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## **My Plan to Preserve Peace in the Taiwan Strait**

**As Beijing ratchets up military and economic tensions, we can never take our democracy for granted.**

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**By  
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**My defining moment came as China's military adventurism disrupted commercial shipping to Taiwan and threatened our shores with live fire exercises and missiles. I decided I had a duty to participate in Taiwan's democracy and help protect this fledgling experiment from those who**

**wished it harm.**

**That was 27 years ago.**

**I was a doctor at National Cheng Kung University Hospital when news broke of the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis. This was during the runup to a presidential race, the first free election after decades of martial law during which activists had fought for democracy and freedom. Beijing wanted to send a message to those who supported Taiwan's democratic reforms, preferring candidates more receptive to their authoritarian tendencies.**

**Thankfully, those candidates lost by a landslide. Our democracy has since flourished, but history has a way of repeating itself. After hanging up my white coat, I served in successive roles as an elected official—premier, vice president and now presidential candidate. I find myself in the same position as my predecessors. Consequently, my commitment to defending peace, our democratic**

**achievements and the cross-strait status quo is stronger than ever.**

**A lot is at stake. President Xi Jinping has quashed dissent in Hong Kong, established “re-education” centers in Xinjiang, fomented conflict in the South China Sea, and stepped up military adventurism across the Taiwan Strait.**

**It’s unsurprising that in recent years there has been an outpouring of global support for peace in the Taiwan Strait. The invasion of Ukraine and growing strains of authoritarianism around the world have awakened the international community to the fragility of democracy. It can wither and die without proper care and attention.**

**Care must start at home. As a doctor, I never left patients without a treatment plan. As president, I will implement a four-pillar plan for peace that is clear-eyed about the challenges we face and ensures**

**continued stability in the region.**

**First, we must build up Taiwan's deterrence. Defense is the bedrock of our national security. Under President Tsai Ing-wen, we have increased defense budgets, reformed conscription and the reserve system, and supported new practices and capabilities within our military. These measures reduce the risk of armed conflict by raising the stakes and costs for Beijing. I will also expedite our transition into an asymmetric fighting force, focusing on cost-effective and mobile capabilities. I will seek greater cooperation with partners and allies, particularly in training, force restructuring, civil defense and information sharing.**

**Second, economic security is national security. In the years since democratization, Taiwan has become a high-tech powerhouse. As a former mayor of Tainan, I am proud to see semiconductors made both in the city and around Taiwan driving the next**

**generation of technology. As premier, I spearheaded efforts to increase salaries, cut taxes and attract new investment.**

**Our economic achievements, however, have brought both opportunity and challenge. Trade dependencies toward China have created vulnerabilities that can be exploited through economic coercion. We must foster secure supply chains while pursuing trade agreements that encourage trade diversification. I will support innovative indigenous industries, cut unnecessary regulation, and strive to ensure that the fruits of economic growth are more evenly enjoyed.**

**The third pillar is based on forming partnerships with democracies around the world. This year Taiwan sent the first medical team from Asia to Ukraine, assisting war-wounded personnel and residents. Record numbers of parliamentarians, nongovernmental organizations, think**

**tanks and official delegations have visited Taiwan, showing that despite Communist Party pressure, we do not stand alone.**

**The fourth pillar is steady and principled cross-strait leadership. In recent years, China has cut off exchanges in line with its insistence on the “1992 consensus” and the “one China” framework that Mr. Xi himself has called a road map for unification. Military tensions are rising, fueled by coercive People’s Liberation Army actions against Taiwan, Japan and our neighbors in the South China Sea.**

**Despite increased military and economic challenges, my top priorities remain pragmatism and consistency. I will support the cross-strait status quo—which is in the best interests of both the Republic of China, as Taiwan is formally known, and the international community. I will never rule out the possibility of dialogue without preconditions, based**

**on the principles of reciprocity and dignity.**

**Much has changed since 1996, yet much remains the same. People's Liberation Army fighter jets and naval vessels continue to move around Taiwan in a bid to influence our democratic elections. Economic tensions persist. We are reminded daily that we can never take our freedom and democracy for granted. But my commitment is as clear today as it was 27 years ago: I will always work toward peace and stability for the people of Taiwan and the international community.**

***Mr. Lai is vice president of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Democratic Progressive Party's candidate for the 2024 presidential election.***

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