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# Defending Taiwan from an Invasion: Next Steps

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Taiwan should field a force that can deter and, if necessary, delay a Chinese invasion until other forces can arrive within theater to assist in Taiwan's defense.

The U.S. foreign military sales process needs to be aligned with national security strategy and prioritize Taiwan.

Deterring China is the national security priority, so the United States should assume a higher level of risk when selling defense technology to Taiwan.

There is broad consensus in the Washington defense policy community, the Pentagon, and elected officials that China is the United States' biggest foreign threat.[1] There is increasing concern that China seeks to field the capabilities it needs to seize Taiwan by 2027, even if the United States and other like-minded nations come to Taiwan's defense. Indeed, the "Davidson Window" is named after former Indo–Pacific Command Commander Admiral Phil Davidson, who said in congressional testimony that he believed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership had given China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) guidance to be ready to seize Taiwan by 2027.[2]

The Davidson Window may not be correct. Admiral Davidson may have been misinformed. The PLA may not be ready by 2027. Being "ready" to conduct an invasion is not the same as the intention to invade

Taiwan in 2027. But given Chinese—particularly Chinese dictator Xi Jinping's—statements and actions by Chinese security forces—harassing Philippine vessels in Philippine waters, simulating amphibious assaults on Taiwan, and engaging in more coercive behavior more generally—it is incumbent that Taiwan field a force that can credibly deter and, if necessary, delay a Chinese invasion until other forces can arrive to assist in Taiwan's defense.[3] And given that those forces may be coming from thousands of miles away, Taiwan needs to be prepared for a protracted defense of its island.

## The Porcupine Strategy

Such a defense should focus on turning Taiwan into a "porcupine"—a nation that can cause significant pain if the enemy tries to "swallow" it. Such capabilities include long-range precision fires, sea-denial capabilities, integrated air and missile defenses, and anti-armor capabilities.

Further, such capabilities should enable an echeloned defense designed to limit the conflict to those forces directly engaged in an invasion as far from Taiwan as is possible. In this sense, Taiwanese forces should use long-range fires to engage PLA forces while in port or on an airbase—before those units begin the assault itself (but after the conflict begins); failing that, in the seas and airspace between China and Taiwan; failing that, during the landings of PLA forces onto Taiwan; and then trying to contain PLA forces where they land in Taiwan before they can break out. To use a World War II analogy, the goal is to turn landing zones into an Anzio for the PLA, not a Normandy.[4]

This strategy also focuses on procuring a large number of relatively low-cost but still effective and credible systems designed to destroy an invasion force—not fighting the PLA as a peer in a protracted conflict. Put another way, the porcupine strategy is designed to deny the PLA from successfully absorbing the island through a cross–Taiwan Strait invasion, not defeat the PLA in a peer-on-peer conflict. For these reasons, Taiwan should invest not in high-end, expensive platforms such as additional fourth- or fifth-generation fighter aircraft or self-propelled artillery systems or even main battle tanks but instead in cost-effective, disposable denial systems aimed at destroying an invasion force itself. The goal, again, is to survive long enough until third parties, led by the United States, can intervene and lend assistance.

## Specific Capabilities

There are specific capabilities for Taiwan to field that are essential to deterring (and, if necessary, denying) a PLA invasion of the island itself.

**Long-Range Precision Fires.** In August 2025, Taiwan procured additional High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HiMARS) from the United States, bringing the total number of systems to 57. Each HiMARS is able to launch multiple rockets at targets up to 80 kilometers away. Taiwan has also ordered additional Army Tactical Missile Systems, which have a range of up to 300 kilometers.[5] Such systems could strike targets such as Chinese ports—particularly, ports of embarkation—to keep PLA forces as far from Taiwan itself as possible. These are good, effective systems that have proven to be combat capable in Ukraine.[6] Taiwan should increase its capabilities in this area by purchasing additional HiMARS and fielding a force of roughly 100 HiMARS based on analysis of battlefield necessity. In addition, Taiwan should consider purchasing a number of other lower-cost (but still capable) systems, such as those made in South Korea, including the Hyunmoo-5 ballistic missile.

**Sea Denial.** A key capability for Taiwanese forces is anti-ship cruise missiles designed to engage and destroy maritime targets moving over the horizon. Taiwan already fields some of these capabilities, including the Hsiung-Feng III, an air-launched medium-range missile that can engage and destroy maritime targets.[7] Taiwan is spending over a billion dollars to mass produce the Hsiung-Feng III as part of a sea-denial strategy.

