

Shifting loyalties in Taiwan's KMT: A cause for concern

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By Bo Tedards

The Taiwanese have always been among the most warmly pro-American people in the world, as most visitors can roundly attest. Within Taiwan's political discourse, there historically has never been a substantial constituency of voters opposing America in general. Yet this has begun to change within the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), as it aligns itself with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), its former mortal enemy. This metamorphosis is a cause of concern for Taiwanese and Americans alike.

In recent decades, with the end of the Cold War, democratization and rise of Chinese influence, the KMT has shifted away from its historic friendship with the United States. In response to serious electoral competition, which resulted in its first loss of power in 2000, elements of the KMT have increasingly sought assistance and patronage from none other than the CCP.

The CCP has exploited Taiwan's new openness to facilitate this transformation. It has mounted an intensive and sustained influence campaign to foster an anti-American faction within the KMT, while members of the more pro-American camp have continued to travel regularly to reassure their "old friends" in Washington. This has generated increasingly serious internal wrangling within the party about how to balance relations with China and the US.

This year, we can finally say that the party's leadership is fully in the hands of the anti-American, pro-CCP faction. Chairwoman Cheng Li-wun's visit to China, and in particular her meeting with CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping, should be seen as a moment of clarity.

Cheng's speech in Beijing was notable for being so thoroughly in lock-step with Xi's. Indeed, her entire text



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could have been delivered by a CCP spokesperson. Cheng upheld not only the so-called "92 Consensus" but also opposition to Taiwanese independence. She used one of Xi's favorite slogans — the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" — as a joint project of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, even though a 2022 CCP "white paper" stipulates that "rejuvenation" must include unification of Taiwan.

Regarding the US, she added this alarming statement: "Hopefully, through the persistent efforts of our two parties, the Taiwan Strait will no longer be a geopolitical flashpoint and will never be a chessboard for interference by external forces." Let's unpack that. A "chessboard" is obviously a binary frame, with China on one side and the United States on the other. All other countries are merely pawns employed by the two main players. Thus, "external forces" can only be understood as referring to the United States.

"Interference," in CCP-speak, includes arms sales to Taiwan, freedom of navigation operations, and any form of military training. It also includes any statement of support for Taiwan in the diplomatic sphere, the Taiwan Relations Act itself, and any acknowledgement that peace and stability in the Strait are a matter of international concern.

With this statement, then, Cheng clearly set forth her opposition to the main thrust of U.S. policy in Asia.

Meanwhile, the KMT has repeatedly wielded its narrow plurality in Taiwan's Legislative Yuan to block critical American priorities, especially on defense. After Taiwan's government spent over a year working together with the Trump administration to craft an historic increase in defense spending and investments, the KMT stalled it on procedural grounds. Chairwoman Cheng notably expressed support for a KMT member who said she hoped the final budget would be "zero."

After intense pressure from the Trump administration and bipartisan members of Congress, a slimmed-down budget was eventually approved. It was notable that the final compromise bill was not sponsored by the KMT but rather by its junior partner. The KMT caucus never fully supported even the reduced defense package, they merely

grudgingly ceased their obstruction.

Cheng attempted to address the increasing alarm among American observers about her party's growing alignment with Beijing during her recent visit to the United States, but her efforts fell flat. It didn't help that, in her marquee speech, she dismissed the very concept of the First Island Chain — a key American strategic priority — as "Cold War thinking."

Fortunately, the Taiwanese voters will in due course have their chance to render a verdict on these views and the overall direction Cheng is taking the KMT. For its part, the Democratic Progressive Party continues to put its faith ultimately in the wisdom of the voters. President Lai Ching-te has continuously appealed for unity in the face of the CCP's attempts to subvert Taiwan's democracy. All free countries must hope that Taiwan's democratic institutions will be able to withstand this pressure.

In the meantime, until the KMT presents concrete evidence of a change in direction, the United States needs to set aside its historical sympathy for the party and regard it as a hostile actor, inimical to US interests.

