

## DRAWING PARALLELS AGAIN: WHAT IF IT WAS A CROSS-STRAIT CONTINGENCY?

by

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With everyone's eyes glued to the ongoing conflict between the United States and Israel against Iran in West Asia, a question arises in the far eastern waters of the Taiwan Strait—how similar or different will the situation be if a cross-strait war flares up? And how will it affect its neighboring countries that host United States military bases?

It was not long ago in 2021 when the [United States withdrew from Afghanistan](#). Analysts had started to explore what this could mean for Taiwan. The withdrawal gave an opportunity to China's propaganda arm to put forward a [narrative undermining](#) Taiwan's resolve to be independent. The Afghanistan withdrawal was followed by the [Russia-Ukraine war](#) in 2022 and again a new set of comparative lessons were drawn from which Taiwan could learn. While the Russia-Ukraine war is still ongoing, the Iran conflict has given another opportunity for pundits focusing on Taiwan's security to assess the fallout and explore options if a clash occurs between Taiwan and China.

### Safety of Leadership

First, is the importance of the safety of key leadership. Irrespective of the nature of conflict in the Taiwan Strait, safety of the core leaders would be the foremost priority. Geographically, Taiwan is of much smaller in size but diverse, providing ample locations of safe places for decision-making officials during a conflict. Key politicians, government offices, and other critical infrastructure may be among the first targets during the first wave of military escalation, which will require alternatives.

China's state media Xinhua has described President Lai Ching-te as a "[true troublemaker](#)" for his views opposing Beijing's narratives. Chinese officials have

never refrained from stating that their targets will be the leaders. They have offered [cash in return](#) for information on key stakeholders. China has used different methods to spy on the Taiwan leaders. This was highlighted in 2024, when Taiwan's Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim visited Prague. According to the Czech Republic's military, during her visit there was a [plan to attack](#) her motorcade.

### Blockade of Sea Routes

Second, is the blockade of sea routes. There is no doubt that a blockade can create higher tensions in the region. The declaration of the [closure of the Strait of Hormuz](#) by Iran and attacks on the oil tankers has already created panic among countries, as it has led to an increase in oil prices. The Taiwan Strait might see a similar action, as demonstrated briefly by the Chinese during its [live-firing military exercise](#) in August 2022 and in follow-up exercises over the years. Like air traffic disruptions at major airports in West Asia, any blockade affecting flights in the Taiwan region can have catastrophic effects on the movement of people and goods.

As per a [2024 report](#) published by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), several countries around the world are heavily dependent on the Taiwan Strait for trade and economic growth. Therefore, any closure of the Taiwan Strait can be catastrophic for the global economy.

### Involvement of External Actors

Third is the involvement of external actors. It is no secret that the United States will be the primary security partner for Taiwan during any conflict. This has been demonstrated in the past several times. But, the level of commitment or the degree of United States involvement has been seen as that of a "hesitant partner" in certain corners of the in Taipei, including among the [public](#).

According to a survey by Academia Sinica, about 59.6 percent of Taiwanese respondents do not view United States as a trustworthy partner. The results reflect Washington's [withdrawal from Afghanistan](#)

and its decision not to commit military manpower to Ukraine, which has created skepticism among Taiwan's citizens. The presence of U.S. military bases in South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines can also play a key role in terms of logistics during a Taiwan contingency. However, there will always be a danger of those bases being attacked to stop assistance to Taiwan during a conflict.

Another actor that could be closely involved is Japan. The newly elected Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, in November 2025, spoke on the [seriousness of the Taiwan issue for Japan](#) as a “survival-threatening situation”. Her response brought significant [backlash](#) from Beijing, including the downgrading of diplomatic and economic relations, but Takaichi has stood firm and refused to back down from her statements. Japan also hosts thousands of U.S. troops on its territory, and furthermore, it has announced to host a [missile defense system](#) on Yonaguni island by 2031 which could be crucial during any Taiwan Strait contingency.

Additionally, the Philippines also has a stake in the Taiwan Strait, given its geographical positioning close to Taiwan and the presence of a U.S. bases on its territory through the [Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement \(EDCA\)](#). Unlike Japan, the Philippines hosts U.S. forces on rotational basis in those EDCA bases ([sites](#)). It has also regularly faced aggression at sea from Chinese forces, including its Coast Guard, militias and navy. With its northern island of Luzon and Taiwan separated by the Luzon Strait by around 200km, the Philippines can play an [important role](#) in supporting Taiwan for the United States. Similar to the possibility of U.S bases being attacked in allied countries in West Asia, China too could target such bases so as to delay response times in defending Taiwan.

### Safety of Migrant Workers

Fourth, like countries in West Asia that host millions of foreign workers, Taiwan also hosts more than a million workers from around the world, primarily from Southeast Asian countries. During a potential conflict scenario, the [safety of these workers](#) will

become an international issue for their home countries, which may seek a halt to the conflict or request exceptions during any blockade for the safe return of their citizens. In the past, the Chinese leaders have warned Southeast Asian countries against supporting Taiwan in the event of war.

The Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines had warned about the [safety and security](#) of Overseas Foreign Workers (OFW) in Taiwan if a war breaks out. Leaders of the [Philippines](#) and [Indonesia](#) have also spoken about evacuation plans for their respective OFWs. Overall, the OFWs play a key role in Taiwanese society, working in sectors such as elderly care, fishing, construction, and manufacturing. Taiwan has also been in talks with [India to hire workers](#) in the future, which would bring India—a major power in the Indo-Pacific—closer to the Taiwan Strait. The withdrawal of OFWs from Taiwan could lead to major industries collapsing due to labor shortage.

### The Challenge of Fake Narratives

Lastly, there have been a series of [fake news](#) narratives spread during the ongoing Iran conflict. Fake videos created by Artificial Intelligence (AI) when circulated can create a dangerous situation by causing panic and confusion. Although, Taiwan is not new to AI-driven disinformation, it needs to remain vigilant. Responding to such content in a timely and organized manner will be crucial to avoid confusion. Further disruptions, such as submarine cables being damaged or destroyed, could lead to communication blackouts during a conflict. Such acts can make it harder for the government to coordinate and assess responses.

As outlined above, several parameters can be found to be similar between the current conflict in the West Asia and a potential one in Taiwan Strait. One key element that will differ is the role of oil resources. Taiwan is considered a leader in semiconductor production, with more than 90 percent of advanced chips produced there. A Taiwan Strait blockade could lead to a global semiconductor shortage, which would significantly impact economic growth. For the

world, semiconductors can be considered the “[new oil](#)”. Safeguarding their production and supply has become a key priority for many countries. Therefore, Taiwan’s importance is at the forefront of global strategic concerns. The world saw a preview of such consequences during the COVID-19 pandemic, when supply chains for critical technology were disrupted. This led to delays in production and delivery of essential components in machinery and other equipment.

It would not be wrong to say that there are multiple lessons and comparative points for Taiwan in observing how the world reacts to other conflicts. By incorporating these lessons, Taiwan’s policymakers and stakeholders need to develop greater flexibility in policies, which will be critical during any Taiwan contingency.

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