

Resistance is Victory: Taiwan's 2025 National Defense Report and Resisting Cognitive Coercion

Description

In October 2025, Taiwan published its latest [National Defense Report](#). This document, released every two years by the Ministry of National Defense (MND), periodically [informs](#) the people of Taiwan, what it has done, what it is doing, [and] what it prepares to do in their defense. It is an expansive paper that describes myriad areas of national security, including strategy, military organizations, force structure, acquisition and finances, domestic resilience, and international cooperation, among other topics.

Taiwan's 2025 National Defense Report reframes deterrence as national resistance, integrating cognitive resilience, societal mobilizations, and maritime defense into a coherent strategy of [irregular deterrence](#).

It is notable how much of this year's report features an overarching emphasis on *resistance*. Specifically, it describes how the MND is preparing Taiwan as a nation and the Taiwanese as a people to resist [gray zone harassment](#), [cognitive warfare](#), and [narrative warfare](#) by the People's Republic of China (PRC). These activities all support the most significant strategic threat identified by the report: a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. While such an invasion would necessarily be characterized by naval and amphibious operations, the report flags the ongoing and continuing irregular means by which the PRC is attempting to undermine Taiwanese sovereignty and legitimacy on the world stage and within the minds of the Taiwanese people.

This subversion includes [salami slicing](#) intended to erode accepted lines of territorial sovereignty and legal jurisdiction. Cognitive and narrative warfare combines to transform the way people view Taiwan's place in the world and its future in a way favorable to China's interests. This entire approach is intended to erode Taiwan's sovereignty; if this erosion occurs, it would translate into major advantages for China in a potential unification campaign, whether through a naval quarantine, naval blockade, or amphibious assault.

In turn, the report breaks new ground in describing how Taiwan is reinforcing societal [resistance](#) and [resilience](#). The goal is to build cognitive hardening now, making Taiwan stronger against the psychological operations it faces every day. Meanwhile, clearly providing whole-of-society means for resisting an invasion will make the Taiwanese more resilient should they have to fight a defensive war.

The following analysis consolidates these elements from the report to provide a clearer picture of Taiwan's significant progress against one of China's most insidious threats to Taiwan's self-determination and peaceful existence. By understanding the irregular threat and its intended aim, policymakers and security practitioners can be better postured to enable Taiwan's defense, both in the cognitive domain and across the Taiwan Strait.

The Irregular Threat

Taiwan identifies gray zone harassment as the most immediate and complex threat posed by the PRC, integrating military, informational, and economic pressure. In their definition, Taiwan identifies gray zone harassment as low-intensity, unlawful, quasi-military actions that fall below the threshold of armed conflict.

These actions include an escalating material presence and increasing frequency of PRC air and naval [harassment](#), often involving the crossing of the [median line](#), into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone ([ADIZ](#)), or approaching the [24-nautical mile line](#) to gradually increase pressure and intimidate. The report also emphasizes the increasing frequency, jointness, and integration of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) naval forces during these drills. They encompass simulated naval blockades, incorporate civilian roll-on/roll-off vehicles for amphibious shipping, and integrate China's coast guard and maritime militia, while PLA amphibious forces conduct landing exercises on Chinese beaches.

The explicit goal is to normalize the idea of the Taiwan Strait being under PRC jurisdiction. The more immediate outcome is to test Taiwan's early warning capabilities, consume resources to impact its military readiness, and intentionally obscure the line between peace and war to catch Taiwan and its allies unprepared. The ultimate objective is to position PLA forces such that they can shift quickly from seemingly routine conduct of drills to wartime operations, facilitating a PRC unification by military force if Xi Jinping deems it necessary.

The Battle for Minds: China's Cognitive Warfare Campaign

Connected to gray zone harassment, which blurs the line of legally accepted norms around Taiwanese sovereignty, is the PRC's cognitive warfare. This involves tools of "invisible cognitive suppression" that manipulate information and reshape historical meaning in the minds of target audiences.