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Two Exercises, One Test: Inside Taiwan's Biggest Readiness Drills

September 21, 2026

To commemorate the devastating earthquake in 1999, September 21 has been designated Taiwan's National Disaster Prevention Day. This year, the Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee hosted an international forum on resilience. Speaking at the opening ceremony, President Lai Ching-te emphasized that last month's Han Kuang and Urban Resilience Exercises were "the largest in our history." Safeguarding Taiwan, he said, has never been the responsibility of the military alone. People across society, regardless of background, can all play a part in defending the nation.

And this year's exercises put that idea to the test.

One Fight, Two Fronts

Han Kuang is Taiwan's most important annual war game, simulating how the armed forces would respond to a blockade, missile strikes, an amphibious landing, and a drawn-out fight. The Urban Resilience Exercises test whether government agencies, hospitals, businesses, and residents can keep essential services running as that fight unfolds.

The two work in tandem: the same blockade and missile strikes that

prompt the armed forces to call for reinforcements also send casualties to hospitals—so military and civilian authorities have to share the same roads, vehicles, personnel, and communications to meet those needs.

Taken together, the exercises give a fuller picture of how Taiwan is preparing for a crisis that would put both its military and civilian systems to the test.

Han Kuang 42

Han Kuang 42 opened with a 14-day command-post exercise in April, followed by readiness drills in June and joint defense drills in July. The live troop phase ran from August 5–14, covering four phases:

1. ***Mobilization***: Transitioning from peacetime to wartime operations through force mobilization, pre-positioning, and deployment.
2. ***Force protection and preservation***: Protecting forces and critical facilities to preserve combat power under blockade and attack.
3. ***Joint counter-landing operations***: Coordinating air, naval, and ground forces to repel enemy landings and prevent a foothold ashore.
4. ***In-depth defense and sustained operations***: Using terrain and layered defenses to sustain resistance inland while maintaining resupply and medical support.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Han Kuang 42

- 1 First full activation of all command centers
- 2 Mission command through backbriefs and rehearsals
- 3 UAV operations, counter-UAV defense, and battlefield intelligence sharing
- 4 M1A2T Abrams debut
- 5 First participation by the new Littoral Combat Command
- 6 Full-brigade mobilization expanded to two brigades
- 7 Joint resupply escorts and Coast Guard wartime conversion

DPP MISSION IN THE U.S.

The newly formed Littoral Combat Command—created to fuse radar, shore-based anti-ship missiles, and mobile launchers under one

command—moved mobile missile launchers across open water to Penghu. M1A2T Abrams tanks also debuted in Han Kuang's live troop phase this year. The tanks, [assigned to](#) the 584th Armored Brigade, [bring a hunter-killer sighting system](#) that lets a commander search for their crew's next target while the gunner engages the current one.

The Navy and Coast Guard [escorted](#) the Yushan-class landing platform dock into port for cargo transfer, standing in for a merchant vessel carrying critical supplies, while the Coast Guard's Bali [practiced](#) fitting missile canisters for the first time. At Taipei Port, drills tested measures to deny an enemy the use of the facility. Meanwhile, units shared drone imagery and [marked coordinates](#) with brigade headquarters in real time through TAK, combined with [helmet-camera footage](#). Personnel equipped with drone jamming guns watched for aerial threats during helicopter resupply, while the 584th Armored Brigade tested protective canopies against drones while refueling M1A2T tanks.

Full-brigade mobilization expanded this year, from one reserve brigade to two. In total alongside active-duty forces, 20,000 reserve personnel and nearly 10,000 civilians from government agencies at the central and local levels [were called up across the exercise](#), and the active-duty 564th Armored Brigade made its first cross-theater deployment to northern Taiwan.

Ground units carried out field refueling and rearming of helicopters, [field repairs](#) to Clouded Leopard armored vehicles, and rear-area maintenance of M60A3 tanks. The [MND highlighted](#) drone repair, part replenishment, and 3D printing to support sustained operations, and the Armaments Bureau [tested](#) wartime production capacity and the dispersal of production lines.

