

Chinese Information Operations against Taiwan: The “Abandoned Chess Piece” and “America Skepticism Theory”



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Executive Summary

The narratives of “America Skepticism Theory” (疑美論) have come to occupy a prominent place in Taiwan’s information environment over the past year. This narrative—and its associated parallel and subordinate narratives—holds that America is an untrustworthy and treacherous ally, that it is exploiting Taiwan for its own purposes, and that it will eventually abandon its support for Taiwan when doing so accords with its interests. A particularly prominent, and colorful, element of “America Skepticism” is the depiction of Taiwan as a “chess piece” (棋子) or “pawn” (馬前卒) of America—with the intended message that the island and its people represent a disposable proxy for the United States, which could be abandoned at any time.

Some of these narrative themes have roots in Taiwan’s domestic discourse, reflecting insecurity connected to the island’s international isolation. However, whether these narratives may originate in Taiwan, or whether they are generated by the state propaganda architecture of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), they are heavily promoted and amplified by the latter system. Both these terms and their associated content are employed extensively by official PRC media outlets and PRC proxy actors in Taiwan, and represent a concerted propaganda campaign by Chinese government-directed entities to sow doubt among Taiwan’s citizens—and to undermine the progress made in recent years in building a closer and more cooperative relationship between the United States and Taiwan. This propaganda material has successfully infiltrated Taiwan’s in-

formation ecosystem in terms of both traditional and online media, and has even become a part of the public discourse employed by prominent political figures in Taiwan.

Employing a narrative, case-study approach, this GTI research report is intended to provide an analysis of the narrative elements of “America Skepticism,” and to demonstrate how they function as part of a directed Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) information operations campaign intended to subvert not only the US-Taiwan relationship, but also the resilience of Taiwanese society to resist PRC coercive pressure for “reunification” on the PRC’s terms. It will also provide illustrative examples of the ways in which these narratives have been promoted and amplified by PRC-aligned proxies in Taiwan, and how these themes have infiltrated media and political discourse about Taiwan’s relations with the United States, as well as Taiwan’s own agency regarding its future.

In so doing, GTI hopes that this report will serve to further expose the efforts made by the CCP and its proxies to undermine US-Taiwan relations, and to subvert Taiwan’s democratic society. We further hope that it will make a contribution to the ongoing efforts by government and civil society organizations in Taiwan to increase the resilience of Taiwanese society to CCP-directed hostile propaganda and disinformation.

Whether these narratives may originate in Taiwan, or whether they are generated by the state propaganda architecture of the PRC, they are heavily promoted and amplified by the latter system.

Part 1: Mapping Out the Propaganda Narrative of “America Skepticism” in US-Taiwan Relations

The Narrative and Scope of “America Skepticism Theory”

“America Skepticism Theory” (or by alternative translations, “Doubting America Theory” or “America Suspicion Theory”) (疑美論) is a broad narrative, embracing multiple affiliated and subordinate narratives, which has become increasingly prominent in Taiwan’s information environment. The overarching narrative is challenging to define in specific terms, but generally holds that America is exploiting Taiwan for its own purposes, and will abandon its support for Taiwan whenever US interests dictate doing so. “America Skepticism Theory” is a relatively new term in Taiwan’s media and online spaces, but it plays off of past legacies of tension in the US-Taiwan relationship.¹

The ongoing “America Skepticism” narrative is invoked not only in regards to historical events connected to Taiwan, but also to more recent examples of alleged US perfidy, such as the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan (*see further discussion on page 16*). The narrative also looks ahead to the future, predicting that America will withdraw its political and military support for Taiwan at an undisclosed point. Accordingly, the narrative holds that Taiwan should seek closer relations with the PRC—or at the least, seek out a neutralist stance between China and the United States.

The “America Skepticism” narrative is a key element of

1 These legacies include the sense of “betrayal” expressed by many in Taiwan’s government and state media following the US switch of diplomatic recognition from the Republic of China (ROC) to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1979. For example, a February 1980 editorial in the English-language China Post declared that the US shift in recognition represented “betrayal of a U.S. friend and ally of more than 60 years [and] shocked beyond description not only the government and people of the Republic of China but also the whole free world.” See: “Stronger than Ever,” *China Post*, February 1, 1980, <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=4&post=5020>. See also: Graham Hovey, “U.S. and Taiwan Flags Lowered as Ties Are Symbolically Ended,” *New York Times*, January 1, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/01/01/archives/us-and-taiwan-flags-lowered-as-ties-are-symbolically-ended-only-one.html>.



Image: A headline from China Daily (a primary English-language Chinese state media publication) promoting the narrative of Taiwan’s role as an “expendable” pawn of the United States. The editorial stated that “secessionists on the island... can stand on the right side of history and work with Beijing for the peaceful reunification of the island with the motherland, or do Washington’s bidding and sacrifice the island on the altar of the US’ hegemony.”²

PRC state propaganda directed at both Taiwan and international audiences. Direct PRC state sources tend to employ a certain element of circumlocution in terms of identifying America as a source of support for “Taiwan independence separatism” (台獨分裂)—tending instead to use veiled terms such as “outside interference schemes” (外來干涉圖謀) or “foreign forces” (外部勢力), with the United States clearly insinuated as the guilty party.³ Despite their veiled inferences to the United States when it comes to the

2 “Taiwan Is Expendable in Washington’s Game,” *China Daily*, July 10, 2023, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202307/10/WS64abeb77a31035260b8158ed.html>.

3 For examples, see: “Foreign Ministry: Any Foreign Forces that Interfere in China’s Internal Affairs [and] Undermine Peace and Stability in the Taiwan Strait Will Pay the Price” (外交部：任何干涉中國內政、破壞台海和平穩定的外部勢力，都將付出代價), *Huanqiu Shibao*, May 5, 2023, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1765039313282342951&wfr=spider&for=pc>; and “Wang Yi: China’s Internal Affairs Will Brook No Outside Interference” (王毅：中國內政不容外來干涉), *Zhongguo Ribao*, July 15, 2023, http://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202307/15/WS64b28bbaa3109d7585e450ec.html?ivk_sa=1023197a.



有台湾学者一针见血地指出，在美国眼中



台湾依然是棋子，一颗随时可被抛弃和牺牲的棋子

Images: Still images from a PRC state media video promoting the “abandoned chess piece” narrative. Amid alternating scenes of Taiwan and PRC military equipment, the video asserts that “As Taiwan scholars sharply point out, in the eyes of America, Taiwan is still a chess piece, [and] at any time could become a discarded and sacrificed chess piece.”⁴

topic of Taiwanese independence, such sources tend to be more explicit in invoking the narrative of America employing Taiwan as an expendable pawn.

