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Introduction

The 2025 year ended with the two-days military drill of the PLA around Taiwan, baptized "*Justice Mission* 2025", as well as with the traditional New Year's Eve message from Xi Jinping, stating that "the reunification […] was unstoppable". It showed to what extent the *status quo* within the Strait is further eroded by Chinese military coercion, despite the unpredictability of the Trump administration reaction that could have deterred China to adopt such an aggressive posture before the organization of the presidential meeting between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, which is supposed to take place in the first semester of 2026. In that respect, **2025 was a continuation of the 2024[1] year which showed an acceleration of the strangulation strategy of China towards Taiwan**. The latter saw the organization of no less than three important military manoeuvres, to be added to hybrid coercion – economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, disinformation, cyberattacks[2], lawfare[3], e.g. – and grey zone activities – damage on submarine cables, intrusion in restricted waters around peripheric islands, e.g. Besides, 2025 saw an increasing polarization between the government's political party and the opposition and showed again to what extent the cohabitation established since the 2024 presidential and legislative elections keeps being detrimental to Taiwanese democracy's resilience instead of reinforcing it.

A further erosion of the *status quo* within the Strait, with a significant threshold crossed in December 2025

The 2025 year has been characterized by an important but slightly decreased[4] number of Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) joint manoeuvres around Taiwan. First, these

[1] See Maëlle Lefèvre, "The resilience of the Taiwanese democracy challenged from the outside and the inside: A look back at William Lai term's beginning during the 2024 year", *Asia Centre*, January 6, 2025. https://asiacentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ML_twnresilience.pdf

[2] In the beginning of January, a report published by Taiwanese National Security Bureau noted a 6% increase in average daily intrusion attempts against critical infrastructures compared to 2024 (an average of 2.63 million intrusion attempts per day). Energy infrastructures have been particularly affected, as well as hospitals.

[3] For instance, at the end of January 2024, China unilaterally changed the flight path (6 nautical miles to the East) of the M503 that can be seen as a further effort to "normalize" China's air presence over the disputed waters, followed by the unilateral activation, on April 18, of air routes W122 and W123 for commercial purposes, further encroaching on the flight space around the island, and, in this case, the Taiwanese islands of Kinmen and Mazu, near which the recently activated routes pass. On July 2025, China announced the activation of the air route W121, illustrating once again Chinese efforts to deny Taiwan's Flight Information Region (FIR) and to increase the pressure on Taiwanese air defense.

[4] The 2024 year showed the organization of three significant military maneuvers: 1) the *Joint Sword* 2024-A drill organized on May 2024; 2) the *Joint Sword* 2024-B drill organized on October 2024; 3) the military large-scale drill with 60 first rank

drills serve operational training purposes for the PLA which is supposed to be able to take Taiwan by force by 2027 if it has no other choice to do so. Second, they help Beijing to normalize in the eyes of the international community and the Taiwanese population a military response to political statements or gestures which did not provoke a military reaction of this magnitude in the past. It contributes redefining permanently the *status quo* to China's benefit and imposing a new normality in the Strait. Within a cognitive warfare framework, it aims to make the Taiwanese leadership as well as its foreign supports increasingly responsible for Cross-Strait tensions. This psychological pressure, if successful, could 1) dissuade the Taiwanese government and its partners to cross a red line gradually redefined by Beijing, decreasing their freedom of action; 2) have impacts on the 2026 local and 2028 presidential and legislative elections' results in Taiwan and bring about the victory of the KMT. Being the opposition party with more favourable views towards China, its victory could be beneficial to the Chinese so-called "peaceful reunification" plan, an option that is still preferable for Beijing given the risk that a military failure would pose to the legitimacy of the CCP.

On the 1st and 2nd of April 2025, the PLA launched a two-days military drill, dubbed "*Strait Thunder* 2025-A".

1. On April 1, 2025, without prior notice, the PLA's Eastern Theatre Command launched a joint exercise involving the army, navy, air force, and rocket force, **simulating the implementation of a partial blockade of Taiwan and strikes on Taiwanese ports and energy infrastructures**. In terms of air units, 71 aircrafts were detected near Taiwan and 37 crossed the median line of the Strait. As for naval units, 13 Chinese navy ships and 4 Chinese Coast Guard[5] (CCG) vessels were detected around Taiwan, two of them being around the Dongyin island[6]. The aircraft carrier Shandong was deployed southeast of Taiwan in the Philippine Sea, but no "denial of access" objective was publicly announced.
2. The exercise continued April 2, renamed *Strait Thunder* 2025-A, with the following officially announced objectives: identification and verification, warning and exclusion, interception and detention in order to train troops' capabilities in restricted and controlled areas, joint blockade and control, and precision firing at key targets. The press also announced a long-range artillery firing exercise in the East China Sea, with the primary objective of simulating precision strikes on port and energy targets. During the second day of the drill, Taiwanese armed forces have detected 23 Chinese navy ships, 10 CCG vessels (7 around Taiwan, 2 closed to Dongyin and another one closed to Kinmen).

navy units deployed around Taiwan but also beyond the First Island Chain, organized from the 9th to the 11th of December, and on which the PLA did not communicate.

[5] As a reminder, the integration of Chinese coast guards (CCGs) into PLA drills appeared with the *Joint Sword* 2024-A exercise. The associated use of CCGs shows that with other law enforcement actors, they are likely to play an increasing role in military and quasi-military operations against Taiwan, alongside the PLA. Enhanced PLA and CCGs operations could strengthen China's ability to quarantine or blockade the main island of Taiwan or any of Taiwan's outlying islands. The use of the CCGs also enables the division of tasks in a larger-scale exercise. Besides, it also supports the PRC in its attempts to internalize the waters of Taiwan Strait, through a revisionist reading of the international law.

