

## Taiwan's Response on China's Military Threats in the Taiwan Strait 2016-2020

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**ABSTRACT:** One China Policy stifles Taiwan's efforts to achieve independence. Before 2016, Taiwan did not show hostility towards China. For instance, the Kuomintang Party and the Chinese Communist Party signed the 1992 Consensus in an effort to reunify Taiwan and China. However, when the Democratic Progressive Party won power, Taiwan adopted a policy direction that firmly rejected any form of Taiwan-China reunification. As a result, relations between the two countries deteriorated further, notably due to increased military exercises in the Taiwan Strait. Against this backdrop, this study analyzes Taiwan's response to China's military security threats from 2016 to 2020. Specifically, it uses secondary data from the Taiwanese and Chinese Ministries of Defense, as well as previous similar studies. The balance of threat theory is applied to examine the rationalization of Taiwan's policy on increasing military capabilities from 2016 to 2020. The research method used is the process tracing technique in deductive qualitative case studies. The results of this study indicate that Taiwan does not trust China and therefore rejects all attempts at Taiwan-China reunification. The election of Tsai Ing-wen from the Progressive Democratic Party, the Taiwanese people's perception of their identity as citizens of Taiwan, and international support for Taiwan as a counterbalance to Chinese communism are some of the factors behind Taiwan's rejection of reunification with China. Furthermore, Taiwan has chosen to balance its position by increasing its military capabilities and diversifying its economy to reduce China's dominance

**KEYWORDS:** Taiwan, China, Military Threat, One China Policy, Policy

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Taiwan's strategic position in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region led to its colonization during World War II. The end of World War II resulted in Taiwan, as a Japanese colony, being handed over to the Eastern Bloc country of China. Taiwan's statehood is still debated by China today because China considers Taiwan to be its lost territory, while Taiwan itself wants to free itself from Chinese invasion. Taiwan gained independence from China in 1949 through the remnants of the Kuomintang Nationalist Party after the Chinese Civil War. The Foreign Policy Research Institute wrote in 2011 that Taiwan had declared independence in 1945 but had received de jure recognition from only 23 countries (deLisle, 2011). Taiwan's declaration of independence was condemned by China.

The Taiwan-China conflict began during the era of Chiang Kai-shek, who was a highly influential figure in the Kuomintang Party, also known as the Nationalist Party. In 1926, he launched the Northern Expedition as a military campaign to unify China. However, Chiang wanted to get rid of the Communist Party first and carried out massacres of communists, which eventually led to bloodshed. At the same time, similar conflicts occurred in southern China, such as the massacre of nationalists in areas with a communist majority. This marked the beginning of the civil war between Taiwan and China.

China has attempted to reunify with Taiwan several times but has failed to date. The 1992 Consensus was one of the measures resulting from meetings between representatives of the Chinese government and Taiwan in 1992. President Yang Shangkun of the Chinese Communist Party signed the 1992 Consensus together with President Ma Ying-Jeou of the Kuomintang Party. The 1992 Consensus discusses efforts to reunify Taiwan and China through the 'One China Policy', which means that there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is part of China (Crookes, 2016). Furthermore, Paul (2016) explains the various strategies employed by China, with the 'One China Policy' statement emphasizing the importance of the unification of China and Taiwan in order to create a strong Chinese state (Sutter, 2000).

From 2008 to 2016, Taiwan was under the rule of the Kuomintang Party, which was known to be close to China and opposed Taiwan's separation through the 1992 Consensus. The first sign of improvement in relations between the two countries came when Taiwan's President Ma Ying-Jeou was elected, prompting an immediate response from Chinese President Hu Jintao, who sent a telegram as the leader of the Kuomintang. This was the first direct communication between Taiwan and China since the end of the

## Taiwan's Response on China's Military Threats in the Taiwan Strait 2016- 2020

civil war. The message was certainly seen as a response aimed at improving cross-strait relations, even though Taiwan and China were not politically aligned, but still needed each other. Taiwan hoped to benefit from economic cooperation with China, while China aimed to invest in Taiwan's growing economy (BBC Indonesia, 2012).

The author examined an article by T.Y. Wang and Su-fung Cheng titled "Taiwan Citizens' Views of China: What are the effects of cross-strait contacts?" published in the Journal of East Asian Studies Volume 17, Issue 2, 2017. This study analyzes how cross-strait contacts influence Taiwanese citizens' negative views of Chinese citizens and the Beijing government. Using contact theory to assess reciprocal perceptions, it finds that increased exchanges during President Ma's term did not improve Taiwanese perceptions of China, despite better official relations (T. & Su, 2017). The study supports the 2016 transfer of power to Tsai Ing-wen, elected president of Taiwan by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). This shift from the Kuomintang Party to the DPP set a new policy direction for Taiwan. Early in her term, Tsai Ing-wen urged both Taiwan and China to let go of historical burdens and pursue positive dialogue for the benefit of their people.