The “America Skepticism Theory” further posits Taiwan as a manipulated proxy of US efforts to restrain China, rather than as an actor possessing any agency of its own. It also denies any element of US ideological sympathy for Taiwan as a fellow democracy threatened by authoritarian pressure: within this narrative, Taiwan is entirely a functional tool for the United States, which is being employed in an ongoing effort to weaken China. (See further discussion of this particular sub-narrative on page 6, and pp. 10-11.) By clear implication, such a functional relationship could be terminated at any time if it were no longer to serve US interests *vis-à-vis* Beijing. In other words, an “America Skepticism” narrative carries a message something like this: “Because America is self-interested and prepared to abandon Taiwan at any time, Taiwan should therefore keep its distance from the United States, and seek an accommodation with China.”

The “chess piece” narrative—as well as “America Skepticism” narratives more broadly—have been actively promoted by both the PRC and influential interests in Taiwan

4 “America Scheming to ‘Use Taiwan to Contain China,’ *People’s Daily*: On the Taiwan Question, China Has No Room for Compromise” (美試圖“以台製華”，人民日報：中國在台灣問題上沒任何妥協餘地), *Global Times Media*, undated, <https://open.163.com/newview/movie/free?pid=CGFRV8M5M&mid=QGFRV8M6E>.



Image: A Chinese state television news segment titled “Taiwan Youth Don’t Want to Be Pawns of ‘Taiwan Independence’ Politicians,” which employs the “pawn before the horse” (馬前卒) chess piece metaphor. The featured speaker from Taiwan is Yu Tzu-Hsiang (游梓翔), a faculty member of Taiwan’s Shih Hsin University (世新大學). The news segment is an example of how Chinese state media sets overarching themes, while leveraging selected individuals from the marginal pro-unification spectrum of Taiwan politics, to promote the narrative that most Taiwan citizens are eager to unify with the PRC.⁵

as a prominent component of discourse in Taiwan regarding relations with the United States, as will be explored in the examples provided in the next section of this report.

5 “Taiwan Youth Don’t Want to Be Pawns of ‘Taiwan Independence’ Politicians” (台灣年輕人別做“台獨”政客馬前卒), *CCTV*, October 27, 2020, <https://haokan.baidu.com/v?pd=wisenatural&vid=8432068172353008299>.

The “Chess Piece” Metaphor in Taiwan’s Political Discourse

A key component of the “America Skepticism” information campaign is that America—sometimes identified by name, and sometimes indirectly alluded to as an unnamed “powerful country” (強國)—“makes Taiwan into a chess piece” (美國把台灣當棋子), or expendable pawn, for its own purposes.⁶ In Mandarin, the “chess piece” (棋子, *qizi*) metaphor is often used to describe someone with no agency, and/or someone who may be treated as a disposable pawn. This is closely homophonous (same sound, different tone) with “discarded thing” (棄子, *qizi*), which may also describe a person or thing in similar circumstances.

Another chess metaphor used to describe Taiwan’s situation in the context of the abandonment narrative is “pawn in front of horse” (馬前卒)—meaning something akin to “expendable pawn,” or “cat’s paw.” PRC government sources have used this term in reference to Taiwan government officials: referring, for example, in 2019 to Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council as “willing to act as a pawn of anti-China forces” (甘當反華勢力馬前卒).⁷ This metaphor is also sometimes used alongside cruder, insulting language for both Taiwan and countries that demonstrate support for it. For example, PRC state media in spring 2022 referred to Lithuania (which had attracted PRC ire for approving the opening of a “Taiwanese Representative Office” in Vilnius⁸) and Taiwan as “pawns before the horse” and “fathead dupes” (冤大頭) for criticizing Russia and aligning with US positions in the context of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.⁹

Terms such as “chess piece” (棋子), “discarded thing” (棄子), and “pawn before the horse” (馬前卒) all describe a person or thing with little control over their future, and who may be easily abandoned by the manipulative force exploiting it. This is very much the narrative about Taiwan’s relations with the United States that PRC sources—and by extension, PRC-influenced media and internet discourse actors in Taiwan’s own information environment—wish to promote to Taiwan’s citizens.

6 Chen Ting-zhen, “If Doubting America Theory Becomes the Leading Trend, Taiwan Will Ultimately Be Defeated!” Taiwan National University Professor Warns: Our People Are Feigning Ignorance” (「疑美論占上風，台灣終走向敗亡！」台大教授警告：我們的人故作不知), *Storm Media*, January 19, 2023, https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E7%96%91%E7%BE%8E%E8%AB%96%E5%8D%A0%E4%B8%8A%E9%A2%A8-%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E7%B5%82%E8%B5%B0%E5%90%91%E6%95%97%E4%BA%A1-%E5%8F%B0%E5%A4%A7%E6%95%99%E6%8E%88%E8%AD%A6%E5%91%8A-%E6%88%91%E5%80%91%E7%9A%84%E4%BA%BA%E6%95%85%E4%BD%9C%E4%B8%8D%E7%9F%A5-071953749.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM-6Ly93d3cuYmluZy5jb20v&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAA6YEVFOI07MXpTRGY_YuBbZW-SKfVn9vNNDPEJAEIpkxQv1c122sZo-hAdztlHaxljbDQtbJWEDO9_hA_YGtIsXGrEVRGZ7i7wmsmKIlNtCf9UX1gtpMAvf5e8wYx1pHBHHAa2IPFFEaDVLEIsLmH-p5Y5ooK0LnIk98TT7LizRN.

7 State Council Taiwan Office: The Mainland Affairs Council Is Willing to Act as Pawns for Anti-China Forces / (It Has an) Extremely Bad Nature” (“國台辦：台陸委會甘當反華勢力馬前卒 性質極惡劣”), *China Youth Net*, June 26, 2019, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1637375471436366272&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

8 Thomas Shattuck, “Lithuania’s Bet on Taiwan and What It Means for Europe,” *FPRI*, July 12, 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/07/lithuanias-bet-on-taiwan-and-what-it-means-for-europe/>.

9 “Lithuania and Taiwan, the ‘Pawns’ and ‘Fathead Dupes’ Under the Control of America” (立陶宛和台灣，美國操縱下的“馬前卒”和“冤大頭”), *Haixia Xinxun*, April 3, 2022, <https://haokan.baidu.com/v?pd=wisenatural&vid=6197857212344716603>.