[6] As a reminder, the integration of peripheric islands (Kinmen, Mazu, Wuqiu, Dongyin et Penghu), was also an unprecedented pattern which occurred for the first time with the *Joint Sword* 2024-A exercise.

3. In addition, the communication accompanying the exercise, which was more aggressive this time, specifically targeted Taiwanese President William Lai, who was described as a "parasite" and a "vicious instigator of war."
4. A video released by the PLA showing missile strikes on liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals highlighted the growing military threat to Taiwan's critical energy infrastructures. The video posted on the PLA's official social media channels showed rocket artillery systems firing 16 missiles at a mock complex resembling the LNG storage facility in Kaohsiung's Yongan District.

These manoeuvres took place in the following context: four days after the ceremony (in the United States, attended by Taiwan's Deputy Minister of National Defence) marking the delivery of the first of 66 refurbished F-16 fighter jets to be delivered to the Taiwanese Air Force by the end of 2026; 19 days after the Taiwanese President described China as a "hostile external force" and announced 17 measures aimed at countering Chinese infiltration into Taiwanese society; and just as US Deputy Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth completed his tour of the Pacific (Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, Japan) with a very offensive speech towards China.

On the 29th and the 30th of December 2025, the PLA launched a two-days military drill, dubbed "Justice Mission 2025".

In Chinese information operations and official communications, including PLA's statements, this exercise was presented as a warning to "separatist forces" promoting Taiwanese "independence," but also to "external interference," and as a "legitimate and necessary action to safeguard China's sovereignty and national unity." It should be noted that the name "Justice Mission" is used to present China's action as just and lawful according to Chinese State media. With regard to "external interference," different communications[7] were made to frame this exercise as being partly a response to the Trump administration's announcement, on December 18, of the largest arms' sale ever made by the United States to Taiwan – still to be approved by Congress – amounting to $11 billion. The exercise also took place against a backdrop of diplomatic tensions[8] between Japan and China, following Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's statement on November 7 that, in the event of a military blockade of Taiwan by China, an attack by Chinese military vessels on US ships sent to support the island would be perceived as an "existential threat" to Japan. President William Lai also announced in an interview with the *Washington Post* in late November 2025 a special additional defence budget of $40 billion for 2026 to 2033, prompting a strong reaction from Beijing. However, these various elements serve as pretexts for launching an operation that was in fact prepared well in advance.

On a tactical level, the main operational objectives announced by the PLA were: 1) the conduct of air and sea combat readiness patrols; 2) the establishment of an air and sea blockade of key "ports" and "areas", being in the continuity of the blockade scenario encompassed in *Strait*

[7] For instance, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian described the drills as "severe punishment" for forces seeking Taiwan independence and criticized Washington for "arming Taiwan".
[8] Read Jean-Yves Colin, « Démarrage tumultueux des relations de Mme Takaichi avec la Chine : un mois de tension croissante », *Asia Centre*, Décembre 8, 2025. https://asiacentre.eu/fr/2025/12/08/demarrage-tumultueux-des-relations-de-mme-takaichi-avec-la-chine-un-mois-de-tension-croissante-jean-yves-colin/

Thunder 2025-A and targeting energy infrastructures; 3) the acquisition of military superiority in the approaches to Taiwan; 4) a "three-dimensional deterrence" beyond the first island chain, the latter objective being mentioned explicitly by Beijing for the first time in comparison with the previous exercises. Domestically, this drill was also a way to show that the purges have not affected the PLA's operational capabilities, as well as an opportunity test for the new Commander of the Eastern Theatre Command in charge of Taiwan, General Yang Zhibin, who was promoted on December 22.

According to public reports and press conferences from the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defence (MND)[9], here below are the main features of the two-days drill and a comparison that can be made with *Strait Thunder* 2025-A as well as the previous Chinese joint forces manoeuvres around Taiwan:

1. Eight drill zones have been settled, the eight-one extending partly into the Japanese EEZ. **It must be noticed that these exercise zones are much larger than in the previous manoeuvres, and most of them extend beyond the 24 nautical miles limit for Taiwan's contiguous waters, and even in Taiwan's territorial waters** (12 nautical miles). Besides, they were theoretically capable of cutting off maritime links between the main island and Kinmen and Matsu. The zones were closed to the main strategic ports of Taiwan (Keelung in the North, Kaohsiung and Tainan in the South, Hualien in the East) in order to simulate their blockade.
2. On December 29, Taiwanese forces detected 89 Chinese aircrafts. 130 sorties by aircrafts of all type (fighters, bombers, aerial surveillance aircraft, and drones) were recorded, constituting the second highest level of air activity around Taiwan in a single day, after the *Joint Sword* 2024-B exercise in October 2024, with 153 sorties recorded. In terms of naval deployments, in comparison to *Strait Thunder* 2025-A and the manoeuvres of the previous years, no aircraft carrier was involved. However, Taiwanese forces detected 14 PLA Navy ships, 11 of which entered the 24-nautical-mile contiguous zone (described as 鄰接區 in the MND publication), and 14 CCGs vessels, 8 of which crossed the 24-nautical-mile line, as well as 4 amphibious assault ships in the Pacific. **This crossing of Taiwan's contiguous waters was unprecedented**.
3. On December 30, the exercise entered a live-fire phase, with 27 long-range artillery rockets fired in two waves from Fujian province: 17 shots toward the reserved maritime zone north of Taiwan and 10 shots toward an area west of Tainan, near Penghu, both without flying over Taiwanese territory. Of these 27 shots, **the 10 rockets fired towards west of Tainan reportedly fell into Taiwanese contiguous waters[10].** The deputy chief of the general staff for intelligence, Lieutenant General Hsieh Jih-sheng, declared that compared to the 1996 missiles' crisis[11], it was the

