



Taiwan to Track Chinese Interference in 2024 Presidential Elections

On September 13, Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu revealed in an interview with the Al Jazeera news outlet that Taipei is “watching carefully” any efforts by Beijing to influence the outcome of Taiwan’s 2024 presidential elections. Beijing claims Taiwan as its own and has considered the use of military force to attain its aims.

Wu, a member of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presently dominating the race, has been vocal in defending Taiwan’s elected government from Beijing’s ire.

When questioned by Al Jazeera about China’s endeavors to step up hostilities as the election date nears, Wu admitted that he anticipated an increase in Chinese misinformation and disinformation campaigns, as attempts to shape the election outcome via “forceful” methods, such as widespread military drills, would most probably fail.

The minister stated:

Whenever China tries to interfere in our elections in a forceful way, it tends to backfire. It [test-fired missiles during] the first presidential election in 1996 and every time we go through the same cycle. If the Chinese are interested in the election results here in Taiwan, I don’t think that they will do anything as major as what we saw last August or this past April like large-scale military exercises. If the Chinese do that, I’m sure that people are going to look at China in a very negative way.

That being said, however, he added a caveat, stating:

But if you look at the Chinese decision-making system, it’s highly centralized. All the power is central to Xi Jinping. And of course, he is one man. He cannot have all the information he needs. If he makes a wrong judgment by thinking that maybe the election in Taiwan is not going in a way that the Chinese Communist Party would like, there’s a possibility — or we don’t rule out the possibility — that China may resort to military exercises or a military threat against Taiwan.



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Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 17, 2023

Wu also warned against other Chinese methods to influence Taiwan's election results, such as economic coercion and hybrid warfare:

They've been talking about ending the EFA — the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement — reached between Taiwan and China [in 2010]. They are also investigating some of Taiwan's exports to China and they may do something like ban our mangoes. Hybrid warfare is something that we are watching very carefully. This does not [involve] airplanes or military ships, [rather, the infiltration of] Taiwanese society, free society, through traditional media, through social media.

To further explain Taiwan's situation, he pointed out China's economic slowdown and the nature of the authoritarian Beijing regime:

If we look at the problems posed by China, we can come to some basic understanding. The first is economic. If you look at the Chinese economy, it's slowing down very significantly, to the degree where a lot of international businessmen operating in China right now are looking at alternatives. And if you look at the Chinese government policies, they are creating an economic environment that is not friendly any more. For example, they have an anti-espionage law. They can check business operations, they can detain people, they can prohibit companies from doing certain things. The second thing that we need to be aware of is what China represents as an authoritarian country. It's trying to export its authoritarianism through different kinds of mechanisms ... they are exporting their Belt and Road Initiative, they are also exporting digital authoritarian mechanisms to the Global South — contrary to our shared beliefs in freedom and democracy, protection of human rights, rule of law, and all this.

Wu then lamented that Taiwan was under repeated military threats via Chinese actions such as “hybrid warfare and gray zone activities.” Cautioning against the global ramifications should a Chinese incursion of Taiwan occur, Wu used the Russo-Ukrainian conflict to highlight his point:

Taiwan is also a semiconductor hub. About 60 percent of the semiconductor products come from Taiwan and about 90 percent — to be more precise 92 percent — of the highest end of the semiconductor chips are produced here in Taiwan. If you look at the war in Ukraine, we ended up with a food crisis, energy crisis, inflation everywhere and if you think about the Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the economic impact throughout the world is probably going to be much, much more serious than Ukraine.

He further suggested that the island adopt “a very rational, very moderate policy to prevent China from having any excuse to launch a war against Taiwan,” and that they “arm” themselves with “advanced capabilities” to discourage an invasion.

Wu noted that Japan was also keeping a lookout on Chinese activity in the Taiwan Strait, asserting that Tokyo understands “that Taiwan's security may be inseparable from Japanese security”:

If you look at the Chinese movements, their air force or their naval force, there are two channels that they can go through: one is the Bashi channel, and the other one is Miyako



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Strait. And whenever they pass through the Miyako Strait, they can threaten Taiwan and whenever they pass through the Bashi Channel to go north, they threaten Japan. Towards the end of last year, they [Japan] revised their three national security documents and they have decided to double their military budget and fortify some of the outer islands that are close to Taiwan. And I think all these efforts are part of the international effort in deterring China from using force against Taiwan.

Since current President Tsai Ing-wen was first elected as leader of Taiwan in 2016, Beijing has ramped up its propaganda efforts on the island. Tsai does not qualify to run for president for a third term.

In 2019, Tsai hurried to pass a law, known as the anti-infiltration bill, to outlaw political activity supported by Chinese funding ahead of the presidential and legislative elections in January 2020. According to the law, those who help “external counter forces” organize political activity, disrupt social order, or lobby lawmakers would be penalized.

“We are aware that China is infiltrating Taiwan, China is expanding its influence on Taiwan,” she announced in a policy presentation in December 2019, quoting episodes of espionage that involved “Taiwanese retired generals.” “The new anti-infiltration law completes the last piece of the puzzle. We need to build a safety net for national security and we only have very limited time.”

Tsai and her DPP have been constantly touting themselves as the best guardians of democracy in Taiwan to counter Beijing’s plans for unification, and such a narrative has aided them in local elections.



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