The MND's report observes that the PRC uses social media and mainstream media to carefully design and deliver thematic [propaganda](#), focused against specific targets for psychological operations.

China's frequent naval drills are presented to international audiences as an [internal matter](#) dealing with a domestic disturbance, reinforcing the false claim that Taiwan has always been and remains an inalienable part of China.

The recurrent themes promoted across these channels include military intimidation, defamation of Taipei's government policies, and controversial messages aimed at dividing society and manufacturing internal discord. The PRC wants Taiwanese audiences to believe some combination of the following untruths: that Taiwan is part of China; that Taiwanese people are exclusively Chinese; that unification with China is inevitable and in their best interests; and that resisting Chinese unification would be futile and disastrous to their interests.

Rewriting History: China's Narrative Warfare Strategy

Narrative Warfare, described as a supporting arm of cognitive warfare, seizes the authoritative interpretation of facts through stories and discourse, primarily aimed at changing Taiwanese consciousness and vying for discourse power internationally.

China deliberately [exaggerates](#) the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) historical contributions during the Second Sino-Japanese War while minimizing or erasing the contributions of the Republic of China (ROC) military in the fight against Imperial Japan. This constructs the false narrative that the CCP led national liberation and was the sole force in the resistance, undermining the substantial role of the ROC while attempting to weaken Taiwanese pride, identity, and national resilience. This was illustrated during China's recent [Victory Day Parade](#), at which Beijing honored the role of the CCP in Japan's defeat, while [calling](#) Taiwan's insistence on its own wartime contributions a "shameless betrayal of the entire Chinese nation."

The PRC consistently uses international press conferences and multilateral venues to deny Taiwan's sovereignty and reject the legitimacy of external intervention. The story repeatedly told by China is that its naval blockade drills defend its sovereign territory from external interference and are a warning to Taiwanese separatist forces. This aims to shape a regional order and international issue framework favorable to the PRC's political stance, weakening the influence of the United States and its allies in supporting Taiwan's right to peacefully determine its future.

Understanding these threats is crucial, but Taiwan's response represents an even more significant development for defense planners worldwide.

Fighting Back: Taiwan's Psychological Readiness and Resilience

The report asserts that in response to the PRC's constant incursions into its ADIZ and exclusive territorial waters, Taiwan's armed forces are undertaking immediate actions to interdict and eject PLA forces. In addition, it states that Taiwan's military is refining its defensive operational plans by rehearsing and verifying them through immediate combat readiness drills. While it emphasizes coastal defense and beachhead combat, the report also highlights new comprehensive inland defenses that present the most rigorous defense-in-depth plans seen to date. In short, Taiwan's defense policies and postures are rapidly [evolving](#) in response to China's aggression.

Building Mental Resilience Against Information Warfare

The ROC military recognizes that psychological readiness is the essential foundation for combat effectiveness. To support this, the MND is undertaking a host of proactive and preemptive initiatives to prepare its military and civilian populations to resist PRC messaging. ROC military personnel are continuously educated to understand the threat and deepen their pride in their country.

Starting in 2025, the weekly [Juguang Garden](#) military television program [added](#) regular analyses of regional situations and PRC cognitive warfare. This is intended to build media literacy and help service members recognize the PRC's strategies of inducement and united front tactics.

The MND actively promotes media literacy education for all sectors of Taiwan's government. It produces educational videos, such as "Media Literacy" and "Cognitive Primary School," for use by government agencies and local governments.

The Taiwanese government also publicly clarifies false information immediately through the "Real-time News Clarification Zone" on its website. It uses official [social media](#) accounts to share and augment these clarifying messages.

To quickly respond to threats and boost international outreach, the MND deployed Artificial Intelligence (AI) "virtual anchors" starting with the Han Kuang 40 exercise in 2024. This system can rapidly generate video clips in as many as 18 languages, significantly increasing cross-cultural dissemination to gain international support and recognition.

