

Standing Watch: Enhance US-Taiwan Defense Cooperation

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Given Beijing's ambitious political-military aims, and the increasingly unstable environment it is creating around its periphery, it is imperative that regional maritime states with shared defense interests continue to advance their security partnerships. The importance of Taiwan's strategic location in the heart of East Asia and the Western Pacific for collecting information and monitoring regional events cannot be overstated. Nor can its unique ability to simultaneously access the linguistic and cultural landscapes of the Chinese, Japanese, and English speaking worlds. Moreover, Taiwan's technological prowess and its special relationship with the United States give it access to the most advanced military information and communications technology available. Its liberal democracy also plays a positive role in regional security.

The single most valuable asset the U.S. has for adapting to the increasingly risky strategic environment is its allies. Taiwan has an important, but often underappreciated, role to play in the maritime component of the U.S. rebalance to Asia. First, as a capable security partner, Taiwan can provide the Pacific Command with critical indications and warning information. Second, its Navy, Air Force, Army and Coast Guard can work jointly with their counterparts in the U.S. and other friendly maritime nations in the Western Pacific to form a common operational picture of the maritime domain. Third, Taipei can improve its ability to operate with U.S. forces in responding to natural disasters and other crises.

Reflecting the importance of Taiwan to the rebalance, there has been an increase in the number of military exchanges between the U.S. and Taiwan. For example, around 3,000 U.S. military visits to Taiwan reportedly occurred in 2014, hundreds more than the year prior. Significant numbers of U.S. military personnel are involved in the approximately 300 bilateral programs that exist to assist Taiwan further develop highly specialized military skills. Yet while the U.S.-Taiwan defense and security relationship is already one of the strongest in the world, it is still not strong enough. Much more can and should be done. Our recommendations are as follows:

1. It is in the American interest to integrate Taiwan's maritime domain awareness capabilities into a joint infrastructure for shared indications and warning and regional situational awareness. This would include the exchange of everything from radar and sonar data to intelligence derived from signals, human agents and imagery, as appropriate and warranted by events. However, both the U.S. and Taiwan militaries should continue to maintain their respective abilities to independently collect information as well. This ensures that redundancy is built into the system and no side become overly susceptible to the political vagaries of the other in a crisis.
2. The U.S. and Taiwan should continue to work toward the ability to better share a common operational picture that would allow them to seamlessly work together as coalition partners during a crisis or conflict. While the equipment

needed, such as shared digital data links, appears to be in place, serious human “software” challenges remain. These challenges can only be surmounted through improved government-to-government, military-to-military, and people-to-people contacts.

3. Washington must stop isolating Taiwan from bilateral and multilateral exercises and security events in order to appease or “reassure” Beijing’s communist party leadership. Such a policy, in effect, creates a broken link in the first island chain, and undermines American security interests in Asia. U.S. Navy ships should conduct port visits in Taiwan, and the Department of Defense should invite Taiwan to the Rim of the Pacific Exercise and other maritime and air warfare events. The stakes are too high for Washington to continue its self-defeating policy behavior.

4. The U.S. has plans for operating alongside the Taiwan military in the event that known contingencies occur. To ensure that these plans could be successfully executed, U.S. military leaders at the two-star rank and above with significant joint experience should regularly visit counterparts in Taiwan and learn about the Western Pacific battlespace firsthand. Nobody understands the local landscape better than Taiwan.

5. As a further means of building trust and interoperability, the Pacific Command should expand and deepen its military exchanges with Taiwan as part of the rebalance to Asia. Taiwan should be renewed as a hub for training personnel in the Chinese language and culture. Taiwan’s National Defense University and other professional military education institutions should be leveraged by American military officers and civilians studying regional security affairs.

6. The U.S. government should ensure that Taiwan’s most advanced early-warning radar system has software properly enabled so that Taiwan has a maritime, air and space tracking capability. This would allow Taiwan to contribute to the shared monitoring of Chinese warships, aircraft, and ballistic missiles as well as space debris and naval ocean surveillance satellites.

7. The U.S. should strengthen its relationship with Taiwan in the area of integrated undersea surveillance systems. A joint sonar surveillance system could be a key component of an all-hazards situational awareness network in the Western Pacific that could monitor earthquakes, tsunamis, illegal-trafficking, adversary surface ships (including minelayers), and submarines.

8. Washington should clearly signal to Taiwan and the U.S. defense industry its intention to approve licensing for American industrial participation in Taiwan’s indigenous defense submarine program. In addition to other missions, such as anti-submarine warfare and anti-surface operations, submarines are a critical part of an integrated intelligence architecture. The strategic benefits of new diesel-electric submarines and the range of missions they could undertake as part of coalition operations, merit full U.S. support for whatever submarine program Taiwan decides to pursue. **BT**

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