[9] https://mna.mnd.gov.tw/news/detail/?UserKey=cb32e627-ce3d-4823-aa16-d490cd4e7b39
[10] Joseph Yeh, "PLA rockets land inside Taiwan's 24 nautical mile contiguous zone: MND", *Focus Taiwan*, December 12, 2025, https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202512300025
[11] The crisis began in May 1995, when resolutions passed by the State Department to allow Lee Teng-hui, President of the Republic of China (Taiwan's official name), to visit the United States were adopted by the House and Senate. This visit enabled him to give a speech at Cornell University on the democratization of China. In mid-1995, the PLA launched a first

closest distance to the Taiwanese coast ever observed. A video released on December 30 by the Eastern Theatre Command of the PLA suggested that these long-range artillery firings simulated the engagement of warships converging on Taiwan from the southwest and northeast. In addition to the live-fire phase, 77 aircrafts were detected, as well as 17 Chinese navy ships and 15 CCGs vessels. 11 naval ships and 8 CCGs vessels entered once again the contiguous zone of 24 nautical miles.

4. In a similar way than during the *Strait Thunder* 2025-A drill, the Chinese information warfare accompanying the drill portrayed William Lai and the so-called "independantists" as parasites. Besides, 46 pieces of disinformation[12] were detected, according to the Political Warfare Bureau within the Taiwanese MND, aimed in particular at denigrating the Taiwanese armed forces and the strength of US support for Taiwan.

Therefore, once again, this exercise allowed China to unilaterally erode the *status quo* in its favour and strengthen its "anaconda strategy"[13] around Taiwan: 1) the exercise areas reserved by the PLA had never been so close to Taiwan (six out of eight encroaching on Taiwan's contiguous waters); 2) Chinese long-range artillery had never fired so close to the Taiwanese coast; 3) Chinese navy and coast guards had never approached Taiwan so massively. The normalization of incursions within Taiwanese contiguous waters is now a fact, and for this reason, **the *Justice mission* 2025 drill has allowed the PLA to cross a threshold as significative as the one implemented after the crisis of August 2022**. The latter had led to ballistic missile launches, some of which flew over Taiwan – five landing in the Japanese EEZ – and to the normalization of crossing the median line of the Taiwan Strait. From a tactical point of view, the increasing rapprochement of Chinese military forces to the Taiwanese coast to be added to its numerosity, is facilitating the Chinese ability to turn quickly an exercise into a real blockade/invasion operation.

If the *Justice Mission* 2025 drill was the second major military manoeuvre targeting Taiwan in 2025, however, we must not forget the massive naval deployment by the PLA launched on December 4, 2025. More than a hundred ships deployed from the Yellow Sea to the South China Sea, passing through Taiwan Strait and extending into the Western Pacific. This manoeuvre in early December 2025, about which the PLA did not communicate, seemed yet to be aimed more at Japan in the context of diplomatic tensions between Beijing and Tokyo. Besides, there was

series of missile tests to send a signal to Lee Teng-hui's government, which it accused of pursuing a policy contrary to the "One China policy". The second series of missile tests, in early 1996, was reportedly intended to intimidate the Taiwanese electorate ahead of the 1996 presidential election, the first direct election by universal suffrage. On 8th March 1996, the PLA fired missiles 20 miles off Keelung and 29 miles off Kaohsiung for instance.

[12] "Military highlights Chinese disinformation during drill", *Taipei Times*, December 31, 2025, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2025/12/31/2003849806 For instance, one piece of disinformation was the claim by the *Global Times* that CCGs vessels had quarantined the ports of Keelung, Tainan, Kaohsiung and Hualien. Another was the allegation that the PLA forces had advanced to within 9km of Taiwan's southern shores. The supposed drone footage of the Taipei 101 skyscraper was also a fake news.

[13] Admiral Tang Hua, Former Chief of Navy, described in November 2024 the "anaconda strategy" of the PLA as being the strategy to increase the pressure on Taiwan's approaches and get increasingly closer to the 12 nautical mile limit of territorial waters, by crossing the 24 nautical mile limit of contiguous waters. One of the objectives pursued by the PLA through this strategy is to wear down the Taiwanese forces and therefore weaken them, test them nervously and ultimately make them lower their guard.

no reservation of drill zones, contrary to the massive naval deployment on December 2024[14]. In addition to these manoeuvres, "Joint combat readiness patrols," which are also exercises between different components of the Chinese military but on a smaller scale, have increased in frequency and intensity: for instance, on February 26, the PLA announced the reservation of a maritime zone in the southwest of Taiwan, at 40 nautical miles from Kaohsiung, and held a "Joint combat readiness patrol" more significant than usual as the PLA took advantage of the return of the naval group (7 military vessels) led by the Chinese amphibious assault helicopter carrier LHA-33 to conduct a more complex exercise. Another example is the organization of two "Joint combat readiness patrols" in one single day on March 17.

