Does Raising the Defense Budget Prevent Conflict or Provoke It?

Kolas Yotaka × RADM. Mark Montgomery



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Does Raising the Defense Budget Prevent Conflict or Provoke It?

By **Kolas Yotaka**

After nearly four years of war in Ukraine, in late November 2025 a sudden ceasefire proposal shocked the world: a U.S.-drafted "peace agreement" listing 28 conditions for a Ukraine–Russia ceasefire, each of which appeared to reflect Russia's point of view. In addition to requiring Ukraine to amend its constitution to pledge never to join NATO, it also demanded that Ukraine hold a presidential election within 100 days and replace President Zelensky. These were alarming enough, but what was truly shocking was that this U.S.-drafted peace agreement required Ukraine to cede the territories already occupied by Russia.

The United States had long been Ukraine's strongest ally. Since Ukraine's independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. had been a major force supporting its move toward Europe and its entry into the democratic camp, and it had long provided Ukraine with intelligence and military assistance to help withstand Russia's aggression. No one expected that this time the U.S. version of a ceasefire agreement would align itself with Russia's position, leaving Ukrainians—after four years of war—devastated, and prompting European leaders to voice their displeasure at Washington.

According to a Wall Street Journal report published on November 24, 2025, titled "How the U.S. Drafted a Russia-Friendly Peace Plan for Ukraine," one reason the United States ultimately aligned itself with Russia was its assessment that after four years of war Ukraine "was in the weaker position militarily" and no longer had real negotiating leverage. Therefore, if Ukraine hoped to persuade Russia to halt its attacks, "it would need to concede more than Moscow in a peace deal to have any hope of getting the Kremlin to stop the war."

Kolas Yotaka

Kolas Yotaka is a Taiwanese author and politician. She previously served as spokesperson for both the Executive Yuan and the Office of the President. A former legislator with the Democratic Progressive Party, she now leads policy initiatives focused on supply chains, defense, and energy security.



On November 26, 2025, Taiwan's Presidential Office held a press conference at which President Lai Ching-te personally announced an increase in the defense budget, pledging to raise defense spending to 5 percent of GDP by 2030. The 5 percent target is a public demand of the Trump administration, and represents Taiwan's commitment to meet that expectation to the fullest extent possible. China's Taiwan Affairs Office quickly issued a statement, warning that "the DPP authorities, for their own selfish interests, are yielding to every demand of external forces, and will only push Taiwan into disaster." Meanwhile, the announcement did not gain broad support at home. Opposition parties sharply criticized the move, arguing that it would provoke even greater tensions and turn the Taiwan Strait into a "powder keg," along with other predictable objections.

So, does increasing the defense budget to strengthen national security help prevent war, or does it invite it? I raised this question with Rear Admiral Mark Montgomery, a retired U.S. officer who has visited Taiwan many times to participate in war-game exercises. He is now the Senior Director and a Senior Fellow at the Center on Cyber and Technology Innovation (CCTI) at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a Washington-based think tank. Mark previously served as Director of Operations at U.S. Pacific Command and has commanded destroyers and frigates in the U.S. Seventh Fleet, as well as Destroyer Squadron 15 and Task Group 75.4. He told me plainly, without hesitation, that he believes increasing the defense budget is necessary.

The war in Ukraine has been going on for nearly four years—what has Taiwan learned from it? In Ukraine, President Zelensky is

exhausted and may well be forced into a ceasefire agreement that would be humiliating for both himself and his country. Yet even now, with what strength he has left, he continues to appeal to neighboring Europeans, and also to Americans:

"Russia kills our people on the front every day and strikes our cities and energy infrastructure daily. Therefore, while diplomatic efforts to end this war continue, it is important for our partners not to forget that Ukraine still needs sufficient defensive support, security assistance, and help to maintain resilience — every single day."