The DPP party rejects the One China Policy and seeks international support through international relations with other countries. Tsai Ing-wen, as the new President of Taiwan, rejects both the One China Policy and the 1992 Consensus (Asad, 2021). In her last speech in 2019, President Tsai Ing-wen emphasized this rejection of "One Country, Two Systems," stating that Taiwan's identity is distinct from China's. Building on this stance, some of Tsai Ing-wen's policies include proposing peaceful negotiations with China and applying for UN membership.

China responded firmly to Taiwan's rejection of reunification, making it clear that it would not remain silent. Building on this posture, exactly two years after Tsai's victory, China escalated its response by implementing various coercive tactics in addition to armed conflict. These measures were aimed at weakening Taiwan and encouraging the island's people to see reunification as their best option. In further support of these efforts, Wu Qian, spokesperson for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), emphasized the importance of using military force to achieve Taiwan's reunification with China, arguing that any attempt at reunification would fail without it. Reflecting these concerns and intentions, China employed military force, including the Dongfeng-17 hypersonic missile launched off the southeast coast, J-20 fighter jets stationed at an airport 500 km from Taiwan, and military exercises along the Taiwan Strait. Through these measures, the Chinese military aimed to demonstrate its constant readiness to defend national sovereignty and its capability to defeat any form of Taiwanese separatism (China Military Online, 2020).

This aligns with research by Inneke Firsana Dewi and Karina Utami Dewi, entitled "Xi Jinping's Government Strategy towards Taiwan in Securing China's Sovereignty," published in 2019. The article shows that during Xi Jinping's administration, China focused its strategy on the military, political, and economic sectors. The findings state that the military and political sectors facilitate potential reunification with Taiwan or at least maintain the status quo, thereby preventing Taiwan from taking extreme measures to break away from China. This is supported by China's large military budget of 1.268 trillion yuan or around 2.763 quadrillion rupiah (Dewi & Dewi, 2019).

China's military stance has raised concern in Taiwan. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) said China is disregarding the safety of Taiwanese people and continuing to confront Taiwan. This could jeopardize stability in the Taiwan Strait (China Military Online, 2020). According to the annual report Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China to Congress, China's spontaneous military training near Taiwan is linked to the high likelihood that the United States (US) will become involved in Taiwan Strait security alongside the Taiwanese government. This involvement creates a security dilemma for China.

This aligns with Yeh-chung Lu's research titled "Taiwan's Viable Diplomacy in Times of Uncertainty." This research focuses on the viable diplomacy promoted by President Ma regarding Taiwan's position with China and the US. Yeh-chung Lu's research found that viable diplomacy is a policy that allows Taiwan to survive and thrive in times of uncertainty. The challenges include instability on the Korean Peninsula, the possibility of escalating crises in the South and East China Seas, and the risk that China will force Taiwan into its orbit. However, the US plays an important role in preventing the situation from worsening. Taiwan's viable diplomacy primarily serves to maintain good, trusting relations with the US (Lu, 2014).

The United States (US) intervened in the Taiwan-China conflict by selling weapons that directly enhance Taiwan's defensive capabilities. The US Department of State approved the sale of US\$2.22 billion worth of weapons, including Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, which strengthen air defense, and General Dynamics tanks, which improve ground force resilience (China Military Online, 2019). Through the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI), the US has demonstrated its support for Taiwan's independence. Article B i contains an agreement on military assistance to Taiwan:

*"conduct regular transfers of defense articles to Taiwan that are tailored to meet the existing and likely future threats from the People's Republic of China, including supporting the efforts of Taiwan to develop and integrate asymmetric capabilities, as appropriate, including mobile, survivable, and cost-effective capabilities, into its military forces"* (Authenticated US Government Information, 2020)

China's Defense White Paper explains that the separatist movement for "Taiwan independence" is increasing hostility between Taiwan and China, is receiving assistance from other countries, and is seeking de jure recognition of its independence (China Military Online, 2020). China itself is seeking to offer an alternative to the One China Policy with 'One Country, Two Systems', which grants Taiwan authority over foreign affairs, the military, and politics (China Daily, 2019). China has deployed more than

## Taiwan's Response on China's Military Threats in the Taiwan Strait 2016- 2020

3,300 joint patrols and held more than 8,100 border meetings with other countries since 2012. According to China, the armed forces and military aircraft are used as a stern warning against the separatist movement for "Taiwan independence."

This study is an interesting topic because of Taiwan's policy shift regarding China's reunification efforts from the Kuomintang Party to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). This study will explain the dynamics of Taiwan-China relations and Taiwan's reaction to China's military security threats during the 2016-2020 period. Through the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019, Taiwan has increasingly emphasized its opposition to Taiwan-China reunification, with the United States' support. This tension has led to an increase in military capabilities between Taiwan and China during the period 2016-2020. This study will examine Taiwan's specific strategies and responses to China's military security threats from 2016 to 2020.