Therefore, **2025 saw an acceleration of the strangulation strategy of China towards Taiwan with a significant threshold crossed in December 2025**. Besides, at the domestic level, **the 2025 year led to unprecedented and historical political crises between the ruling party and the opposition.**

An increasing polarization between the ruling party and the opposition: a political gridlock hindering Taiwanese resilience and defence vis-à-vis China

The 2024 year saw the newly elected President William Lai (*Democratic Progressive Party* – DPP) starting his new mandate, constrained by an opposition-dominated Parliament[15]. It has been characterized by the adoption of legislative amendments promoted by the opposition, triggering massive protests such as the *Bluebird movement* in May 2024, followed by its second phase, the *Bluebird wintertime action* in December 2024. Indeed these legislative amendments, notably the ones to the *Legislative Yuan Exercise of Official Powers Law* (立法院職權行使法), the *Constitutional Court Procedure Act* (憲法訴訟法), the *Public Officials Election and Recall Act* (公職人員選舉罷免法) and the *Act governing the Allocation of the Government Revenues and Expenditures* (財政收支劃分法), were respectively criticized for posing risks to the separation of executive and legislative powers, weakening the Rule of Law, negatively impacting Taiwan's innovative democratic tools and hindering Taiwan's defence expenditures[16]. These amendments, to be added to KMT delegations' trips to China and exchanges with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), including those of the KMT whip Fu Kun-chi and former President Ma Ying-jeou, led a part of the Taiwanese society to increasingly worry about a potential collusion between the KMT and China.

[14] A deployment of nearly a hundred ships with 60 front-line units from December 9 to 11, 2024, consisted of testing a "two-pronged" strategy designed to take control of the first chain of islands—with around 20 ships remaining concentrated around Taiwan—and to organize a large area of denial of access in the depths of the Western Pacific.

[15] As a reminder, for the 2024 elections, neither the DPP nor the KMT won more than 57 seats (the absolute majority). The DPP won 51 seats, the KMT won 52 seats and the Taiwan's People Party (TPP) got 8 seats. This situation gives an important power to the TPP: it can either paralyse the President by blocking his legislative priorities or advance his agenda while shaping it. However, it appeared that in most of the cases, the TPP took the same position as the KMT, leading to the blockade of various governmental measures.

[16] For more details on the content of these amendments, please read Maëlle Lefèvre, "The resilience of the Taiwanese democracy challenged from the outside and the inside. A look back at William Lai term's beginning during the 2024 year", *Asia Centre*, January 6, 2025, (p10-14).

The KMT-TPP/DPP dispute over the 2025 national budget and the opposition's refusal to support the vote of a special defence budget: a potentially negative impact on Taiwan's defence capacities

At the end of January 2025, the Legislative Yuan, the one Chamber Parliament, has managed to pass a budget for 2025, after a heated debate. Ultimately, this budget represents an increase compared to 2024 (+ 2,56 %), but the initial version proposed by the government has been significantly revised downwards. The level of spending cuts and freezes voted by Parliament, estimated at -6.6%, far exceeds the averages of -1 to -1.3% seen in previous years. Regarding the defence budget, the adjustments affected flagship programs such as the indigenous "Hai Kun" submarine project[17] and investments in drones[18]. In parallel, the Legislative Yuan has decided 1) a 3% reduction of spendings related to military equipment, potentially impacting the maintenance of key combat equipment, replenishment of training ammunition, and purchase of fuel for fighter aircrafts; 2) a 60% reduction of spendings related to defence communication, including advertising measures concerning recruitment, as well as missions to combat disinformation and cognitive warfare; 3) 15-20% reductions in travel expenses, which could impact international exchanges and, above all, staff training; 4) a 30% freeze on the proposed budget envelope for operations, that is to say for operational preparation. At this occasion, the former Defence Vice-Minister declared that this budgetary cut was the worst in the history of the Taiwanese MND.

If democratic debates on the national budget between the executive and legislative branches are important, the fact that this budgetary cut is much higher than the ones decided during the previous years raises questions, especially when China's military and hybrid coercion on Taiwan is drastically increasing. The same paradox was illustrated on December 31, when, for the fifth time, the Legislature refused to review the special defence budget bill (of 39.8 billion USD), only one day after the *Justice Mission* 2025 drill was concluded. This special budget, announced by President William Lai in an interview given to the *Washington Post* at the end of November 2025, was supposed to run from 2026-2033 and to cover items including missiles, drones, as well as the new "T-Dome" air defence system, a "multi-layered integrated defence system designed to protect Taiwan from missiles, rockets, drones, and fighter jets from the PRC"[19]. In the same tribune, President William Lai advocated for a defence budget reaching 3.3% of GDP for the 2026 year, and 5% of GDP for 2030. The issue of a defence budget not meeting this threshold because of the opposition's decisions is not only about undermining Taiwanese national security but also about weakening the credibility of Taiwanese commitment to ensure its own defence. While the Trump II administration is asking its Asian partners to spend at least 5% of GDP in defence, the ongoing difficulties faced by the Taiwanese Executive

[17] The national submarine construction plan has seen the proposed budget of NTD 2 billion (60.7 million USD) frozen by 50%. The legislative freeze will only be lifted once the Hai Kun completes its sea trials and the Ministry of National Defense submits a comprehensive performance report to lawmakers.
[18] The NTD 76.25 million (2.3 million USD) budget earmarked for the development of the Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology's drone industrial park has been completely eliminated, and the budget for the Chiayi Minxiong park (R&D for drones and AI) has been frozen by 50%, which could lead to stagnation in the development of the national defense industry.
[19] William Lai, "Taiwan plans to spend 40 billion USD on US arms, increase defense budget", *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2025. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/11/26/taiwan-us-arms-deal-china/

to answer these expectations could also hinder the US-Taiwan partnership on the long term, even though the recently published American *National Strategic Security* (NSS) reminded Taiwan's strategic importance[20] for American national interests.