In the face of pressure from Beijing, the space for rational dialogue in the Taiwanese political arena has disappeared. Even now, the question of whether to increase the defense budget continues to produce polarized confrontation in the legislature, online, on social media, in the press, and on political talk shows. In this policy debate over the defense budget, the parties involved are engaged in ideological battles, with virtually no discussion of a strategy that is genuinely grounded in Taiwan's national interests. Before Beijing even takes action, we've already plunged into our own internal war, with political casualties everywhere. Against this backdrop, I wanted to invite a battle-tested military expert to look at Taiwan's situation, and to urge that we first call a truce among ourselves and start looking for a way forward. If readers think of this installment as an emergency kit, then reading it is like putting on a life jacket for a moment—steadying ourselves as we wait for help and search for a way through.

“America’s Ability to Defeat a Chinese Attack on Taiwan Is Eroding”

A Conversation Between Kolas Yotaka and Rear Admiral Mark Montgomery (Ret.)

By **Kolas Yotaka**

When I first heard Admiral Montgomery say, “America’s ability to defeat a Chinese attack on Taiwan is eroding,” the words felt like a wake-up call. In his testimony before the U.S. Congress this past May, Admiral Mark Montgomery argued that the United States should increase the number of personnel it stations in Taiwan. He stated that America’s ability to prevent a Chinese attack on Taiwan is weakening, because China has spent thirty years investing in advanced technologies and preparing its military; the gap between the two sides is no longer wide.

At a time when governments, political leaders, and think tanks in Europe and the United States are already conducting rigorous analyses of the Taiwan Strait, what about Taiwan itself? In the course of our conversation, the issues he raised pointed to a larger question for Taiwanese: **Do we value our own democracy, independence, and freedom of expression enough to make the necessary investments?**

Could War Break Out in the Taiwan Strait?

People in Taiwan have long thought of the United States as an unshakeable great power. But when a U.S. admiral himself says that “America’s ability to defeat a Chinese attack on Taiwan is eroding,” it is a message we cannot afford to ignore. Montgomery stated clearly that Taiwan’s defense budget must be raised to 5 percent by 2028. I couldn’t help asking him whether Taiwan is truly facing an immediate threat. Montgomery replied that while Beijing is unlike-

ly to send fighter jets to bomb Taiwan right now, an economic war waged through cyber interference has already begun.

"One, there's the most dangerous scenario. That's the one—the cross-strait invasion people worry about: amphibious ships and helicopters, or maybe a significant blockade that stops everything. I think both of those are some way off because of investments the United States and Taiwan have made over the last few years. I don't think that's likely.

But there is a most likely scenario. That's a cyber-enabled economic warfare campaign, where China uses diplomatic, economic, and administrative—or lawfare—techniques, amplified by cyber activity and influence operations, to try to pressure the Taiwan public and break societal resilience.

That most likely campaign is going on right now. And the question is, will the Chinese Communist Party increase the intensity of that campaign in the near future?"

Montgomery recalled that since retiring in 2017, he has visited Taiwan seven or eight times, taking part in both government-run and independent war-game exercises. In those exercises, did Taiwan reveal any fatal weaknesses? Montgomery believes that the imbalance in national power means Taiwan must proceed with great caution.

"I think they're working hard to prepare Taiwan to be ready for that most dangerous scenario, the cross-strait invasion. But let's be clear: China's economy is 22 or 23 times bigger than Taiwan's. This isn't Russia versus Ukraine — this is five times Russia versus Ukraine. So Taiwan will need key allies and partners to support them."



Many countries are wary of China and hesitate to engage in military interactions with Taiwan — a situation Montgomery believes works against Taiwan's interests. Yet Taiwan does need to stockpile the weapons and equipment it would require both before and after a conflict breaks out.

"Unfortunately, Taiwan has to prepare for the crisis before a war, which means you have to have air assets like F-16s and E-2Cs—maybe eventually E-2Ds, which are those kinds of surveillance aircraft. And F-16s, as you know, the fighter aircraft. And you need the most recent ones, the F-16 Vipers, you know, that are still outstanding. You need that. You need some naval forces, again, against the Chinese patrols before the war.

