

The Inevitable Invasion is Over, Now What? Resistance in a Post-Invasion Taiwan

Description

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Introduction

What if China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) successfully invaded and conquered the island of Taiwan? Due to the rising tensions surrounding the Taiwan Strait, the proposed question isn't merely hypothetical but is increasingly becoming a possible scenario. In this context, Taiwan needs to start thinking about certain questions. For example, how would a Taiwan insurgency form and operate following an invasion? And how could Taiwan prepare now to put up an effective resistance campaign against the PLA? While significant analysis has been dedicated to a potential invasion and defense of Taiwan, far less attention has been paid to the post-conflict environment in which civil resistance, guerrilla tactics, and subversion may arise as part of a broader [insurgency](#). This article aims to fill that gap by analyzing insurgency strategies through a multidimensional framework.

To examine these questions, it is important to first provide a background and the strategic importance of Taiwan. Next, we will consider how geography may play a factor (i.e., Taiwan's complex urban and mountain terrain) and who could make up the Taiwan insurgency. We will then turn to the likely asymmetric tactics Taiwan should consider now and not be afraid to implement, even if they may seem extreme. Also, we will analyze the political and social movements Taiwan could utilize, leveraging international assistance and mobilizing mass support from diaspora networks both domestically and internationally. Finally, we will explore future projections and implications of resistance, primarily focusing on long-term viability and possible endgame scenarios. This multidisciplinary lens will enable a holistic understanding of the conflict environment and provide actionable insights for policymakers, defense planners, and scholars alike.

Foundations of Resistance: Strategic, Geographic, and Political Dimensions of an Occupied Taiwan

Background and Strategic Importance

The Taiwan Strait conflict has long stood as one of the most volatile flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific region, with the potential to spark a major power confrontation involving China, the United States (U.S.), and its allies. The roots of this enduring geopolitical tension trace back to the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949), which concluded with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) establishing the PRC on the mainland following the defeat of the Kuomintang (KMT) government. After Mao Zedong's communist armies defeated the KMT Nationalist Party and its military, their supporters fled to the island of Taiwan, where they maintained themselves as a separate political entity from the People's Republic of China (PRC). To prevent Mao from invading Taiwan, U.S. President Harry Truman sent the U.S. Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait, preventing an invasion of the island by communist [armies](#). This brief historical snapshot brings us to the current situation in place today. Since then, the PRC has asserted that Taiwan is an inseparable part of the PRC and has viewed reunification as a core national [interest](#). Separately, Taiwan has developed a distinct democratic identity and governance structure. This divergence has created a precarious status quo, characterized by de facto independence under the threat of military [coercion](#).

One of the more consequential laws passed creating the current state of play was the [Taiwan Relations Act \(TRA\) of 1979](#). The TRA was enacted by the U.S. after it shifted diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing following formal recognition of the PRC, but it also authorized de facto diplomatic relations with [Taiwan](#). The TRA commits the U.S. to provide Taiwan with defensive arms and maintain the capacity to resist coercion. Yet, it does not guarantee U.S. military intervention and was designed to be deliberately ambiguous on whether the U.S. would intervene in a conflict. This policy of "strategic ambiguity" has served as a stabilizing factor within the [region](#). However, increasing military parity across the strait and broader U.S.-China strategic competition have made the longstanding balance more fragile.

First in text image for Tawan Now What Article
[Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the PRC](#)

The strategic importance of Taiwan extends well beyond its historical and ideological significance to the PRC. Geographically, the island sits astride key maritime routes in the Western Pacific, serving as a critical node in the first island chain. This first island chain is a string of allied and partner territories

that the U.S. relies on to project power and contain PRC naval [ambitions](#). Control over Taiwan would give the PLA Navy direct access to the broader Pacific Ocean, bypassing current chokepoints and undermining the regional security architecture upheld by the U.S. and its [allies](#). For Beijing, this is not only about sovereignty but about reversing a perceived history of a [“century of humiliation”](#) and restoring China’s status as a global power.