The failure of the 'Great Recall Movement' (大罷免): a missed opportunity for the ruling party to gain back the majority within the Parliament

The December 2024 controversial amendments as well as the drastic budgetary cuts eventually led to the collection of enough signatures in order to force the recall of 31 KMT's legislators and one from the TPP, being Taiwan's largest recall campaign at such a national level[21]. It was indeed the first time in Taiwanese history that any concerted attempt tried to recall all legislators of a specific camp. If successful, this campaign would have led to the election of new legislators, offering an opportunity to give the ruling party a majority within the Legislative Yuan. However, the 23 plus 7 KMT legislators kept their seat, respectively after the votes of July[22] and August 2025. This important setback for the DPP can be explained by different factors: 1) a massive mobilization from the KMT of elderly voters, an important KMT stronghold, and through ground operations, favoured by the nice weather the day of the vote, while the DPP decided to support this campaign coming from Taiwanese civic groups only lately[23], and at the national level ; 2) the relative failure of President William Lai "Ten Speeches on National Unity"[24] which sparked controversies.

However, **the process in itself was democratic** and by being triggered, was the concrete application of an innovative mechanism linking a political leader to his electoral base and limiting potential impunity if not immutability. It showed once again the extent to which changing opinions can be expressed in real time in Taiwanese society, without necessarily having to wait for the four- yearly election cycle to carry weight in the political sphere. And if the DPP has to receive this result with humility and keep trying to find compromises with the opposition, the KMT, even if emboldened by this confidence vote, has to consider the large number of "yes" votes which expressed the existence of a real dissatisfaction.

The result cannot be neither simplified into the expression of a Taiwanese public opinion favouring engagement with China as the KMT does. Indeed, recall votes differ from regular

[20] It stated that "deterring any conflict over Taiwan, ideally by preserving military superiority, was a priority " and recognized that Taiwan "provided direct access to the second island chain and divided Northeast and Southeast Asia into two distinct theaters of operations," but at the same time changed the wording of Washington's policy on the *status quo*. The United States "does not support" any unilateral change to the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait, abandoning the term "oppose" used in the previous NSS under the Biden administration.

[21] As a reminder, this procedure led to dismiss on June 2020 the KMT mayor Han Kuo-yu, elected in the 2018 municipal elections and being the KMT candidate for the presidential elections of January 2020. Han Kuo-yu's controversial stance on China, which also coincided with the rise in tensions in Hong Kong from 2019 with a bill to extradite him to mainland China before the national security law is passed at the end of June 2020, was one of the factors behind his dismissal.

[22] Read Jean-François Di Meglio, « 'la tentative de destitution du 726' : A Taïwan, plus qu'un 'vote pour rien', une nouvelle démonstration de vivacité démocratique », *Asia Centre*, July 28, 2025.

[23] Indeed, the recall campaign was not a party-driven initiative, but a movement coming from the civil society. Yet, the KMT as well as Chinese disinformation intentionally portrayed the vote as DPP-promoted.

[24] This campaign of 10 speeches was launched at the end of June 2025 and the 4th speech on national defense was given on the 1st of July. The 5th and 6th speeches that were supposed to address the issue of the "the two shores of the Strait" have been cancelled, officially because of the damages caused by typhoons at the South of Taiwan needing an emergency response. The campaign was not continued, the 4th speech being the last one.

presidential and legislative elections which are the occasion for the voters to make a choice on issues related to China. Local elections and recall initiatives, on the contrary, rely more on the evaluation of individual politicians within specific districts, partly explaining the failure of the DPP in the 2022 local elections with an "anti-China" campaign. However, interestingly, this result could be perceived by China as increasing the chance for the KMT to get a victory for the 2026 local and 2028 presidential elections, favouring a rapprochement with the CCP and going in the right direction towards the so-called "peaceful reunification", the blockade and/or invasion of Taiwan being still the ultimate and not preferred option for Beijing as a military failure would be dramatic for the CCP leadership legitimacy. Therefore, if the recall movement result cannot be analysed through the lens of Cross-Strait tensions, it can still have an indirect impact on those by pushing China to wait till the 2028 elections' results before attempting a real manoeuvre against Taiwan.

The opposition's rhetoric labelling the DPP as an anti-democratic political force: a narrative indirectly supporting the Chinese information and cognitive warfare against Taiwan

Another feature which appeared as soon as during the beginning of the 2025 year when the first calls for a Great Recall Movement occurred, was the **increasing labelling of the DPP as an anti-democratic, dictatorship and even a fascist force**. For instance, on April 2025, a rally titled "Oppose the Green Communists, Fight Dictatorship – Stand Together on Ketagalan Boulevard!" was organized by the KMT in front of the Presidential Office. The KMT former chairman Eric Chu described President William Lai as "more communist than communists, more fascist than fascists" and threatened to push for an impeachment motion. This rally was organized to denounce the so-called authoritarian policy of President William Lai as on April 24, prosecutors raided the KMT party office and arrested four staff members for questioning over allegations that petitions to launch an election to recall DPP legislators contained forged signatures. Prosecutors then asked the court for permission to detain the KMT members suspected of forgery. Eric Chu also declared in May 2025 that what President William Lai was doing towards the opposition party was similar to "what Hitler did". Similarly, the use of the "green terror"[25] term, which is not a new feature yet[26], became more popular and banalized in the public discourse as the polarization between the ruling party and the opposition increased.

[25] The term "green terror" echoes the period of the KMT's dictatorship under martial law between 1949 and 1987, known as the "White Terror", the green being the color of the DPP.

