



TAIWAN'S TRUE REGIONAL AND EXISTENTIAL IMPORTANCE, OUTSIDE OF SEMICONDUCTORS

BY JULIAN MCBRIDE

Julian McBride (Julian@sofrep.com) is a former US Marine, forensic anthropologist, defense analyst, and independent journalist born in New York. His bylines can be found in the National Security Journal, Byline Times, 19FortyFive, Heritage Daily, The Defense Post, Journal of Forensic Psychology, Modern Warfare Institute, Manara Mag, The Strategist, NKInsider, Global Taiwan Institute, Pacific Forum, and UK Defence Journal.

Taiwan is a strategically important country in terms of economics, exports, and overall US foreign policy. Currently shunned internationally due to efforts from mainland China, Taiwan now relies on American defense against China.

Questions have arisen about whether the US will [fully militarily respond to a People's Liberation Army invasion of Taiwan](#), especially as America-first populism gains traction. Furthermore, questions have arisen about Taiwan's importance outside the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC).

Despite Taiwan's international isolation and plans to invest in expansion of its operations to the United States, Taiwan remains strategically important to Washington, and its continued survival will be critical to existential threats against America and various Indo-Pacific allies.

Reassessed relations between the US and Taiwan

The current Chinese paramount leader has [emphasized](#) forcibly unifying Taiwan by diplomatic

means or military force, the latter of which has caused alarm across the Indo-Pacific.

In lieu of the PRC's militarization and aggressive posture, the US military is now preparing contingencies to counter China. The US [Marine Corps are returning to their amphibious roots](#), with the [Navy attempting to bolster ships and submarine building](#).

USMC battalions are being reconstituted as a branch into [Force Design 2030](#) so that Marines can maneuver to block the freedom of movement of the Chinese navy in the South China Sea in the event of war.

Taiwan is also getting serious about growing its defense spending and bolstering the country and outlying islands. [Major weapons purchases are pending](#), and the its armed forces are preparing [various contingencies](#) for future Chinese naval assaults or blockades and [learning from various Western doctrines](#).

Furthermore, America seeks active allies to help counter China's rising regional force projection. [AUKUS](#), the submarine alliance between the US, UK, and Australia, is a step in the right direction, but the stagnant Virginia class SSN production could hinder the readiness timeframe.

[Japan has also expressed interest in defending Taiwan](#), and growing Chinese naval capabilities threaten Tokyo's outlying islands. Already having close relations with Taipei, Tokyo is remilitarizing and preparing contingencies.

However, despite all the positive developments in growing Indo-Pacific partnerships and the renewed American focus in the region, Washington still recognizes Beijing. Compared to the early foundations of the ROC, [Washington does not have a formal treaty with Taipei](#).

The first island chain

Protecting TSMC is in America's technological and economic interests, even if it means fully relocating the company stateside; Taiwan's existence is existential to US national security for various reasons.

Taiwan represents an unbroken defensive line, the [first island chain](#), which gives Japan, the US, Indonesia, and the Philippines a naval advantage against China's increasingly powerful amphibious forces.

China's vast naval force is primarily located in East Asia, while the US Navy is divided into seven fleets with differing responsibilities. Because of this, having partners such as Taiwan in the first island chain helps fill gaps in containing an aggressive PRC that is rapidly militarizing.

If China were to conquer Taiwan and subdue the entire population successfully, the PLA Navy would have freedom of access to break out of the first island chain. The PLAN will have [even greater freedom of movement across the Indo-Pacific](#). It can directly threaten Japan, the Philippines, Guam, and various US bases—especially with [Beijing's growing ballistic missile capabilities](#).

Furthermore, if the United States and China were to have a direct war post-potential PLA conquest of Taiwan, Chinese nuclear submarines could then [sail towards the American coastline without the solid defensive line](#) the first island chain brings—giving Beijing the opportunity for a preemptive strike in the future.

An eventual global superpower showdown

Taiwan's future will ultimately test America's and China's superpower status along with the international reputation of both countries. Though the US previously had a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan, bolstering Taipei's defense and the Indo-Pacific would greatly affect America's international reputation just to sit idly.

America's reputation has already suffered from the [fall of Saigon](#), the [botched Afghanistan withdrawal](#), and the [slow trickling of aid to Ukraine](#). Furthermore, the turbulence in US politics could hinder the critical time frame of defending Taiwan.

A Chinese victory over Taiwan would not only signal another humiliation for America but kickstart a new

world order. American allies without nuclear weapons or guaranteed US military bases and protection could feel inclined to push for a [nuclear deterrent](#) as mutually assured destruction to any adversary is guaranteed to keep the status quo.

Countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Ukraine have considered independent nuclear programs due to fears of an American unwillingness to defend allies akin to the past. Unwavering support for Taiwanese freedom and independence could give the reassurance that the allied states sought.

Taiwan is more than just the TSMC—it is an island whose people not only resisted decades of attempted assimilation by the PRC but also a country whose people did not fight against its founders—ending decades of military dictatorship and transforming into a democracy. Vital to the first island chain and national securities of Japan, the Philippines, Guam, and even the US, Taiwanese defense is critical to American defense and foreign policy.

Conclusion and recommendations

Tensions in the Taiwan Strait will continue to grow, and Indo-Pacific allies and the American public will become increasingly concerned about strategic ambiguity in concurrent foreign policies. However, intertwining Taiwan's existential crisis can be tied to US national security through a method of R.A.I.S.E.

(R) Rebuild the Navy, reassess where America's strengths and weaknesses are in the Indo-Pacific, and (a) advance partnerships in the region, particularly with Japan, which is more inclined to defend Taiwan. Furthermore (i) increase presence in the Indo-Pacific as Europe prepares to control its destiny, (s) strengthen alliances with our allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines, and most of all (e) exemplify deterrence and educate constituents on how a fall of Taiwan could start the fall of American soft power and mutual trust.

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