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Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept: Theory and the Practice

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China's military power is expanding rapidly and has surprised the world. As part of Xi Jinping's great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and China dream, Taiwan is the most important piece of the puzzle. Xi Jinping's ambition to seek unification with Taiwan is no secret. If he cannot do it peacefully, that puzzle piece will have to be taken by force, which is also the ultimate mission of the PLA.

Taiwan faces an existential threat. Given the extreme imbalance in defense resources across the Strait, Taiwan will fail if we continue to use traditional ways to resist the threat from China. For Taiwan, it is no longer a question of whether we need to change or not. If we want to survive, and if we want to successfully defend Taiwan, we must change. This is a matter of life and death.

The challenges facing Taiwan's national defense

But, before we decide on how to change, we first need to make sure that we are changing in the right direction. We need to look closely at the defense challenges we are facing, so that we can find out correct solutions to solve the problems we have. From my perspective, there are four challenges that are creating problems for Taiwan's defense.

First is PLA coercion, or gray zone aggression. PLA aircraft and ships are intruding upon Taiwan's ADIZ, Air Defense Identification Zone, on a daily basis. Taiwan's military has to take the actions to respond in order to maintain our national sovereignty and our people's morale.

Second is the possibility of a full-scale invasion by the PLA. Politically, Taiwan has three options: declare independence, unify with China, or maintain the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. However, if the gap in military capabilities between Taiwan and China continues to grow wider, Taiwan could have only two choices: unification or war. If Taiwan refuses peaceful unification, it will only be a matter of time that China chooses to annex Taiwan by force. This is the existential threat that Taiwan faces.

Third is Taiwan's limited defense resources. How we can effectively allocate these resources is the most pressing issue and a harsh reality faced by Taiwan.

The fourth challenge is about how much time we still have. Former INDOPACOM commander Admiral Davidson, in his congressional testimony in March this year, said that the PLA could be capable of a full-scale invasion against Taiwan within six years. If we take this assessment seriously, it is extremely urgent for Taiwan to reform its defense, buildup capabilities, and prepare for a possible war.

It is not an easy task to deal with all four challenges at the same time because the best solution to one problem takes away resources for the others. So, we must develop a balanced approach to meet our unique security requirements.

So here is the brief analysis.

Analysis of Strategic Choices

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In order to effectively counter gray zone aggression, we need high-profile, advanced, traditional platforms and weapons. Unfortunately, these expensive systems run counter to the solutions to the other three problems.

First of all, these large, advanced, shiny platforms are difficult to survive in the early stages of a full-scale war. They can be easily destroyed by enemy's missile and air attack or become inoperable due to neutralization of critical facilities, such as runways or C4I installations. Therefore, they are not the suitable weapons for countering a full-scale invasion.

Second, the shiny, sophisticated, conventional systems are very expensive. The opportunity cost is too high for us to pay.

Third, these traditional capabilities require a very long lead time and are therefore not able to address the pressing military threat that Taiwan is facing right now.

To effectively address the threat of a full-scale invasion, Taiwan needs highly survivable and resilient asymmetric capabilities, that is, large numbers of small, dispersed, mobile, and lethal weapons. These low-cost, small, asymmetric weapons are very cost effective. They can also be established in a short time and be instant capabilities despite the fact that they might not be as effective to counter gray-zone operations in peacetime.

Obviously, Taiwan's limited defense budget cannot afford everything. We must make a balance and focus on the worst scenario and make the best preparation. That is to say, Taiwan should invest most of its resources on the weapon systems that can effectively counter a full-scale invasion from China instead of against gray zone aggression. A full-scale invasion is an existential threat. Gray-zone operations are not. The ODC was specifically developed based on those strategic concepts.

The ODC

Now, let me give you a summary of the ODC. The ODC is a set of strategies based on asymmetric concepts.

The focus of the ODC is for Taiwan to be able to:

- 1) resist the existential threat,
- 2) effectively allocate our limited defense resources,
- 3) build instant capabilities to address near-term crisis, and
- 4) maintain the ability to counter gray-zone coercion to maintain the public's morale.

Redefine "Winning the War"

Next, I would like to introduce you to a special concept about the definition of winning the war in ODC's theory.

Because of the huge gap of military power across the Taiwan Strait, we cannot defeat the enemy totally in the battlefield, therefore we must be pragmatic and redefine "winning the war" for us. And then we make the best preparation based on that definition.

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The ODC defines "winning the war" as "fail the enemy's mission to occupy Taiwan" instead of totally destroying enemy forces. Under this definition, the ODC specifically established some operational concepts based on the threat from the PLA and Taiwan's unique environment.

First is to abandon the traditional war of attrition and adopt concepts of asymmetric warfare.

Second, we need to adopt the concept of "denial" instead of "control."

Third, we need to focus on mission kills and attack the enemy's center of gravity instead of focus on destroying their actual forces.