[26] The term has been used for the first time in 2014 by a member of the New Party, about the DPP's contest of an education reform led by the KMT. In 2016, the president of the KMT's think-tank employed this expression again to say that Tsai Ing-wen's arrival at the Presidency would set the beginning of a "green terror". The term gained a new popularity in 2019-2020, more specifically within the framework of the debates on the Anti-Infiltration Act, passed by the Legislative Yuan in December 2019, supposed to create legal tools to counter the CCP's United Front strategy, following revelations of Chinese influence operations within the Taiwanese media. Coinciding with the presidential campaign, this bill sparked a major debate in Taiwan and was accused by some as an infringement on freedoms. The KMT resumed, this time on a massive scale, its well-established use of the term "green terror" in its communications, during a press conference entitled "Anti-infiltration: green terror, a trap that kills Taiwanese democracy". The narrative of "green terror" became on this occasion a veritable slogan for the KMT.

As explained by Alexis Franchaud, China's strategic narrative on Taiwan encompasses three levels[27]: 1) system narratives; 2) identity narratives; 3) issue narratives, that is to say narratives on a particular political issue. First, the Chinese system narrative is about an international order currently defined by Western ethnocentrism and standards favouring imperialist mentalities. For the case of Taiwan, Chinese narrative is about a sovereignty over the island legitimized by history, notably through the treaties signed at the end of the World War II[28]. Yet, these treaties ratified the retrocession of Taiwan by the Japanese Empire to the Republic of China and not the People's Republic of China (PRC) which emerged only in 1949 and was recognized as the sole representative government of China within the UN later in 1971. However, Chinese diplomacy develops its own interpretation of international law, emphasizing an ideological conception of "China" as an entity rather than the political regimes that legally embody it, in order to give legitimacy to its claims on Taiwan. Second, the Chinese narrative on identity is about Taiwan being historically and culturally Chinese, and the PRC being the custodian of the so-called "5 000 years" of history of China. This narrative allows the PRC to downplay its two predecessors, portraying the Qing as a decadent regime and the Republic of 1911 as an illegitimate government. Thirdly, the production of narratives on specific political issues is linked to the other two levels of storytelling: when it comes to Taiwanese domestic politics, the narratives mostly come from Chinese State media as official structures, such as the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO), generally refrain from commenting on Taiwanese political competition not to legitimize the Taiwanese regime. The reappropriation of the "green terror" term by the CPP appeared around 2019-2020 when it gained a new popularity on the Taiwanese stage and started to become a widespread slogan by the KMT. As an illustration, on December 31, 2019, the TAO's spokesperson issued a press release stating that the DPP authorities were engaging in "green terror" by voting to adopt the anti-infiltration act[29]. The DPP is said to be deliberately going against "the aspirations of the people" for electoral gain, thereby seriously undermining "the well-being and interests of the Taiwanese masses", a narrative allowing the PRC to portray the Taiwanese government as illegitimate because of its authoritarianism. Since that period, references to "green terror" have become firmly entrenched in the Chinese narrative on Taiwan and since January 2020, the term has appeared in more than 50 articles in the *Global Times*, most of them being published after May 2024, when President William Lai took office. The TAO has thus generalized the use of the term to label measures aimed at countering Chinese

[27] See Alexis Franchaud, « 'terreur verte', 'nazisme' : ce que la reprise d'éléments de discours du Kuomintang par la Chine nous dit de l'évolution de son récit stratégique sur Taïwan », *Hypothèses*, Octobre 24, 2025, https://fabulaemundi.hypotheses.org/2462#more-2462

[28] The Cairo (1943) and Potsdam (1945) declarations as well as the San Francisco (1951) Treaty remain controversial between Japan and the PRC. The Cairo declaration set out the terms of Japan's return of Manchuria, the main island of Taiwan, and the Pescadores to the then official Chinese government, that of the Republic of China as the PRC did not exist yet. The Potsdam declaration set the terms of Japan's surrender, referring to those of the Cairo Conference, and limiting Japanese sovereignty to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku, and other islands to be determined. Interestingly, the San Francisco Treaty renounces Japan's sovereignty over the main island of Taiwan and the Pescadores but says nothing about its transfer to the Chinese government – the Republic of China at the time – which could then be considered as granting *de jure* independence to Taiwan. Also, in the current context of diplomatic tensions between China and Japan, Mao Ning, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated on November 28 that "China has never recognized anything stipulated in the so-called 'San Francisco Treaty,' particularly with regard to sovereignty over Taiwan or the treatment of China's territory and sovereign rights as a non-signatory."

[29] See Note 26.

influence: this was the case, for example, in 2025 after the ban on dual Chinese-Taiwanese nationality, including the "border tourism passport" issued by China.