But once a war starts, it's going to be critical that Taiwan has enough of that counter-intervention gear—drones, mines, anti-armor weapons, shoulder-launched anti-air weapons, all the things that are necessary for a counter-intervention fight. So I think Taiwan has the challenge of having to buy both to prepare for the fight before the fight and then the actual counter-intervention fight. And that means they've got to buy a lot of equipment or manufacture a lot of equipment inside Taiwan."

When the discussion turns to weaponry, Montgomery can go into great detail, but all of this requires funding. Yet inside Taiwan, an almost surreal debate has emerged: does increasing the defense budget prevent war, or provoke it? For Montgomery, demonstrating credible military strength and being able to deter an aggressor is something Taiwan must be fully prepared to do.

"What you really have to do is you have to have enough that China goes, 'This is not a fight we'll win.' Deter them from that cross-strait invasion. You have to have enough unmanned surface vessels. You have to have enough air drones. You have to have enough cruise missiles. You have to have enough, as I said, anti-armor weapons. You have to convince—you really have to deter—China.

And to do that, you need to get these weapons systems and you need to drive down the cost. Taiwan can build a lot of these things themselves at this lower end. They probably shouldn't be building an F-16. It's too expensive to set up the line and everything. But they should be building a lot of these counter-intervention weapons."

3%? 5%? 10%? A War Over the Numbers?

Politicians can debate endlessly over what percentage of GDP should go to the defense budget, and these numbers are no trivial matter. But political leaders in both the United States and Taiwan make their own calculations when it comes to these figures. The Taiwanese government has already announced that the defense budget will reach 3 percent of GDP in 2026, and has expressed willingness to raise it to 5 percent by 2030, a move Montgomery welcomes.

"I saw they have got it up to 3.2 or 3.3 percent next year. That's very good. Eventually, they need to be a real 5 percent, I think. And that's the limit. No more. Five percent is, I think, the maximum for a democracy. It's too hard for a democracy to spend more than that. But that's a good number.

And it will mean over time that Taiwan has a stronger counter-intervention capability, better reserves, reserve warfighter capability, and be in a better position to deter China with American support."

Within Taiwan, different political parties keep circling around these percentages, turning them into tools of partisan fights. In the United States as well, there are dif-

fering views on what costs Taiwan should be prepared to bear. Curious about this, I asked Montgomery about a comment made by Pentagon policy chief, Elbridge A. Colby, who has said that even 5 percent is not enough and that Taiwan should raise its defense spending to 10 percent. How should we interpret that number?

"That number means exactly nothing. It is a number said by someone who doesn't understand the numbers. Here's why — two reasons.

One, democracies don't... even Israel, one of the most beleaguered democracies in the last decade — if I look at the 2010s, threats from Iran, from Iraq, from Syria, from Yemen, from Gaza, from the West Bank, from Egypt, threats from everywhere — they were spending about 5.8 percent on average over a decade. That's the maximum."

Montgomery considers 10 percent a fantasy. He went on to point out a need to face the facts: it is unrealistic for the United States to keep pressing other countries to raise their defense spending in order to buy American weapons, because the U.S. defense industry also has limited production capacity. The United States provides roughly five billion dollars a year in Foreign Military Financing (FMF), yet its production lines are already stretched, and deliveries are often delayed. In Taiwan, this has drawn fierce criticism from opposition political parties, who regularly accuse the government of buying weapons from the United States that cannot be delivered on schedule, deepening the political controversy. The reality of America's constrained production capacity has become a tool for the opposition to attack the administration's strategy of "preparing for war to avoid war."

"Our delivery on average is about five billion a year. Who else is selling weapons to Taiwan? Only the United States. So if they had a 10%, the amount of FMS sales, foreign military sales, the United States would have to provide would be 20 or 25 billion dollars a year, every year.

No one thinks our foreign military sales can do that. It would be like burning money in a barrel is the only way to get to 10%. And that's not... you know... this is, and again, 10 percent is a number made up by a person who doesn't understand numbers. So I dismiss it."

Taiwan is facing a United States in flux, an Indo-Pacific in flux, and a constantly shifting strategic landscape. What, then, would Montgomery advise Taiwan to do?