Fourth, we need to shape the battlefield conditions to our advantage and engage the enemy when they are most vulnerable.

Fifth, we need to utilize Taiwan's unique geographical environment and civilian resources.

Sixth, we need to do our best to prevent the enemy from landing on our soil and establishing footholds.

Seventh, the last line of defense is to conduct insurgency operations to make the enemy not able to effectively control our homeland.

Due to time restrictions, I will not go into the details of these concepts. If there is interest, I can discuss more in the afternoon.

The concrete content of the ODC

After the ODC's theory, now I'll talk about the ODC in practice.

The structure of the ODC includes two major elements: force buildup and concept of operations. They are supported by an all-out homeland defense mechanism to perform defense in-depth.

Capability buildup

First, I'll talk about capabilities buildup. We need to think strategically in guiding the force buildup. Otherwise, we could easily see the trees and miss the forest, and fail to build necessary warfighting capabilities, and waste limited defense resources. This is the core purpose of the ODC. Any weapons acquisition that is not supported by the ODC will not become capabilities that we can rely on to deter and win the war.

There are three categories of capability buildup under the ODC.

First, highly survivable capabilities.

In my perspective, building highly survivable capabilities is a form of active defense. The PLA's long-range weapons can be precise and lethal. Therefore, when the PLA launches massive missiles and air attacks during the initial phase of war, whether Taiwan's forces and capabilities can survive and still perform in follow-on operations will be critical to Taiwan's defense.

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For the purpose of force preservation, we should not prioritize any weapon that is either on a fixed site, enormously large, or lacking in tactical mobility no matter how advanced it is. If we want to successfully defend ourselves, the top priority for us is to build resilient operational capabilities that can survive the enemy's massive air and missile strikes so they can carry out the follow-on defensive and counterattack missions.

Survivability is not just about the weapons, equipment, and platforms. Other capabilities that include C4ISR and target acquisition, are equally important. Without ISTAR systems, defensive operations will not be effective.

Second, asymmetric capabilities.

The essence of asymmetric capabilities is to have a large number of small things. They have to be highly survivable and lethal on the battlefield.

They might not attract much attention in peacetime, but in wartime they can be a game changer that decides life or death. These weapons can be covered under the natural environment and launch timely strikes at the invading forces' vulnerable points.

Taiwan's asymmetric systems should be lower cost, numerous, small, mobile, dispersed, precise, and lethal. Even if the enemy knows about their existence, it should be extremely hard to locate, attack, and destroy them. If the enemy forces insist on the course of invasion, they will pay a terrible price because of those large numbers of small but lethal weapons.

In order to counter a full-scale invasion, Taiwan should spend most of its defense resources on the priority of developing asymmetric capabilities. Specifically, Taiwan needs:

- sea mines and fast minelayers
- unmanned systems (UAV/USV swarm, UUV)
- Man plus unmanned micro missile assault boats enhanced by artificial intelligence. Unfortunately the program had just been killed months ago.
- small stealth missile corvettes, that are under construction indigenously.
- coastal defense missile systems, like one of FMS cases recently, Harpoon coastal defense missile system.
- Land-based mobile short- and medium-range precision munitions
- precision-guided multiple launch rocket systems
- precision anti-armor missiles
- mobile area air defense systems
- MANPAD-man-portable air defense system and anti-armor rocket systems
- mobile ISTAR systems
- electronic warfare capabilities

Third, conventional capabilities.

In everyday people's minds, large and sophisticated traditional platforms are symbols of national power. Their high visibility makes them effective in peacetime to counter the PLA's gray zone aggression and safeguard Taiwan's air and maritime space. Traditional capabilities are also good for the morale of the troops and the people. In this regard, they are necessary. However, their high visibility also makes them vulnerable on the battlefield and, therefore, not the ideal weapons for Taiwan's defense. Too much investment on those systems could squeeze the resources needed to build asymmetric capabilities, which are far more important

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for the nation's survival. Taiwan's traditional capabilities should therefore be a low quantity of high-quality systems. Their numbers should only be just enough to meet requirements, so as to lower opportunity costs. There needs to be a mandated minimum percentage level of budget resource allocation for asymmetric capabilities (such as 60%).

Concept of Operations

Now I'll talk about another element of the ODC--the concept of operations--which specifically guides force employment. Concept of operations provides how Taiwan's military would use asymmetric forces under the worst-case scenario to defeat the enemy's mission to occupy Taiwan.

The ODC's concept of operations can be divided into three parts.

First, force protection.

The purpose of force protection is to make sure most of the military's capabilities are intact after sustaining the PLA's initial air and missile attacks, so that they can be employed to perform follow-on operations. Without proper force protection measures, most of Taiwan's military power could be destroyed or neutralized in the initial phase of war.

Having force protection measures is different from constructing highly survivable capabilities. Force protection focuses on tactics, techniques, and procedures. Taiwan's military performs tactical mobility, dispersed deployment, deception, camouflage, concealment, installing fake targets, electronic jamming, close-in defense, redundancy, rapid repair, and more, to make it hard for the enemy to detect, attack, and sabotage our forces.

