



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on October 6, 2023

Taiwan Accuses China of Election Meddling; Probes Claims That Submarine Program Details Were “Leaked”

On October 4, Taiwan National Security Bureau Director-General Tsai Ming-yen told lawmakers during a parliamentary committee session that China has “very diverse” ways of meddling in Taiwan’s upcoming elections in January next year. Interference can range from military pressure to disseminating fake news and manipulating opinion polls, he asserted.

Before elections, Taiwan typically points out the risk of election meddling by Beijing, the latter which claims the democratically governed island as its own, to be reunited with the mainland, by force if necessary. Taiwan usually slams China for trying to manipulate election outcomes in favor of pro-China candidates.



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“The way the Chinese Communists interfere in elections is very diversified,” Tsai said, adding that China can rely on military coercion, economic pressure, or fake news to create a false choice between “war or peace” in the election and scare voters.

“We are paying special attention to the Chinese Communists cooperating with opinion poll and public relations companies for the possibility of manipulating opinion polls and issuing them to interfere in the elections,” he continued, without specifying the names of any companies.

China has ramped up military activities around Taiwan since the last election in 2020, and regularly deploys warships and fighters into the seas and skies surrounding the island.

Tsai posited that China’s most recent drills close to Taiwan, which started in September and have been portrayed as “abnormal,” were essentially the same as those in past years regarding their focus, such as landing exercises.

Nonetheless, there were more aircraft and ships that participated this time around, with more practice firings by the People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF), which superintends China’s conventional and nuclear missiles, Tsai continued.

Such increased military activities might be linked to Chinese leader Xi Jinping’s efforts to impose his control over the PLARF, a branch of China’s military that has come under scrutiny after its two top leaders were abruptly replaced in July this year with external commanders, Tsai surmised.

For the past three years or so, China has increased its military activities around Taiwan, including staging war games, and has recently conducted drills that it claimed were aimed at tackling the “arrogance” of separatist forces.

When questioned about the rise in drills, and Taiwan’s worries about increased risk, China’s Taiwan



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Affairs Office spokeswoman Zhu Fenglian admitted to drills by China's People's Liberation Army.

"The purpose (of the drills) is to resolutely combat the arrogance of Taiwan independence separatist forces and their actions to seek independence," Zhu said during a regular news briefing in Beijing. "The provocation of Taiwan independence continues all day long, and the actions of the People's Liberation Army to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity are always ongoing."

On September 28, Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu told a news conference in Taipei that China's leadership knows that its pugilism around Taiwan to pressure the island prior to the January elections will not work, adding that Beijing would likely not attempt such actions before the presidential vote.

"The historical lesson is that the more China adopts a forceful way of intervening in our election, it's going to backfire, and I think the Chinese leaders know that very well," Wu said. "So it's not likely for them to do anything major to threaten Taiwan or anything so visible that the Taiwanese people understand that they are trying to intervene in our election."

Furthermore, Wu said China was preparing for a possible assault of Taiwan, including how the People's Liberation Army would react to U.S. intervention. "So the scale has been increasing," he said, adding that besides the U.S., others in the region, including Japan and Australia, have been monitoring China's actions closely.

At the moment, Vice President William Lai of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which promotes Taiwan's distinct identity from China, is the favorite to be Taiwan's next leader in the January 2024 elections, opinion surveys have revealed.

China regards Lai and his party as separatists and has constantly dismissed their offers for discussions. For his part, Lai stated that he does not wish to alter the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, and that only Taiwan's people can determine their future.

The situation across the Taiwan Strait has "not improved due to the passage of time," observed Lai, presently Taiwan's vice-president.

"China's attempts to annex Taiwan have not changed," Lai said at an event in Taipei recently for the 37th anniversary of the founding of the DPP.

In 1996, China lobbed missiles into the Taiwan Strait to try to scare the island's voters away from backing Lee Teng-hui — whom Beijing disliked for his perceived pro-independence tendencies — for president. Chinese actions provoked the so-called Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, in which the U.S. Navy conducted a huge show of force in the waterway. Eventually, Lee emerged triumphant in the election in a landslide.

On October 2, Taiwan prosecutors disclosed that they were probing into claims that people attempted to meddle with the island's submarine program and that details about it were leaked, in what would be a major violation of security.

[Taiwan unveiled its first homemade submarine](#) on September 28, a key step in a project meant to boost the island's defense against the Chinese navy.

Admiral Huang Shu-kuang, who is directing the program, told local media last week that lawmakers, whom he did not single out, had made it challenging for the program to purchase vital equipment, and that a contractor who had failed to obtain a bid leaked information to China.

In turn, Taiwan's Supreme Prosecutors Office, in a brief statement, said Huang's claims had garnered



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“great attention,” given the national security and defense implications, and said it had instructed prosecutors to “investigate the case as soon as possible in order to safeguard national security.”

Taiwan has made the domestic submarine program a crucial part of an ambitious project to overhaul its armed forces amid Beijing’s rising military ambitions to reinforce its sovereignty claims. The program has relied on expertise and technology from several countries — a major feat for diplomatically isolated Taiwan.



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