"I would just be polite and patient, get to 5 percent by the end of the Trump administration, and then stay there."

If Taiwan Is Attacked, Japan Is Next

Montgomery's son is also serving in the military and is currently stationed in Japan. When he talks about Japan, he speaks with particular feeling. Ishigaki

Island is only 270 kilometers from Taiwan — closer than the distance from Taipei to Kaohsiung. For this naval military expert, the logic is simple: if Taiwan is in danger, then Japan is in danger as well.

"I think Japan is more recognizing that a Chinese threat to Taiwan is an existential threat to Japan. And Takaichi, the new prime minister of Japan, said that out loud three or four days ago, and the Chinese MOFA and press went crazy. I mean, someone said we should cut her neck off, right? She just said the truth."

Montgomery believes that from Shinzo Abe to Sanae Takaichi, they have understood clearly what Japan's real existential threat is.

"The prime minister said the truth. The truth is that if something were to happen to Taiwan and it were to lose — you know, it would be coercively reunified into the mainland — it would be an existential threat to Japan. Because who's next? Japan, with their East China Sea issues; the Philippines, with their South China Sea issues.

Chairman Xi has many grudges. Taiwan is one, Japan is another, the Philippines are a third. You know, Tibet and Macau and Hong Kong are already resolved in his view. Japan knows what's coming. They know they need to work with Taiwan.

My son is stationed on a ship in Japan. Japan hosts our Navy — a Navy that is necessary."

The United States has both Navy and Air Force units stationed in Japan.

"We have a big Air Force laydown in Japan to protect Japan, to protect Taiwan. So from my perspective, Japan is all in. I know they don't say it that frequently, although the prime minister came close the other day."

On November 5, 2025, Xi Jinping secretly traveled to a military port in Sanya, Hainan, to preside over the launch ceremony of the PLA's third aircraft carrier, the Fujian. The carrier was officially commissioned into service. The Chinese government kept all information tightly sealed; only two days after the ceremony did state media release the news. The Fujian is China's first aircraft carrier equipped with electromagnetic catapults. According to reports, its deck includes four arresting cables, three catapult launch positions, and new carrier-based aircraft such as the J-35, J-15T, and KJ-600. This carrier poses a threat to the Western Pacific. I asked Montgomery whether Taiwan should be concerned.

"So there's two answers to that. First, the Fujian is about power projection over distant places for China. But you're right, it could also have a role in the Taiwan Strait. Now, if this is a Taiwan Strait scenario where the United States is not a player, it could be a problem for Taiwan. But if the U.S. is involved, those carriers won't last days. U.S. submarines will sink all those carriers. I'm not worried about that."

Will the United States Abandon Taiwan?

After nearly four years of grinding combat in the Russia-Ukraine war, Ukraine has found itself depleted of ammunition and support. The United States drafted a "peace agreement" calling on both sides to cease fire, which in practice meant asking Ukraine to concede. Many in Taiwan now worry that as Washington and Beijing negotiate over tariffs, Taiwan could become a bargaining chip in their economic and political contest.

"I don't think so. Look, I think we need Taiwan. The United States needs it. We don't like to say it out loud, but because of TSMC, because of UMC, because of the microelectronics, we're trying to figure out how to get off of Chinese microelectronics. Well, where are we going to go? Taiwan.

You know, we just—I don't think that's realistic. Do I think there are, on occasion, do we make deals with China that aren't in Taiwan's best interest? Probably. But I don't think the over... I think the president avoided talking about Taiwan with Xi last time. And I don't think he's going to quote 'trade Taiwan for anything.'"

Montgomery's read of the American president was frank and matter-of-fact.

"The president's an opportunist and he sees the opportunity in Taiwan."

As the storm of Trump 2.0 sweeps across the world, Taiwan—long reliant on the United States—has been pulled into its path. Since Trump returned to office, Taiwan has been navigating in a fog. Where the United States once resembled a solid, steady aircraft carrier that could always serve as a supply point, the storm has now obscured visibility. In these conditions, a fighter navigating through heavy weather cannot locate the carrier, and may even wonder whether that carrier could mistake its own aircraft for the enemy. In fact, Taiwan now faces higher tariffs than Japan or South Korea, and Trump has publicly accused Taiwan of "stealing America's chips."

