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Setting the Record Straight: The KMT Defense Blueprint for Taiwan

If elected, Hou Yu-ih plans to publish Taiwan’s first National Security Strategy within the first ten months of the presidency.

By **Howard Shen**
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Credit: Office of the President, ROC (Taiwan)

On December 1, in an op-ed for The Diplomat, the director of International Affairs for Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party, Vincent Chao, deliberately distorted the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) position on compulsory military service. It misleads readers around the world who are eager to understand the issues that will determine the winner of Taiwan's upcoming presidential election, and that is most unfortunate.

KMT presidential candidate Dr. Hou Yu-ih, during his visit to the United States this past September, made clear to U.S. government officials and scholars that a KMT government will continue to invest in a strong national defense including deterrence capabilities. Defense spending, weapons systems acquisitions, and the length of compulsory service will all be threat-based. A Hou administration will not only uphold "continuity" in Taiwan's defense strategy but will also inject innovative policy proposals to further expand cooperation in common security interests with Taiwan's allies.

The KMT's comprehensive defense policy includes the creation of a cabinet-level national defense council for civil defense and reserves mobilization, a common operations

picture across our military services, improved C4ISR, and investment in Taiwan's asymmetric capabilities based on a rebalancing of where we invest and which defense systems we acquire.

The DPP's defense policy lacks an overall strategic blueprint and overemphasizes superficiality in terms of overall defense mobilization. The DPP plan does not address the plummeting retention rate and is out of touch – with its unpragmatic conscription plan severely impacting both voluntary servicemen and conscripts.

In furtherance of the “3D Strategy” – Deterrence, Dialogue, De-escalation – proposed by Hou, the KMT, in its conduct of defense policy, will uphold the principle of “strengthening national defense, deterring future conflict” to deliver an elite, valiant, and agile Republic of China (ROC) military. Hou's vision for a stronger ROC national defense can be broadly divided into four policy categories: 1) laying out the strategic blueprint for ROC's national security; 2) giving a pay raise to voluntary troops and expediting the conscription waitlist; 3) cultivating the foundation for national defense; and 4) prioritizing ten major development projects for deterrence.

National Security Strategic Blueprint

To maintain peace and security across the Taiwan Strait and stabilize the Indo-Pacific region, if elected, along with the governing 3D Strategy, we plan to release a “Republic of China National Security Strategy” within the first 10 months of the presidency. The NSS will outline national values and interests; current and future threats and challenges; necessary national capability priorities; and development responsibility and cost assessment.

The strategy will also concretize our 3D Strategy: delineating the Republic of China’s core objectives, national interests, elements of power, elements of strategy, force sizing metric, and regional approaches. It will cover cross-strait relations, foreign policy, national defense, people’s livelihood, energy, public order, and birth rate to promote prosperity, secure democracy, and strengthen security.

Voluntary Troops Pay Raise and Conscription Waitlist Expedition

The current government has failed to retain our voluntary troops. This June, the total number of personnel fell to 155,218. The retention of combat unit personnel is of grave concern; the ratios of actual strength to authorized strength in various combat units

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more often than not are below 80 percent. The authorized strength for the fiscal year of 2024 is 5,187 persons less than that of the fiscal year of 2023. We are down by 10 battalions without any fighting.

To reverse this downward trend, we propose a set of pay raises to express our gratitude to and honor our men and women serving in the military.

For Class I Combat Units, such as all companies under Army Infantry, Army Artillery, and Army Armor; Marine Corps (ROCMC); Navy Submariners; and Surface-to-Air Missile Command, every person will receive a pay raise of 10,000 NTD per month, including 8,000 NTD of "Combat Allowance" and 2,000 NTD of "Volunteer Allowance."

For Class II Combat Units, such as all Battalion HQ Companies under Class I Units, every person will receive a pay raise of 7,000 NTD per month, including 5,000 NTD of "Combat Allowance" and 2,000 NTD of "Volunteer Allowance."

All other voluntary troops will receive a monthly pay raise of 2,000 NTD.