Taiwan also fields a large number of older generation air-launched anti-ship missiles, such as Harpoons, that are still quite capable.[8] Such anti-ship missiles could and should be augmented by naval mines. Indeed, Taiwan's 2021 defense report notes the need to expand Taiwan's naval mine capacity[9] and its efforts to purchase four minelaying ships.[10] The shallow waters and difficult seas around Taiwan make, in many ways, an ideal place for mine emplacement and thereby provide Taiwan a "low-cost and effective means to delay, disrupt, and degrade Chinese forces" and help channel Chinese ships into corridors for Taiwan's anti-ship missiles and gun batteries.[11]

Taiwan also needs to invest in anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities to counter the rapidly expanding number of Chinese submarines operating in the vicinity of Taiwan. Taiwan already has U.S. P-3C *Orion* ASW patrol aircraft but needs to expand its capabilities further. One option would be for the United States to approve a foreign military sale (FMS) of Sea King ASW helicopters to Taiwan, which would nicely complement existing capabilities.

**Air and Missile Defense.** A critical component of a Taiwanese porcupine strategy is an integrated air and missile defense capability to delay and defend against Chinese missiles, drones, fixed-wing aircraft (that could launch strikes on the island itself or deliver PLA forces directly to the island), or rotary aircraft.[12] Such short-range air defenses, to include ground-launched Stinger surface-to-air missiles and newer Tien Chien-2 (or Land Sword-2) surface-to-air mobile launchers, provide a critical air defense capability that is affordable and capable.[13] With an effective range of 15 miles, systems such as the Tien Chien-2 can be used in small squad- and company-sized units that are highly mobile and therefore difficult to destroy. In addition, Taiwan in 2025 fielded its fourth PAC-3 Patriot air defense battalion, giving it a credible, combat-proven system that has been effective in multiple real-world combat environments.[14] In addition, Taiwan is fielding additional NASAMS (Norwegian Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System) batteries capable of hitting airborne targets up to 30 kilometers away and more than 15 kilometers in altitude.[15]

Beyond short-range missile defenses, Taiwan is also pursuing a longer-range missile defense system that can engage ballistic missiles at high altitudes. Known as the Chiang Kung, the system is meant to defend Taiwan from large barrages of ballistic missiles launched from mainland China.[16] It is possible that this system, in time, will be on par with the Israeli-made Arrow-2 or the U.S.-made THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Air Defense) system, capable of engaging in ex-atmospheric interception of high-velocity ballistic missiles.

Taken together, these systems are meant to give Taiwan a "Taiwan-Dome" capability, similar to the U.S. Golden Dome system, in which various missile and air defense capabilities are fielded and integrated into a cohesive and overlapping architecture against a number of air threats.[17]

Significant gaps remain, however, and Taiwan will be looking for other systems to build out the layers of its missile defense system. The Israeli David's Sling and Arrow system could be a perfect fit for further building out Taiwan's layered missile defense. Israel has already sold David's Sling to Finland, which, like Taiwan, has an unfriendly great power with extensive missile stocks.[18]

**Anti-Armor.** In addition, Taiwan has a robust arsenal of anti-armor capabilities, including Taiwanese-developed shoulder-launched anti-armor missiles and U.S.-made TOW (Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided) anti-tank missiles. Both can be operated by a single person and have the ability to engage and destroy enemy armored vehicles, including tanks. Such shoulder-fired systems give Taiwan the ability to pin Chinese

landing forces on the beaches and, ideally, prevent large numbers of vehicles from off-loading onto the island itself.

## Non-Material Solutions

Capabilities are critically important, but Taiwan needs more than just hardware. It also needs significant non-material solutions if it will be able to deter and, if necessary, defeat a Chinese invasion.

**Training and Exercises.** Taiwanese forces should focus on small-group operations with an emphasis on jungle warfare, maritime and air denial operations (noted above), and guerrilla operations.

In addition, Taiwan should participate in more bilateral maritime exercises with the United States and potentially multilateral exercises with partners within the region. Such exercises could include named exercises such as RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific), which has for decades involved numerous nations conducting air defense, anti-ship missions, search and rescue activities, and humanitarian assistance efforts. Not all multilateral or bilateral exercises with Taiwan must be named, however. They can also be simple unnamed exercises in which Taiwanese and U.S. naval forces rendezvous in the Philippine Sea to exercise various defensive scenarios.

In addition, there are ample opportunities to participate in tabletop exercises and wargames exploring a variety of crises and contingencies, various concepts of operation for the defense of Taiwan, various planning assumptions, and understanding the role and function that Taiwanese defense forces should play in the defense of Taiwan, including best tactics and strategies to deny a Chinese invasion.

**Updating and Modernizing Command and Control.** Taiwan should also continue to invest in domain awareness, command-and-control capabilities, and battle management so that it can maintain operational control of its forces in a variety of contingencies. Such contingencies should include coercion or gray-zone activities, defeating an invasion, and a post-landing guerrilla contingency.