Second, the littoral battle.

The second part of the ODC is to fight a decisive battle in the littoral zone. This is the phase of operations when Taiwan's military could impose heavy casualties on PLA forces. At the littoral, when the PLA forces are close to the shoreline, Taiwan's military has the greatest chance to integrate fire strikes from the air, the sea, and the coast and seriously damage incoming forces with a focus on center of gravity targets, such as specialized amphibious lift ships and other high-value, mission-critical assets.

Third, the beachhead battle.

The third part of the ODC is the beachhead battle. We choose the beaches as the desired battlefield to destroy the enemy because:

- 1) Taiwan is highly urbanized. There are only a few suitable locations for landing and airborne operations. Taiwan can therefore concentrate fires to attack the main forces of the enemy.
- 2) triphibious landings are a very difficult and complicated form of operations. When the enemy is taking the beaches and disembarking, that's the time they are most vulnerable. And also, the timing for Taiwan's counterattacks.
- 3) this is where all the asymmetric capabilities can be used to attack the enemy.

The last assurance: the homeland defense mechanism

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My final point is on the reserve force and all-out defense. Given Taiwan's conditions, an all-out defense is a representation of Taiwan's resolve of self-defense. Without the will to fight, nothing is reliable, not even the most sophisticated weapons.

Currently, Taiwan's military plans to organize and equip the reserve force like the regular army, to become an armored type of unit. It would certainly face the reality in lacking resources for training, equipment, maintenance, facilities and other logistical requirements.

The ODC, however, has a different idea. Taiwan should transform the current reserve system into a homeland defense force to comprise volunteers, conscripts, policemen, fire fighters, and coast guards. We can task the special operations forces to be in charge of their training and technical support. Currently, the SOF, who have a variety of special skills, is an elite force that still does not have a clearly defined mission in Taiwan's defensive operations. They are the best force to do the organizing and training of urban/rural operations and guerrilla warfare.

Given Taiwan's defense budget levels and battlefield requirements, we should equip the homeland defense force with light-weight and mobile weapons and equipment such as:

- light arms
- IED (improvised explosive devices)
- MANPAD (Man-portable air-defense system)
- man-portable anti-armor rockets
- precision-guided micro or Mini-missiles (Spike, pike
- Micro/miniature UAV
- man-portable communications devices
- light tactical wheeled vehicles, and motorcycles.

During peacetime, these systems can be stocked locally with the military, police, fire stations, and coast guard stations, so that they can be quickly obtained and used in wartime.

The homeland defense units would be small and mobile guerrilla forces. They can quickly link up with a local supply depot or arsenal and operate independently and immediately after mobilization. We can train the homeland defense force with an on-site exercise once or twice a year, so that their training plan is easier to implement and the cost is relatively low.

Their missions should keep simple. They do not have to be trained like a regular force. To a certain extent, they don't even have to wear uniforms. Their responsibility is to fit in with the local people for a hit-and-run type of guerrilla warfare to deny the enemy forces. They should not be used to fight with the enemy in an urban defense operation that aims to seize control.

There are many in Taiwan who do not agree with this idea. They think that a militia kind of force is no match for the PLA. I have to say that, from the perspective of having the will to fight, and complicating the enemy's operational plan, the most important task of the homeland defense force is the organization and not the combat skills. A resilient all-out homeland defense mechanism in Taiwan would greatly complicate PLA invasion plans and therefore strengthen deterrence.

Also, many people in Taiwan think that, if the country is at war, young people will not be willing to stand up and fight for their homeland. I think it is not truly objective and not fair enough to impose such a negative assumption on young people without concrete evidence,

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especially when the government doesn't have a feasible plan for them to join the lines of defense for the country.

I do believe that our young people would be willing to defend their own country as long as government provides a pragmatic and viable all-out defense mechanism.

I deeply believe that as long as Taiwan can implement the ideas from the ODC by establishing a proper weapon acquisition policy, restructuring the forces, developing the doctrine, operational plan and suitable training system, Taiwan can build up its own deterrence capabilities by itself. It doesn't matter whether the US government is to take strategic clarity or ambiguity about Taiwan. As long as the US can help Taiwan to establish credible self-defense capabilities, it would be the best strategy for the US toward Taiwan defense.

Finally, I would like to say that there is a hope over the horizon for Taiwan to establish asymmetric capabilities. Just two weeks ago, Taiwan's Executive Yuan approved a 5 years 8.5 billion USD special budget, and there are many programs in line with the definition of asymmetric capabilities laid out in the ODC. This is a good sign for Taiwan to put asymmetric capabilities in a higher priority and I do believe that this is a positive result of cooperation between the Taiwan and the US. Let's continue to proceed forward.

And that concludes my presentation to you on the theory and practice of the Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept.

Thank you.