However, **what seems new for the 2025 year is the appearance of a supposed "Nazification" of the DPP in Chinese media, showing once again how messages used by Taiwanese parties are gradually integrated into Chinese strategic narrative**. It was for instance illustrated within the framework of the Great Recall Movement. On August 28, in the *People's Daily*, Wang Yingjin, the head of the Centre for Cross-Strait Relations at Renmin University in Beijing, described the recall votes failure as one of the illustrations of Taiwanese society dissatisfaction with President's misuse of democratic mechanisms, and feigned concern for Taiwanese democracy, portraying the DPP as responsible for a "green terror" and "dictatorship", thus reemploying the KMT rhetoric. He also added that the Kuma Academy – a non-profit organization of which goal is to bolster the civil society defence and resilience – and the *Bluebird movement*, were exposing the "dangerous tendency of 'Taiwan independence' forces becoming increasingly Nazi-like"[30]. The publication date, closed to the organization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit at Tianjin at the end of August and at the beginning of September and the military parade organized on September 3 in Beijing, was not a coincidence. Interestingly, in the declaration issued after the SCO summit, lots of references were made to the fight against Nazism, fascism, militarism and neo-Nazism, notably in a section dealing with international security. It shows to what extent China seems promoting this strategic narrative on the international stage, not only for commemorative purposes but for its security policy agenda as well. The use of Nazism-linked references was also instrumentalized by Chinese media within the framework of the 80th Anniversary of the "Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War". On this occasion, on the 3rd of September 2025, Beijing organized its largest military parade on a decade, showcasing for the first time its nuclear triad and different military equipment of which use is strategic in case of a Taiwan's contingency, a warning message indicating the centrality of the Taiwanese issue in the buildup of the PLA and the Chinese paramilitary forces. The anti-fascist discourse promoted during these celebrations can be analysed as 1) "a claim to international co-ownership born out of the victory over fascism and Nazism in 1945"[31] in order to appear as a responsible power within the international community ; 2) "a Chinese revisionism" which manifests itself as a "tacit support to Russian reading of History, presenting the 'special operation' against Ukraine as the continuation of the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany"[32]. Alexis Franchaud concludes his analysis by stating that "the systemic level, which concerns the anti-fascist legacy of World War II and the rules-based international order, is connected to the identity and issue levels, which make Taiwan a Chinese province whose people are oppressed by an authoritarian, even 'Nazified' government. This narrative framework has the advantage of being evocative for a large part of the world's population and is likely to generate a strong consensus, as it draws on a commonly accepted narrative about the 'post-war international order' since 1945 (anti-fascism and rule-based governance) […] More specifically,

[30] See Tuvia Gering, "In calling Taiwan 'Nazis', Beijing weaponizes history", *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, September 4, 2025, https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/in-calling-taiwan-nazis-beijing-weaponises-history/
[31] See Mathieu Duchâtel, « Un 3 septembre à Pékin : lecture stratégique du défilé militaire », *Institut Montaigne*, Septembre 3, 2025, https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/un-3-septembre-pekin-lecture-strategique-du-defile-militaire.
[32] *Ibid*.

labelling Taiwan's pro-democracy and autonomy forces as 'Nazis' has the advantage of legitimizing a future escalation of coercive Chinese actions, including military invasion. Far from violating international law, the PRC would be living up to its heritage by intervening against a figure universally despised and considered the antithesis of the post-1945 international order." Interestingly, as another Chinese attempt to link its position on Taiwan to the post-war international order, the Permanent Committee of China's National People's Congress decided on October 24 to establish a National Day of Commemoration of the "return" of Taiwan to China. It was set on October 25th, the anniversary of the official ceremony in Taipei on October 25th, 1945, which formalized the transfer of sovereignty over Taiwan from Japan to the Republic of China.

Therefore, this new Chinese strategic narrative which tends to align with the Russian one on Ukraine and would put China on the right side of the story in case of a Taiwanese contingency, is reinforced by the KMT-TPP similar and ongoing rhetoric used against the DPP, showing to what extent the opposition is indirectly fuelling Chinese cognitive warfare within Taiwanese society but on the international stage as well. It has to be noted that the KMT newly elected chairman (chosen on October 18, 2025), Cheng Li-wun, embraced this China-Russian narrative partnership by echoing Russian messages, stating that "Vladimir Putin was not a dictator, […] was elected through democratic votes"[33], refused the idea of Vladimir Putin being at the origin of the war in Ukraine, adding that "the core reason the war broke out and continues today is NATO's repeated eastward expansion".

Eventually, **the Chinese cognitive warfare within the Taiwanese society has also known an unprecedented success during the *Justice Mission* 2025 drill**: unlike in previous exercises, the KMT did not issue any official reaction to the *Justice Mission* 2025 exercise. Cheng Li-wun went even further in a December 29 interview, denouncing President William Lai's "provocations" without condemning the exercise or calling for the *status quo* to be maintained. This situation triggered an internal crisis within the KMT, with some members not supporting Cheng Li-wun's approach, such as Taipei's mayor Chiang wan-an. This more divided Taiwanese political landscape, at a time when military pressure from the PLA is increasing, contributes to China's goal of discrediting Taiwanese democracy and undermining Taiwanese society's confidence in the government's ability to protect its interests.

The unprecedented and historical constitutional crisis dividing even more Taiwanese political landscape

The dispute between the DPP led Executive and the opposition dominated Legislative reached a new level when Premier Cho Jung-tai refused to countersign the *Act Governing the Allocation of Government Revenues and Expenditures* (財政收支劃分法) on December 15. As a reminder, since an amendment has been passed in December 2024, this legislation would have increased the revenue allocated from the central government to local governments, having implications on the defence budget, giving more power of decision to local cities and potentially favouring

[33] Wang Cheng-chung, Shih Hsiu-chan, "Incoming KMT chair doubles down on 'Putin was elected' remarks", *Focus Taiwan*, October 31, 2025. https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202510310017

Chinese interference in those. Cho Jung-tai justified the refusal by the fact that this legislation would lead the government to borrow to 17.1% of the national budget, exceeding the statutory debt ceiling of 15%, being therefore "unconstitutional". This refusal has then been endorsed by President William Lai and the DPP. It marks the first time in the history of Taiwanese democracy that the Executive Yuan refuses to countersign a bill passed by the Legislative Yuan, the only closed example being the refusal of the Premier Hau Pei-tsun (KMT) to countersign the promotion of General Chiang Chung-ling in 1992.