The bigger shift was a procedural one, building on last year's push toward less scripted, decentralized command. This year, commanders put more weight on backbriefs, [requiring subordinates](#) to explain what they understood the mission to be and how they would carry it out. Updated [rules of engagement](#) accompanied the change to counter gray-zone tactics, which fall short of open conflict but still test Taiwan's response. In its closing assessment, the MND said command centers at every level were [fully activated](#) for the first time, issuing orders as conditions changed rather than following a fixed script. And for the first time, Han Kuang opened its drills to [embedded reporting](#), testing how the military could keep the public informed without compromising operational security.

Urban Resilience Exercises and Civil–Military Coordination

The Urban Resilience Exercises test a different kind of readiness, one that doesn't require a uniform. Eleven cities and counties participated from April to August, with four [holding joint drills](#) during Han Kuang's live troop phase that brought military and civilian authorities into the same scenarios.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Urban Resilience Exercises

- Exercise expansion from one day to two, with field drills spread across multiple sites
- Mobile network throttling to 1% bandwidth for the first time, affecting roughly 17 million people
- Five cities moving command centers underground
- First co-location of military and local government command centers
- Hospital operations care moving underground, including triage and casualty care
- Evacuations to neighboring counties from Kaohsiung and New Taipei
- Joint military-civilian establishment of road barricades

DPP MISSION IN THE U.S.

Fourteen localities deliberately [throttled mobile data](#) for 30 minutes, simulating degraded communications while keeping voice calls, text messages, and emergency alerts online. During Han Kuang, military vehicles and requisitioned civilian flatbed trucks transported materials to [construct obstacles](#) on Danjiang Bridge. Similar drills at Guangfu Bridge were designed to [halt an enemy advance](#) on Taipei. Closing those routes could disrupt evacuation and medical access, requiring military and local authorities to coordinate transportation.

For the first time, military personnel were [stationed inside](#) local emergency operations centers alongside their civilian counterparts, building on last year's coordinated exercise schedules with [shared scenarios](#). A central joint emergency response center led by the premier linked military operational headquarters with local emergency centers to [coordinate civilian needs](#) and military support. And at the July exercise in Nantou, military tactical maps showing enemy activity were displayed alongside civilian platforms [tracking](#) ambulance movements and supply allocations. Nantou also [rehearsed](#) activating a backup command post

after a simulated attack on its emergency operations center, testing whether its local government could keep functioning without its primary facility.

Meanwhile at casualty evacuation points, a [triage app](#) was used to record and share patient information, with forward surgical teams deployed on site and paper records available if network connectivity failed. Civilian hospitals [practiced](#) reducing patient loads, transferring patients, and providing care in protected spaces with the [capacity to treat](#) both civilian and military patients. [Earlier drills](#) at Taipei Veterans General Hospital combined alternative ward setup, drone delivery of blood products, and communications resilience testing.

Locally, Kaohsiung ran a [joint evacuation drill](#) with Pingtung, and New Taipei ran one with Yilan, covering cross-jurisdiction evacuation, medical transport, reception, and shelter arrangements. New Taipei [piloted](#) parallel public and private distribution channels backed by a smart inventory system, drawing in [community volunteers](#) and alternative service reservists who took part across the broader exercise program.

Public Reception

This year's exercises were impossible to ignore. An internet slowdown affected some [17 million people](#), while bridges were barricaded and hospitals moved their operations underground. A survey [published last week](#) captures how the public responded. The Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) and National Chengchi University's Election Study Center found that satisfaction with Han Kuang soared to 60 percent this year, the highest level recorded since the survey began in 2021. Satisfaction hovered around 50 percent for years, dipped to 45.5 percent in 2023, climbing back to 51.3 percent last year prior to this year's rise. The share of respondents with no clear opinion, whether they were unaware of the exercises or declined to answer, also fell—from 36.7 percent in 2021 to 25.3 percent this year—the lowest on record.

The survey [also asked](#) how well people understand what the exercises actually test. Nearly three-quarters of respondents described their understanding as limited. INDSR argues that limited understanding doesn't erase the value of that support. It still lends the exercises public legitimacy and shows most people see real value in continued preparation, even without a detailed grasp of what every drill is designed to test.

