



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on December 30, 2022

Taiwan to Extend Compulsory Military Service, Increase Soldier Pay & Training to Counter China

SINGAPORE — Taiwan is extending its compulsory military service from the present four months to one year, as part of an attempt to boost the island's defense and combat readiness in light of escalating cross-strait tensions.

The changes come amid increasing pugilism from the communist regime in Beijing, which regards Taiwan as a breakaway province to be "reunified" by force if necessary. China's threat has become more serious since Beijing's military drills in August, President Tsai Ing-wen said at a press conference. "Nobody would want a war ... but peace will not fall from the sky."



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Following U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taipei in August this year, which Beijing rebuked as an infringement of its territorial integrity, China conducted a series of unprecedented military drills, such as flying ballistic missiles over Taiwan. Chinese warships and warplanes have since persisted in crossing the Taiwan Strait, which separates China and Taiwan, almost daily.

Moreover, China's military said it had organized "strike drills" in the sea and airspace surrounding Taiwan to retaliate for what it claimed was "provocation" from the democratically governed island and the United States. Taiwan said that at least 71 air force aircraft had entered its Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) within 24 hours.

Hence the commitment by Taiwan to boost its military.

The compulsory service is slated to begin in 2024, and will affect all Taiwanese males born on or after Jan. 1, 2005. Also beginning in 2024, conscripts will receive a higher monthly pay of NT\$26,307, a huge increase from the present NT\$6,510. Additional changes include longer training programs for servicemen.

Critics have long posited that Taiwan's military service program, which presently encompasses bayonet drills, is too obsolete. In response, Tsai pledged an overhaul to include more shooting exercises and close-combat training, as well as the opportunity to operate more powerful weapons such as anti-tank missiles.

"It was an incredibly difficult decision, but as President and commander-in-chief of Taiwan, it is my unavoidable responsibility ... to safeguard national security and ensure future generations can live freely and in a democracy."

Defense specialists have observed that the changes are a step in the right direction and depict Taiwan's resolve. "Washington and the rest of the international community will strongly question Taiwan's willingness to defend itself if it didn't extend the military service period. Taipei would have been viewed



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as irresponsible,” said Dr. Chen Liang-chih from the government-funded Institute for National Defense and Security Research in Taipei.

According to a December poll by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation, around 73 percent of respondents aged 20 or older said they backed the idea of prolonging the military service to at least a year.

Nonetheless, several male teenage students told *The Straits Times* that they were cynical about how much an extended conscription period would benefit the island in a war.

“In Taiwan, we always say that military service is a complete waste of time because you do not really learn very much,” said 16-year-old Liao Kuo-sen. “I’ve heard seniors say that they spent their military service cleaning the floor, so would eight more months of that be useful?”

That being said, however, Liao has accepted that he will be among the first group of recruits to experience the longer service period. “After what happened in Ukraine, you realize that the threat of war can become real, so it was inevitable that there would be some changes to our military program,” he said.

The military service extension marks a key shift for Taiwan, which had slowly reduced the period from two years to the present four months in 2013 as part of attempts to depend more on a volunteer force of professional soldiers instead.

Yet the island has faced difficulties in recruiting sufficient people to meet its military targets.

Based on a Legislative Yuan report in June, Taiwan currently has a professional military force of 162,000, which is 7,000 fewer than the target, and its military manpower challenges are likely to be exacerbated by a dropping birth rate.

In 2022, the pool of military conscripts was the smallest in ten years — totaling no more than 118,000 — and this figure is expected to drop further in upcoming years. Taiwan’s estimated fertility rate of just over 1.08 in 2022 is the lowest in the world, according to the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

Taiwan plans to raise defense spending to NT\$586.3 billion, a 14-percent year-over-year increase, and the island’s push for a landmark defense budget for 2023 showcases that it is not succumbing to Beijing’s mounted aggression, analysts contend.

“The Tsai administration had to show resolve in the face of China continuously conducting drills and provocations in the Taiwan Strait,” Larissa Stunkel, a China expert at the Institute for Security and Development Policy, told *The Straits Times*.

“Nancy Pelosi’s visit has arguably exacerbated tensions, and then there’s the stone-throwing video that surfaced,” she said, referring to a short video clip that depicted Taiwanese soldiers hurling stones at a Chinese drone that hovered near their guard post near the coast. Taiwan’s defense ministry on August 24 this year said that it would dispatch drone defense systems to offshore islands next year.

The island’s announcements indicate a change in policy priorities, observed Assistant Professor James Lin, a historian of Taiwan at the University of Washington.

“Under KMT (Kuomintang) administrations, military spending was deprioritized because KMT foreign policy emphasized friendly relations with Beijing as a form of maintaining peace,” he said. However, “Given that Beijing has grown increasingly nationalistic and aggressive since 2016, it only makes sense



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that Taiwan's priorities will shift to ensuring it has a greater capability for providing its own self defense."

After all, defense has "become more prominent in Taiwan's daily political awareness" amid Beijing's rising military hostility, Lin added. "This awareness has provided enough impetus to justify this year's 14 per cent increase in defense spending."



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