

WHY TAIWAN MATTERS

Claire Chin. First Secretary, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New Zealand.

The views expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of APSI Forum and COE

Abstract:

The Russian invasion into Ukraine brings about the reality that invading a democratic country is an option for authoritarian regimes. The Ukrainian successful resistance brings some significant hope that such unprovoked and unprecedented challenge can be contained. Thus, the lesson we are learning is like a double-edged sword. This paper explores the two sides of this lesson. On one side, it notes that China is watching closely how democratic allies are reacting to the war. One fact is salient. It is either the outcome of the Ukrainian invasion gives China more courage and confidence to take more aggressive steps in Taiwan or weakens its ambition. On the other side of the lesson, the situation offers the Taiwanese a gleam of hope on the possibility of winning a war with asymmetric capability. The paper concludes on the importance of securing liberal democratic world order. The way to start is for like-minded countries to work together to save Taiwan.

Introduction:

The population and the scale of Taiwan economy necessitate the ranking of the country among the advanced economies group and the high-income economies in the world. Its geo-political importance needs not be over-emphasized as part of the “first island chain” along China’s coast. Taiwan is on the frontline of China’s expansionist authoritarianism. These two factors have made Taiwan to become one of the leading enemies of China’s re-unification aspiration and expansionist agenda. Taiwan is democratic nation state seeking independent sovereignty from oppressive China. Would it end in a physical war similar to Russia/Ukraine war? Could Taiwan win? Are there lessons to be learnt from Russian invasion of Ukraine and the latter’s resistance that could help Taiwan? What advantages over Ukraine does Taiwan have? Better geographical locations for military and non-military assistance? More time to strategize?

China is the problem: The expansionist agenda and the military aggression of China

The reason for the seemingly unstoppable China/Taiwan conflict is not farfetched. The economic gains from China annexing Taiwan are obvious. The historical dream is also there. The geographical location of Taiwan that hinders China's access to the Pacific Ocean is also obvious. China's ambition and aggressive power gave birth to a policy that China is ready to pursue if not contained. The path seems to be inevitably crossed, between a powerful, oppressively expansionist state and a smaller but democratic nation state that is seeking independent sovereignty. With China's apparent expansionist policy, the horizon for negotiation is bleak. China's hostilities make it obvious that dialogue will not work. China's hostilities to Taiwan include; (i) pressure on Taiwan's international space (ii) Poaching Taiwan's diplomatic allies (iii) blocking Taiwan's participation in international organizations such as W.H.O. and UNFCCC and (iv) bullying international companies to change the name from Taiwan to "Taiwan China".

China's aggressions and expansionist policy are not limited to Taiwan.

The history of China's aggression and military expansion shows that its hostility to Taiwan is not accidental. It is a matter of political policy. China's aggression and military expansion in SCS has caused various conflicts with Vietnam and Philippines. There are conflicts with India on border issues, tariff retaliation on Australia, repression of Uighur muslims, crackdown on Hong Kong. A potential military base in South Pacific is gradually becoming a reality. The point is that China will not change this aggressive policy if not called to order.

Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine war:

The Russian invasion into Ukraine brings about the reality that invading a democratic country is an option for authoritarian regimes. The Ukrainian successful resistance brings some significant hope that this unprecedented challenge can be contained. Thus, the lesson we are learning is like a double-edged sword. This paper explores the two sides of this lesson. On one side, it notes that China is watching closely how democratic allies are reacting to the war. It is either the outcomes of the Ukrainian invasion embolden China to take more aggressive steps in Taiwan or the outcomes weaken its ambition. On the other side, the situation offers the Taiwanese a gleam of hope on the possibility of winning a war with asymmetric capability.

Conclusion: the importance of securing liberal democratic world order.

China is not challenging Taiwan, Hong Kong or India. These countries are like litmus paper to China. China is actually testing world collective order. It is actually challenging democratic ethos and world order. Consequently, defending Taiwan is an important step towards securing liberal democratic world order. The way to start is for like-minded countries to understand China's end game and to work together to save Taiwan. The world needs to draw or re-draw the red lines.

Taiwan is on the frontline of China's expanding "authoritarianism". However, this threat is spreading everywhere. It has reached Australia. This threat is now edging to New Zealand. Currently, China's threats to Taiwan may be too far for New Zealand to feel, but China's challenges to New Zealand's neighbors are too close to ignore.