Economically, Taiwan’s relevance to global technology supply chains makes it irreplaceable. [Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company](#) (TSMC) is central to global manufacturing, producing the world’s most advanced semiconductors. These chips are foundational to industries ranging from consumer electronics and telecommunications to advanced military [systems](#). Any disruption in TSMC’s operations would have cascading effects across the global economy. Both China and the U.S. have made securing semiconductor supply chains a national priority, further raising the stakes in the Taiwan conflict. Taiwan also serves as a symbol of ideological contrast between authoritarianism and liberal democracy. Taiwan’s successful transition to a pluralistic democratic society stands in sharp contrast to the centralized control of the CCP. As such, the fate of Taiwan is viewed by many in the West not only as a matter of regional security but also as a litmus test for the resilience of democratic governance in the face of authoritarian [revisionism](#). In this light, Taiwan becomes not just a contested territory, but an ideological battleground with implications for the future of the international order.

Geographic Concerns and Insurgency Personnel

As defined by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the [Guide to Analysis of Insurgency](#), “insurgency is a protracted political-military activity directed toward completely or partially controlling the resources of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. Insurgent activity – including guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and political mobilization – is designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control and legitimacy.” In the event of a successful PLA invasion and occupation of Taiwan, it is likely that a determined and multifaceted insurgency would arise to resist the occupation. The foundation for resistance lies in Taiwan’s unique political identity, technological sophistication, and deep societal aversion to rule by the CCP. Drawing on military, civilian, and external actors, a Taiwan insurgency would likely pursue an asymmetric strategy, combining guerrilla tactics, cyber operations, and economic sabotage with political and social mobilization both domestically and internationally.

Second in text image for Tawan Now What Article
[The World Factbook 2024. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2024.](#)

Taiwan's terrain is advantageous for urban and rural resistance. Urban areas like Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Taichung offer dense, complex environments that can neutralize many PLA advantages in mobility and firepower. Civilian infrastructure, underground transit networks, and civilian populations would serve as cover for insurgents. Conversely, Taiwan's mountainous regions and dense forests represent two-thirds of the eastern side of the island and would provide ideal terrain for rural guerrilla bases, logistical hubs, and [ambushes](#). However, we cannot ignore that Taiwan's status as an island poses significant challenges for any sustained insurgency. Primarily due to the inherent geographic isolation limiting the flow of resources, places of safe-haven, and external support. Unlike insurgent movements on continental landmasses, Taiwan's insurgents would be cut off once the PLA secures maritime and aerial dominance. This isolation would create a struggle to import weapons, medical supplies, communication equipment, and other critical resources. While covert maritime resupply from the U.S. and its allies via submarines or small crafts might be possible, it would be risky and limited in [scale](#). Safe-haven would also be a struggle since insurgents on the island could not easily retreat to regroup or train in territory abroad. With no contiguous borders with other countries, it'd be very difficult to attempt to flee. The PLA would most likely monitor and intercept electronic communications, physically patrol maritime approaches, or even deploy anti-access/area denial capabilities to isolate Taiwan [further](#). Taiwan's island geography presents a double-edged sword. While its terrain offers strong defensive potential and compartmentalization for guerrilla tactics, its isolation makes sustained insurgency logistically difficult.

Regardless, the composition of a Taiwan insurgency would be diverse and most likely decentralized. As of 2024, Taiwan's active-duty military personnel are estimated to be around [169,000](#). These include special operations, intelligence, and cyber warfare personnel. They would form the backbone of early resistance networks, alongside Taiwan's large reserve force. As of 2022, estimates have Taiwan with roughly 1.66 million reservists who can serve as a latent pool for recruitment and [leadership](#). Taiwan also hosts a large population that served in mandatory conscription, with service recently increasing from four months to one [year](#). This increases the pool for insurgent recruitment and allows conscripts to be better prepared in case of invasion. Along with military personnel, civilians would likely be integral to the resistance. Civilians of interest include software engineers, community leaders, logistics personnel, and medical professionals who could support sabotage, communication, and information operations. Organizationally, the insurgency would likely adopt a cell-based structure to maximize operational security and adaptability. Coordination between cells could be maintained via encrypted communication networks and supported by intelligence-sharing efforts led by a government-in-exile or clandestine command [infrastructure](#). A decentralized model allows cells to operate independently while pursuing shared strategic objectives.