Part 2: Examples of “America Skepticism” and the “Chess Piece” Narrative in Taiwan’s Political Discourse

Promotion of the “America Skepticism” Narrative in PRC-Influenced Media

The “disposable chess piece” metaphor, along with other prominent elements of “America Skepticism,” has emerged as a significant theme in Taiwan’s information space, and has been actively promoted in Taiwan by actors within the island’s media ecosystem that are influenced by the PRC. Reporting in 2019 revealed that the Want Want Group (旺旺集團有限公司), a snack food and media conglomerate owned by the outspoken pro-unification billionaire Tsai Eng-meng (蔡衍明), had accepted the equivalent of nearly USD \$500 million in subsidies from the PRC between 2007-2018 to continue its pro-PRC messaging across a range of newspapers, television channels, and internet outlets.¹⁰ Tsai’s Want Want media empire has become one of the most obvious conduits of CCP-generated propaganda content into Taiwan’s information environment, to the point of reportedly taking direct orders on content and coverage from the PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office (國務院台灣事務辦公室).¹¹

Such coverage has included direct promotion of the “abandoned chess piece” narrative. For example, in March 2023 the Want Want-owned *China Times* (中國時報) published an editorial by former National Security Council Deputy Secretary Yang Yong-ming (楊永明) titled “Don’t Be a Strong Country’s Chess Piece” (不做強國棋子), which argued that Taiwan should pull back from closer relations with the Unit-

ed States in order to improve relations with China. It stated:

For the sake of Taiwan's security, economy, diplomatic relations and international space, Taiwan needs to wisely maintain a balanced self-reliant diplomatic position between America and China, not be any strong country's chess piece, [and] construct stable cross-Strait relations; only in this way [can we] pragmatically expand Taiwan's economy and trade agreements and international space.¹²

Such narratives have also become prominent in certain sectors of Taiwan’s pro-unification “Pan-Blue” broadcast media. For example, in an interview in January 2023, the firebrand political commentator Jaw Shaw-kong (趙少康)—who has become a prominent Taiwan media personality known for intemperate anti-American and pro-Chinese views—harshly criticized Kuomintang Party (KMT, 國民黨) political figures for allegedly following excessively pro-American policies. He harshly demanded, “Is the Kuomintang capable or not of boldly saying to America, ‘I am not your chess piece?’” (“國民黨能不能大膽的跟美國說我不是你的棋子?”).



Image: Outspoken media commentator Jaw Shaw-kong speaking to reporters in Taipei (Jan. 3, 2023). In his comments, Jaw demanded “Is the Kuomintang capable or not of boldly saying to America, ‘I am not your chess piece?’”¹³

10 Kenji Kawase, “Chinese Subsidies for Foxconn and Want Want Spark Outcry in Taiwan,” *Nikkei Asia*, April 30, 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Companies/Chinese-subsidies-for-Foxconn-and-Want-Want-spark-outcry-in-Taiwan>.

11 Jonah Landsman, “Assessing Taiwan’s Media Landscape and PRC Influence, Part One: The Dangers of Deregulation,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, July 19, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/07/assessing-taiwans-media-landscape-and-prc-influence-part-one-the-dangers-of-deregulation/>.

12 Yang Yong-ming, “Don’t Be a Strong Country’s Chess Piece” (不做強國棋子), *China Times*, March 16, 2023, <https://www.china-times.com/newspapers/20230316000562-260118?chdtv>.

13 M News, “Military Service Policy Runs with the Green Camp / Jaw Shaw-kong Declares: Don’t Be an American Pawn” (兵役政策跟著綠營跑 趙少康嗆朱：別做美國棋子), YouTube, January 3, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZUBlzaG84Q>.

Social Media Promotion of PRC Propaganda by Proxy Political Figures in Taiwan

Anti-American propaganda content has also made its way extensively into Taiwan's social media environment—including short videos and similar material posted to Line, TikTok, and other apps popular in Taiwan. These materials often employ the simplified characters used in the PRC (rather than the traditional characters more widely used in Taiwan), thereby providing an un-subtle indicator as to their likely point of origin. These materials often involve, or else are re-posted on the social media accounts of, figures associated with the marginal pro-unification “deep blue” spectrum of Taiwan politics.

For example, in one undated short video posted to TikTok, Taipei City Councilman Hou Han-ting (侯漢廷)—currently the only member of the pro-unification New Party (新黨) to hold any prominent elective office in Taiwan—identifies US arms sales to Taiwan as part of an American scheme to manipulate Taiwan and the PRC into fighting, so that Taiwan may be used as a proxy to damage China with minimal cost to the United States. In the video, Hou states:

America has a group of strategists [who] hope to see the two sides of the Strait fight as soon as possible, [and to see] Taiwan people die in great numbers... afterwards the mainland will be weakened, [and] America therefore will be able to continue consolidating and maintaining its hegemony. America has repeatedly sent or sold to Taiwan military equipment. What is America's intent in doing this? It is to promote war between the two sides, and only Taiwan people will die, not Americans. So from this, we can see America's treacherous intentions.¹⁴

Another such example is the social media content posted by Tsai Cheng-yuan (蔡正元), a former KMT legislator who

14 “Taiwan Media: America Treacherously Seeks to Trap Taiwan for its Own Selfish Interests” (台媒：美國用心險惡為一己私對坑害台灣), TikTok, Feb. 25, 2023, https://www.tiktok.com/@hhm.men/video/7204037523981552901?_r=1&percent3B_t=8cCbtEhhN-jH&percent3Bsocial_sharing=v1.



Image: “Taiwan Media: America Treacherously Seeks to Trap Taiwan for its Own Selfish Interests.” In this TikTok video distributed in Taiwan, Taipei City Councilman Hou Han-ting identifies US arms sales to Taiwan as part of a scheme to manipulate Taiwan into fighting the PRC, in order to maintain American “hegemony.” Of note, the video clip employs simplified characters in the labeling and subtitles—thereby indicating that the video editing was likely performed in the PRC.¹⁵

has also emerged as a prominent spokesman for “America Skepticism” narratives. Tsai has used his media and social media presence to promote PRC conspiracy theories about the United States, such as a video claiming that the US Central Intelligence Agency was secretly involved in organizing the 2019 protest movement in Hong Kong.¹⁶ He has served as a conduit for posting anti-American

15 “Taiwan Media: America Treacherously Seeks to Trap Taiwan for its Own Selfish Interests” (台媒：美國用心險惡為一己私對坑害台灣), TikTok, February 25, 2023, https://www.tiktok.com/@hhm.men/video/7204037523981552901?_r=1&percent3B_t=8cCbtEhhN-jH&percent3Bsocial_sharing=v1.

16 “Directed by America's CIA / The Person Responsible for Inciting the Hong Kong Disturbances, Chinese Name 'Bao Wei Zhong' is Arrested by the Hong Kong Police” (美國CIA指揮 煽動香港騷亂的負責人 中文名「包偉忠」被港警逮捕), Facebook Reels video, undated, <https://www.facebook.com/reel/922661864768092>.

propaganda material evidently generated in the PRC, as laid out in the example below.