Resilience and Resistance

Taiwan is strategically shifting toward resistance and unconventional defense, highlighting key public exercises and preparedness documents. Notably, several exercises dedicated toward all out mobilization, integrating civilian agencies, and protecting critical infrastructure were integrated into a single, more complex Urban Resilience Exercise. In addition, [Han Kuang 41](#), this year's annual

iteration of an exercise simulating nation-wide defense against Chinese invasion, involved the most significant incorporation of urban terrain, reserve mobilization, and civilian involvement to date.

The former *All-Out Defense Response Manual* was [revised](#) and retitled *In Case of Crisis: Taiwan's National Public Safety Guide*. This revision integrates the [whole-of-society resilience concept](#) and incorporates lessons from international examples like Ukraine.

The MND translated and published the *Resistance Operating Concept*. Originally [published](#) by the U.S. *Joint Special Operations University Press*, the publication spells out a plan to develop a nationally endorsed, organized resistance movement *before* an enemy invades. Advanced planning in this way ensures a resistance movement is in place prior to the potential loss of sovereignty and territory, ensuring a pre-invasion plan to preserve national [resilience](#) against aggression.

The MND also translated *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century*, a [text](#) arguing that the largest and most intense battles of the modern era frequently occur in dense urban areas. The bulk of Taiwan's population lives in its major cities, most notably Taipei, and preparing the people to fight and endure in this terrain is critical to bolstering national resolve.

Assessing the Direction of Taiwan's National Defense

A key insight into Taiwanese military thinking is that the report uses the term "gray zone **harassment**" instead of "gray zone **warfare**", the term more commonly used by Western defense analysts. *Harassment* is a more precise characterization of the PRC's salami slicing strategy. It clearly indicates that while the Taiwanese military views such harassment as insidious and dangerous, Taiwan perceives it as a categorically different phenomenon than war and warfare.

The inverse is also true when assessing Taiwan's perception of Chinese psychological operations. While deliberately referring to the physical actions of PLA naval and aircraft incursions into its ADIZ and across the median line as harassment, the battle China is waging in the mind is unambiguously described as "cognitive warfare," and the fight over meaning is "narrative warfare." While this conflict is not violent, the outcome of the battle is understood to be existential. If the Taiwanese people, policymakers, or military [believe](#) their sovereignty cannot be defended because China's military might is too great, or that Chinese unification is the lesser of two evils, then the war is lost before a shot is fired. Similarly, if international audiences believe the same, they will be deterred from intervening on Taiwan's behalf or otherwise provide diplomatic and military support.

Policymakers and defense planners outside of Taiwan should follow Taiwan's lead and reinforce its efforts in building resistance against China's irregular operations. Gray zone harassment should be

countered at every turn. While freedom of navigation patrols through the Taiwan Strait might be militarily insignificant, they provide a strategic and diplomatic signal that the world is watching and does not recognize China's claims over Taiwan. In addition, the psychological impact of China's naval blockade drills could be hamstrung by counter-blockade drills and rehearsals by the United States and its allies. This would further sharpen the deterrent effect by showing that third parties could effectively intervene on Taiwan's behalf, even against naval operations short of conventional warfare. Finally, clear and consistent messaging can resist China's cognitive and narrative warfare on the incredible risk of catastrophic defeat that China propagates. The strength and resolve of the Taiwanese people should be amplified, and the possibility of third-party intervention should be a constant theme, including through provision of defense services and foreign military sales that will add credibility to such information campaigns.

Taiwan remains an ever-improving model of resistance and resilience for democratic nations that face authoritarian pressure. By reinforcing Taiwan's efforts and pursuing supportive strategies, policymakers will best enable this nation to hold the front line of sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific for the rest of the world.

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[Main Image](#) courtesy of Military News Agency (MNA), the public affairs corps of the ROC Ministry of National Defense.

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