Preparing for Strategic Resistance

Given the PLA's conventional superiority and Taiwan's geographic isolation, insurgents would need to prioritize guerrilla warfare and other asymmetric tactics. Operations would include ambushes, sabotage of logistics lines, attacks on key military and government installations, and harassment of occupying forces. Insurgents would try to avoid direct engagement and seek to wear down PLA forces through persistent, low-intensity conflicts that erode morale and stretch PLA supply [lines](#). Some of this can be done through cyber warfare since it is the least physically risky domain for asymmetric escalation. Resistance forces could use cyberattacks to disrupt PLA communications, hack surveillance systems, spread propaganda to undermine the legitimacy of the occupation, and collect battlefield intelligence through civilian digital [networks](#). Taiwan and its allies' cyber forces could pre-designate targets inside mainland China, attacking critical infrastructure and deploying sleeper malware or logic bombs for activation during a conflict. Critical infrastructure locations would vary but could include transportation networks, power grids, financial systems, and communication nodes. Coordinated cyberattacks would paralyze civilian logistics, int chaos in major urban centers, and overload state response mechanisms. This would undermine both domestic confidence and PLA operational planning.

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[The World Factbook 2024. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2024.](#)

In parallel, Taiwan could place covert action units inside mainland China prior to or during any significant invasion. These units would be trained specifically in sabotage, espionage, and psychological operations. These operatives could be drawn from special forces, intelligence agencies, and diaspora networks, recruiting Mandarin-speaking assets with knowledge of Chinese terrain and urban [environments](#). Pre-war infiltration or post-invasion insertion of these cells could facilitate acts of sabotage and create cascading effects across China. Strategic bombings or coordinated arson against soft targets, like warehouses and transportation hubs, could generate insecurity and economic volatility without needing to defeat the PLA in open combat. Another avenue would involve psychological and political warfare targeting vulnerable regions within mainland China. Taiwan and its allies could establish covert channels to support disaffected groups in Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, or among Hong Kong pro-democracy [activists](#). These efforts could spark unrest or diversionary movements that force the PRC to reallocate security forces away from Taiwan. This would effectively open a second front without requiring a conventional military force and mitigating geographic isolation concerns with a resistance only being on the island. While risky, these asymmetric strategies would raise the costs of invasion exponentially by creating instability within China's own borders. It would transform Taiwan from a passive target into an active and unpredictable threat, forcing the PLA to consider not just maintaining occupation on the island but surviving its long-term consequences.

Political and Social Movements of the Insurgency

The success of resistance depends on political and social mobilization as much as it does on geography, personnel, or military strategy. Taiwan's population has grown increasingly opposed to unification with the PRC, and national identity polling shows that a majority identify exclusively as [Taiwanese](#). This sense of nationalism towards an occupying force would likely produce widespread public support for insurgents. Taiwan's civil society could become key pillars of resistance and could include religious organizations, unions, and student groups. These actors might assist with humanitarian support, spread anti-occupation messaging, and sustain morale through underground media and local governance in contested areas. If Taiwan's government was to prepare for an invasion now, it could incorporate these civil society groups into a robust [Territorial Defense Corps](#), similar to the [Estonian Defense League](#). These units should be recruited from the communities in which they will train and, in the event of war, fight. Their volunteers should have access to well-stocked armories with sufficient numbers of modern weapons, ammunition, and protective gear. They can make it much harder for China to achieve a quick, surprise victory by showing that the Taiwanese people have the ability to quickly resist and recover from acts of sabotage, subversion, assassination, and [war](#). If Taiwan creates a force of this nature, it could provide meaningful morale for the population and a message that all citizens would be playing an active role in the event of an invasion.

Assuming the Taiwan government survived abroad post-invasion, they would provide political legitimacy and serve as the international face of the insurgency. The government in exile could coordinate aid distribution, issue diplomatic communiqués, and represent Taiwan in international forums. Moreover, its existence would signal continued resistance and provide a political focal point for organizing both domestic and diaspora [support](#). External backing would be vital, and a contingency plan to get key members of the government out of the country is crucial. The U.S. and its allies have strategic interests in preserving Taiwan's autonomy and would likely provide behind-the-scenes assistance to prolong PLA difficulties and prevent normalization of the [occupation](#). Covert support could include arms transfers, intelligence sharing, cyber warfare assistance, or financial aid. However, financing a protracted insurgency requires a mix of domestic and foreign resources. Taiwan's pre-invasion government may be able to secure funds abroad or divert them before collapse. Domestically, insurgents could rely on private donations, black market networks, and contributions from sympathetic business elites. Additionally, Taiwan's extensive diaspora community may play a crucial role in financing resistance efforts and advocating for independence on the global [stage](#). Such action could contribute to political pressure on the PRC. Yet to significantly impact the PRC, a high degree of consensus and coordination among nations willing to impose economic penalties would be required, and even then, the effects would take time to materialize.

