, and continuous arms sales have been testimonial records of the "rock-solid" US-China relations since then. The goal is to ensure Taiwan has a strong defensive capability to deter China from rushing to invade Taiwan without deliberation. Any miscalculated move by China would meet Taiwan's well-fortified defense and collaborated action by the US-centered security partners in the West as demonstrated in the Ukraine war.²³

Still, Taiwan faces an asymmetric disadvantage in comparison with China's troop size and weapons systems. Even if the Taiwanese armed forces have an exuberant fighting spirit and are well trained, US security assistance in arms supply and allies' military support remain essential to sustain its "porcupine" or "hedgehog" strategy. Not only does the US need to strengthen its forces in bases near Taiwan, e.g., Guam, but also the delivery of military assistance in a timely fashion to the battlefield is important for Taiwan to bear the brunt force of China's first strike.²⁴ While other regional security partners, including Japan and Australia, have issued their support of Taiwan's security, it is hard to deny the possibility of "free rider" in a future Taiwan crisis when each security partner has a second thought of countering China's move due to circumstantial changes.²⁵

Accordingly, the US is the first and foremost stakeholder of Taiwan's security. The US periodically has sent military personnel to Taiwan and collaborated with Taiwan's defense planners for strategic coordination in the layout of forces, joint practices of combat tactics, and

²² J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, and N.M. Ripsman, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy," in S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, and J.W. Taliaferro (eds.) *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 1–41.

²³ H. Brands, "The Taiwan Problem," *Foreign Policy* no. 250, Fall 2023, 56-62.

²⁴ K. Webb, "The Continued Importance of Geographic Distance and Boulding's Loss of Strength Gradient," *Comparative Strategy* 26, no. 4, 2007, 295-310.

²⁵ Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of International Relations, Theory of International Politics*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979, 164-165.

the assessment of appropriate island defense capability. Taiwan sent troops to the US in 2023 for joint combat training and drills.²⁶ Additionally, US arms sales assured Taiwanese public confidence and boosted military morale. The Taiwanese government naturally has employed US arms sales as a securitization discourse to legitimize its anti-China policy.

As a matter of fact, the US has been Taiwan's primary arms supplier. Approximately 77 percent of Taiwan's conventional weapons from 1979 to 2020 came from the US, except for the purchase of two Dutch *Zwaardvis* submarines and the acquisitions of French Mirage 2000 jet fighters and Lafayette frigates in 1992.²⁷ The attempt to acquire non-US weapon system was almost a "mission impossible" task because most suppliers declined the opportunity to send weapons to Taiwan because of their fear of China's retaliation in trade, investment, and diplomacy. Indigenous development becomes the last resort, though they usually encounter high capital investment, a long learning curve, uncertain success, and operational consistency once developed and deployed.

Nevertheless, the US-China confrontation has made the US more eager than before to sell more advanced arms to Taiwan. Arms sales valued \$18.37 billion were approved during the Trump administration, 2017-2020. The Biden administration granted US\$4.35 billion in arms sales, 2021-August 2023. The 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, Public Law 117-263) approved on December 23, 2022, also authorized the administration's proposed Taiwan foreign military finance grant assistance by granting US\$2 billion per year in 2023-2027 and an annual appropriation of US\$100 million for regional contingency stockpile in 2023-2032 (22 USC 3351, Sec. 5502) to upgrade Taiwan's defense capability and show US support. One problem is that the Ukraine war as well as other US delivery priorities, such as the Taiwan arms supply backlog, amounted to \$19.7 billion, including F-16 C/D block 70 jets and M1A2T Abrams Tanks, as of the end of April 2024.²⁸