"President Trump sometimes is a little confused. He thinks that TSMC was stolen. We all know TSMC was not stolen from the United States. No, there's a book called Chip War. If you're confused, read a book called Chip War. All right. We lost it. We lost it because of poor decision making, and Morris Chang found a more appealing environment in Taiwan and he brilliantly built a fantastic company that drives a lot of the world's economic growth. So we cannot replace Taiwan in the United States."

How should Taiwan work with a Trump 2.0 administration amid such rapidly shifting circumstances?

"You have to be patient," Montgomery said.

The remark carried a deeper implication.

An Urgent Crisis: Beijing Is Tightening Its Blockade of Taiwan

"Ninety-five percent of [Taiwan's] energy is imported. You know, it's 50 percent LNG, some coal, a little bit of oil, and then there are some renewables on the island. But the reality is 50 percent LNG. The LNG comes from just a handful of countries—Qatar, Australia, the United States. It needs to come through very tricky navigation choke points, and much of it has to come along ... it's delivered on the west coast of Taiwan.

So China can use a mix of diplomatic—lean on Qatar—and economic tools. They can do embargoes or quarantines to block some LNG ships."

In the eyes of a military expert, Taiwan's energy resilience is worryingly weak.

"Taiwan gets about 350 a year, so about one ship a day. It's not exactly one ship a day, but about one ship a day. And they have weeks of stowage, not months or years of stowage. So if China can block 15 or 20 ships through all these different mechanisms—maybe even just declare a missile closure area near one of the LNG terminals—if they can somehow block 15 or 20 ships, now you've got a problem on the island."

Once Taiwan is hit by a PRC energy blockade, its economy will suffer, society will be shaken, and its political system will come under attack.

"You may get to the point where there's just no LNG and 50 percent of the grid has to come offline. And then this leads to another complication, which is that Taiwan has one of the most vulnerable grids in the world among developed countries, because such a high percentage is used every day—versus, say, the United States. So when you're relying on that 50 percent, you're really going to have to start turning some things off. Do you turn off homes and hospitals and schools and the Ministry of Defense, or do you turn off manufacturing like UMC or TSMC or the many companies that support them?"

Just hearing this makes clear that an energy blockade would be far more damaging than bombs. A loss of power would throw society into disorder and undermine public confidence in the government—precisely the scenario Beijing would like to see.

I asked him, *'Do you believe that Beijing is actively considering or preparing for this—I mean, an energy blockade?'*

"Absolutely. Why wouldn't they?"

In fact, various forms of blockade are already underway. During past PLA exercises around Taiwan, LNG tankers were unable to dock, and Beijing has severed undersea cables serving the Kinmen and Matsu islands, disrupting communications. Attacks on infrastructure of this sort are no longer news.

"All they have to do is slowly increase the pressure, do a little bit of everything. Just enough that it hurts Taiwan."

Another source of concern for Montgomery is that the United States and Japan do not seem to grasp the urgency of the crisis or provide the support Taiwan needs. If the waters around Taiwan were to be blockaded, the island would face internal disruption, and commercial shipping, LNG carriers, and oil tankers transiting the region from all over the world would be impeded—harming the interests of countries across the Indo-Pacific. Montgomery has very concrete recommendations.

"Like U.S. convoys, U.S. Navy ships that convoy in the LNG. China will have to back off if the U.S. Navy says, 'We're going to escort these ships to Kaohsiung.' I think China would be like, that's some escalation we don't want to deal with. Set up maritime information sharing centers, set up maritime regional control centers, transit lanes for the LNG ships. In other words, set up a process that says, you're not going to get away with this, China."

Montgomery believes the countries around Taiwan should take a more active role.

