

The Role of Foreign Fighters in a Taiwan Resistance Scenario

Description

“Taiwanese veterans who fought in Ukraine’s International Legion against Russia have returned with a stark warning: Taiwan is not ready for war with China.”

•

While diplomatic efforts and military deterrence strategies dominate headlines on Taiwan, a less explored area is the potential role of foreign fighters should an invasion occur. Drawing parallels from conflicts like the ongoing war in Ukraine, where thousands of international volunteers have joined the fight on both sides of the battlefield, this article explores what may happen in a Taiwan occupation scenario. Foreign fighters, motivated by ideology, adventure, money, solidarity, or other reasons, could play an important role in a protracted war. Maximizing the effectiveness of any [resistance](#) movement, Taiwan might consider inviting volunteers, facilitating their infiltration, integrating them into the resistance, and deploying them in operations designed to bleed the PLA. This scenario is grounded in Taiwan’s [porcupine strategy](#), which emphasizes asymmetric warfare to make an invasion prohibitively costly.

This article does not imply that the occupation of Taiwan is a foregone conclusion should Xi Jinping choose to invade. It is instead simply a matter of responsible national security planning and [whole-of-society preparation](#) to be ready for conceivable contingencies. The author anticipates an effective coalition response that will repel an illegal PLA invasion attempt. Should an occupation occur, however, the importance of having a plan in place is imperative. As the war in Ukraine has shown, the integration of foreign fighters should be considered.

Potential Scenario

Imagine the year 2028. The PRC has reached a predetermined threshold of military preparation. After months of blockade and international campaigning to gain support and mitigate opposition, the PLA launches a full-scale assault on Taiwan. Despite resistance from the Republic of China (ROC) Armed Forces and other assistance from allies and partners, the PLA’s numbers and advanced weaponry secure key beachheads. Taipei eventually falls, and the island is declared “reunified” under Beijing’s control. Occupation, however, does not equate to pacification. Taiwan’s rugged terrain, mountains covering two-thirds of the island, and urban sprawl provide ideal cover for [insurgents](#).

Inspired by Afghanistan's mujahideen or Vietnam's Viet Cong, a decentralized resistance emerges, comprising former soldiers, civilians, and hidden stockpiles of weapons.

Taiwan's pre-invasion preparations under the "porcupine strategy" lay the groundwork for what comes next. This doctrine focuses on a large number of small things: portable anti-ship missiles such as the indigenous [Hsiung Feng](#) (Brave Wind) series, drones, man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS), and coastal mines. These tools are designed to inflict maximum attrition on invaders. Post-occupation, the strategy evolves into full-spectrum guerrilla warfare, targeting PLA supply lines, command centers, and infrastructure. Foreign fighters, with diverse skills and external perspectives, could amplify this effort, turning a domestic uprising into an internationally backed insurgency against the PLA.

If Ukraine is an indicator of what comes next, the number of foreign volunteers wanting to assist Taiwan and fight the PLA is in the thousands. In 2022, approximately [20,000 foreigners](#) applied for Ukraine's International Legion. Motivations for foreigners to travel to Taiwan may vary: Western veterans seeking purpose, ethnic Taiwanese diaspora returning home, pro-democracy activists from Hong Kong, or even adventurers from other conflict zones. But how would Taiwan, under occupation, orchestrate the involvement of these foreigners?

Clandestine Calls to Arms

In the immediate aftermath of the occupation, Taiwan's government-in-exile would open the door to recruitment. Drawing on Ukraine's playbook, in which President Zelenskyy issued a [global call](#) for volunteers on February 27, 2022, Taiwan could broadcast worldwide appeals for assistance. Commercial social media apps, encrypted chat platforms, and dark web forums would host coded messages, urging volunteers to join the resistance.