Concurrently, Taiwan's defense budget climbed from NT\$580.3 billion (US\$18.4 billion) in 2023, and NT\$606.8 billion (US\$19.1 billion) in 2024, to NT\$647 billion (US\$20.24 billion) in 2025, accounting for 2.45 percent of GDP in 2025 and a 0.05 percent decrease from that of 2024.²⁹ Of course, the US hoped Taiwan's defense spending would reach 3 percent, or even higher, of its GDP as an expression of Taiwan's commitment to its own national security. Regardless of Taiwan's effort in defense budget and spending, Taiwan's 2024 defense budget accounted for only 8.5 percent of China's official defense spending, US\$224 billion, in 2023.³⁰

Internal Balancing: Strategic Doctrine Shifts and Public Sentiment

²⁶ D. DeAeth, "Taiwanese Soldiers Joined US Military Exercises in Michigan," *Taiwan News*, September 3, 2023. <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4988338> (Accessed September 28, 2023).

²⁷ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 2023. https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php (accessed September 28, 2023). "US Arms Sales to Taiwan," Forum on the Arms Trade, 2023. <https://www.forumarmstrade.org/ustaiwan.html> (accessed September 28, 2023).

²⁸ Eric Gomez and Benjamin Giltner, "Taiwan Arms Backlog, April 2024 Update," CATO at Liberty, May 2, 2024. <https://www.cato.org/blog/taiwan-arms-backlog-april-2024-update> (accessed October 5, 2024).

²⁹ Pei-ju Teng, "Taiwan's defense spending to reach NT\$647 billion, 2.45% of GDP in 2025," *Focus Taiwan*, August 22, 2024. <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202408220015> (accessed October 5, 2024).

³⁰ Pei-Ju Teng, "Defense/Taiwan's Defense Spending to Reach Record NT\$606.8 billion in 2024," *Focus Taiwan*, August 24, 2023. <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202308240029> (accessed September 28, 2023).

Reports of bombings, casualties, infrastructure destruction, allies' aid fatigue in the Ukraine war, and unfavorable reports of the Ukraine war development led to strategic doctrine debates in Taiwan. The truth is that Taiwan's defense doctrine needs to envision the likelihood of ground battles on Taiwan proper if the island's air and maritime interception of China's invasion forces in the Taiwan Strait fails, given China's continuous expansion of its fighter jets, bombers, and naval ships. Although Taiwan remains committed to air and naval defense in the Strait, it is a cautious move to consider additional war game scenarios regarding the PLA's landing sites, Taiwan's beach defense postures, and the follow-up ground force layout for urban warfare and resistance, as part of the multi-layered "defense in depth" to engage in an asymmetrical warfare listed in Taiwan's 2023 National Defense Report.³¹ The Ukraine war certainly led Taiwan to adjust its strategic logic and reformulate defense planning and preparation in several areas, such as civil defense, military personnel recruitment, military buildup via indigenous development to compensate the difficulty of arms transfers from abroad, and domestic efforts for consensus building.

Civil Defense

Taiwan established the "All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency" (*Quanmin fangwei dongyuanshu*) on January 1, 2022, to oversee the civil defense plan and the training of reserve forces. The Ukraine war in February 2022 alerted the US to urge Taiwan to incorporate its civil defense plan into the overall defense framework. Former Admiral Lee Hsi-min also proposed the 'Overall Defense Concept' (ODC), with the emphasis on the acquisition and training of weapons that are cost-effective to repel the invasion force. It suggests the mobilization of reserve units of civilians to engage in guerrilla warfighting, mirroring Ukraine's Territorial Defense Force, rather than continuous acquisitions of big conventional items like fighter jets, tanks, and warships. Additionally, the plan includes the bomb shelter arrangements, triage training plan, designation of local medical facilities, and even training sessions for civilians and internal security forces of being familiar with the use of small firearms. According to the principles of ODC,³²

they provide non-conventional warfighting capabilities that are aimed at exploiting natural advantages and the enemy's vulnerabilities while delivering maximum tactical impact with minimal effort. Taiwan's asymmetric systems must be small, mobile, lethal, and numerous for strategic dispersion. They must be cost-effective and easy to develop and maintain, yet also resilient and sustainable. They must complicate enemy operations by being difficult to target and counter. The essence of Taiwan's asymmetric capabilities is a *large number of small things*.

