TAIWAN SHOULD NOT RUSH TO SURRENDER

BY DENNY ROY

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Taiwan's external security situation is bleak. China, flush with new and modern weaponry, is regularly practicing for a military operation to forcibly annex the island.

There are doubts about continued US support. The Trump Administration, hoping for a big bilateral trade deal with China, is delaying a large arms sale already approved by Congress. President Trump's own remarks about Taiwan are not encouraging: he has said on multiple occasions that Taiwan is unimportant compared to China, is indefensible, should pay the US protection money, and "stole" America's semiconductor manufacturing industry. The successful pressure on Taiwan to build fabs in the US seemingly reduces Washington's incentive to get involved in a cross-Strait war.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find observers urging Taipei to surrender. A recent example is *South China Morning Post* columnist Alex Lo's Oct. 23 editorial, which argues that "Taiwan might as well give up now."

The PRC government would certainly welcome that outcome. "Giving up" in this context would mean Taipei seeking a settlement on Beijing's terms, trading away Taiwan's *de facto* independence for peace.

In contrast, I argue that based on the interests of Taiwan's people, there are good reasons to not give up now.

Taiwan's people overwhelmingly oppose unification with the PRC for good reason. Taiwanese endured occupation by a government from Mainland China starting in 1945, as defeated Japan yielded up its colonial conquests. The incoming Kuomintang government officials considered the Taiwanese disloyal to China, brushed aside their nascent self-government movement, and looted the island of its wealth. Public outrage culminated in the 2-28 (1947) Incident, an island-wide rebellion. Troops dispatched from the Mainland ruthlessly crushed it in a massacre of thousands.

While today's situation is not identical, the sudden imposition of rule by the PRC would be miserable for Taiwan's people. They have enjoyed over three decades of hard-earned liberal democracy, including the freedom to criticize officials, policies and government narratives and the right to choose national and local leaders. The PRC government would tolerate none of this.

When confronted with restive communities in the past, the Chinese government has responded with heavy-handedness. In Tibet, the Chinese government is credibly accused of the mass killing of protestors; in Xinjiang, mass arbitrary imprisonment in "re-education centers." Since the Chinese government took the gloves off its handling of Hong Kong in 2022, it has punished with imprisonment even minor acts of dissent, such as wearing T-shirts with political slogans.

PRC ambassador to France Lu Shaye said the Chinese government would "re-educate" Taiwan's people so they "become patriots again." Xiao Qian, China's ambassador to Australia, said "secessionists" on Taiwan would be "punished according to law." Under Chinese law, advocating "splitting the country" carries a penalty of five years to life in prison. By continuing to resist, Taiwan has a fighting chance of avoiding this fate. By giving up now it would have no chance.

China's ability to forcibly annex Taiwan is still far from certain. The PRC is working to increase its likelihood of winning a cross-Strait war. It is leveraging its unmatched manufacturing capacity to overwhelm its potential adversaries with greater numbers, challenging areas of US technological superiority, and closing operational gaps.

But Taiwan, the US and Japan are similarly trying to beef up their abilities to blunt a potential Chinese attack. The US, in particular, is aggressively attempting to expand its capacity to build more precision fires, and to build them more quickly. America is also putting serious money and effort into increasing naval shipbuilding capacity, along with taking steps toward outsourcing some production to Japanese and South Korean shipyards.

The likely net result of this contest is that China is gradually increasing its odds of prevailing in an armed conflict over Taiwan. Nevertheless, for the foreseeable future, China will not achieve such a large overmatch that it could confidently expect victory, and in any case massive losses by the People's Liberation Army forces (as well as the forces of the defending countries) will appear unavoidable. The military option is a last resort for Beijing, at best a terribly costly

victory and possibly a terribly costly failure. Under these circumstances, Taipei should not assume that war is inevitable unless Taiwan surrenders.

There is no longer a basis for expecting that Taiwan will get a better deal if it settles with Beijing sooner rather than later. Prior to the Xi Jinping era, Beijing offered Taiwan a unification deal that included Taiwan keeping its military forces and maintaining its current political and economic system, and the mainland promising to station no soldiers or officials in Taiwan. In more recent formulations, however, the PRC has dropped those specific sweeteners. Astonishingly, Beijing continues to insist that Taiwan accept the "one country, two systems" model that has been thoroughly and fatally discredited by the PRC's dismantling of civil liberties in Hong Kong. A new stipulation is "patriots governing Taiwan," which indicates Beijing intends to replace Taiwan's political system.

PRC media, officials and analysts such as Alex Lo argue that Americans won't fight China over Taiwan. Multiple polls indicate that half or more of Taiwan's people agree. Signs of wavering US support for Taiwan are indeed worrisome. If it became clear that the US would no longer help Taiwan defend itself, that would be cause for Taipei to rethink its cross-Strait policy.

This, however, has not happened. The Trump administration's National Security Strategy says "We will build a military capable of denying aggression anywhere in the First Island Chain." While Trump is using a proposed $14 billion arms sale as a "negotiating chip" during bilateral trade talks with China, in December 2025 his government approved an $11.1 billion arms package for Taiwan, the largest ever. Taiwan media have reported that the Pentagon plans to embed US personnel in Taiwan's Defense Ministry to help coordinate military strategy.

Doubts about US intervention have not reached the point where the Chinese can assume they would not have to contend with US forces. The deterrence supplied by the US is still an asset, one that Taiwan should not rush to squander.

If the US now seems less forthright about supporting Taiwan than under the previous US president, note that Japan has moved in the opposite direction. Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae has helped normalize that idea that a Chinese military attack against Taiwan could justify Japan entering the conflict as a combatant. Her remarks in October 2025 enraged Beijing but did not harm her popularity at home. Taiwan still has friends.

Furthermore, the external environment could change in Taiwan's favor in a couple of years. The US will have a new Congress in early 2027 and a new president in early 2029. Support for Taiwan—perhaps in the form of timely arms sales, a reaffirmation of the Six Assurances, praise for Taiwan's democratization, or stronger hints that the US would intervene in a cross-Strait war—might become more visible and consistent.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping is 73 and apparently not in great health. A change of paramount leader in the PRC would create an opportunity for a reassessment of Beijing's failed policy toward Taiwan. A reasonable possibility is that a new Chinese government could decide to dial down the current tempo of military exercises and harassment if Taipei makes no additional moves toward *de jure* independence.

Being ruled by the current version of China would be worse for Taiwan's people than enduring the current tensions with China. Beijing's willingness to go to war and ability to conquer Taiwan are not foregone conclusions. Consequently, the case for Taiwan's immediate surrender is not persuasive. It does, however, fit nicely into Beijing's psychological warfare campaign.

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