Taiwan's invitation process would likely cover a diverse spectrum of people, places, and things. First, official channels: Taiwanese diplomatic missions and other representative offices located in allied countries could serve as recruitment hubs. Volunteers might apply through secure online portals modeled after Ukraine's [joinuarmy.org](#), providing personal details, military experience, and motivations. Background checks, conducted via allied intelligence, would identify would-be CCP infiltrators, a [lesson from Ukraine](#), where Russian spies attempted to sabotage the International Legion.

Second, informal networks: Taiwan's global diaspora, numbering around [two million](#), would act as conduits. Organizations like the [World Taiwanese Congress](#) could organize fundraisers and training camps in neutral countries. Social media influencers and exiled politicians might post viral videos

highlighting PLA atrocities, echoing how Ukrainian drone footage galvanized global support.

Third, allied governments could facilitate indirect recruitment. Supportive nations might provide visas and logistical support without overt involvement, as [NATO countries](#) did by funneling volunteers to Ukraine. Incentives might include citizenship promises for survivors, financial stipends from crowdfunding, or even symbolic honors.

Risks abound in this line of effort. Beijing would likely label volunteers as terrorists or international criminals, justifying crackdowns and intimidation. Host nations might face diplomatic and economic reprisals. Despite this, the psychological boost, demonstrating Taiwan is not alone, could [undermine](#) the PLA at the ground level and the CCP on the international stage.

Infiltration

Once invited, foreign fighters face the daunting task of infiltrating an occupied island under PLA lockdown. Taiwan's geography, 160 kilometers from China, surrounded by water, severely complicates infiltration. Ukraine has approximately 2600 kilometers of land borders with friendly nations, allowing foreign fighters to enter the battlespace quite easily. For Taiwan, geography presents a significant if not the most critical obstacle to foreign fighter infiltration. The situation, however, does offer opportunities for covert insertion.

Primary infiltration routes would mirror historical smuggling paths. Sea infiltration via small boats or submarines from the Philippines or Japan could be orchestrated by resistance cells using encrypted communications established prior to invasion. Volunteers might rendezvous in international waters with Taiwanese fishing fleets, which double as partisan vessels, reminiscent of how Ukrainian [partisans](#) operated across the [Black Sea](#). [Emerging technologies](#), such as autonomous drones, could ferry fighters ashore under the cover of night.

Air drop represents another option for foreign fighter infiltration. Allied special operations forces might use military free-fall or non-standard aviation methods to insert teams into mountainous interiors. Drawing from WWII's [Jedburgh](#) teams, where Allied commandos parachuted into occupied France, volunteers could land in pre-designated drop zones signaled by resistance cells.

Overland routes through China are riskier but feasible for Mandarin speakers posing as tourists or workers. While it may sound like the making of a Hollywood movie, all options should be considered. Forged documents may enable crossing the Strait by ferry or fishing vessels. Cyber tools, such as hacked PLA surveillance systems, might create blind spots in the blockade.

AI-enabled intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and PLAN patrols present challenges. To counter this, resistance elements would need to employ countermeasures like electronic jamming, decoys, and human intelligence from sympathetic locals. Prior training in escape and evasion would be crucial. In Ukraine, volunteers crossed borders legally before heading to the front lines. In Taiwan, geography demands greater stealth. Infiltration success rates would be significantly lower than in Ukraine. Upon arrival, fighters would link up with resistance cells using pre-established procedures. Safehouses in rural villages or urban centers would provide initial shelter, medical checks, orientation, and onward integration for those who pass muster.

Integration

Integration into the resistance movement requires careful orchestration to maximize effectiveness while minimizing friction and compromise. Taiwan's resistance, decentralized into cells, would absorb foreigners based on skills and trust levels. Language barriers, with most volunteers lacking Mandarin, necessitate interpreters. Crash courses in language are helpful but usually insufficient. A training program lasting weeks would cover guerrilla basics: improvised explosives, drone operations, and hit-and-run tactics, adapted from Taiwan's [All-Out Defense](#) Mobilization plan. Foreign fighters might have varying degrees of proficiency in unconventional warfare, but they would need to adapt their skills to Taiwan's unique language, terrain, culture, and operational environment.