**Resiliency.** In 2025, Taiwan adopted the new minimum NATO standard for military spending of 3.5 percent of gross domestic product for core defense spending and a 1.5 percent minimum for infrastructure spending linked to national security goals. In Taiwan's case, the 1.5 percent infrastructure spending should be focused on the resiliency and redundancy needed in energy and communications to sustain itself. In the event of a blockade or outright invasion, Taiwan needs to be able to meet its domestic energy needs for months without imports and maintain communications links with the U.S. military.

## Military Sales and Assistance

**U.S. Weapons Sales to Taiwan.** Regrettably, due to Taiwan's isolated political status, the overwhelming majority of the military systems imported by Taiwan are from the United States. During the Cold War, other governments had been willing to sell to Taiwan. Chinese economic influence and political pressure have since resulted in a situation where only the United States is still willing to sell these systems to Taiwan.

Taiwan is therefore dependent on either building its own weapons or purchasing systems from the United States through FMS, foreign military financing, or direct commercial sales.

There is a substantial backlog in military equipment that Taiwan has purchased from the United States that has not yet been delivered. As of November 2024, Taiwan was waiting for an arms delivery of $21.95 billion, with around $2.66 billion in munitions, $10.87 billion in traditional arms, and $8.42 billion in asymmetric capabilities. President Donald Trump's first Administration, which rightly placed a high priority on support to Taiwan, is responsible for $15.7 billion of these deals (about 72 percent).[19]

American partners and allies have long complained of delays and red tape when attempting to purchase military equipment from the United States. The Trump Administration has placed a high priority on fixing these issues. President Trump's Executive Order on *Reforming Foreign Defense Sales to Improve Speed and Accountability* instructs the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to reevaluate restrictions imposed by the Missile Technology Control Regime (and consider supplying certain partners with specific items), propose to Congress an update to statutory congressional certification thresholds, and develop a list of priority partners for conventional arms transfers.[20]

**Co-Production in Taiwan.** The United States needs to speed up deliveries, and Taiwan will continue purchase military equipment from the United States, but Washington can also help Taiwan help itself. Co-production deals in which munitions, drones, and other systems are built on the island reduce the burden on the U.S. defense industrial base and enable Taiwan to deepen its stores on its own. Additionally, it enables Taiwan to continue production if the island were blockaded.

Taiwanese and Americans both have recognized that this is a necessity and are advancing co-production deals. In September 2025, Taiwan revealed its first missile that will be jointly manufactured with an American company. Taiwanese military-owned National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology will be co-producing the Barracuda-500, an autonomous, low-cost cruise missile with Anduril Industries.

Taiwan is one of the only countries that deploys the entire family of Stinger systems, which includes Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS), dual-mount Stinger systems, helicopter-launched Stinger missiles, and the AN/TWQ-1 Avenger Air Defense System. Taiwan is looking to increase its inventory of these systems, and in 2025 the Taiwanese army placed an order for thousands on FIM-92 Stinger missiles.[21] Given this consistent demand signal and the need for Taiwan to field large numbers of Stingers, the United States should seriously consider licensing production of Stingers to Taiwan to be produced domestically.

## Policy Recommendations

The U.S. and Taiwan should:

- **Prioritize Taiwan for military equipment sales.** Taiwan should be at the front of the line among America's partners and allies the acquisition of military equipment. The FMS process needs to be aligned with national security strategy and therefore prioritize Taiwan.

- **Expand and elevate the systems Taiwan can purchase.** There are systems that Taiwan has not been able to purchase in the past that would have an outsized effect on Taiwanese defense. Deterring China is the top U.S. national security priority, so the United States should assume a higher level of risk when selling or sharing defense technology to Taiwan.

- **Expand co-production in Taiwan.** Existing systems such as Stinger missiles and new systems such as those produced by Anduril are all great candidates for co-production within Taiwan. Munitions especially need to be produced in Taiwan both to reduce the burden on the U.S. defense industrial base and to ensure that Taiwan can ramp up production on its own.

- **Maintain Taiwanese defense spending increases.** The burden is not exclusively or even primarily on the United States. Taiwan has primary responsibility for its own defense and needs to maintain defense spending increases to build a military capable of deterring invasion by the Chinese military.

## Conclusion

Taiwan is under severe threat from Chinese coercion on a day-to-day basis and existential threat from a Chinese invasion for the foreseeable future. It is in the interest of the United States to prevent Beijing from changing the status quo through the use of military force, and the United States should prioritize FMS, foreign military financing, co-production, and joint training for Taiwan, pushing Taiwan to the front of the line among America's many allies and partners. At the same time, the United States should help Taiwan help itself by pursuing co-production deals in which Taiwan builds munitions, drones, and other weapons systems within its own borders. For its part, Taiwan needs to keep increasing defense spending and investing in its own capabilities, taking as much responsibility as possible for its own defense and purchasing the right capabilities to pursue an asymmetric defense strategy.

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