Actually, David Helvy, US Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, in October 2017, had urged Taiwan to think small items rather than big purchases in arms transfers. The suggestion was to prioritize the arms acquisition and combat training geared toward "affordable, timely, and cutting-edge systems that are integrated into a multi-domain defense" for a "credible, resilient, and cost-effective" deterrence in an asymmetric warfare. The suggestion implied the

³¹ Ministry of Defense, Taiwan, 2023 National Defense Report, 63-64.

³² His-min Lee, and Eric Lee, "Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept, Explained," *The Diplomat*, November 3, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained/> (accessed October 11, 2024).

impossibility of land battles and urban warfare on Taiwan proper and the expected difficulty to intercept China's air and maritime invasion force on the Strait.³³

After his inauguration in May 2024, President Lai soon announced his plan to establish an "All-Society Defense Resilience Committee" under the Presidential Office to enhance Taiwan's military response capabilities by expanding the cooperation between the public and private security related sectors.³⁴ It aims to train civilian sectors and internal security agencies for defensive response, enhance strategic material preparation and critical supply distribution in civilian locales, and maintain energy and critical infrastructures for crisis operation. So far, there are no details of the committee's range of authority and operational differentiation in responsibility from the Ministry of Defense. However, the government reportedly outsources certain official duties of civil defense duties, disaster triage, logistics supply, and information transmission to the pro-DPP non-governmental Kuma (Black Bear) Academy and other similar non-governmental organizations. It not only confuses the authoritative responsibilities of All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency but also challenges the regular command-and-control structure of the Ministry of Defense. This ambitious plan intends to recruit 400,000 civil service personnel in size and plans to start conducting rehearsal practices next year. The plan also aims to train civil defense personnel to prepare for localized resistance in battles, operating like people's militia or auxiliary quasi-military units to assist regular troops.

In essence, the government's civil defense plans not only have prompted public concerns but also have spurred opposition parties' accusations that the hype of civil defense plans only further provoke China's rhetorical criticism and military drills around the island. The announcement and publicity of a variety of civil defense schemes have remained a discomfoting matter in the society.³⁵

Military Personnel Recruitment

The end of the Cold War, the de-escalation of cross-Strait tension in the 1990s, the idea of the welfare state, the task for a better and capable force for modern warfare, and the US suggestions to have a leaner and effective military force led the Taiwanese government to reduce the size of male-only conscription troops and to implement an all-volunteer active-duty force without gender distinction in 2014.³⁶ Such an idealistic plan encountered difficulty as recruitment hardly reached its expected quota considering the demographic decline of the youth population and changing socio-economic circumstances. Active-duty personnel shortage remains an unresolved issue. As revealed in Taiwan's National Defense Report in 2023, 18 percent of planned recruitment slots in Taiwan's military have remained unfilled.

³³ D. Helvey, "Prepared Remarks of David Helvey, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs," *Defense Industry Conference, US-Taiwan Business Council*, Princeton, NJ, October 16, 2017. https://www.us-taiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2017_october16_david_helvey_dod_keynote.pdf (accessed September 29, 2023).

³⁴ Office of the President, Taiwan, "President Lai Presides over First Meeting of the Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee," September 26, 2024. <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6810> (accessed October 9, 2024).

³⁵ G. Dominquez, "Taiwan Civil Defense Groups Push for More Resilience as China Threat Grows," *Japan Times*, January 12, 2024. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/01/12/asia-pacific/social-issues/taiwan-civil-defense-groups/> (accessed February 28, 2024).

³⁶ J-M. Tu, "Jianyuan baogao: mubing zhanli xiankuan, weineng zhengming youyu zhengbing" (The Current Fighting Capability of Volunteer Recruits Cannot Prove to Be Better than Conscripts), *Liberty Times*, January 28, 2018. <http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/focus/paper/1172558> (accessed October 10, 2024).

