

Hellscape Taiwan: Drones, Deterrence, and the Future of Asymmetric Defense

Description

This week's episode of the *Irregular Warfare Podcast* examines how Taiwan could deter or potentially defeat a Chinese invasion by transforming the Taiwan Strait into an unmanned hellscape. Anchored in the recent CNAS report *Hellscape for Taiwan: Rethinking Asymmetric Defense*, the conversation explores how drones, autonomous systems, and mobile defenses are reshaping warfare in the Indo-Pacific. Drawing from lessons in Ukraine, the guests argue that cheap, expendable drones offer Taiwan a way to strengthen its longstanding porcupine strategy by imposing massive costs on a PLA invasion force during the dangerous amphibious crossing of the Taiwan Strait.

The episode also explores how Taiwan's geography favors the defender if leveraged correctly. Narrow beaches, mountainous terrain, dense urban areas, and the roughly 100-mile Strait create opportunities for a layered defense built around mines, kamikaze drones, mobile air defenses, and uncrewed maritime systems. At the same time, the guests assess the political and organizational barriers Taiwan faces in implementing a truly asymmetric strategy, arguing that the island's security may depend less on high-end prestige platforms and more on building a resilient and scalable ecosystem of autonomous systems capable of making invasion prohibitively costly.

[Rear Admiral \(Ret.\) Mark Montgomery](#) is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), where he directs work on cyber, emerging technologies, and Indo-Pacific security. A former PACOM J3 and carrier strike group commander, RADM Montgomery has extensive experience working on Taiwan defense issues and regularly conducts engagements with Taiwanese military officials.

[Dr. Stacie Pettyjohn](#) is a senior fellow and director of the Defense Program at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). A leading expert on defense strategy, drones, and emerging technologies, she is the co-author of *Hellscape for Taiwan: Rethinking Asymmetric Defense*, which serves as the foundation for today's discussion.

[Ben Jebb](#) is the host for this episode. Please reach out to Ben with any questions about this episode or the Irregular Warfare Podcast.

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