What Comes Next

Defense Minister Wellington Koo [told service members](#) on August 14: "As the exercise concludes, the real work of improvement is only beginning." He called for personnel training and adjustments to force organization, tactics, and employment that turn new technologies into combat capability. Mobility, dispersion, survivability, and sustained operations were the priorities, alongside practical reviews of what worked and what didn't. Stronger readiness, he said, is what deters war.

Future Han Kuang exercises will enhance drone and counter-drone operations, with capabilities and training [ready](#) in the leadup to 2027's drills. And building on this year's integration of the Urban Resilience Exercises, closer coordination between military and civilian authorities will make future exercises even more realistic.

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Securing the technologies of tomorrow for the Free World

US-Taiwan cooperation key to winning tech competition with China



By Iris Shaw

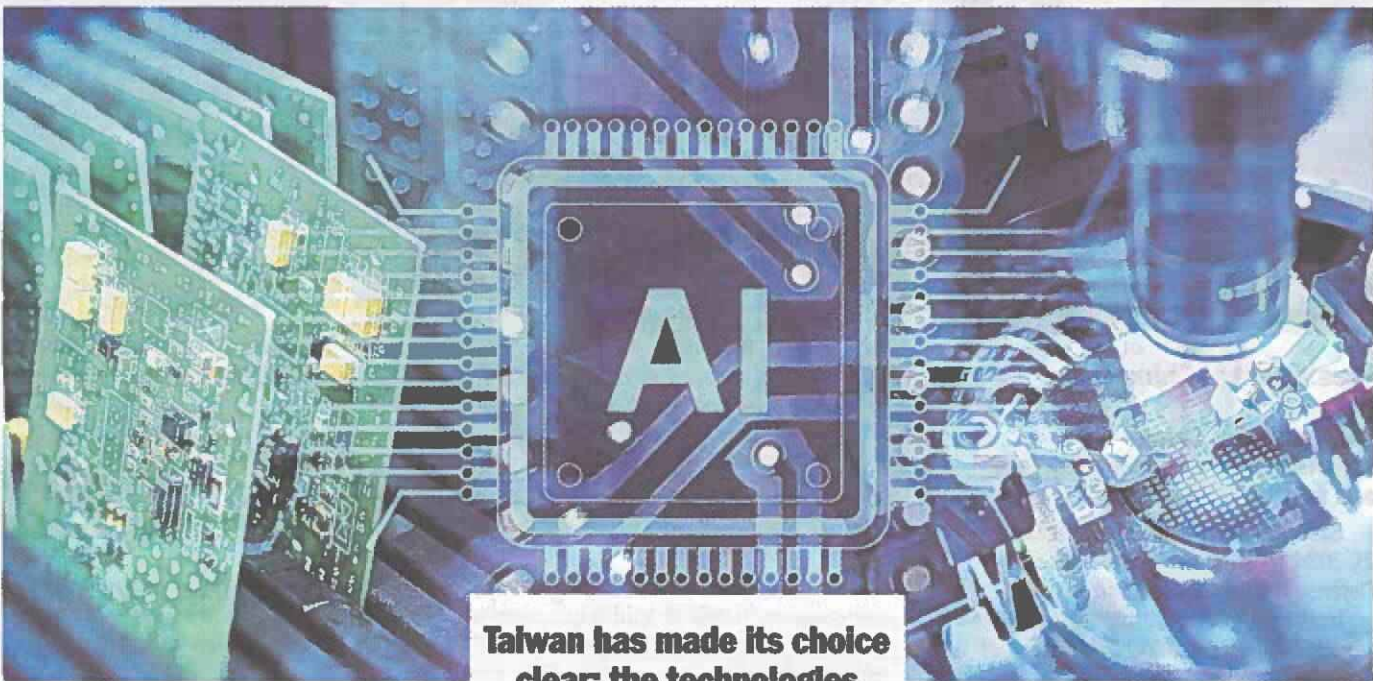
Beijing is determined to dominate the strategic technologies that will define the 21st century. Fortunately, Taiwan's economic partnership with the United States ensures they remain in the hands of the free world.

Semiconductors, artificial intelligence, smart defense systems and other advanced technologies are becoming increasingly foundational to the global economy. Whether they remain responsibly governed by open societies or manipulated by authoritarian control is a pivotal contest for the future character of world affairs.

