



Taiwanese Presidential Election 2024: A Defense Reflection

By: 1st Lt Grant T. Willis, USAF



Figure 1: Taiwan Election Results 2024. Pic courtesy: Reuters¹

The DPP Victory

The 2024 Taiwanese elections have resulted in another Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) victory with President-elect William Lai Ching-te continuing the DPP's hold on power for an unprecedented third term. The continuation of

former President Tsai Ing-Wen's policies marks the DPP's continued position of a separate Taiwanese identity and the rejection of Communist China's territorial claim over the island of nearly 24 million. As tensions rise in the Indo-Pacific, with wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, Taiwan's election represents a clear signal from Taipei to Beijing that despite any interference efforts made by the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan's population will for the time being, continue to display defiance to Chairman Xi's dreams of reunification. President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have made it clear that although peaceful reunification is preferred, China touts that it retains the right to use force to quell any "separatist" attempts of a declaration of unilateral independence from the mainland. China warned the Taiwanese voters that their vote would be between "peace and war".² Taiwan's democratic society and free market economy system seems to disagree with the CCPs final vision, but with this victory for continued Taiwanese sovereignty, the Pacific may see an increase in the likelihood of war between Beijing and the Western Allies. The status quo may tread forward in the Taiwan Strait, but Xi's clock may have moved forward.

Taiwan's Defense and the DPP: Future Needs

Even though the PRC considers Taiwan to be its own sovereign territory, it holds no military or political power to impose any policy other than through direct military action or a self-imposed capitulation on behalf of the Taiwanese leadership and society. President-elect William Lai Ching-te said to TIME in October 2023 that Taiwan is "already a sovereign, independent country."³ This sounds like an understandable observation of the nature of the society Taiwan has created since the Nationalist defeat in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, but to Beijing statements like these increase the consternation amongst the Communists. In 2023, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) used 1,709 military aircraft sorties through the Taiwan air defense identification zone (ADIZ). Despite its many military exercises like

those in 2022 and 2023, the Taiwanese remain defiant. Any congratulatory messages from other free world governments towards Lai are met by the PRC with phrases like, “interfering with China’s internal affairs.”⁴ Militarily, the situation grows in tension. Former U.S. National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley met with the outgoing President Tsai in Taipei “to reaffirm that the American commitment to Taiwan is rock solid, principled and bipartisan and that the United States stands with its friends.”⁵ This commitment may be unbacked by Washington officially, but Beijing sees very little difference.

The current Biden Administration recently signed \$80 million in weapons to Taiwan for defense under the foreign military finance (FMF) clause with a further \$500 million worth of military arms and equipment in total through Biden’s presidential discretionary powers. The PRC of course, “deplores and opposes” Washington’s decision.⁶ According to a ruling party legislator with close ties to the DPP and U.S. Congressional leadership, “to reaffirm that the American commitment to Taiwan is rock solid, principled and bipartisan and that the United States stands with its friends.”⁷ Wang continued by revealing that Taiwan is sending two full battalions to the United States for training. A first since the 1970s when the United States retained the US Taiwan Defense Command with airbases and thousands of troops on the island.

The regional war across the Middle East along with the ongoing Russo-Ukraine War will continue to drain US and Allied resources; however, Taiwan can utilize their time and money now to invest in weapons that will be key in holding the line against a PLA invasion. Man-portable air defense (MANPAD) weapons like the American “Stinger” and shoulder fired anti-tank weapons such as Javelin with small UAS support can make Taiwan’s ground force a potent and lethal force to attempt to crack. Large stocks and supplies of these types of weapons must be procured and mastered by the DPP and its military forces and reserves as it will prove difficult to resupply in wartime.⁸



Figure 2: Taiwan receives US Stinger Air Defense Missiles. Source Army Recognition⁹

Taiwan's Navy can also contribute to the buildup required through asymmetric weapon capabilities through purchasing and becoming proficient in submarine warfare. In late 2023 Taiwan launched its first domestically built submarine. The "Hai Kun" which in Mandarin means "Sea Monster" or "Narwhal" in English is the first of a new class of diesel electric attack submarines based on Dutch design and American combat systems.¹⁰ Outgoing President Tsai Ing-Wen said of the new sub, "The submarine is an important realization of our concrete commitment in defending our country," Tsai said. "It is also important equipment for our naval forces in developing asymmetric warfare strategies."¹¹ ROCS *Hai Kung* (SS-711) with her upcoming sister ship(s) will increase the littoral lethality around Taiwan that will compliment Allied air power and other Allied submarines' impact on an approaching PLA amphibious force, which will represent the center of gravity for any PRC attempt to subjugate the DPP and Taiwan's position of sovereign freedom from Beijing.



Figure 3: US providing Advanced Systems for Taiwan Submarine¹²

The Allied Insurance Policy

With this successful election for the Alliance's goal to keep Taiwan separate, the increase in the chances for a military clash should motivate the principal Allies in the immediate region like the United States, Philippines, Australia, Japan, and South Korea to increase their conventional defense capabilities to counter a joint invasion of Taiwan by the PLA. Japan has recently taken a major step by increasing its defense budget by 16 percent which will make the Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) the 3rd largest global military power behind the U.S. and PRC.¹³ As the new year dawns, the risk of an expansion of global conflict into the Pacific remains a constant anxiety in the minds of many analysts and defense watchers. It is vital that a conventional Allied military capability keeps pace with PLA capabilities if we are to deter Beijing from taking advantage of any perceived vacuum caused by any further instability elsewhere. Will the DPP's victory solidify Taiwan's sovereignty and maintain the status quo or will the new administration in

Taipei need further support for the possibility of a red wave poised to make a historic attempt from across the Strait? We shall see.



Figure 4: Japan Launches fourth Taigei Class Submarine¹⁴

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