

## 9 - What's preventing Taiwan from preparing for potential war?

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Taiwan's military is not yet "optimally manned, trained, equipped and motivated to defend against an attack" by China on the self-ruled island, and efforts at defense reform face obstacles from institutional opposition from senior officers and a lack of time.

This is according to Michael Hunzeker, assistant professor at George Mason University's School of Policy and Government, who testified to the congressional U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. The hearing was held last month to discuss ways to deter Chinese aggression against Taiwan, which China considers a rogue province and has vowed to take back by force if necessary.

Hunzeker added that Taiwan's military needs to focus on countering the threat of a full-scale invasion by the Chinese People's Liberation Army vis-a-vis "sub-invasion" scenarios that would see large-scale missile strikes, blockades or the seizure of Taiwanese islands located in the Taiwan Strait separating the two countries.

However, he noted, Taiwan's military is experiencing several shortfalls in active and reserve personnel numbers, equipment, doctrine, and training. While its equipment numbers look imposing, supply and maintenance issues as well as the age of some of Taiwan's platforms mean availability rates are low, potentially affecting training in peacetime and effectiveness in conflict. Even worse for the armed forces is the obsolescence some of those platforms, an issue exacerbated by Taiwan having to regularly scramble aircraft and maritime vessels to investigate Chinese military activity around the island.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's military doctrine for countering a Chinese invasion calls for a symmetric response, therefore shaping its force posture and acquisition of expensive and high-end platforms, which is "high on prestige but of limited utility in an actual conflict," Hunzeker warned. This is particularly the case, he added, as the People's Liberation Army has a qualitative and quantitative edge over Taiwan's military.

Nevertheless, Hunzeker noted, the Taiwanese government under President Tsai Ing-wen has introduced a series of reforms for the military. Known as the Overall Defense Concept, or ODC, it seeks to address many of the aforementioned shortfalls and adjust the military's posture to a multilayered, asymmetric force.

But while the ODC is "more appropriate to Taiwan's threat environment," its implementation is facing opposition from military officers and officials in the Defense Ministry, some of which are veterans, according to the expert. He suggested this is driven by "interpersonal animosity, principled disagreement or bureaucratic inertia."

Even if the ODC is implemented, he fears time is against Taiwan's side, with weapons acquisition and development plans years away from delivery. He said even more time is needed to change doctrine, training, logistics and sustainment systems, and the military's culture.