



***PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH:
DEFENDING TAIWAN WITH AUKUS***

BY EMERSON TSUI

Emerson Tsui (shx007@ucsd.edu) is a DC-based foreign policy researcher and Carter Center contributor focusing on Indo-Pacific and Taiwan security and U.S.-China relations. With expertise in the Chinese language and primary sources, Tsui has 24 foreign policy analyses and translations featured by Columbia-Harvard China and the World Program, Carter Center, and Pacific Forum, with public endorsement from Pacific Forum and Dr. Joel Wuthnow. Tsui is an alumnus of the Carter Center and a Young Leader of the Pacific Forum.

The People’s Republic of China’s intensifying [gray zone tactics](#) demand countermeasures from Taiwan and the international community. The PRC “[Joint Sword B](#)” military drill in October 2024 again highlighted Taiwan’s security challenges. The [AUKUS](#) (Australia-UK-US) partnership is instrumental in providing the necessary resources and technologies to strengthen Taiwanese implications with allies.

Cyber Defense and Information Warfare:

The PRC targets [Taiwanese resiliency](#) in the cyber domain through selective attacks against its [infrastructure](#) and elections. Leveraging the AUKUS Pillar II’s [quantum computing](#) capacity can enhance [Taiwanese cyber defenses](#) and address such pain points. Maximizing the trilateral alliance’s joint capacity, especially intelligence sharing and technological cooperation, should be a priority.

Under the [AUKUS framework](#), the [US Cyber Command](#) could extend critical support to Taiwan through [joint cyber exercises](#) and intelligence sharing, similar to its collaboration with NATO allies.

Normalizing the US-Taiwan [security partnership](#) at the command and strategic levels can significantly augment Taiwan’s cyber security. For instance, implementing [Sec. 1518](#) of the [National Defense Authorization Act](#) directs cooperation between the US Secretary of Defense and Taiwanese officials.

Active initiatives, such as [Cyber Offensive and Defensive Exercise](#) highlight the potential of multilateral partnerships in the cyber domain. As a middle power in the Indo-Pacific, Australia can leverage its [Joint Cyber Security Center Program](#) to strengthen Taiwan’s cyber industry’s research and development (R&D) capacity. Taiwan’s cyber defense can also benefit from AUKUS Pillar II, which strategically focuses on AI development for [threat detection](#) and quantum computing for secure communication.

Amid the PRC’s [selective attack](#), Taiwanese infrastructures (e.g., power grids and [communication networks](#)) require countermeasures for data security and communication protection. [Technological transformation](#) under AUKUS Pillar II can alleviate such pain points. The shared capacity of AUKUS’ legislative framework facilitates Taiwanese access to frontier techniques and practices in cybersecurity. As a de-jure island [autonomy](#), the technique duality necessities Taiwan to implement advanced technology across the [DIMEFIL](#), especially the military and information domain, for comprehensive [resiliency](#).

Advanced cyber capacities AUKUS allies can use to address and strengthen Taiwan’s cyber security:

Leveraging AUKUS’ expertise in quantum technologies is crucial to ensuring Taiwanese R&D success in developing and deploying [Quantum Key Distribution \(QKD\)](#) systems. QKD systems help prevent interception and disruption of communications during critical periods, such as [election cycles](#) and military mobilizations, shielding information security by thwarting [classical computing methods](#) aimed at interception. For example, QKD systems can ensure secure communication channels during critical military

operations, shielding Taiwanese infrastructure from PRC's state-sponsored hackers (e.g., [RedJuliett](#)).

[Operational collaboration](#) remains vital to addressing vulnerabilities to PRC [disruption](#), further bolstering cyber defenses, and ensuring communication confidentiality by participating in joint research initiatives. Frontier tech sharing makes AUKUS a crucial asset for securing against PRC [cyberattacks](#) and [cognitive warfare](#) (認知戰).

