

The view from Taipei

No. 1

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Corey Lee Bell

The view from Taipei is a sister series of UTS:ACRI's *The view from Beijing*. It provides readers with an up-to-date overview of Chinese-language statements from Taiwanese authorities on matters that have the potential to impact Australia's relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The view from Taipei matters because Australia's relationship with the PRC is profoundly influenced by both nations' relationships with Taipei. And in each of these relationships, Taipei has become increasingly confident about asserting its agency.

Taiwan, whose formal name is the Republic of China (ROC), is a flourishing island democracy of 24 million people situated 150 kilometres east of the PRC's Fujian province. It has its own [president](#), democratic constitution and armed forces. Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade lays out Australia's [position](#) on Taiwan: 'the Australian government does not recognise the ROC as a sovereign state and does not regard the authorities in Taiwan as having the status of a national government.' As the Australia-PRC relationship has soured in recent years, Canberra has in parallel forged [closer relations](#) with Taipei, which is trying to [promote](#) its potential to become as a regional hub and a source of resilience, and is exploring its role as a [pivot](#) in the Free and Open Indo Pacific strategy promoted jointly by the United States and Australia. At the same time, Taipei's ongoing [defiance](#) of Beijing's claims of sovereignty have raised tensions and seen Taiwan [described](#) 'as the most likely place where the rising tensions between the US and China may lead to an actual confrontation', or a potential site of military conflict between Australia's largest trading partner (the PRC) and its most important ally (the US). With US-PRC geopolitical competition [heating up](#) in the Asia-Pacific, keeping a finger on the pulse of the presidential and legislative halls of Zhongzheng District has never been more important for Australia.

The view from Taipei aims to highlight pertinent statements by Taiwanese authorities and policy developments in Taiwan by selecting, translating and summarising foreign-language sources. In particular, it strives to keep a tab on Taiwan's views on the Canberra-Taipei relationship, as well as matters that could have a significant impact on Australia's relationship with the PRC – most notably, statements and developments that could affect stability across the Taiwan Strait.

Overview

After the initial results of Australia's federal election were announced, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 21 released a [statement](#) congratulating Australia for hosting a successful election, and acknowledging the assumed victory of the Australian Labor Party. Since that time, public statements on the Taiwan-Australia relationship from Taiwanese authorities have been sporadic. On June 11, the Taiwan Chamber of Commerce in Australia (TCCA) hosted a Taiwan Night Gala Dinner which was attended by the head of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, Freda Fan. She [expressed](#) her gratitude for the final [report](#) of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, released after an inquiry into expanding the membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), that recommended 'that the

Australian Government work with other CPTPP members to encourage and facilitate the accession of Taiwan to the CPTPP and to consider negotiating a bilateral Taiwan-Australia FTA concurrently.'

In contrast, many statements have emanated from Taiwanese authorities on the issue of cross-strait tensions. Since June 10, several political figures, including Taiwan's President [Tsai-Ing wen](#), and the President of the Legislative Yuan, [You Si-Kun](#), have made speeches or statements criticising 'authoritarian governments' (and in some cases the People's Republic of China (PRC) [specifically](#)) that threaten peaceful democratic nations. Some of these statements were made in the context of discussions on parallels between Taiwan's geostrategic anxieties and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Cross-strait tensions

'Authoritarian powers' and Taiwan's security

Over the last few weeks Taiwanese officials have spoken on numerous occasions of existential threats to the island's security. This uptick coincided with the staging of a number of international events which discussed international security and which featured Taiwanese or PRC officials, including the Copenhagen Democracy Summit 2022 (June 9-10) and the Shangri-La Dialogue 2022 (June 10-12).

Tsai Ing-wen, who is fluent in English (her name, Ing-wen 英文, literally means 'the English language'), delivered an address in English to the Copenhagen Summit titled 'Taiwan: An Integral Partner of the Global Democratic Alliance.' While not mentioning the PRC by name, she [stated](#):

The threats posed by authoritarianism are not confined to theft, pressure, or coercion. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shown us once again that these regimes will stop at nothing in the pursuit of their expansionist goals... I would like to stress that, like Ukraine, Taiwan will not bend to pressure. Despite growing threats, we are determined to defend our country and our democratic way of life, and we are confident that our determination will, like Ukraine, rally fellow democracies to our cause.

The PRC was, however, soon after explicitly identified as the source of 'threats' to Taiwan's security by Taiwanese authorities, including the President of the Legislative Yuan, You Si-kun.