## II. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses the Balance of Threats (BoT) theory regarding alliances and defense strategies. Stephen M. Walt introduced this theory in his article "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power" (1985) and further explained it in his book "The Origins of Alliances" (1987). This theory expands on the balance-of-power theory that previously dominated neorealist thinking. According to Stephen M. Walt, states' alliance behavior is determined by their perceptions of threats from other states, not by military strength or economic capacity alone. Thus, the Balance of Threats theory emphasizes that states will form alliances to counter serious threats, regardless of their relative strength (Walt, 1987). This theory identifies four main criteria that countries use to assess threats. First, aggregate power, which includes a country's population, economic capacity, and military capability; the greater a country's aggregate power, the greater its potential threat to other countries. Second, geographical proximity, which is the tendency for countries to feel more threatened by countries that are geographically close, as this proximity allows for more direct and rapid projection of power. Third is offensive capabilities, which refer to a country's capacity to carry out military attacks against other countries; countries with high offensive capabilities can create fear among their neighbors. Finally, aggressive intent is also an important factor in determining threat; a country considered to have the intent to attack is more likely to be viewed as a threat than a powerful but non-aggressive country (Henneberg, 2013).

According to Schweller (1994), BoT theory gives rise to two important assumptions in the analysis of international relations, namely balancing and bandwagoning. Balancing is a condition in which countries form alliances to confront a country considered a threat to their security. Balancing serves as a collective effort to counter potential aggressors, thereby enabling countries to strengthen their defensive positions. Bandwagoning, on the other hand, occurs when countries choose to cooperate with parties considered threats in order to gain protection or benefits from such relationships (Schweller, 1994). In this study, BoT theory is used to analyze how Taiwan's rationalization of its military capabilities and its decision to align with the US are influenced by its perception of the threat from China. This study aims to further explore how Taiwan is adjusting its defense policy amid new challenges in the era of the Democratic Progressive Party. In addition, BoT theory will comprehensively explain the changes that have occurred, providing a broader context for international interactions and Taiwan's defense strategies amid increasingly complex conditions in the current geopolitical environment (Schweller, 1994).

## III. METHODS

The method used in this study is a qualitative research method that collects data on a phenomenon to interpret what occurs. Qualitative studies with inductive/qualitative data analysis involve concept development simultaneously with data collection. Qualitative approaches generally provide data in the form of writing, words, symbols, physical objects, or images such as maps and photographs (Neuman, 2014). Data collection techniques employ secondary data sources, including documents and internet materials such as library studies related to the research topic, online journals, online news, official government websites, books, press releases from relevant ministries in the three countries, internet news, and writings from previous studies related to the research topic. Overall, this approach enables a comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon by utilizing diverse and relevant data sources. Next, the author will use descriptive analysis techniques to provide an overview of the facts of a phenomenon that occurred, provide new data that differs from previous data, and explain a stage. Thus, the results of this study are analyses of operationalized data using an international relations framework to draw conclusions about Taiwan's response to China's military threats during the 2016–2020 period.

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Taiwan's determination to achieve independence has caused tension since Tsai Ing-wen was elected President of Taiwan in 2016. Taiwan is preparing itself to prevent a war between Taiwan and China. The main mission of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is to prevent Taiwan's independence, which is supported by China's defense white paper that shows increased military tension in the Taiwan Strait. The Chinese government allows the PLA to take various actions that could prevent Taiwan from achieving its independence and reunification with China. President Tsai Ing-wen has reiterated her rejection of the 1992 Consensus, which states that Taiwan is part of "one China." Taiwan's 2016-2020 President, Tsai Ing-wen, from the Democratic Progressive

## Taiwan's Response on China's Military Threats in the Taiwan Strait 2016- 2020

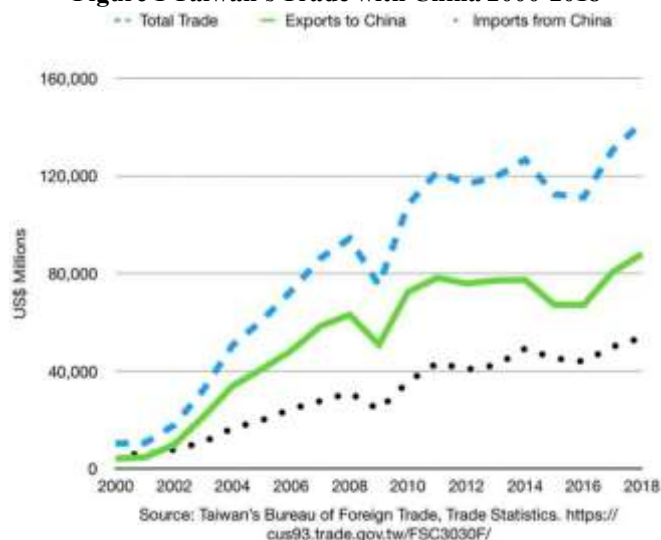
Party, has expressed agreement with the status quo but rejects the interpretation of the 1992 Consensus due to Taiwan's political stance shifting away from the Kuomintang Party.