The United States and Taiwan engaged in over \$1 trillion in trade in 2025, according to the Taiwan Ministry of Economic Affairs. This means Taiwan has become America's fourth-largest trading partner, a relationship that spans semiconductors, agriculture, energy, defense technology, and much else.

The two countries cooperated in writing the trade rules and bolstering the investment deals that made this possible. That scaffolding is what allows the secure movement of advanced technologies between open economies, independent of supply chains vulnerable to communist coercion.

The dynamism of today's semiconductor industry demonstrates the immense value of U.S.-Taiwan cooperation. Taiwan's chip industry consists not of one company but a web of specialized firms in design, testing, packaging and fabrication, a comprehensive ecosystem that the Hoover Institution's Kharis Templeman has called one of the most valuable economic partnerships the United States has anywhere in the world. That ecosystem is evolving rapidly.



Taiwan has made its choice clear: the technologies that shape our future must stay in free hands.

TSMC is ramping up production of advanced computer chips, including at its new campus in Arizona, to meet the rapidly growing demand by American entrepreneurs, businesses, research institutions and consumers, powering America's buildout of artificial intelligence. The company has invested \$165 billion in U.S. facilities, the largest foreign direct investment in American history, spread across new fabrication plants that are already creating jobs and training a new generation of home-grown engineers.

What makes this partnership strategically significant is not just its scale but its structure. Taiwan's government answers to its own voters in regular and free elections. This is why Taiwan consistently ranks as one of the best economies in the world for ease of doing business, according to the Heritage Foundation. In industries where long-term trust, enforceable contracts and transparent legal systems are essential, that distinction is foundational and indispensable.

Washington's actions reflect that understanding. The House China Select Committee's "Ten More for Taiwan" report in December called for finalizing a much-needed double-taxation relief agreement between our two countries and building coordinated capacity to counter Chinese economic coercion. That agreement, the United States-Taiwan Expedited Double-Tax Relief Act, passed the House by a vote 423 to 1, a margin of bipartisan consensus rarely achieved on almost any other

issue. Its enactment would meaningfully strengthen cross-border investment flows between our two economies, reinforcing the legal and financial infrastructure that underpins secure technological collaboration.

And make no mistake, Taiwan is not waiting on Washington to protect what both countries have built. In September, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense published a national public safety guide covering air raid response, disinformation awareness and civil defense enrollment, issued under President Lai's directive.

The presidential committee is backed by the equivalent of \$5 billion in dedicated funding for civilian training and the protection of essential energy, infrastructure and healthcare systems, ensuring Taiwan can thrive, not just survive, during crises.

Taiwan prepares its people with the same discipline it brings to building one of the world's most formidable free markets. Deterrence and economic openness are not separate undertakings in Taiwan but key parts of a strategy to preserve freedom under pressure.

The same instinct toward building together is on display in the defense technology industry. Taiwan's drone exports have grown nearly twentyfold in a single year, and Taiwanese manufacturers have earned a place on the Pentagon's

approved supplier list at a moment when the free world is rightly wary of Chinese-made hardware. A drone supply chain that runs through Taiwan rather than Beijing is another asset for free world technological security.

Taiwan is also integrating artificial intelligence directly (AI) into its air and missile defenses, fielding battle-field management systems designed to shorten decision time under coordinated missile and drone attacks. These systems depend upon Taiwan's broader technological ecosystem. That same industrial base underpins the secure supply chains the United States and Taiwan are building together.

These achievements are made possible only because both governments keep choosing to strengthen cooperation: through trade agreements, tax policy, and defense procurement. Taiwan has shown — in chips, in capital and now in drones and AI-enabled defense — that it intends to proactively build this future with America.

Every dollar invested, every agreement ratified and every contract awarded is a choice about who writes the rules for the technologies that will shape the rest of this century. Taiwan has made its choice clear: the technologies that shape our future must stay in free hands.

Iris Shaw is the Director of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Mission in the United States, where she leads the Party's outreach to the U.S. government, Congress and the greater policy community.