The “Seven Laws of Diplomacy”: A Case Study in CCP “Propaganda Laundering”

One of the most interesting—and potentially revealing—examples of “America Skepticism” social media content is the “Seven Laws of U.S. Diplomacy” (美國外交七定律), a linked series of graphics and commentary that appeared on the Facebook account of Tsai Cheng-yuan in February 2023.¹⁷ The graphics lay out the alleged principles that underlie US foreign policy, and present a picture of an aggressive and rapacious hegemonic power whose actions are characterized by hypocrisy and deceit—all fundamental elements of CCP propaganda narratives about the United States. The graphics were nominally original material, and PRC state media praised it as clever satirical content produced by Tsai, which had caused “multitudes of netizens to roll over laughing.”¹⁸



Images: Selected graphics from the “Seven Laws of U.S. Diplomacy,” a presentation nominally produced by former KMT legislator Tsai Cheng-yuan. The content bears hallmarks (including themes and the use of simplified Chinese characters) that strongly suggest the material was actually produced in the PRC.¹⁹

However, the graphics once again bore evident fingerprints of the CCP propaganda system: they were rendered in the simplified characters employed in the PRC, a choice that would make little sense for a Taiwan creator producing material for a Taiwan-based audience. They also included themes of questionable relevance to Taiwan, but which align with CCP narratives and ideological formulations about the United States.

17 “Seven Laws of U.S. Diplomacy” (美國外交七定律), posting on the Facebook account of Tsai Cheng-yuan, February 6, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/tsaichengyuan/posts/733410394815951?ref=embed_post.

18 “Can’t Taiwan Have ‘Doubting America Theory’? Tsai Cheng-yuan Exposes ‘The Seven Laws of US Diplomacy’ to the Wild Approval of Netizens” (台灣不能有“疑美論”？蔡正元揭“美國外交七定律”引網友狂贊), *Huaxia Wang*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.huaxia.com/c/2023/02/07/1606372.shtml>.

19 “Can’t Taiwan Have ‘Doubting America Theory’? Tsai Cheng-yuan Exposes ‘The Seven Laws of US Diplomacy’ to the Wild Approval of Netizens” (台灣不能有“疑美論”？蔡正元揭“美國外交七定律”引網友狂贊), *Huaxia Wang*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.huaxia.com/c/2023/02/07/1606372.shtml>.

These include “If America suspects you of some evil deed, then it has certainly done it” (如果美國懷疑你做了什麼壞事，那它自己肯定做過); and, “If you perform better than America, you are sure to encounter misfortune [or plunder]” (如果你做得比美國好，那你肯定難逃一劫).²⁰

The “Seven Laws of U.S. Diplomacy” provides an illustrative example as to how much of the anti-American propaganda material in Taiwan’s information spaces is likely generated in the PRC (indeed, its tell-tale hallmarks make it seem lazy in this respect). It also demonstrates the CCP practice of “propaganda laundering”—that is, attempting to make it seem as though CCP-generated content is indigenous to Taiwan, and reflective of mainstream local opinion.²¹ In this instance, the use of a former Taiwan legislator’s social media accounts to propagate such material is yet another example of the role played by coopted proxies in the CCP’s efforts to promote the “America Skepticism” narrative in Taiwan’s political discourse.

20 The full list of seven “laws” is provided below, in the original simplified characters, and provided English translation. (The author would translate some of the sentences differently.) They are: “Never believe in what the US tells you” (永 不要相信美国说了什么), “The US has done everything it accuses you of” (如果美国怀疑你做了什么事，那它自己肯定做过), “Watch out if you’re richly endowed, for you will definitely be on Uncle Sam’s hit list till he has full access to what’s yours” (如果你有好的资源，美国必然虎视眈眈，不攫取入囊中不罢休), “Trouble awaits if you outperform the US” (如果你做得比美国好，那你肯定难逃一劫), “If the US starts slinging mud at you, brace yourself for its sticks” (如果美国开始污蔑抹黑你，那他的黑手正向你伸来), “If the US acts nice, be ready to hear its demands” (当美国对你好，一定有所图), “When the US calls you an ‘ally,’ it’s actually saying ‘I’m your boss’” (当美国称你盟友，就是要当你的老大).

21 The “laundering” of propaganda and united front work through front organizations and proxies has a long history in CCP information operations. For a discussion of CCP “propaganda laundering” connected to Taiwan in a different context, see: John Dotson, “The China Cross-Strait Academy: A Case Study in CCP United Front Cultivation of Taiwan Youths and Media Manipulation,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, June 30, 2021, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2021/06/the-china-cross-strait-academy-a-case-study-in-ccp-united-front-cultivation-of-taiwan-youths-and-media-manipulation/>.

The “Chess Piece” Narrative in Discourse by Taiwan Political Figures

The “chess piece” metaphor has also been employed, albeit usually in somewhat more vague and moderate terms, by selected political figures in Taiwan. For example, the “chess piece” theme was invoked at a 2023 New Year’s Day rally by Taipei New City Mayor Hou You-yi (侯友宜), since selected by the KMT as its candidate for Taiwan’s 2024 presidential election.²² Hou has adopted aspects of this narrative, in a more temperate tone—perhaps in part to shore up his right flank in the party, in the face of reported suspicions by elements of the KMT

22 Zaki Atia, “KMT Factional Divisions and their Implications for the 2024 Election,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, March 8, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/03/kmt-factional-divisions-and-their-implications-for-the-2024-election/>.

old guard that he has “blue skin and green bones” (藍皮綠骨).²³ Referring obliquely to America, Hou stated that amidst tensions between the United States and China, “we are absolutely not a powerful country’s chess piece” (我們絕對不是強國的棋子).

The “chess piece” language has also been employed, with a somewhat different emphasis, by former Taipei City Mayor Ke Wen-je (柯文哲), the presidential

23 “Liu Chia-chang Secretly Criticizes ‘Blue Skin, Green Bones’ / Hou You-yi: Work Hard for the Country” (劉家昌暗批“藍皮綠骨” 侯友宜:為國家努力做事), *FTV News*, March 2023, <https://tw.sports.yahoo.com/video/%E5%8A%89%E5%AE%B6%E6%98%8C%E6%9A%97%E6%89%B9-%E8%97%8D%E7%9A%AE%E7%B6%A0%E9%AA%A8-%E4%BE%AF%E5%8F%8B%E5%AE%9C-%E7%82%BA%E5%9C%8B%E5%AE%B6%E5%8A%AA%E5%8A%9B%E5%81%9A%E4%BA%8B-060746121.html>.



Image: New Taipei City Mayor Hou You-yi speaking at a public event on New Year's Day 2023, in which he told the assembled crowd that "Amid the Ukraine war, and US-China competition... Taiwan cannot stay uninvolved... [but] we are absolutely not a powerful country's chess piece."²⁴

candidate of the Taiwan People's Party (民眾黨). In a public appearance in July 2023, Ke expressed his hope that Taiwan would become "a bridge for communication between America and China," but that it would "not be a chess piece in America-China confrontation" (而不是美中對抗的棋子).²⁵

By contrast, Taiwan's current Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨)-led government has taken a public stance against the proliferation of anti-American propaganda in the island's information ecosystem. President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), in office since 2016, has made a concerted effort not only to forge a closer security relationship between Taiwan and the United States, but also to promote the ideological affinity between Taiwan

24 CTI TV News, "We Are Absolutely Not a Powerful Country's Chess Piece! Hou You-yi Casts Aside 'International Strategy' and Calls for Unity" (我們絕非強國棋子! 侯友宜拋"國際戰略"喊團結), YouTube Video, January 2, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3r8rOdIshs>.