"In a crisis, the United States needs to show up and set up an escort scheme and say, we are going to convoy these ships. If necessary, we will reflag these ships, U.S. ships, to demonstrate our seriousness in bringing them in. We need to talk to Japan and say, let us bring some of your... Japan has much more stowage of LNG than Taiwan, so they could flow some to Taiwan. And they're less dependent on it because they have a significant nuclear power program in Japan."

He repeatedly emphasized the need to pay close attention to PRC cyberattacks.

"In cyber, I would flow U.S. cyber specialists, you know, from our U.S. Cyber Command to support Taiwan in defending their critical infrastructure networks. We did this with Ukraine just prior to the war, from December of 2021 through February of 2020."

Is Nuclear Power Essential in Wartime?

For decades, Taiwan's pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear camps have stood at opposite ends of the spectrum, with no room for compromise. In anti-nuclear arguments, one often hears that nuclear power plants would become prime targets in wartime, and that the risk of catastrophic contamination demands their rejection. The Democratic Progressive Party has now governed for ten years, and in May 2025 it shut down the last operating reactor, completing the transition to its "nuclear-free homeland" policy.

But in August 2025, a referendum on extending the life of the Third Nuclear Power Plant produced a surprising shift. Beyond the clear need for massive electricity to support semiconductor and AI develop-

ment, the past year has seen Beijing's military ambitions grow increasingly bold, and discussions about a potential blockade of Taiwan have become far more frequent.

Montgomery, who in his naval career served as reactor officer on the USS Nimitz, finds little merit in the claim that "in war, nuclear power plants would be the first targets bombed."

"I'm a strong believer in nuclear power. When I thought about my ship getting hit with a missile, my nuclear project, I didn't worry about contamination or radiation. I worried about getting killed by a missile... I think that nuclear power plants are inherently safe. And when they lose power, lose weapons, they can be safe."

Montgomery urged us to look at the facts.

"All the fighting going on in Ukraine, all the fighting going on in Ukraine has not led to a reactor casualty. It's led to energy power grid casualties. And I don't... and the final thing I'll say is China, again, I think China doesn't want a Taiwan that's very badly damaged, whether by missiles, by tanks, by aircraft, or by a contamination. That's not the Taiwan China wants."

Energy policy shapes a nation's development, and Taiwan cannot afford to treat it lightly. Montgomery believes that strikes on a nuclear power plant are something you can anticipate and prepare for, but not something that should determine energy policy. He strongly argues that Taiwan must strengthen the resilience of its grid. If he could turn the clock back thirty years, he said, he would have urged Taiwan's leaders to plan for a far more robust electrical system—one capable of supporting future economic growth and meeting potential military needs.

"What's happened is the amount of power that the grid normally operates at is much closer to 100 percent in Taiwan. It's, I think, in the high—you know—mid 70s, than say it is in the United States, where it's in the 60s, low 60s.

In other words, that means you don't have room for systems to be in maintenance or systems to be subject to a cyberattack and come off the grid, or to run out of LNG or run out of coal. You know what I mean? So there's just less room for error in a grid that's running at maximum capacity."

Running the grid so close to its limits may reflect strong economic growth, but it puts Taiwan in a poor position when confronting PRC threats and highlights the fragility of the system.

"And you have a bad enemy, you know, an enemy willing to use cyber against your grid. There's no doubt China has penetrated the U.S. grid, the Japanese grid, and the Taiwan grid, and probably has put some malware or hooks so they can get back in in a crisis and create a disruption in the cyber grid."

So What Should Taiwan Do?

"We have to exercise ahead of time. That means—and look, there's direction from our Congress to the Department of Defense and INDOPACOM—do more exercises with the Taiwan Navy, Air Force, Army. So with Navy to Navy, do exercises, practice escorting logistics ships or LNG ships into Kaohsiung.

Increasing defense spending and showing real deterrence cannot be treated as political rhetoric. They are decisions that play out on an actual battlefield.

"The first step is working together. And that will send a strong deterrent signal to China that the United States and Taiwan mean business."

Cooperation is essential, but is enough progress actually being made?

"Not yet, not to the degree necessary, not at all. Not like we have with our European allies, or with Japan, or with the Philippines, or with Korea, because we won't be there. Taiwan wants that relationship. The United States is uncooperative in that. We need to change that."