On June 12, You Si-kun delivered a lengthy [presentation](#) as part of the 13th video seminar of the 'Lessons for the Taiwan people from the Russia-Ukraine war' series (俄烏戰爭對台灣人民啟示), hosted by the Taiwanese American Federation of Northern California (TAFNC – itself a conglomerate of eight prominent Northern Californian Taiwanese associations). You's presentation was titled 'The lesson from the Russia-Ukraine war – [strengthening the people's] determination to defend [one's nation] is the right way to go about protecting Taiwan' (防衛意志是護台良方-烏俄戰爭的啟示). The original video – which stoked [controversy](#) across both sides of the Taiwan Strait – has since been removed from YouTube (it can, at the time of writing, still be found [here](#)).

You's presentation emphasised that Taiwan should properly prepare itself to repel an invasion and not merely seek to rely on other nations to protect it.

He also alluded to collateral costs for Beijing. He [mentioned](#) that Taiwan's Yun Fung supersonic land-attack cruise missiles had entered the production phase, and that these were capable of reaching Beijing. You said that while Taiwan *wouldn't* attack Beijing, Shanghai or China's critical Three Gorges Dam [author's emphasis], Beijing should 'think carefully about attacking Taiwan' because the PRC might 'suffer more losses than they will incur.' You's statements were the subject of intense [criticism](#) from PRC officials (i.e., the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office) and other sources, who accused You of making veiled threats. You soon after [said](#), 'I didn't say that, I wasn't clear enough.'

Another point of interest was You's view on the role that other nations should play in Taiwan's defence. Not only did he hold that 'Democracies across the globe should... protect Taiwan', he also said that 'Advanced countries... like America and Japan... should have strategic clarity' (i.e., should have an unambiguous commitment to defend Taiwan should it be attacked). In a clear reference to the Quad, he [added](#) that if America, Japan, Australia and India were to present a united front on the Taiwan issue, they could make 'China dispel any ideas about invading Taiwan.'

A further attempt to assert that PRC bellicosity posed an existential threat to Taiwan posed was also made by Chiu Chui-cheng, the Deputy Minister of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council. In a direct response to the

PRC's Minister of National Defense General Wei Fenghe's [speech](#) to the Shangri-La Dialogue 2022 (a defence summit focused on Asia), in which Wei stated, 'Those who pursue Taiwan independence in an attempt to split China will definitely come to no good end.' Chiu on June 12 [said](#):

We think publicly threatening Taiwan in an international platform [such as the Shangri-La Dialogue] is an act [that is akin to] declaring war, and that treats the principles of international relations and peace with complete contempt. It proves that the authorities in Beijing are the source of heightened insecurity in the region. The Chinese Communist Party has always disregarded opposition from the international community and Taiwan that is directed at its domineering behaviour, and its plans to use military might to compel Taiwan to unify with China, and obstruct the international community from supporting Taiwan, are bound to fail. We must stress that the Taiwanese people are resolute and are determined to defend [their country] and we will continue to cooperate with the international community to curb the ambitions and delusions of aggressors.

The Taiwan Strait under the PRC's 'sovereignty', 'jurisdiction'

The heightened rhetoric on cross-strait issues barely settled when new claims from Beijing on the legal status of the Taiwan Strait stirred controversy in Taiwan. On June 13 PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi [stated](#) that the PRC 'has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the Taiwan Strait', designating it 'a false claim when certain countries call the Taiwan Strait 'international waters'.' Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs promptly rejected these claims in statements that were widely [published](#) in English. On June 15, Taiwan's Premier, Su Tseng-chang, [added](#), 'The waters in the Taiwan Strait [come under the purview of] international freedom of navigation and are definitely not the internal [i.e., sovereign] waters of China. These actions from China are helping the international [community] recognise that [Beijing] is completely unreasonable and irresponsible when it comes to international norms.'

A response to Beijing's claims on the Taiwan Strait by Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council was also widely reported in Chinese-language media – however, videos of the speech cannot be found on the council's official YouTube channel. A paraphrase of the [speech](#) states that the PRC's 'plan to 'domesticise Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait' are in complete contradiction with international law and the reality of the current situation in the Taiwan Strait, and is a provocative measure that breaks the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and further raises tensions in the region.' You was also [reported](#) to have responded to the claim by stating 'in reality Taiwan is already a sovereign, independent nation.'

PLAAF incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ

On June 18, the People's Liberation Navy (PLAN) launched its Type-003 'Fujian' Aircraft Carrier – a large, indigenously produced carrier which is comparable in size to the United State's Ford and Nimitz carriers. In response to this launch, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence's spokesperson Sun Li-fang on June 18 [remarked](#), '[O]ur nation's military is paying close attention to, and has a meticulous understanding of, PLA advancements, and our intelligence on the enemy has been integrated into our future plans. We are applying a new asymmetric paradigm and are proactively developing responsive measures.'