### A. Aggregate Power

According to Stephen Walt, a country's aggregate power to attack another country is the main indicator for assessing the threat it poses. This potential can be seen from a country's economic capacity, military capability, and population size. Aggregate power serves as the main indicator for assessing the potential threat a country poses to another (Rose, 1998). China's economic capacity has grown rapidly, adding to its aggregate strength. The most significant development occurred during the reform era from 1998 to 2008, when China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). In particular, Alibaba, an e-commerce platform, contributed to China's economic rise, with its GDP reaching US\$4.6 trillion by 2008, making it the world's third-largest economy. This strong growth persisted even during the global crisis of 2008-2018, as Chinese people and companies acquired assets abroad. By 2018, China's GDP reached US\$13.82 trillion, making it the world's largest economy (Lai, 2021). Against this backdrop, Taiwan has developed many economic partnerships with China, which demonstrates an imbalance in aggregate strength, as seen in Figure 1

below:

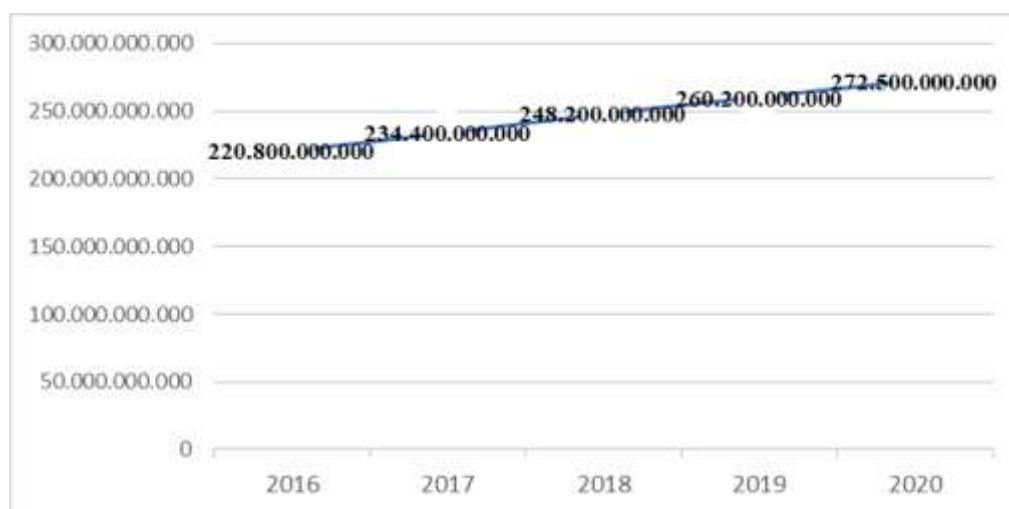
**Figure 1 Taiwan's Trade with China 2000-2018**



Source: Lai, 2021

China has experienced rapid growth in its military capabilities. Reflecting this development, the 2006 Annual Report issued by the United States Department of Defense (US) notes a military imbalance between Taiwan and China. According to the report, this imbalance may widen significantly, resulting in a 3:1 advantage in China's military capabilities by 2035 if Taiwan does not immediately implement its military projects. Consequently, this advantage may increase the risk of the use of weapons in resolving Taiwan's independence efforts (Department of Planning, 2007).

This US projection is supported by China's efforts to reunify through the Anti-Splitting State Law enacted in March 2005. This law authorizes the use of force and attacks if necessary to support reunification, thereby enabling China to continue increasing its military capabilities. China's defense budget has increased by double digits over the past 19 years. A January 2007 report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) actually put the figure at US\$122 billion, compared to China's official announcement of a budget of US\$35.4 billion. In addition, there has been an increase in missiles from 200 in 2000 to 988 in 2006 along the southeast coast of China. There has been a consistent increase of 100 to 120 missiles each year at every point that threatens Taiwan's security. The blockade of Taiwan was also carried out by deploying 50 submarines in the Taiwan Strait and throughout Southeast Asia, causing fears of regional war (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2016). Figure 2 below shows data on China's defense spending growth for the 2016-2020 period.



**Figure 2 China's Defense Budget for 2016-2020 (in USD)**

**Source:** Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2024

The data above shows a significant increase in China's defense spending, including the deployment of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as China's national army tasked with seeking the reunification of Taiwan and China. The two main methods used are deploying ground troops and firing ballistic artillery missiles. The PLA conducts military exercises and patrols around Taiwan. According to Senior Colonel Zhang Chunhui of the Air Force, these combat-ready military exercises and patrols are necessary to deal with Taiwanese separatism and maintain sovereignty. The Miyako and Bashi Straits were among the locations where H-6K bombers, reconnaissance aircraft, and fighter jets were deployed for military exercises in April 2018 (Ministry of National Defense, 2018). China's readiness is evident in Table 1, which shows the types of state budget expenditures in national defense.