Ukraine’ s “Peace Plan” Puts Taiwan in an Impossible Position”

By **Kolas Yotaka**

China has continued to aid Russia’s war in Ukraine through oil purchases, ammunition production, and other forms of support. After nearly four years of brutal fighting, many in Taiwan have projected their own hopes and fears onto Ukraine—casting Russia as China, and Ukraine as Taiwan.

Over these four years, Taiwanese people have found countless ways to show solidarity. Some traveled to Ukraine to join the fight. Others updated their social-media profiles with symbols of solidarity. Taiwanese doctors volunteered in Ukrainian hospitals. One orchid grower, moved by Ukraine’s resistance, used a nano-spray technique to dye orchids in the colors of Ukraine’s flag. For a time, these yellow-and-blue “Ukraine orchids” seemed to be everywhere.

But according to media reports, a ceasefire “peace plan” drafted by the United States—leaked in late November—suggested that Ukraine no longer had the strength to resist Russia and therefore lacked bargaining power. The proposal called on Ukraine to make concessions, even to give up territory, and stated that Washington would not discuss security guarantees before an agreement was reached.

For Taiwan, watching this unfold has been deeply unsettling.

Taiwan Is Ukraine. And Taiwan Is Not Ukraine.

Taiwan is Ukraine. Like Ukraine, Taiwan’s defense relies disproportionately on American support. Ukraine depends on the United States for satellite intelligence and Patriot air-defense systems. It relies on U.S. protection of its energy infrastructure through the winter. Washington also provides major financial and humanitarian assistance that keeps Ukraine’s government functioning and its economy stable. Taiwan, similarly, relies on the United States for training, joint defense support, weapons procurement, and intelligence sharing.

At the same time, Taiwan is not Ukraine. Ukraine is a land power with neighbors in Europe that can support it. Even if American resolve wavers, Europe has begun increasing its weapons-production capacity. When President Volodymyr Zelensky visited the White House in late August 2025, seven European leaders accompanied him in a show of solidarity. And when the 28-point U.S. peace plan became public, European leaders called Washington to voice their strong objections. Europe has been slow, hesitant, and at times insufficient in supplying weapons, but at least its governments openly oppose Russia's invasion and have maintained a consistent position.

Taiwan, by contrast, is an island. Most countries in the world will not even call it a "country," fearing the consequences for their economic and diplomatic ties with Beijing. Few are willing to risk military cooperation with Taiwan. If Beijing declares the Taiwan Strait to be its internal waters and asserts that "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China," and if the United States were to side with China and sacrifice Taiwan, Taiwan would be left even more isolated—pushed into a dead-end.

No nation will readily send troops to fight for another. Increasingly, intelligence and reporting suggest that China's military may soon surpass America's not only in ground and air capabilities but also in cyber warfare. As the war has dragged on, Ukraine has grown increasingly strained and isolated, and has gradually been forced to accept that, in the end, it can rely only on itself. Taiwan must come to the same realization and strengthen its own defenses.

On November 26, Taiwan's president Lai Ching-te announced that Taiwan would raise defense spending to 5 percent of GDP by 2030, signaling Taiwan's willingness to share risks and shoulder part of America's defense burden in the Trump administration's new environment. But Beijing quickly escalated its pressure campaign, launching cognitive-warfare attacks within Taiwan. Pro-China parties and media fiercely opposed the defense-budget increase, arguing that it would turn the Taiwan Strait into a powder keg. Claiming to speak for "the interests of the people," pro-China groups argue that to avoid war, Taiwan must face reality and compromise with Beijing.

This well-worn playbook leans on public fears of war, invoking 'the people' to pressure the ruling party into choosing between 'winning the 2026 and 2028 elections' and 'trusting the United States,' all with the aim of pushing Taiwanese citizens away from the idea of a well-armed Taiwan.

So what should Taiwan fear more—China's threats, or America's betrayal?

Taiwan is willing to give everything in exchange for peace. It should not be forced to choose between fear and disappointment.