The unfulfilled rate was higher than 12 percent in 2022, 11 percent in 2021, and 13 percent in 2019.³⁷ In October 2024, it was reported that average active-duty personnel fulfillment ratio in the military had alarmingly fallen below 80 percent.³⁸

Meanwhile, after the extension to one-year service, the estimate is that about 70,000 male adults, including those serving one-year alternative service members (those born before December 31, 2003), four-month military trainees (born between 1994-2004), and one-year conscription troops (born after January 1, 2005) will be drafted annually from 2024 to 2029. One-year service conscripts will gradually increase from 9,000 more to over 53,000 to serve in garrison forces, local paramilitary, and civil defense operations.³⁹

Since the adoption of all-volunteer forces in addition to conscription troops, Taiwan's military has seen a transition from the model of an "institution-based" mode of army building to one of "occupation-based" mode, dealing with the challenge of a market economy with an emphasis on salary competitiveness and prestige based on monthly pay and a rewarding pension plan rather than its previous focus on duty, honor, and professional pride in the institution-based mode. Material incentive mixed with noble causes will be the primary incentives offered to recruits, as Moskos indicated decades ago.⁴⁰ The civilianization of the military hence relies on the marketization of the military to keep new recruits' loyal service. The hierarchical chain of command in the military becomes quasi-equivalent to occupational ranks in a civilian entity. It is a challenge to Taiwan's armed forces to recruit and retain military personnel without marketwise compatible pay and socially comparable rights and compensations. Without proper care and management, the military's functional imperative for defensive effectiveness would be seriously undercut.

Military Buildup via Indigenous Development

US arms transfer to Taiwan depends on US security assessment of the cross-Strait situation and strategic consideration of US-China relations. The US does not necessarily agree to fulfill Taiwan's wish list. Even if a sale is approved, the US might curtail the functionality of the weapons to avoid drastically tilting the cross-Strait military balance to a degree of emboldening Taiwan's independence move. If Taiwan acquired weapons from non-US sources, it would need to solve non-US weapons' operational systems' compatibility with existing US hardware and secure long term commitment from the suppliers that these non-US weapons will have uninterrupted technical service, continuous supply of parts, updates of operational tactics, and

³⁷ Z-Z. Hong, "Guofangbu: Niandi wangcheng mubingzhi zhuanxing" (Ministry of Defense: Complete Transition of an All-Volunteer Force at the End of the Year), *United Daily*, Oct 5, 2020. <https://udn.com/news/story/10930/4911432> (accessed October 10, 2024). S-W Wu, "Guojun bianxianbi liansannian, kuai diepo bacheng" (For Three Years, National Army's Actual Fulfillment Ratio versus Target Number, Almost Fell Below 80 Percent), *Liberty Times*, April 6, 2023. <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/paper/1577750> (accessed October 10, 2024).

³⁸ Zhang Da-ren, "Guofanbu chen bianxianbi 'bu da ba cheng' shi piaoliang hua? Junshi zhuanjia ba zhenxiang: zui yangzhong zhisheng wu cheng" (The Military of Defense Made a Convoluted Claim that Actual Fulfillment Ratio Was Less Than 80 Percent? Military Experts Revealed Only 50 Percent in Serious Situations), Fengchuan Mei (Storm Media), October 3, 2024. <https://www.storm.mg/article/5248452> (accessed October 10, 2024).

³⁹ Ministry of Defense, Taiwan, 2023 National Defense Report, 97.