**Table 1 Types of China's Defense Expenditure Budget**

| Budget Types |           |                          |           |
|--------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Year         | Personnel | Training and Maintenance | Equipment |
| 2016         | 31,3%     | 27,3%                    | 41,3%     |
| 2017         | 30,8%     | 28,1%                    | 41,1%     |
| 2020         | 29,7%     | 33,2%                    | 37,2%     |

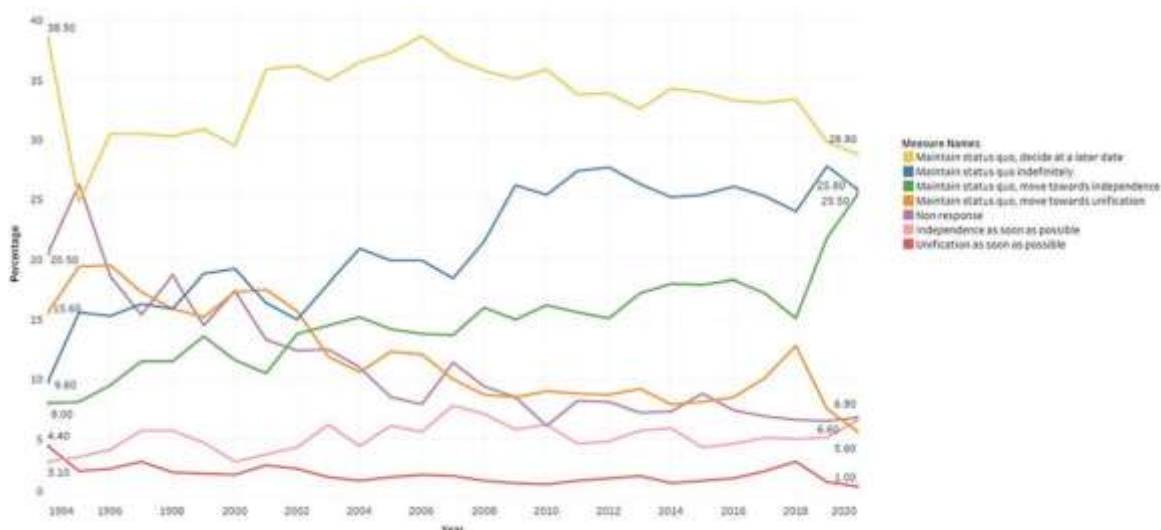
**Source:** CSIS, 2024

China has been modernizing its military for more than two decades. China's defense spending tended to stagnate before the 2000s, then increased dramatically after the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. China's difficulties thereafter took the form of other countries' intervention in China's efforts to reunify with Taiwan. In 2016, China had approximately 1,200 short-range ballistic missiles with a range of 800-1,000 km. The deployment of these missiles poses a direct threat to Taiwan's security and increases concerns among other countries in the Asian region regarding regional stability (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2016).

## B. Geographical Proximity

Not only aggregate power, but Stephen Walt also states that geographical proximity between conflicting countries is an important factor in assessing threats. The closer the geographic proximity of two countries, the higher the risk of conflict due to increased threat perception. The geographical proximity between China and Taiwan has turned the border between the two countries into a political battleground between the Communists in China and the Nationalists in Taiwan. Taiwan was under Chinese rule for more than 200 years, followed by Japanese occupation for half a century. Japan then handed Taiwan over to China in 1945, and China attempted reunification through the role of geography education to build a Chinese identity among the Taiwanese people, although this did not have a significant impact (Chang, *So close, yet so far away: imaging Chinese 'homeland' in Taiwan's geography education (1945-68)*, 2010). The geographical proximity between China and Taiwan explains why Taiwan has high geostrategic value for China, even if it means resorting to military threats (Tsang, 2020).

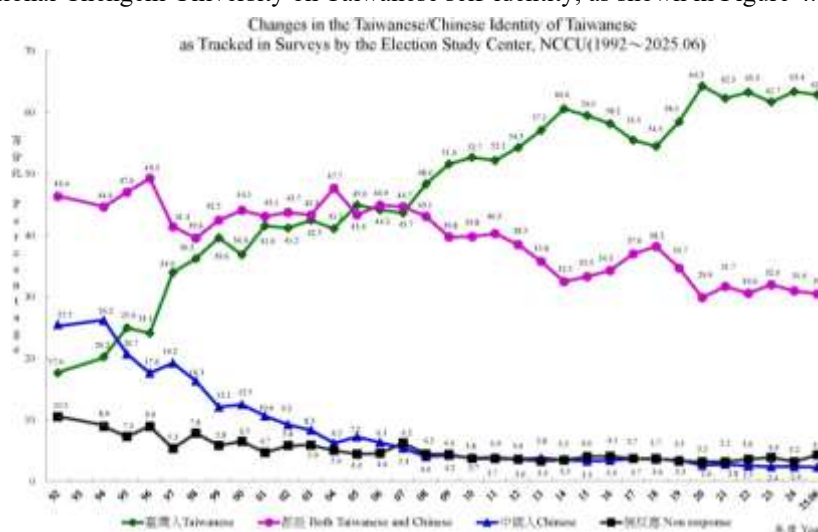
The term "national border" does not refer solely to the physical boundaries of a country; separating one community from another based on identity also functions as a border, creating the risk of exclusion and inequality. This difference in status requires a radical democratic approach to spatial power to claim state sovereignty (Wang, 2021). In addition, a political identity struggle in Taiwan encouraged democratization in the early 21st century (Chang, 2015). In 2015, 60% of Taiwan's total population identified themselves as Taiwanese, while 3% identified themselves as Chinese (Beckley, 2017), as shown in Figure 3:



**Figure 3 Taiwanese Public Opinion on Taiwan's Political Status (1994-2020)**

Source: Lin, 2022

The Taiwanese people feel a sense of identity difference. For example, the Amis tribe on Taiwan's east coast claims that Diaoyutai is their ancestral territory, where they have worshipped their ancestors for generations. This claim emphasizes that the push for Chinese-Taiwanese reunification is a matter of colonialism rather than nationalism (Wang, 2021). The Taiwanese people's views on the rejection of the 1992 Consensus by Taiwanese government officials have changed, with 25.5% identifying as Chinese and only 17.6% identifying as Taiwanese. This rejection changed after 1992 due to the status quo's stagnation, China's repressive actions to prevent Taiwan's independence, and political instability caused by Taiwan-China reunification, rendering the 1992 Consensus no longer relevant to the Taiwanese people (Rigger, Nachman, Mok, & Chan, 2022). This statement is also supported by the results of a survey conducted by National Chengchi University on Taiwanese self-identity, as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese from 1992 to 2025**

Source: National Chengchi University, 2025

Doreen Massey emphasized that spatial arrangements are manifestations of power (Massey, 1995). China's attempt at reunification with Taiwan through its “One Country, Two Systems” policy, which has been implemented in Hong Kong, has yielded poor results according to Taiwan. Tsai Ing-wen's victory in 2016 helped Taiwan maintain its independence from Chinese influence. This image is supported by the international community, which sees Taiwan as a model of a more modern and open Chinese democracy. However, Taiwan's strategic geographic position between the United States and China creates a risk of increased regional instability and intensifies questions about China's legitimacy in East Asia (Chang, 2015).

## C. Offensive Capabilities

Stephen Walt emphasizes that a country's offensive capabilities must be considered when determining whether to adopt a balancing (approaching the enemy) or bandwagoning (opposing the enemy) stance. This refers to a country's military capacity to carry out attacks. Countries with high offensive capabilities can instill fear in their neighbors. Countries that are too powerful will

## Taiwan's Response on China's Military Threats in the Taiwan Strait 2016- 2020

trigger other countries to form alliances and balance the threat (Papageorgiou, Can, & Vieira, 2024).

Maritime security in the Asia-Pacific region is marked by mistrust and strategic competition. Consequently, states are increasingly incorporating cyberattack doctrines into their national maritime security planning. Within this evolving environment, China has long used Taiwan as a testing ground for its cyberattack technology. In response to these persistent threats, Taiwan maintains its national security through good relations with the United States. This partnership provides access to advanced military and communications technologies, enabling Taiwan to track Chinese military activities near its borders. These technologies include surveillance, radar, satellites, sonar, unmanned aircraft, and maritime missiles. Furthermore, Taiwan's location at the heart of the Western Pacific and East Asia further increases its strategic value for gathering information and regional monitoring.

This shows that China's offensive capabilities are on a different level than Taiwan's, requiring Taiwan to adopt a more complex strategy to prevent further attacks that could disrupt its independence efforts. In response to this threat, the Taiwanese Ministry of Defense set the country's main objectives for 2016 as expanding surveillance capabilities and those for naval, air, and ground intelligence, as well as for early warning systems. In addition to traditional security concerns, Taiwan must also anticipate cyberattacks. For instance, the loss of 3,000 classified state documents following an attack on Taiwan's coast guard forces highlighted this risk. Notably, China carried out this cyberattack not through internet access but by targeting the coast guard system via GPS data from fishing boats owned by the Foreign Fisheries Agency (Burton, 2016).

In addition to military threats, China could use economic embargoes if military attacks on Taiwan were unsuccessful. This economic leverage is significant given that, in 2013, Taiwan imported 60% of its food and 98% of its energy resources from China. Furthermore, Taiwan has 18 cooperation agreements with China in areas such as food, tourism, and joint justice. For example, in 2019, 21% of Taiwan's total imports came from trade with China, and around 404,000 Taiwanese people worked in China (Wang, 2021). Despite these economic ties, it is unlikely that Taiwan would surrender its sovereignty for economic reasons, as no country has done so in the past 200 years. Countries have instead shown the ability to adapt and pursue their economic interests alongside other international actors (Beckley, 2017).

### ***D. Aggressive Intention***

The final indicator a country must consider when determining threats, according to Stephen Walt, is the perception of its aggressive intentions. In other words, a country perceived as intending to attack is more likely to be seen as a threat than one that has great power but no aggressive intentions. Applying this idea to the situation in East Asia, China firmly rejects Taiwan's independence efforts and considers Taiwan part of its territory. The significance of Taiwan to China extends beyond sovereignty, as the sea lanes surrounding Taiwan are used to transport energy resources from the Middle East (Kan & Morrison, 2013). As a result, China's efforts to maintain Taiwan's geostrategic value can be seen in its military exercises in Quanshan Province in mid-October 2006, which were reported in various media outlets to intimidate Taiwan. These exercises were part of China's attempt to wage psychological and media warfare to intimidate Taiwan, which it considers a separatist movement.