Future Projections and Implications

As the possibility of invasion looms, future scenarios involving a prolonged insurgency must be rigorously assessed. As this article has already suggested, an invasion of Taiwan is very likely, and proactive planning by Taiwan now is [imperative](#). Unfortunately, Taiwan's government has shown more ambivalence toward asymmetric defense than experts would like. Taiwan's military has made some progress toward implementing asymmetric defense, but the Ministry of National Defense has resisted a full [transformation](#). Without fully committing to asymmetric warfare now, Taiwan's insurgency force will be unprepared and incapable of maintaining an insurgency. The long-term viability of an insurgency will determine whether the PLA can establish sustainable control or if Taiwan becomes the PRC's next geopolitical quagmire.

As for possible endgame scenarios post-invasion, there are only a few outcomes that could come to pass. These scenarios include PLA victory, prolonged insurgency, or political settlement. In the scenario of a PLA victory, the PLA would have successfully suppressed resistance through sustained military and political coercion, combined with economic integration and censorship. This scenario would likely require years of occupation, internment of dissenters, and a heavy counterinsurgency footprint. The cost would be enormous and might leave the PLA victorious in name but weakened in regional influence and global standing. A more probable medium-term outcome is a drawn-out insurgency that continues to drain PLA resources and legitimacy. In this scenario, Taiwan becomes akin to Afghanistan during the Soviet or U.S. [occupations](#). This would mean large areas that are ungovernable, vulnerable to sabotage, and a source of ongoing instability. The PLA may be overstretched, economic backlash from international sanctions could occur, and continued unrest could erode the PRC's control over time. The final scenario, although unlikely immediately after an invasion, would be a political settlement. This scenario could emerge under intense domestic or international pressure, especially if the conflict becomes unsustainable. This could take the form of semi-autonomy, a ceasefire, or power-sharing with a local transitional authority. However, this outcome depends on PRC's willingness to compromise, which currently appears low given Xi Jinping's emphasis on [national unification](#).

The future of a Chinese-occupied Taiwan remains uncertain, but a sustained insurgency is viable under the right conditions. The effectiveness of external support, combined with Taiwan's internal resilience and proactive planning, could transform the island into an enduring symbol of resistance. For PRC, the risk of a protracted, destabilizing insurgency raises questions about the long-term wisdom of attempting military reunification at all.

Conclusion

In considering the possibility of a successful PLA invasion of Taiwan, this article has examined a crucial yet often overlooked dimension of such a conflict: the post-invasion insurgency. While much discourse rightly focuses on how Taiwan might defend against an initial attack, equal attention must be given to the enduring struggle that could follow. By assessing the possible insurgent strategies, evidence suggests Taiwan could put up a resistance should the PLA successfully invade. However, more preparation in asymmetric warfare by Taiwan's government is necessary for them to stand a chance.

Ultimately, the likely outcome of such a conflict would be deeply uncertain. A swift PLA military victory could give way to a long-term insurgency that frustrates efforts to govern and destabilizes the region. The broader implications for regional and global security would be profound. Whether the outcome is PRC consolidation, a negotiated settlement, or a never-ending low-intensity conflict, the strategic choices made today will shape not only the fate of Taiwan but also the future security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

[Tyler Rodriguez](#) is a seasoned national security and international affairs professional, Tyler Rodriguez brings extensive experience in foreign military sales, security cooperation, international cybersecurity, and strategic defense partnerships across the DoD. He has advised senior leaders on global military education programs, coordinated U.S. cyber engagements with foreign partners, and developed international strategies aligned with DoD modernization priorities. Tyler's expertise spans policy development, program management, and cross-cultural defense cooperation.

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