⁴⁰ C. C. Moskos, "From Institution to Occupation: Trends in Military Organization," *Armed Forces and Society* 4 no. 1, 1977, 41–50. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45346051>; C. C. Moskos, "Institutional/Occupational Trends in the Armed Forces: An Update," *Armed Forces and Society* 12, no. 3, 1986, 377–382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X8601200303>.

others.⁴¹ Hence, Taiwan also needs to conduct indigenous R&D developments, but their R&D and manufacturing processes are inevitably long in development, costly in investments, uncertain in success, and hard to compete with existing types of weapons with sufficient battle-ready proof. Additionally, requirements for policy transparency and accountability in a democratic society means that budgetary spending for indigenous arms development may encounter layers of bureaucratic approvals, legislative scrutiny, partisan debates, and media inquiries to prohibit secret cover ups and corruption schemes, and other illegitimate activities for the integrity of the military. Well known scandals in the past have included the 1993 Lafayette frigates scandal and the 2008 secret setup of a partially state-invested company, Taiwan Goal Company Limited (*Dazhen*) in 2008 for future arms transfers without legislative scrutiny and official accounting and auditing procedures.

One lesson from the Ukraine war is the broad use of AI for timely repositioning of forces, creating prioritized a target list, monitoring logistical supply of fuel and ammunitions, synchronizing for a macro-perspective of battlespace situation with micro communication and command of forces within and between units.⁴² For example, the use of facial recognition technology became a tool for Ukrainian officials to identify more approximately 230,000 Russians on Ukrainian soil and Ukrainian collaborators for control and monitoring. With the extensive use of drones, AI helped battlespace imagery, drone footage, and open-source data for command and control in military operation.⁴³ Taiwan's Defense Ministry and the Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology, a corporation that is part of the ministry's Armaments Bureau have made inroads into the development of drones for years for a variety of drones for multiple purposes on the battlefield.⁴⁴ China has rolled out more than 50 types of drones with various capabilities and tens of thousands of drones along with its commercial drone manufacturing capability as evidenced by China's DJI's products, claiming 76 percent of the world drone market in 2021.⁴⁵ Taiwan's Ministry of Defense has set up a long range plan for the development, acquisition, and deployment of multiple types of drones for different missions by 2028.⁴⁶ The aim is to build a "Hellscape" by positioning unmanned submarines, unmanned surface ships, and aerial drones to set up layers of defense against China's invasion.⁴⁷ Naturally, every defensive weapon will eventually meet its offensive countermeasure in operation.

⁴¹ Wei-Chin Lee, "Arms Twisting: US Arms Transfer to Taiwan in the 2000s," *Issues and Studies* 46, no. 3, 2010, 151–186.

⁴² Richard Farnell and Kira Coffey, "AI's New Frontier in War Planning: How AI Agents Can Revolutionize Military Decision-Making," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, October 11, 2024. <https://www.belfercenter.org/research-analysis/ais-new-frontier-war-planning-how-ai-agents-can-revolutionize-military-decision> (accessed October 14, 2024).

⁴³ Vera Bergengruen, "The War Lab," *Time Magazine*, February 26, 2024, 28-35.

⁴⁴ Aaron Tu and Shelley Shan, "MND to Acquire 1,000 AI Drones This Year," *Taipei Times*, June 17, 2024. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2024/06/17/2003819470> (accessed October 13, 2024).

⁴⁵ Katherine Michaelson, "US, Taiwan, China Race to Improve Military Drone Technology," *Voice of America*, July 25, 2024. <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-taiwan-china-race-to-improve-military-drone-technology/7713168.html> (accessed October 14, 2024).

⁴⁶ Dan Gettinger, "Taiwan's Drone Industry Takes Flight," *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/10/taiwans-drone-industry-takes-flight/> (accessed October 13, 2024).

⁴⁷ Tom Porter, "China is Menacing Taiwan with a Drone Swarm Attack — and the US Is Playing Catch-up," *Business Insider*, October 8, 2024. <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-taiwan-drone-swarm-uav-us-playing-catch-up-production-2024-10> (accessed October 13, 2024).