Similar to Ukraine, foreigners might form dedicated battalions for cohesion or disperse into mixed units. Veterans from Iraq or Afghanistan could lead squads, teaching urban warfare, while support-oriented volunteers from Silicon Valley, for example, could assist with cyber operations.

Cultural integration is important and often overlooked. Resistance leaders would pair foreigners with local fighters to build bonds, sharing meals, drinks, and stories to foster unity. Psychological support addresses trauma, with chaplains or counselors available. The command structure remains Taiwanese-led to maintain sovereignty, but foreign input on strategy, such as Western drone tactics or [Space-Cyber-SOF](#) integration, enhances combat effectiveness. Logistically, arming fighters is a challenge and will rely on cached weapons or airdrops, with foreigners bringing their own gear if possible.

Foreigner Roles in the Resistance

Once integrated, foreign fighters engage in a range of operations to erode enemy control. Combat roles would include activities from ambushes on PLA convoys using anti-tank missiles to snipers and IED teams targeting dismounted patrols. Foreign drone operators could launch swarms against airfields, disrupting reinforcements.

Volunteers with linguistic skills and appropriate demographics infiltrate PLA areas to gather data on troop movements. Sabotage missions, blowing bridges or hacking power grids, aim to isolate garrisons. Cyber experts might launch DDoS attacks on Beijing's command networks from hidden servers.

Not everyone in the resistance is a frontline guerrilla fighter. Foreigners with media and strategic messaging skills would document atrocities via body cams, uploading to global media to sustain international awareness and support. Medics provide care in field hospitals, while logisticians manage covert supply chains.

There will be challenges. Ukraine faced [issues](#) with [unruly](#) volunteers and [extremists](#). Taiwan might impose strict codes of conduct and find ways to expel violators. In addition, resistance sometimes takes months, but more often years. The dangers are acute. Capture for any resistance member, Taiwanese or foreigner, likely means torture or execution under Beijing's anti-separatist laws. Ethical dilemmas will arise: Civilian casualties from operations involving foreigners could alienate locals.

Conclusion

The possibility of integrating foreign fighters into Taiwan's military is not entirely hypothetical. Taiwanese politicians, military leaders, and scholars have [already discussed](#) the introduction of [foreigners](#) into the [armed forces](#). While there would be a surge of volunteers to Taiwan after an invasion, it is advisable to develop plans for integrating them before the first PLA shot is fired. But recruiting foreigners into the conventional military and preparing them for the unconventional nature of resistance operations are not the same thing. Resistance operations involve a highly specialized skill set, as discussed briefly above.

As with any other national security undertaking, it is *always* preferable to plan, train, organize, and equip for resistance before invasion and occupation. Preparing for resistance during peacetime in Taiwan is admittedly a [politically sensitive](#) subject. Such things take resources away from what the population may deem more immediate needs today, instead of a fight that may or may not arrive tomorrow. Furthermore, resistance itself implies that some aspects of deterrence and defense may fail, concepts that may be alarming or uncomfortable to accept.

[Taiwanese veterans](#) who fought in Ukraine's International Legion against Russia have returned with a stark warning: Taiwan is [not ready](#) for war with China. While the challenges of building resistance capability and integrating foreign fighters are real, the greater risk lies in failing to prepare. Organizing an insurgency and incorporating international volunteers *after* a kinetic military conflict has been

initiated is exponentially more difficult than building capabilities during peacetime.

Ultimately, the success of any resistance depends on sustained global support, internal cohesion, and careful management to avoid nuclear escalation. A credible, prolonged resistance—one bolstered by capable fighters—may itself deter Beijing from attempting invasion. Deterrence remains the primary objective, but prudent preparation for the worst-case scenario is essential. Regardless of when foreign fighters are introduced, they can lend legitimacy and combat effectiveness to the fight.

Date Created
2026/01/29