25 "Ke Wen-je Hopes Taiwan Will Be a Bridge for Communication Between America and China, Not a Chess Piece in Confrontation" (柯文哲盼台灣是美中溝通橋梁非對抗棋子), Central News Agency July 21, 2023, <https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E6%9F%AF%E6%96%87%E5%93%B2%E7%9B%BC%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E6%98%AF%E7%BE%8E%E4%B8%AD%E6%BA%9D%E9%80%9A%E6%A9%8B%E6%A2%81-%E9%9D%9E%E5%B0%8D%E6%8A%97%E6%A3%8B%E5%AD%90-143644770.html>.

and other democratic states.²⁶ On January 8th, Vice-President Lai Ching-te (賴清德), the current DPP presidential candidate, presented a speech to DPP party members titled "[We] Must Not Allow Suspicion of America to Become the Common Consensus," in which he identified American support as vital to defending Taiwan's democratic system.²⁷

This sentiment was echoed in a Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 中華民國外交部) press statement in February 2023 that warned against "messages from certain individuals expressing anti-US sentiments or those questioning the US commitment to defend Taiwan, as they will take advantage of every opportunity to spread false information using sensational content." The statement further cautioned that such persons "often echo the rhetoric that China uses for cognitive warfare to erode Taiwanese confidence in the US and damage Taiwan-US partnerships."²⁸

The Impacts of "America Skepticism" in Taiwan's Information Environment

While it is difficult to quantify the impact of these narratives in Taiwan's information environment, they are certainly having some effect. For example, in March 2022 the Taiwan Public Opinion Center (TPOC, 台灣議題研究中心) conducted an analysis of Taiwan's online discourse related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and found a surprisingly high level of anti-American content. Per

26 "President Tsai Delivers 2021 National Day Address," Office of the President of the Republic of China, October 10, 2021, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/6175>; and Simone McCarthy, "Beijing Warns of 'Severe Impact' on US-China Relations as Taiwan's Leader Lands in New York," CNN, March 30, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/30/asia/tsai-ing-wen-taiwan-new-york-city-china-response-intl-hnk#:~:text=%E2%80%9CWe%20know%20that%20we%20are%20stronger%20when%20we,to%20footage%20from%20CNN%E2%80%99s%20Taiwan%20affiliate%20SET%20TV>.

27 "Lai Ching-te: If 'America Skepticism Theory' Becomes the Common Consensus, Taiwan Will Be in Great Peril / Sets Off Internet Controversy" (賴清德:「疑美論」如成共識台灣很危險 引爆網路炸鍋), *United Daily News*, January 10, 2023, <https://udn.com/news/story/6656/6901439>.

28 Shelley Shan, "Ministry Warns About False US Reports," *Taipei Times*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/02/23/2003794893>.

TPOC's findings, in its survey of online posts:

25.9% of commentary focused on [themes such as] “condemning America for not helping Afghanistan and Ukraine” (譴責美國不幫阿富汗和烏克蘭), “believing that America did not send troops to Ukraine and would not help Taiwan” (認為美國不出兵烏克蘭也不會幫台灣), [and] “thinking that America is the real devil” (認為真正的惡魔是美國), [thereby] demonstrating that “America Skepticism Theory” occupies a significant voice” [in Taiwan’s online discourse].²⁹

Polling data released by the Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF, 台灣民意基金會) in February 2023 indicated a significant plurality of suspicion towards America, particularly as it pertains to fears of military conflict. TPOF reported that, in regards to a polling statement about US relations and the risk of war (“Recently America has been friendlier than ever before towards Taiwan, supplying various types of military and non-military support, and this will eventually push Taiwan towards war”), 18.4 percent of respondents were in strong agreement and 19.7 percent generally agreed—for a combined 38.1 percent of respondents expressing concern that US support to Taiwan was increasing the likelihood of conflict. (33.1 percent of respondents generally did not agree, 20.3 percent strongly disagreed, and 8.5 percent expressed no opinion.) In the same poll, 51.5 percent

51.5 percent of young adults aged 20-24 reportedly expressed general agreement with “America Skepticism Theory.”

29 “How Do Taiwan People View the Russia-Ukraine War? Investigation: Social Groups Full of ‘America Skepticism Theory’ Reach 25%” (俄烏戰爭台人怎麼看？聲量調查：社群充斥「疑美論」達25%), Taiwan Public Opinion Center, March 3, 2022, <https://www.tpoc.com.tw/article/956>.

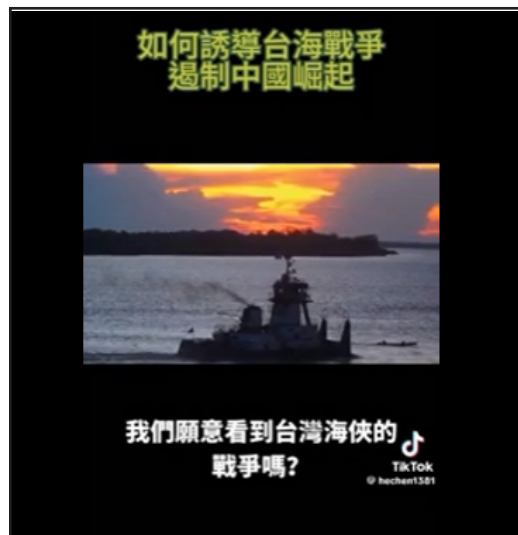


Image: “Are We Willing to See a War in the Taiwan Strait?” A still image from the anti-American propaganda TikTok video “How to Start a War in the Taiwan Strait to Constrain China’s Rise.” The video’s prevalence on TikTok prompted Taiwan’s government to issue a refutation of its contents.³⁰

of young adults aged 20-24 reportedly expressed general agreement with “America Skepticism Theory”—the highest number among any age group in Taiwan.³¹

The prevalence of “America Skepticism” is also reflected in the increased attention that Taiwan’s government, as well as civil society groups concerned with disinformation, are giving to refuting it. For example, in July 2023 Taiwan’s MOFA issued a press release criticizing and refuting the contents of a short film titled “How to Induce a War in the Taiwan Strait to Constrain China’s Rise” (如何誘導台海戰爭遏制中國崛起), which had gone viral on TikTok. The

30 “In Regards to the Film ‘How to Start a War in the Taiwan Strait to Constrain China’s Rise’ Propagated on the Internet, the Foreign Ministry Has the Following Response” (關於網傳「如何誘導台海戰爭遏制中國崛起」的影片事，外交部回應如下：), ROC Foreign Ministry, July 24, 2023, https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=95&sms=73&s=115115.