Other indigenous developments of military weapons include short-range and medium-range missile systems, armored combat vehicles, indigenous defense fighter (IDF) jets in 1992, and recent programs in building Taiwan's own submarines. The difficulties to acquiring new submarines abroad to replace Taiwan's aging and outdated submarines have prompted the Taiwan government to pursue the route of indigenous production. Although it claimed to be an indigenous attempt launched in November 2020 to build eight ships in total with the delivery of the first submarine *Hai-Kun* (Narwhal class) to the Navy in 2025, its highly sophisticated mission-critical systems, sensitive components, and technological know-how have relied heavily on numerous foreign submarine contractors, such as MK 48 anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare torpedoes by Lockheed Martin and experts from South Korea and India.⁴⁸ The first ship was given a budget of US\$1.54 billion (NT\$49.36 billion) with approximately 60 percent of the spending on the acquisition of materials and equipment abroad.⁴⁹ As the first indigenous submarine, *Hai-Kun* will be turned over to the Navy in 2025, and then it will be used for test run for various systems until 2029. Overall, the whole project of eight ships is projected to complete in 2038 for combat service.⁵⁰

While the Taiwan government used the submarine launch ceremony to rally public support and to deter China prior to the January 2024 presidential election, all political parties undoubtedly supported the indigenous efforts. Even so, opposition parties have inquired about the cost-effectiveness of submarine budgets in design and construction in comparison with submarine cost per ship in Japan and Australia, suspected abuses and misuses of funds hidden behind the veil of national security and doubted its system integration to ensure operational safety. The submarine project also caused partisan disputes about potential leaking of highly classified information in 2023.⁵¹ In sum, the option of indigenous development of weapons is feasible, but it requires time and an extensive learning curve to materialize its goal.

Internal Consensus Building for Resistance

The Hong Kong protests in 2019 intensified an anti-China fever with the "Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan" slogan for the government to exploit political gains to win the 2020 presidential election. The initial analogy of "Today Ukraine, Tomorrow Taiwan" was adopted in 2022 by the government and the military as discourses of securitization of the China threat, the importance of arms purchases and civil defense, and the extension of compulsory military service to one year. Interestingly, the government was silent in its securitized discourses by using the "Today Israel/Palestine, Tomorrow China/Taiwan" slogan.

⁴⁸ Curtis Lee, "Taiwan Unveils Its First Indigenous Defense Submarine," *Naval News*, September 28, 2023. <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2023/09/taiwan-unveils-its-first-indigenous-defense-submarine/> (accessed October 10, 2024).

⁴⁹ Eric Cheung, "Taiwan Unveils First Domestically Built Submarine as China Threat Grows," *CNN*, September 28, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/28/asia/taiwan-celebrates-submarine-construction-intl-hnk/index.html> (accessed October 10, 2024). Tessa Wong, "*Haikun: Taiwan Unveils New Submarine to Fend off China*," *BBC News*, September 28, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66932808> (accessed October 10, 2024).

⁵⁰ Tian-bin Luo, "Ha-Kun hao qiantin jiean qi yandao 118 nian" (Hai-Kun Submarine Case Closing Date Postponed to 2029), *Liberty Times*, August 31, 2024. <https://def.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/4785828> (accessed October 11, 2024).

⁵¹ X-H, Hsia, "Taiwan zizao qianting houxiu fengbo, liwei shexian xiemi" (Taiwan's Indigenous Built Submarine's Subsequent Disturbance, Legislator Was Suspected of Leaking Secrets), *Radio Free Asia*, October 2, 2023. <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/gangtai/hx1-10022023100907.html> (accessed October 10, 2024).

The Taiwanese public appeared to have doubts about Taiwan's military to defend the island or the US willingness to deploy troops to defend Taiwan in the crisis. According to the *Taiwan National Security Survey*, for example, 59.6 percent of respondents in 2020, 66.4 percent in 2022, and 64 percent in 2024 continuously expressed no confidence in the Taiwanese military's defensive capability against China.⁵² In this case, the US could offer a helping hand. Even so, the US declined to send forces officially into Ukraine, which made the Taiwanese doubtful of US troop involvement in a future China-Taiwan conflict. Of course, as indicated in Taiwanese surveys, Taiwan's declaration of independence becomes a crucial factor affecting the Taiwanese expectation of US force involvement.