The first step China must take to dominate the seas in East Asia is to reunify China and Taiwan. To pursue this objective, the 2019 Chinese White Paper lists three conditions for the use of military force against Taiwan. First, Taiwan declares independence. Second, there is uncontrollable unrest in Taiwan. Third, peace negotiations are postponed indefinitely (The Taiwan Affairs Office and the Information Office of the State Council, 2000). In addition, the document states that the presence of foreign military forces in Taiwan will be considered a threat, permitting military strikes. As a result, China has not ruled out the use of force against Taiwan and will take whatever measures are necessary to realize the One China Policy.

Taiwan is the center of gravity in East Asia for deterring Chinese expansion and serves as the basis for decisions on military aggression against China. To reinforce its position, China has deployed more than 3,300 joint patrols and held over 8,100 border meetings with other countries since 2012. As a result, China asserts that its armed forces and military aircraft serve as a stern warning against separatist movements for "Taiwan independence." Furthermore, in 2013, China's military focus involving military threats against Taiwan included official declarations of independence, movements leading to independence efforts, internal unrest, nuclear weapons possession, uncertainty in China-Taiwan reunification dialogue, foreign intervention, and foreign troop deployments (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2013). To underscore the severity of these threats, China has 1,500 precision missiles aimed at Taiwan and more than 1,000 advanced fighter jets. In response, Taiwan counterbalances this posture with 10 mobile ground radars, 20 fixed early warning radars, 6 E-2 Hawkeye aircraft, and satellite and aircraft intelligence provided by the United States, as well as thousands of spies on the mainland (Kan & Morrison, 2013).

### ***E. Offensive Capabilities***

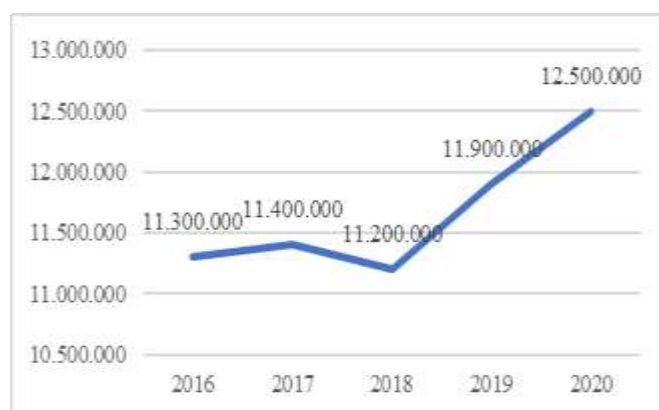
According to Schweller (1994), BoT theory gives rise to two important assumptions in the analysis of international relations, namely balancing and bandwagoning. Balancing is a condition in which countries form alliances to confront a country considered a threat to their security. Balancing is a collective effort to counter potential aggressors, while bandwagoning occurs when countries choose to cooperate with parties considered threats to gain protection or benefits from the relationship.

The Balance of Threat (BoT) theory provides important insights into the dynamics of international alliances and how perceptions of threats can influence a country's foreign policy. In this context, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), as China's national army,

## Taiwan's Response on China's Military Threats in the Taiwan Strait 2016- 2020

is tasked with seeking Taiwan-China reunification. Specifically, the PLA primarily deploys ground troops and ballistic missiles to pursue this goal. As a result, this focus has contributed to a crisis in the status quo between Taiwan and China, particularly as China's economy grows significantly and reduces the US's ability to pressure it. Further complicating these dynamics, Davide notes that the status quo during President Tsai Ing-wen's era embrace of democracy in Taiwan and the 1992 Consensus, represented a dead end for both Taiwan and China. The 1992 Consensus was designed to prevent Taiwan's independence and emphasized that all failed independence efforts were the essence of the One China Policy (Campagnola, 2024).

The Progressive Democratic Party's change in stance regarding the good relations between Taiwan and China established by the Kuomintang Party from 2008 to 2016. In particular, by looking at the four indicators of BoT theory, namely aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intent. In response to these factors, Taiwan has chosen to balance by increasing its military capabilities and diversifying its economy. This strategic approach is further illustrated by the rise in Taiwan's military budget, which aims to counter escalating tensions and pressure from China's aggressive actions, as shown in Figure 5 below:



**Figure 5. Taiwan's Defense Budget for 2016-2020 (in USD)**

**Source:** Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2024

Taiwan does not trust China and therefore rejects all attempts at Taiwan-China reunification. For example, Chen Ming Tong, as the Taiwan Mainland Affairs Council, believes that China intends to take over Taiwan. Furthermore, the Progressive Democratic Party's stance for the 2016-2020 period clearly states that Taiwan will not escalate confrontation, maintain regional stability, and uphold the status quo in the Taiwan Strait (Sutter, Business Dynamism across the Taiwan Strait: The Implications for Cross-Strait Relations, 2002). In addition, Taiwan pursues a military defense strategy focused on preparing for war and military resources.