31 “Should We Have ‘America Skepticism Theory’?: The Views of Youth Aged 20-24 Are Revealed” (不應有「疑美論」？20-24歲年輕人意見曝光), *China Times*, January 17, 2023, <https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20230117002698-260407?chdtv>.

film, evidently originating from an unidentified pro-PRC propaganda organization (the film employs traditional characters, but the paranoid premise contained in its title is a central CCP narrative), asserts that “the West is goading China into war,” and that “America’s strategic plan is to use the blood of Taiwan people to return America to its position in Asia and the world.” MOFA condemned the film’s message, countering that “The central problem behind the tense situation in the Taiwan Strait is not Taiwan, is not America, and is not in the democratic camp, but rather the ambitions of China’s authoritarian government for expansionism and unilateral schemes and actions to change the status quo” through coercive military activity and diplomatic pressure.³²

32 “In Regards to the Film ‘How to Start a War in the Taiwan Strait to Constrain China’s Rise’ Propagated on the Internet, the Foreign Ministry Has the Following Response” (關於網傳「如何誘導台海戰爭遏制中國崛起」的影片事，外交部回應如下：), ROC Foreign Ministry, July 24, 2023, https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=95&sms=73&s=115115.

Part 3: Related Narratives to the “America Skepticism” Discourse

The “America Skepticism” narrative also encapsulates a number of related and/or subordinate narratives promoted by the PRC and its proxies. These associated narratives offer further rationales as to why citizens in Taiwan should distrust the prospects for cooperation with the United States—and by implication, adopt a more accommodating posture towards Beijing. Many of these narratives appear, on their face, to be absurd. However, classic propaganda techniques such as emotive language and imagery—in tandem with steady repetition—are employed to produce an emotional reaction in the target audience beneath the level of rational thought.

This report has identified eight subordinate narratives of the overarching “America Skepticism” narratives, many of which are aligned and/or overlap with one another. For purposes of this report, they are presented here in four related pairs.

Sub-Narrative Pair #1: “Using Taiwan to Contain China” / “Playing the Taiwan Card”

One prominent sub-narrative (or corollary) of “America Skepticism Theory” is that of “the scheme of ‘using Taiwan to contain China’” (“以台制華”的圖謀), as frequently asserted in official PRC sources—which is to say, that America is employing Taiwan as a proxy to inhibit the rightful and inevitable “great revival of the Chinese nation” (中華民族偉大復興). This narrative is also frequently expressed in terms of America “playing the Taiwan card” (打“台灣牌”) against China.³³

One example of this narrative was provided by

33 “Scheming to Play the ‘Taiwan Card’ to Obstruct China’s Complete Unification and the Course of the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation, This Scheme Is Doomed to Fail” (企圖打“台灣牌”阻撓中國完全統一和中華民族復興進程，這一圖謀注定無法得逞), Xinhua, August 7, 2022, http://www.news.cn/world/2022-08/07/c_1128895855.htm.

an August 2021 editorial in the CCP’s official mouthpiece *People’s Daily*, issued in response to an announced sale of US military equipment to Taiwan. The op-ed appeared under the editorial pseudonym “Zhong Sheng” (鐘聲, homophonous with “Voice of China”), a byline frequently employed to indicate an authoritative party position on an issue. Titled “‘Using Taiwan to Contain China’ Is Doomed to Fail,” the editorial stated that:

This instance of the US Department of Defense approving arms sales to Taiwan is another example of America “playing the Taiwan card.” Under the current circumstances of cross-Strait relations, this sort of irresponsible American conduct not only sends a serious mistaken signal to “Taiwan independence” forces, [but also] aggravates tensions and the complicated situation in the Taiwan Strait [...] “Using Taiwan to Contain China” has never worked in the past, it cannot work in the present, and cannot work in the future.³⁴



Image: This political cartoon from PRC state media depicts Uncle Sam exploiting Taiwan—and as presented elsewhere, America’s treaty allies in Asia—to contain China. As a result, Uncle Sam is recklessly creating a powder keg that threatens to blow up peace in the Asia-Pacific region.³⁵

34 “‘Using Taiwan to Contain China’ Is Doomed to Fail” (「以台制華」註定徒勞), *People’s Daily*, August 6, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/tw/2021-08/06/c_1211321316.htm.

35 “US Credibility is Falling Apart in Taiwan Society, Thanks to Washington Itself,” *Global Times*, January 28, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202301/1284377.shtml>.

Sub-Narrative Pair #2: “Leaning on America to Scheme for Independence” / “Selling Out Taiwan to America”

While most of the vitriol of “America Skepticism” propaganda is directed at the United States—with Taiwan itself often treated as an afterthought, possessing no agency of its own—there are associated narratives that accuse political figures in Taiwan of “leaning on America to scheme for independence” (倚美謀獨).³⁶ One such example was provided by the PRC state media outlet *China Daily* (中國日報), which asserted in August 2022 (in the immediate wake of the visit to Taiwan by US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi) that:

*[W]hether it might be “using Taiwan to contain China” or “relying on America to scheme for independence,” neither can shake the great enterprise of China’s unification! They are doomed [to failure], [and] will inevitably receive the just judgment and exposure of history!*³⁷

While the figures “leaning on America to scheme for independence” are sometimes left unidentified, they are just as frequently identified as Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party, which has traditionally been associated with Taiwan’s pro-independence movement. (Notably, however, no steps have been taken by Taiwan’s current DPP-led government to change the island’s Republic of China framework). One of the most prominent recent examples of this was seen in July 2023, when the *Wall Street Journal* published an open letter from a spokesperson at the PRC Embassy in Washington DC, which was intended as a response to an earlier guest op-ed in the newspaper by Taiwan’s Vice President (and current presidential candidate) Lai Ching-

36 For an example of the “great revival” narrative closely identified with Xi Jinping, see: “Xi Jinping Emphasizes, in Chinese Style and Modernization Comprehensively Advance the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation” (習近平強調，以中國式現代化全面推進中華民族偉大復興), *Xinhua*, October 16, 2022, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-10/16/content_5718810.htm.

37 “The World Says ‘Using Taiwan to Contain China,’ ‘Relying on America to Scheme for Independence,’ Will Be Difficult to Avoid Historical Accounting, Hard to Stop the Trend of China’s Unification” (「世界說」“以台制華”、“倚美謀獨”難逃歷史清算，難擋中國統一大勢), *China Daily*, August 9, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1740679836785602087&wfr=spider&for=pc>.