In 2020, 53.2 percent of respondents thought that the US would deploy troops to help if Taiwan's independence declaration caused China's invasion. The percentage reached 67.2 percent in the same year, given that Taiwan maintained the status quo without an independence declaration. Yet, if Taiwan's independence declaration provokes China's invasion, the public expectation of US force deployment to Taiwan in December 2022 dropped significantly to 19.3 percent, even though 44.4 percent still believed that the US would aid Taiwan with arms only, like in the Ukraine war started in February 2022. However, if China invaded Taiwan without Taiwan's declaration of independence, Taiwanese public expectation of US force deployment rose to 33.8 percent, and arms aid dropped to 34.7 percent in 2022. Undoubtedly, the US remains the primary security supplier to Taiwan. Surveys in multiple years showed that 69.6 percent in 2022 and 67 percent in 2024 agreed to strengthen US-Taiwan military cooperation. Moreover, 65 percent in 2022 and 66 percent in 2024 of survey respondents believed that most Taiwanese would resist if China invaded. Meanwhile, 63.6 percent in 2022 and 66.3 percent in 2024 preferred a moderate policy to reduce cross-Strait tension.⁵³

In a separate poll conducted by Academia Sinica, 56.6 percent of Taiwanese respondents in November 2022, and 55.3 percent in September 2023, did not consider the US a trustworthy country, an increase from 47.5 percent in September 2021. In brief, Taiwan's *de jure* act of independence claim becomes the key variable to provoke China's military invasion and US subsequent reaction. Furthermore, the Ukraine war no doubt changed the Taiwanese public mind about US force deployment to assist Taiwan in cross-Strait conflicts. The public was also concerned about the trustworthiness of US commitment. Hence, they look forward to seeing the government's moderate policy in the management of cross-Strait relations, rather than drastic military buildup leading to an action-reaction process in a security dilemma.⁵⁴

Conclusions

The Russia-Ukraine war undoubtedly alerted Taiwan to contemplate its strategic plan, revamp defense force posture, and expand its civil defense plan. However, the government's execution of these modified plans took time and exercise to ensure their feasibility, while frequent circling drills by Chinese aircraft and war ships around the island have become

⁵² *Taiwan National Security Survey*, Duke University. <https://sites.duke.edu/tnss/> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁵³ *Taiwan National Security Survey*, Duke University. <https://sites.duke.edu/tnss/> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁵⁴ Chien-Huei Wu, Hsin-Hsin Pan, Wen-Chin Wu, and James Lee, *American Portrait Survey. Institute of European and American Studies*, Academia Sinica, 2021-2023. <https://www.american-portrait.tw/en/> (accessed October 8, 2024).

routine practices, and Taiwanese countermeasures appeared non-effective to China's "anaconda strategy" to squeeze Taiwan and strain its forces in response. As the Chief of Taiwan's Navy, Admiral Tang Hua, revealed, China's air incursions across the median line of the Taiwan Strait, has increased from 36 sorties in January 2024 to 193 sorties in August 2024, along with the rise of China's warships operating around Taiwan, doubling from 142 sorties to 282 sorties during the same period of eight months.⁵⁵ US arms supplies, military cooperation, and joint operation naturally gave Taiwan material assistance as well as morale boost. Nevertheless, public fear of China's policy miscalculations and speculation as to the extent of US "rock-solid" commitments to Taiwan's defense in the policy rhetoric of "strategic ambiguity" remain existential concerns of the public and politicians.