China has taken various repressive measures since the election of President Tsai Ing-wen of the Progressive Democratic Party. For example, the PLA conducted military exercises and patrols around Taiwan. According to Senior Colonel Zhang Chunhui of the Air Force, these combat-ready military exercises and patrols are necessary to deal with Taiwanese separatism and maintain sovereignty. In particular, the Miyako and Bashi Straits were among the locations where H-6K bombers, reconnaissance aircraft, and fighter jets were deployed for military exercises in April 2018 (Ministry of National Defense, 2018). Despite these activities, China avoids direct military confrontation and conducts only military exercises so as to avoid criticism from Taiwanese people who refuse to submit to coercion (Schreer, 2017). In response, Taiwan undertakes its own military exercises as simulations to prepare for a possible Chinese invasion. For instance, a total of 4,000 personnel and more than 1,500 pieces of defense equipment were used, and drones were flown to monitor the air situation and scout the battlefield (Presse & Reuters, 2018).

In addition, China issued diplomatic threats by cutting off cross-strait communication channels and the formal high-level channels established by Taiwan's former president, Ma Ying-jeou. Furthermore, it restricted Taiwan's participation in international organizations and stripped Taiwan of diplomatic relations with 7 of the 22 countries that recognized Taiwan, as well as restricting cross-border access between China and Taiwan (Templeman, 2020). This diplomatic pressure was accompanied by economic pressure from Taiwan's main partner, China. In response, Taiwan chose to diversify its investments and trade toward South and Southeast Asia to reduce its dependence on China and lessen China's dominance. As a result, Taiwan's exports to China declined by 8.8%, but this was offset by exports to the US, which grew by 17.4% in 2019 (Lai, 2021). Reflecting these changes, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Trade issued an official statement in 2019 indicating that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the US, and Europe had become Taiwan's main trading partners (Bureau of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2019).

President Tsai Ing-wen, who hails from the Progressive Democratic Party, continues to express her disapproval of efforts to reunify Taiwan and China. In her New Year's speech, the President outlined four obligations for China: (1) recognize Taiwan as a country, (2) respect the Taiwanese people's commitment to democracy and freedom, (3) handle cross-strait relations peacefully, and (4) ensure that the Chinese government or institutions communicate through channels authorized by the Taiwanese government (Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan), 2019). Building on these points, Tsai Ing-wen further emphasized that China must recognize the fundamental differences between Taiwan and the Mainland. Specifically, differences in norms and values,

## Taiwan's Response on China's Military Threats in the Taiwan Strait 2016- 2020

political systems, and lifestyles are the reasons why Taiwan-China reunification cannot happen. Moreover, Taiwan's status as a democratic country prevents the unilateral imposition of certain conditions or positions in cross-strait political issues with China. Additionally, the results of the 2016 election sought to thwart efforts at Taiwan-China reunification by promoting trade that could blur the boundaries between the two countries. Finally, the repressive actions taken by China during 2019-2020 reduced the Taiwanese public opinion's positive and neutral views of China.

The United States needs Taiwan as an important partner for spreading democracy in East Asia. However, negative views among the US public rose significantly from 47% in 2017 to 60% in 2018 and 66% in 2019 (Wang, 2021). This rise can be attributed to China's intimidation and repression of Taiwan in order to achieve Chinese-Taiwanese reunification. As a result of these actions, the US decided to sell weapons to Taiwan, which caused concern in China. Notably, US arms sales to Taiwan during the Donald Trump presidency increased significantly from 2018 to 2019, rising from US\$330 million in 2018 to US\$1.1 billion in 2019, with a further increase to US\$1.8 billion that included sensors, artillery, and rocket launchers (BBC, 2020). US support helps Taiwan balance China in its efforts to reunify Taiwan and China. For example, two U.S. warships passed through the Taiwan Strait in October 2018 (Ng & Lu, 2018) and again in September 2019 (Pickrell, 2018). In addition, in April 2020, a U.S. warship sailed twice through the Taiwan Strait (Reuters, 2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that military threats from China have led Taiwan to adopt balancing measures. The Balance of Threats (BoT) theory, proposed by Stephen Waltz, is based on four indicators: aggregate strength, geographical proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intent. Taiwan has chosen to balance by increasing its military capabilities, diversifying its economy, and obtaining assistance from the US through the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019. Changes in the perception of Taiwanese identity and positive support from the international community, which views Taiwan as a democratic country, have influenced the Taiwanese government's decision to strike a balance. However, Taiwan's economic diversification efforts are still hampered by its near-total reliance on China. China's strong offensive capabilities, driven by its military and economic power, have led Taiwan to draw closer to the United States through the TAIPEI ACT, which provides for regular transfers of defense equipment, military exercises, and patrols around the Taiwan Strait.

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