We estimate the program cost would be 10.6 billion NTD per year, including 6.7 billion NTD

of “Combat Allowance” and 3.9 billion NTD of “Volunteer Allowance.”

The current one-year conscription proposal is not backed up by a pragmatic plan. There is a lack of large-scale field training bases; the content of the training is more than often not fully implemented. Therefore, although the length of conscription is extended to one year, we will not see a general increase in strength in the near future.

For the conscripts, even before the conscription length extension, they would have to endure a long and tedious waitlist after registering with the military service section of their district office and before reporting to the barracks. We have yet to see any remedy for the problem.

We must simplify the enlistment process to minimize the wait time. We must combine conscripts’ civilian expertise with their military service. We must innovate our training content. We must increase our pay for those stationed on outer islands, such as those on Kinmen and Matsu.

National Defense Foundation Cultivation

A cabinet-level defense council for civil defense and reserves mobilization is badly needed to guarantee successful inter-agency

cooperation for defense preparedness and mobilization. The placement of the current All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency in the Taiwanese bureaucratic hierarchy inherently impairs the agency to take charge of any defense ministry effort, let alone that of inter-agency nature.

We must improve our national military education, including incorporating modernized joint operations education and significantly increasing relevant educational budgets.

We have flagged 14 critical defense projects to continue deepening our military exchange with the United States. We should assist domestic defense companies in obtaining the Pentagon's Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification for information security alignment, furthering Taiwan-U.S. defense industry supply chain cooperation.

To honor members of our military, we propose to elevate Armed Services Day to a national holiday: Armed Services Honor Day. We will also seek to expand the organization of the 100th anniversary celebration of the ROC Military Academy. We look to expand dormitory units for voluntary troops and their family members and conduct a general review of their benefits.

Ten Major Development Projects for Deterrence

President Chiang Ching-kuo's Ten Major Construction Projects upgraded Taiwan's infrastructure conditions and went hand in hand with our economic miracle and technological advancement. We propose Ten Major Development Projects for Deterrence to prepare ourselves for and deter People's Liberation Army (PLA) adventurism. These projects include:

- Developing and acquiring asymmetric capabilities of “mobile, stealth, intelligent, small-in-size, large-in-quantity” nature, which are difficult to detect and counter;
- Combing network-centric warfare capabilities, a complete development of tri-force common imagery, and high-efficiency, high-efficacy C4ISRT system to shorten our defense's Observe-Orient-Decide-Act loop reaction time to just a couple hundred of milliseconds, to increase our Beyond Visual Range engagement capabilities, efficiency, and effectiveness;
- Strengthening joint suppression operations capability against enemy military targets during a PLA use of force against Taiwan;
- Enhancing critical defense infrastructure's cybersecurity and backup capabilities;

- Maintaining a high-efficacy, elite force, while phasing out equipment requiring too much manpower but producing insufficient firepower; Adjusting ground combat troops' tactical gear to increase our body armor performance standards and taking U.S. military standards and PLA ammunition as reference;
- Setting up wartime intelligence sharing mechanisms with friendly and partner countries to enhance our maritime and air interception capabilities;
- Establishing professional urban warfare training bases; forming urban warfare professional units;
- Elevating unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and anti-UAV capabilities;
- Extending and continuing the indigenous submarine program, as submarine warfare is an integral part of our anti-PLA asymmetric capabilities first executed during the Ma Ying-jeou administration;
- Linking our defense budget and spending with the level of perceived threat.

The KMT's defense policies were previously addressed in detail at the October 2023 U.S.-Taiwan Defense Industry Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia. Chao himself was in the audience. He should know better than to

distort our policies. Regrettably, Chao has chosen instead to misconstrue the KMT's comprehensive defense planning.

The term of the next Republic of China (Taiwan) president, from 2024 to 2028, overlaps with Chinese communist leader Xi Jinping's third term. Whether in Washington D.C., Tokyo, Canberra, or other capitals in the Indo-Pacific region, prudent policymakers know that the stakes are too high to rely on second-hand information filtered through a political agenda.

We suggest concerned policymakers contact the KMT directly to better understand our defense policies.

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