Ultimately, the interaction between allies resides in the push and pull of entrapment and abandonment. Should cross-Strait conflict occur, Taiwan would immediately become the battlefield waiting for US timely assistance in troops and/or arms supply. With two "proxy wars"—the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas-Lebanon war—in process, the US willingness and capability to engage in the Taiwan-China conflict would be a significant challenge. The scope and strength of allies' support to Taiwan might not be as expansive and generous as the Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict, as US military resources have been strained, not to mention that the US would be confronting two major military powers—Russia and China. Collective sanctions in full scale by the US and Western countries against China as the result of China's invasion in Taiwan would be more complicated than the sanction against Russia due to China's octopus-like entanglements in global supply chains of multiple industrial sectors. A complete "de-coupling" strategy in economic sectors has proved hard to execute during the Trump and Biden years. Most importantly, any reduction or delay of US military support might be perceived as a US "soft" abandonment by allies.

Concurrently, the US is cautious about the Lai government's entrapment tactics by continuously transmitting Taiwan's aspiration for a separate state identity from the PRC's "one China" principle. On a series of official occasions, President Lai has persistently proclaimed the "two-state or two unrelated sovereign entities" theory at the Presidential Inaugural Speech on May 20, 2024, declared no desire to sign a peace agreement with China in September 2024, and talked of "ROC and/or PRC's motherland" (or translated as "fatherland, ancestor's land" (*Zuguo* in Chinese) in Taiwan's National Day celebration in October 2024. The intent was that the PRC and the ROC are two separate entities in both sovereignty and governance as a "normal" state, though it might contradict Taiwan's constitutional stipulations. Should rhetoric for Taiwan's separate identity be misconstrued by China, like the Russia-Ukraine interactions prior to February 24, 2024, and lead to military conflicts, the US could be trapped into another Taiwan Strait crisis. It was not a surprise that the US Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs reconfirmed that "We oppose unilateral changes to the status quo by either side, we do not support Taiwan independence, and we expect cross-strait differences to be resolved peacefully."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "China Is Using an 'Anaconda Strategy' to Squeeze Taiwan, An interview with Admiral Tang Hua," *The Economist*, October 3, 2024. <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/10/03/china-is-using-an-anaconda-strategy-to-squeeze-taiwan> (accessed October 11, 2024).

⁵⁶ Daniel J. Kritenbrink, "Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel J. Kritenbrink on the Secretary's Upcoming Travel to the Lao People's Democratic Republic," Special Briefing, State Department, October 8, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/assistant-secretary-for-east-asian-and-pacific-affairs-daniel-j-kritenbrink-on-the-secretarys-upcoming-travel-to-the-lao-peoples-democratic-republic/> (accessed October 11, 2024).

Finally, Zelensky promoted a “Victory Plan,” which includes NATO membership for Ukraine and the use of greater quantities of weapons and Western missiles to strike deeply on Russian territory to create “the right conditions for a just end to the war.”⁵⁷ The prospect for a Ukrainian victory appears to be unpromising at this point, and Zelensky would like to secure better bargaining positions for a ceasefire and a peace agreement. In the case of Taiwan, public concern over the potential conflicts across the Taiwan Strait was also reflected in Taiwan’s presidential elections. With 40.05 percent of votes supporting the DPP presidential candidate, Ching-te Lai and his anti-China stand, and a combined 59.95 percent supporting candidates of two opposition parties, TPP and KMT, and their moderate engagement with China for tension reductions, the voting results were in alignment with public sentiment for moderation in Taiwan’s cross-Strait policy to avoid the possibility of military conflict.

⁵⁷ Jill Lawless, “Ukraine’s Zelenskyy City-hops Across Europe, Promoting ‘Victory Plan’ to Allies,” Associated Press, October 11, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-zelenskyy-europe-allies-c626fb13b60feacfbecf50280bed589b> (accessed October 13, 2024). Isabelle Khurshudyan, “Zelensky Takes his ‘Victory Plan’ to Europe after Biden Cancels Trip,” *Washington Post*, October 10, 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/10/10/ukraine-zelensky-victory-plan-paris/> (accessed October 13, 2024).