To see whether the allocation is unconstitutional and whether Cho Jung-tai's decision is unconstitutional as well, the Constitutional Court should adjudicate such matters. However, because of the amendment[34] of the *Constitutional Court Procedure Act* (憲法訴訟法) passed in December 2024 and the KMT's refusal to approve any of the Lai administration's candidates for having the required number of 10 serving justices, the Taiwan Constitutional Court (TCC) functioning is frozen. Some analysts therefore consider this move as being a "gambit aimed at forcing the KMT to back down over its current freeze of the Constitutional Court"[35]. More generally, this appropriation of a new veto power by the Executive Yuan "is framed as a proximate reaction to the fact that the KMT-controlled legislature has sought to appropriate new powers for itself and to limit the powers of other branches of governments so that none of them can check the legislature in the balance of powers"[36]. On December 18, the KMT held a press conference, stating that it would pursue impeachment against both President William Lai and Premier Cho Jung-tai, condemning it as a power grab, while the TPP suggested that Lai's administration actions were a *de facto* establishment of martial law. On December 26, the Legislative Yuan approved a motion to initiate impeachment proceedings against President William Lai and a roll call vote will be held in May 2026 in the Legislature after various hearings. However, as the impeachment motion has to be approved by a two-thirds majority in the Legislative Yuan – a majority that neither the DPP, nor the KMT-TPP opposition has in the Parliament – and be submitted to the TCC which is frozen, the chances for such an initiative to succeed do not exist. It shows to what extent this impeachment procedure is only symbolical and promotes the KMT's current narrative about the DPP being undemocratic and unconstitutional.

Eventually, on December 19, another constitutional controversy was sparked as the TCC ruled that the 2024 amendment to the *Constitutional Procedure Act* was unconstitutional. The ruling allows the court to resume its operations as well. However, the ruling was adjudicated by only five judges, three other judges refusing to endorse the legal effect of the ruling. The original act before the 2024 amendment requiring two-thirds of the current judges to adjudicate, and a simple majority decision on whether the law is constitutional or unconstitutional, such a ruling did not meet the needed number of votes from six judges. Yet, the same panel of five justices started to deliver their first contentious decision at the beginning of 2026, sparking debates on their receivability.

[34] See Note 16.
[35] Brian Hioe, "Taiwan is in the middle of a constitutional crisis", *The Diplomat*, December 19, 2025. https://thediplomat.com/2025/12/taiwan-is-in-the-middle-of-a-constitutional-crisis/
[36] *Ibid.*

Conclusion

To conclude, the 2025 year was a continuation of the trends already observed in 2024 when it comes to Taiwan's resilience towards Chinese external pressure and domestic fragmentation.

Given this tensed context, to be added to the geopolitical and trade shifts brought by an unpredictable and disruptive US administration, the first goal mentioned by William Lai in his New Year's speech for 2026 was unsurprisingly the need to "build a safer and more resilient Taiwan"[37]. He insisted on his will to implement the "17 major national security strategies to combat infiltration", to accelerate "amendments for 10 national security laws", and reminded the special defence budget project. Similarly than in 2024, he made an appeal towards the opposition and declared that "facing China's alarming military ambitions, Taiwan has no time to wait and certainly no time to consume ourselves with internal strife. We may hold different views on many issues, but without strong and resilient national defence, there will be no country, nor will there be space allowed for us to debate. This should be a national consensus across party lines. And so, I hope the ruling and opposition parties can work together to swiftly pass this crucial national defence budget." The fourth goal mentioned in his speech was the promotion of "democratic unity throughout Taiwan", condemning the "political obstruction" of many bills, in parallel to the adoption of "multiple questionable bills". The term "deadlock" was mentioned three times, while it was not used last year, showing to what extent the emergency feeling to solve the domestic crisis is increasing. President William Lai declared: "I believe many of us share the feeling that the 2025 deadlocks ought not to persist into 2026. Projects that are crucial for the nation to endure and develop must no longer be stalled by obstruction". President William Lai emphasized as well the key importance to abide by the Constitution and "to take the constitutional order as our largest common denominator", thanked the "Constitutional Court for its professionalism and moral courage in making a decision that aligns with both our Constitution and our people's expectations, that is, to resume operations and ensure our citizens' rights and interests". President William Lai is therefore supporting a ruling that can be yet questioned in terms of constitutionality, as explained above. Eventually, he presented himself willing to "promote cooperation between the ruling and opposition parties" and "to deliver a state of the nation address to the Legislative Yuan".

However, whether this call of unity will be heard by the opposition can be questioned. A similar but yet less alarming message in December 2024 was only followed by an aggravation of the domestic political polarization. It is more likely that the only factor that could lead the KMT to review its current posture is an internal awareness within the Party about the risks that some of its policies and narratives could pose on its campaign's success during the 2026 local and 2028 presidential and legislative elections. The latest poll released by the *Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation* (台灣民意基金會) showed an increase of 7.3 percentage points to 38.4% in support for the DPP, compared with 20.6% for the KMT, down by 5.2 percentage points from the previous poll. The internal divisions which appeared within the KMT, after Cheng Li-wun failed to condemn *Justice Mission* 2025 and also sparked controversies when she said being

[37] "President Lai delivers 2026 New Year's Address", Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), January 1, 2026, https://english.president.gov.tw/News/7067

willing to meet with Xi Jinping during the first semester of 2026, could also lead some important KMT figures to join the unity call made by the DPP and influence KMT legislators' votes for the year to come.