Image: “The Democratic Progressive Party has actually turned [itself] into the ‘ravings’ and ‘jokes’ of American extremist politicians” (民進黨把美國極端政客的“瘋話”“笑話”變成現實). A news video from PRC state media directed at Taiwan, which promotes the message that government officials in Taiwan are “selling out” the island to the United States.³⁸

te. The embassy letter denounced Lai as “show[ing] his loyalty to his American patron” by “sell[ing] out Taiwan to the U.S.,” and summed up by asserting that “the DPP’s attempt to sell out Taiwan is despicable. Seeking independence is doomed to fail.”³⁹

Sub-Narrative Pair #3: American Military Commitment Is Weak / American Arms Sales Are Overpriced Junk

As the United States is the only major manufacturer of advanced military equipment still willing to sell to Taiwan in the face of PRC pressure, it plays a key role in maintaining the capabilities of Taiwan’s armed forces. Accordingly, arms sales are one of the aspects of the US-Taiwan relationship that draws the harshest and most consistent denunciations

38 “[If You] Vote for the DPP, Will Women Also Have to Go to the Battlefield?” (票投民進黨，女生也要上戰場？這個“恐怖事實”藏不住了！), *China Taiwan Net*, May 9, 2023, http://v.taiwan.cn/lakp/202305/t20230509_12533004.htm.

39 “Selling Out Taiwan is Despicable, Seeking ‘Independence’ Will Fail / Spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the United States Refutes Lai Ching-te’s Egregious Op-ed at the Wall Street Journal,” PRC Embassy (Washington DC) press release, July 18, 2023, http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/lcbt/sgfyrbt/202307/t20230719_11114918.htm.

from the PRC. (This is also true for the CCP's proxies in Taiwan, as seen in Hou Han-ting's comments on page 6.) This propaganda messaging asserts that US-supplied military systems are intended to bolster moves towards independence, and destabilize the region. This was illustrated by the PRC embassy letter mentioned above, which opined that:

Mr. Lai proposes to “build up Taiwan’s deterrence.” His true agenda is to resist by force the motherland’s reunification. A “military threat” from China’s mainland is the DPP’s pretext for purchasing over \$4 billion in U.S. weaponry in two years alone. Squandering 2.6% of local GDP, the DPP is turning the island into a powder keg.⁴⁰

This line of propaganda messaging also depicts Taiwan’s arms purchases as wasteful spending, which could be better applied towards social services. In one such example, the CCP’s official Xinhua News Agency issued an August 2021 commentary about an announced round of arms sales to Taiwan, claiming that people throughout Taiwan were “crying out to the Democratic Progressive Party authorities, ‘Taiwan needs vaccines not weapons’” (對民進黨當局喊話, “台灣要的是疫苗不是武器”).⁴¹ It is also a common propaganda line to depict US arms sales as composed of overpriced and antiquated equipment—for which Taiwan officials overpay, as a means to secure broader US support—as depicted in the cartoon below, which was circulated to Taiwan social media users in autumn 2022.



Image: “America Promises: As Long as You Buy Weapons...” Uncle Sam pushes Tsai Ing-wen to purchase cast-off US weapons. This was a sponsored image circulated on social media in Taiwan in October 2022.⁴²

Sub-Narrative Pair #4: America Will Make Taiwan a Battlefield / America Is Scheming to Destroy Taiwan

This sub-narrative pair asserts that the United States is maneuvering to make Taiwan’s territory a venue for destructive armed conflict. This was the message contained in a PRC state media article from April 2023 that once again cited a member of Taiwan’s marginal New Party to assert that America planned such a fate for Taiwan. (Compare this with the comments of New Party member Hou Han-ting on page 6.) Yok Mu-ming (郁慕明), the New Party’s chairman from 2003-2020, was cited to accuse the United States of “malicious intention [...] to turn Taiwan into a battlefield” in a “proxy war with China,” and that “it intends to use the island as a pawn to contain the Chinese mainland in the same way as it is using Ukraine to suppress Russia.”⁴³ This “battlefield” sub-narrative has also branched off into material intended to generate anxiety among demographic sub-groups in Taiwan, such as the spring 2023 PRC state media video “[If You] Vote for the DPP, Will Women Also Have to Go to the Battlefield?”⁴⁴

40 “Selling Out Taiwan is Despicable, Seeking ‘Independence’ Will Fail / Spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the United States Refutes Lai Ching-te’s Egregious Op-ed at the Wall Street Journal,” PRC Embassy (Washington DC) press release, July 18, 2023, http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/lcbt/sgfyrbt/202307/t20230719_11114918.htm..

41 “Taiwan Society Criticizes America’s Plan for Arms Sales to Taiwan: ‘We Need Vaccines Not Weapons’” (台灣社會批美對台軍售新計劃: “要疫苗不要武器”), Xinhua, August 6, 2021, <http://www.taihainet.com/news/twnews/twdnsz/2021-08-06/2539039.html>

42 J. Michael Cole (@JMichaelCole), Twitter Post, Oct. 26, 2022, <https://twitter.com/JMichaelCole1/status/1585204022931488768/photo/1>.

43 “US Intends to ‘Turn Taiwan into Battlefield,’” *China Daily*, April 21, 2023, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2023/0421/c90000-20009167.html>.

44 “[If You] Vote for the DPP, Will Women Also Have to Go to



This narrative has been intertwined with a broader PRC propaganda narrative that the United States is an aggressive, rapacious power that spreads chaos and war throughout the world. The term “hegemony” (霸權) is employed frequently in CCP discourse whenever the international role of the United States is mentioned, particularly in regards to the US presence in Asia. As stated in an early 2023 commentary in the CCP’s official *People’s Daily*:

America, from its founding to the present, can little separate diplomacy and war, in the previous century it overturned many popularly elected governments in the developing world, [and] immediately replaced them with pro-US puppet regimes. Today, from Ukraine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, [and] Syria, to Pakistan [and] Yemen, America as always cannot change its nature, sending out agents [for] low-intensity and UAV warfare.⁴⁵

Per this narrative, the United States is conducting “interference in China’s internal affairs” (干涉中國內政)⁴⁶ as it has always done throughout its history, as, a means of dividing and weakening its rivals. In the more outlandish versions of this story, this extends to ultimate intentions by the United States to destroy Taiwan itself—as alleged, for example,

the Battlefield?” (票投民進黨，女生也要上戰場？這個“恐怖事實”藏不住了！), *China Taiwan Net*, May 9, 2023, http://v.taiwan.cn/lakp/202305/t20230509_12533004.htm.

45 “America’s Hegemony, Hegemonic Path, Hegemonic Bullying, and Its Harm” (美國的霸權霸道霸凌及其危害), *People’s Daily*, February 21, 2023, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1758386353237924656&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

46 Qin Gang: America Must Stop ‘Using Taiwan to Contain China,’ Return to the Original Meaning of the One China Principle” (秦剛：美方應該停止“以台製華”，回歸一個中國原則的本源本義), PRC Foreign Ministry, March 7, 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjbzhd/202303/t20230307_11036896.shtml.

