

Taiwan Lessons Learned from Russia-Ukraine

“Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow” is now a commonly used phrase in Taiwan. For decades, Taiwan treated a potential invasion by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as a remote possibility. However, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has made a PRC invasion of Taiwan appear more credible and generated a sense of urgency among some leaders in Taiwan. This report examines the lessons learned that Taiwan government and defense officials are extracting from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

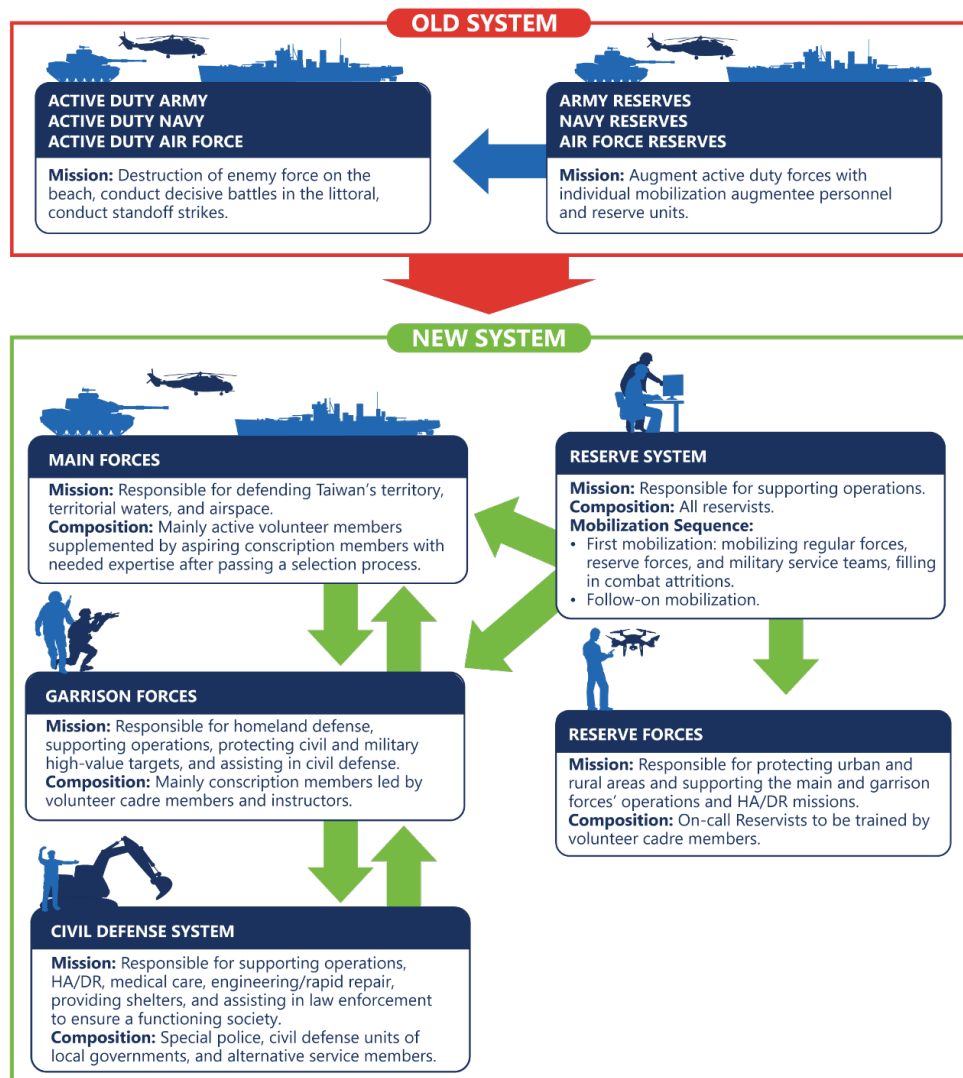
The Taiwan government and military have enacted multifaceted reform with the goal of turning the Taiwan military into a credible deterrent and warfighting force. While some reform debates predate the Russia-Ukraine war, Taiwan government officials have taken lessons from Ukraine to guide restructuring of Taiwan’s military forces. Changes include lengthening the terms of service for conscripts and changes to military training. The Russia-Ukraine war also highlighted the role of uncrewed autonomous systems, emphasized the need for satellite communications connectivity, and reinforced the importance of defending against cognitive warfare operations. Below we describe five areas in which the Taiwan government has taken lessons learned from the Ukraine conflict to help guide its efforts to turn the Taiwan military into a credible deterrent and warfighting force.