[Underwater deterrence](#) and power projection in the military domain:

Taiwan's reliance on [Sea Lines of Communication](#) underscores the critical role of underwater capabilities in its defense strategy. Naval might is vital to deterring PRC maritime coercion and potential [blockades](#). The AUKUS submarine initiative, particularly [nuclear-powered submarines](#) featured by the [Virginia-class](#) and AUKUS-class [SSN-AUKUS](#)), provides a strategic advantage with their extended endurance and [operational dexterity](#), making them vital for sea denial. As President Lai Qing-te emphasized during the [2024 Copenhagen Democracy Summit](#), strengthening national defense and [asymmetric capabilities](#) remains a priority for Taiwan.

A strait close to the PRC, Taiwan's geostrategically-contesting maritime environment makes prioritizing lethality enhancement necessary. Taiwan must secure maritime domain superiority by integrating advanced [sonar systems](#), [torpedoes](#), and long-range strike capabilities. As Deputy Secretary of State Dr. Kurt Campbell noted, these "[crown jewels](#)" are critical for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance ([ISR](#)) missions. Incorporating these advancements would allow Taiwan to pose credible threats to the People's Liberation Army Navy and China Coast Guard, the primary forces engaged in gray zone tactics against Taiwan, and would-be vanguard forces during the military operation.

By convincing the antagonist that the costs outweigh the benefits, deterrence stems from a [credible threat](#) (capacity) and will. Under the context of defending Taiwan, the strategic deployment of nuclear-powered

submarines under the AUKUS framework bolsters power projection. It signals the PRC that any military operation would incur significant costs. Early in its [2016 Defense White Paper](#), Australia expressed substantial concerns over the PRC's growing influence and military activities in the Indo-Pacific, aligning closely with US defense priorities. Diplomatic criticisms from the PRC, particularly regarding Campbell's "[rare linkage](#)" between AUKUS and Taiwan security, highlight the alliance's military impact. [Beijing's criticism](#) of such a fact further validated AUKUS' significance in defending Taiwan.

Taiwan's security rests on a non-assurance political balance preconditioned by [strategic ambiguity](#), necessitating sustaining the status quo. Advancing underwater capacities should prioritize the ability to detect, deter, and deny PRC aggression for a pre-emptive advantage. The home-field advantages enjoyed by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) make strategic deployment of nuclear-powered submarines critical. For example, Xiamen City (廈門市) resides door-close (6.2 miles) to Quemoy Island (金門島). There's only 175 nm (201 miles) between the [Amoy Port](#) (廈門港), part of the PLAN's Fujian base, and the Taichung Port (台中港), the second largest port of Taiwan and a crucial hub for bulk cargo shipping. Such geostrategic factors further emphasize the role of advanced capacities for [peacetime deterrence](#) and a potential contingency.

In short, while Taiwan is not formally part of the AUKUS framework, the alliance indirectly contributes to Taiwan's security and [regional stability](#) in the Indo-Pacific. As Campbell described, utilizing "[interchangeability](#)" among AUKUS members is vital for strategic deterrence and peace-building.

[Pacing challenges](#) from the PRC have galvanized rising demands for joint military exercises, [maritime domain awareness](#), and [missile defense information sharing](#) among Indo-Pacific states. These shared objectives further justify the regional implementation

of the AUKUS framework, contributing to peacetime deterrence. Strategic readiness is the key, demanding effective addressing of the prolonged deployment of the Virginia-class submarine.

Si vis pacem, para bellum should be the policy answer to the PRC incursion against Taiwan, the divide-and-conquer tactics under its end of “[Subduing the enemy without fighting](#) (不戰而屈人之兵).” [Peace through strength](#) features the AUKUS’ role in defending Taiwan, reshaping [Beijing’s strategic calculus](#) by leveraging frontier technologies like nuclear submarines, AI, and quantum computing. This alliance can effectively signal an ironclad security commitment, deterring PRC coercion and countering cognitive warfare and [diplomatic isolation](#). Despite PRC propaganda, AUKUS’ multi-domain cooperation demonstrates a united front. The narrative was well-echoed: Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has [endorsed](#) the partnership for bolstering Indo-Pacific security, crediting value-based peacetime coalition-building as the credible source of deterrence.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.