Images: Still images from an animated music video disseminated on social media by the PRC state media publication China Daily. The video, titled “Look, There Is an Eagle Staring at Ukraine!” (有隻老鷹盯著烏克蘭) blames America for starting the war in Ukraine—and accuses America of similarly stoking a war in the Taiwan Strait.⁴⁷

in a March 2023 op-ed nominally attributed to former New Party leader Yok Mu-ming in the Want Want-owned *China Times* (中國時報), who alleged a secret “plan to destroy Taiwan” (毀滅台灣計畫) on the part of officials in the Biden Administration, which would “far exceed in scale the calamity that [US] elements devised for Ukraine.”⁴⁸

47 “Just After the Fire in Ukraine, Did America Come to Make Provocations in the Taiwan Strait?” (剛在烏克蘭拱完火，美國就來台海挑釁?), *China Daily*, May 5, 2022, https://www.ximalaya.com/sound/526128166?source=m_jump.

48 Yok Mu-ming, “America’s Plan to Destroy Taiwan Is Already Underway” (美國的「毀台計畫」已是現在進行式), *China Times*, March 12, 2023, <https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E7%BE%8E%E5%9C%8B%E7%9A%84-%E6%AF%80%E5%8F%B0%E8%A8%88%E7%95%AB-%E5%B7%B2%E6%98%AF%E7%8F%BE%E5%9C%A8%E9%80%B2%E8%A1%8C%E5%BC%8F-201000470.html?guccounter=1>.

America's Alleged Unreliability as Revealed by Afghanistan

The United States has commitments to aid Taiwan's defense as contained in the 1979 *Taiwan Relations Act*, and US President Joe Biden has stated on multiple occasions that US forces would aid Taiwan in the event of a direct attack from the PRC. Despite this, doubts have continued to circulate regarding the US commitment to come to Taiwan's defense, and "America Skepticism"-associated propaganda has placed a particular emphasis on the fall of Afghanistan as an example of the alleged unreliability of the United States as an ally.

On the heels of the collapse of the Afghan government, the PRC state outlet *Global Times* issued an August 2021 editorial titled "Why the US Will Abandon [the] Island of Taiwan Eventually," which stated:

[W]hat capital does the island of Taiwan have to make it different from Afghanistan? As long as the costs of supporting the Taiwan authorities far outweigh the benefits, the US will abandon the island [...] In 1949, the US abandoned the Kuomintang as it saw the latter was not worth supporting. Then the US diplomatically abandoned the island of Taiwan in 1979 [...] When it comes to defending Taiwan in a costly and unwinnable war, the US will choose the lesser of two evils and the American people will not allow their young generations to die in large numbers for Taiwan secession.⁴⁹

Another example from this theme was provided by the citation in PRC-sponsored media of comments by Taiwan Shih-hsin University Professor Yu Szi-hsiang (遊梓翔). (*Yu has served as a pro-PRC proxy on multiple occasions, as seen in the previous example on page 3.*) As cited in an article on the PRC-operated propaganda website *Taiwan Net* (台海網), Dr. Yu asserted that just as America had abandoned Afghanistan, its promises to Taiwan were also suspect; and that its "rock solid commitment" to Taiwan was only a pledge to support Taiwan through sales of American weapons systems.⁵⁰

49 "Why the US Will Abandon [the] Island of Taiwan Eventually," *Global Times*, August 18, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1231877.shtml>.

50 "Are America's Promises to Taiwan Solid as a Rock?: You Zixiang Mocks: They Will Only Allow Taiwan to Buy American Weapons for Defense" (美國對台灣的承諾堅如磐石？遊梓翔諷：只會讓台灣買美國武器自衛), *Taiwan Net* (台海網), August 21, 2021, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1708688235008256455&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

Conclusions

The Chinese Communist Party maintains rigid, irredentist claims of sovereignty over Taiwan, and has repeatedly demonstrated its intent to subvert the island’s democratic system in the pursuit of “reunification” on the PRC’s terms. Information operations conducted by the CCP are one of the key pillars of this larger effort. The overarching narrative of “America Skepticism,” and its associated narratives such as those depicting Taiwan as a sacrificial “chess piece,” should be understood as components of this longer-term campaign: one intended to undermine the will of Taiwan’s citizens to resist PRC coercion, as well as to isolate Taiwan from sources of international support.

These narratives often originate in the CCP’s propaganda apparatus, and are actively promoted both openly by state media organs, and more surreptitiously through internet media. Such material is frequently presented

as representing the views of indigenous voices from Taiwan—whether the persons cited be academics, politicians, media, or simply vaguely defined social groups (e.g., “netizens,” “Taiwan youth,” etc.). The propagation of this material into Taiwan’s information environment relies heavily on the willingness of coopted proxies in Taiwan—such as marginal political figures, PRC-influenced media organizations, or more anonymous promoters of social media content—to serve as the conduits for CCP-generated material. As shown by the case study examples presented in this report, these proxies usually possess either an ideological or financial motivation (or both) to act as agents for the CCP.

Despite the manipulative nature of such material—as well as the frequently obvious CCP fingerprints left upon it—these narratives have had a measurable im-

pact on public opinion in Taiwan, as revealed both by polling data and the steps taken by Taiwan’s government to publicly refute it. The adoption of the “chess piece” narrative by two of the three major party candidates in Taiwan’s upcoming presidential election demonstrates the extent to which that particular narrative has come to color Taiwan’s political discourse.

As with any democratic society, Taiwanese political discourse may be expected to contain a broad diversity of opinion. Furthermore, America’s sometimes checkered history of foreign engagements leaves it open to genuine criticisms regarding its dealings with overseas allies. Accordingly, the existence of skeptical attitudes towards the United States cannot be written off as entirely the result of hostile propaganda. However, in

Left unchallenged, “America Skepticism” could go a long way towards achieving the purpose intended for it by the CCP propaganda system: undermining the progress made in recent years in forging closer US-Taiwan ties, and in the level of public confidence among Taiwan’s citizens that international allies are prepared to assist them in resisting PRC coercion.

the case of recent “America Skepticism” in Taiwan’s information environment, CCP-directed information operations do appear to be having a measurable effect in moving the needle of public opinion in the CCP’s preferred direction. Left unchallenged, “America Skepticism” could go a long way towards achieving the purpose intended for it by the CCP propaganda system: undermining the progress made in recent years in forging closer US-Taiwan ties, and in the level of public confidence among

Taiwan’s citizens that international allies are prepared to assist them in resisting PRC coercion.

To push back against these corrosive narratives, it is necessary to first expose their origins and their intended purpose. Taiwan has seen the emergence of a robust civil society response to CCP information operations, but much re-

mains to be done in the face of concerted Chinese pressure. GTI hopes that this research report will provide further information for both government officials and civil society actors working to defend not only Taiwan's information environment, but also that of the broader international community, from the negative effects of CCP disinformation and hostile propaganda.