On June 21 and June 23, respectively, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence reported that [29](#) and [22](#) People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) aircraft had entered into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ)¹. In both cases the Ministry claimed to have responded by 'tasking CAP [Combat Air Patrol] aircraft, issuing radio warnings, and tracking [the aircraft] using surface-to-air missile systems.' At around the same time (June 21-22) Taiwanese media [reported](#) that the PLAN Eastern Theatre Command Navy had sent six ships (three corvettes and three destroyers) into seas to the northeast of Taiwan, with four sailing within relative proximity to northeast Taiwan.

Taiwan's Foreign Minister: 'China has never controlled Taiwan'

Diplomatic tensions between the PRC and Taiwan again increased towards the end of June. On June 27, Taiwan's defence spokesperson Sun Li-fang [announced](#) that an American destroyer had passed through the Taiwan Strait, but that its operations in the area were 'normal.' On June 28, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu said America's decision to send naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait reflected the United States'

¹ 我空域 – lit. 'our airspace' – however the referent is clearly not Taiwan's national airspace in the strict sense, but rather its self-defined Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). For a brief explanation on the difference between airspace and ADIZ see 'China's Taiwan military incursions test the limits of airspace', *Deutsche Welle*, October 4 2021 <<https://www.dw.com/en/chinas-taiwan-military-incursions-test-the-limits-of-airspace/a-59398039>>.

commitment to regional security and stability. He also [stated](#) that ‘neither side of the Taiwan Strait belongs to the other’ and that ‘China has never controlled Taiwan’ is a ‘fact known to the whole world.’ The PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson, Ma Xiaoguang, [responded](#) with a statement noting that the international community supports a one-China policy and that Beijing opposes nations provoking the PRC and threatening its sovereignty and security under the guise of ‘freedom of navigation.’ He was also [cited](#) in the PRC’s Central Government website as criticising Taiwan for ignoring the [1992 Consensus](#), colluding with foreign powers, provocatively pursuing Taiwanese independence, and damaging cross strait relations – actions which ‘are the source of the current tensions and volatility across the Taiwan Strait.’

Analysis

Early June arguably marked a recent high point in cross-strait tensions. During this period Taiwanese officials repeated claims that Beijing poses a threat to their national security. However, while there was an uptick in PLAAF incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ and PLAN exercises within close proximity of Taiwan, publicly available intelligence (i.e., mobilisation) does not indicate a rapidly escalating, [immediate threat](#) from the PLA.

Of the statements made in relation to the threats facing Taiwan’s security, You Si-Kun’s statements are the most notable in that they directly identified the PRC as the source of existential military threats to Taiwan, and involved explicit warnings about the ‘cost’ that an invasion of the island would incur. It is also notable that You’s call for strategic clarity from Japan and the United States came on the back of Taiwan reaching out to [express its desire to enter the Quad](#), which held its most recent leader-level meeting in Tokyo late May. In the wake of this meeting, Japan formally [protested](#) incursions from Russian and PRC military aircraft into Japan’s ADIZ, and its Prime Minister Kishida Fumio [stated](#) that Russia’s invasion ‘shakes the foundation of international order’ and that ‘We should not allow similar things to happen in the Indo-Pacific region.’ These echoed the statements of US President Joe Biden, who during the Quad summit [said](#), ‘Russia’s assault on Ukraine only heightens the importance of those goals of fundamental principles of international order, territorial integrity and sovereignty. International law, human rights must always be defended regardless of where they’re violated in the world.’

While these comments from Quad leaders do not mention the PRC or Taiwan by name, Taiwanese officials’ more recent parallels between the Russian invasion of Ukraine and security threats facing Taiwan clearly resonate with their core tenets. Similar views were also expressed more recently by Australia’s Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. In an [interview](#) with *The Australian Financial Review* just prior to his attending the June 28 NATO Summit in Madrid, the Prime Minister responded to a question concerning the PRC’s designs on Taiwan by stating that Ukraine ‘had shown attempts to impose change by force on a sovereign country meets resistance’ and ‘[a]lso, that determination of countries which share common values and a commitment to that rules-based international order have been brought together.’ In reply to this, the PRC state mouthpiece China Daily published an [article](#) which said, ‘It is hard to believe that the new Australian leader can be so ill-informed as to not know China’s stance on the Ukraine crisis... or that he can be so ignorant as not to understand the status of Taiwan.’ It also said that the interview revealed the Prime Minister’s ‘lack of diplomatic nous and poor grasp of political realities’, and that hopes for a ‘reset’ in Australia-China relations in the wake of Labor’s recent election win ‘are diminishing by the day.’

Author

Dr Corey Lee Bell is a Project and Research Officer at the Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney (UTS:ACRI).