Lesson #1: Force structure

Ukraine’s Territorial Defense Force serves as a model for Taiwan military restructuring to create a defense in depth, which would raise the potential costs of invasion for the PRC. Taiwan’s military is in the process of changing its warfighting concept of operations. Rather than the old system of only active and reserve forces, the “all-out defense system” includes four pillars: (1) main forces, (2) garrison forces, (3) reserve forces, and (4) civil defense elements, each with their own missions and areas of responsibility.

Drawing on Ukraine’s experience with its Territorial Defense Force, the main force will have better trained and equipped units. Garrison forces will be made up primarily of conscripts and will be responsible for homeland defense missions, such as protection of cities and key government and military facilities. In wartime, the reserve forces will be mobilized to provide support to main and garrison units.

Despite changes to warfighting concepts of operation, the role of the navy and air force appears relatively unchanged. Personnel changes, such as the length of service obligations for conscripts pertain to the navy and air force, but the “all-out defense mobilization” plans appear primarily directed at the army.



Lesson #2: Personnel critical for all-out defense strategy

Taiwan recognizes that well-trained personnel are key to any defense but has not adopted Ukraine's popular resistance model. The Russia-Ukraine war demonstrates the importance of having sufficient numbers of well-trained personnel. Taiwan has made the politically unpopular decision to lengthen service commitments for conscripts from four months to one year. The decision to increase conscription service length is intended to increase the number of personnel available for Taiwan's defense and to make those conscripts better trained. Despite important personnel changes for the military, the Taiwan government does not appear to support peacetime measures to promote popular resistance.

Lesson #3: Importance of uncrewed systems

Uncrewed systems could increase costs for the PRC and limit the costs for Taiwan. Taiwan's government and military have recognized the utility of drone warfare and embarked on an ambitious national drone program. Uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) could potentially inflict costs upon the PRC and PLA while limiting losses for Taiwan. The Taiwan military has committed to acquiring more than 3,200 drones by 2028.

Lesson #4: Necessity of connectivity

Satellite communications plans promise to increase resilience and reduce Taiwan's telecommunications vulnerability. In 2023, the Taiwan Ministry of Digital Affairs and Chunghwa Telecom both signed agreements with European companies to receive satellite communication services and access low Earth orbit networks. The Taiwan Space Agency has suggested that it may need 120 satellites for resilience, and the Taiwan government has committed to acquiring additional ground-based satellite communication terminals. However, the number of terminals is far below the amount used by Ukraine.

Lesson #5: Cognitive warfare concerns

PRC cognitive warfare activities remain a critical issue for Taiwan. PRC cognitive warfare activities predate the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and remain a focus for Taiwan government authorities. In 2022, former president Tsai Ing-wen called information warfare operations the biggest challenge to Taiwan's survival. Although Taiwan researchers monitor Russia-Ukraine trends in cognitive warfare, Taiwan's efforts to counter PRC cognitive warfare operations largely draw upon its own experience.

Taiwan government and academic documents do not discuss protracted warfare. Despite a strong focus on the concerns associated with cognitive warfare, discussions of the likelihood of protracted warfare are not prominent. In the Taiwan sources surveyed for this report there is little discussion of Taiwan's options if the conflict should turn into a stalemate.

Indicators to watch

Predicting national resistance or will to fight are incredibly difficult. However, this study found that Taiwan officials and researchers are taking lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine war seriously. Indicators to watch to evaluate how Taiwan is applying its lessons learned include: (1) progress on implementation of the current military training program, (2) additional changes to the length of service requirements for conscripts; (3) changes to civil defense systems, (4) acquisition and production of commercial and military-grade uncrewed systems; (5) increases in ground-based terminals necessary for resilient communications; and (6) discussions of popular resistance plans or the potential impacts of protracted war or expansion of current mobilization systems.

For more information about this study, please contact

April A. Herlevi | Senior Research Scientist
703-824-2547 ▪ herlevia@cna.org

Elizabeth Barrett | Project Manager for International Engagement
703-824- 2922 ▪ barrette@cna.org

This document contains the best opinion of CNA at the time of issue. The views, opinions, and findings contained in this report should not be construed as representing the official position of the Department of the Navy.

This summary is based on the full-length CNA report, *Taiwan Lessons Learned from the Russia-Ukraine War*, DRM-2024-U-09153-Final (Unclassified).

The Center for Naval Analyses created this work in the performance of Federal Government Contract No. N00014-22-D-7001.

© 2024 CNA Corporation