

China-Taiwan Weekly Update, October 19, 2023

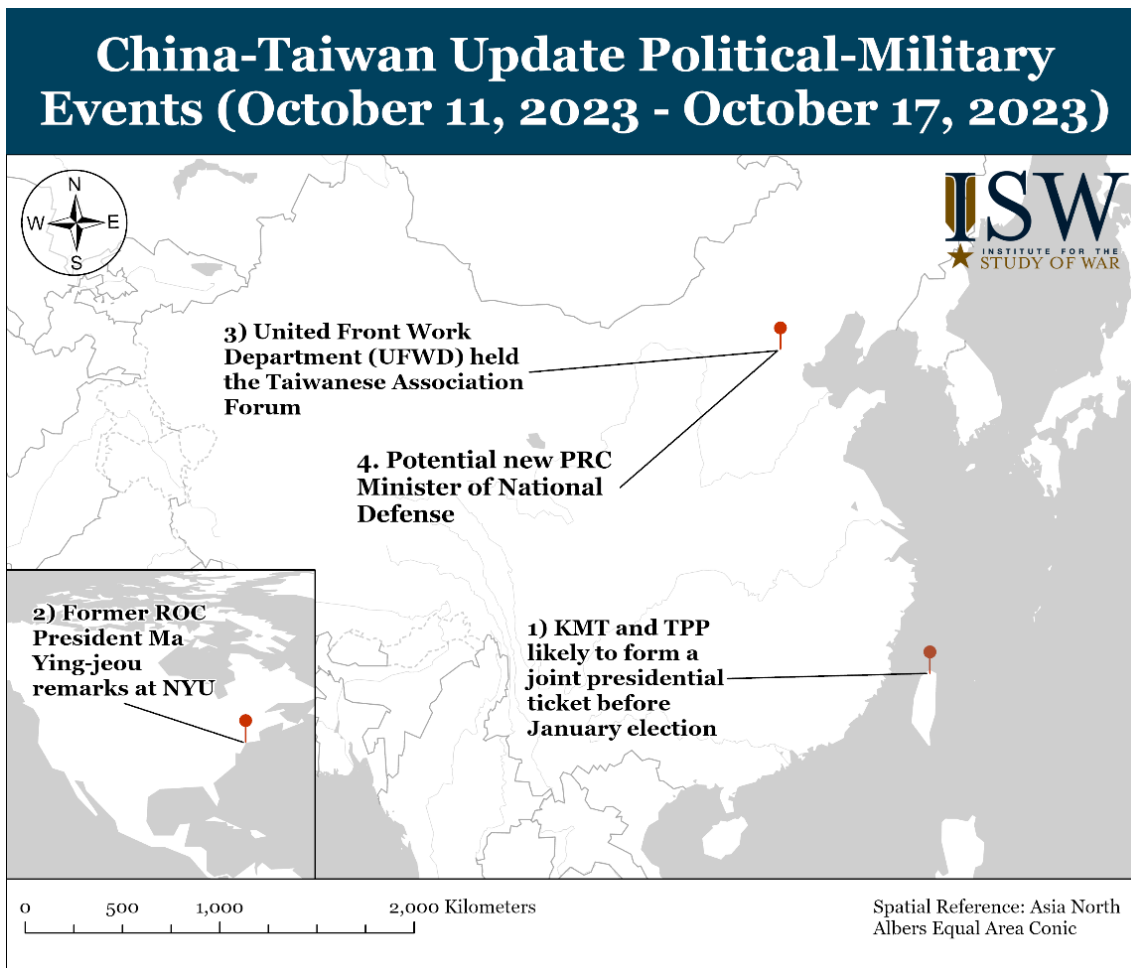
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Data Cutoff: October 17 at Noon ET

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update focuses on the Chinese Communist Party’s paths to controlling Taiwan and relevant cross–Taiwan Strait developments.

Key Takeaways

1. The Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People’s Party (TPP) agreed to debates between their presidential candidates and will likely form a joint presidential ticket before the January 13 election.
2. KMT member and former ROC President Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016) proposed that the United States encourage the ROC to “hold peace talks” with the PRC during an October 16 New York University event.
3. The CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD) held the Taiwanese Association Forum in Beijing on October 16 to undermine the sovereignty of the ROC (Taiwan).
4. General Liu Zhenli could become the next Minister of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China.



Taiwanese Presidential Election

The Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) agreed to debates between their presidential candidates and will likely form a joint presidential ticket before the January 13 election. Officials from the parties agreed on October 14 to hold three debates between KMT presidential candidate Hou Yu-ih and TPP presidential candidate Ko Wen-je to determine who should lead a joint presidential ticket.[1] The parties still need to resolve disagreements over the method of selecting a presidential candidate, however. Forming a joint ticket would enable the parties to combine their support and mount a challenge to the leading Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Lai Ching-te.[2] The agreement to hold the debates is consistent with ISW's standing assessment that the KMT and TPP could form a joint presidential ticket before the January election.[3]

- KMT campaign officials King Pu-tsung and Justin Huang and TPP campaign officials Huang Shan-shan and Chou Yu-hsiu held a three-hour meeting to discuss electoral cooperation on October 14.[4] The agreed upon debates would have to occur before the November 24 presidential candidate registration deadline with the Central Election Commission.[5]
- The KMT and TPP disagreed over how to select the presidential nominee for a joint ticket during the October 14 meeting. The TPP negotiators advocated for opinion polls while the KMT advocated for an open primary.[6]

A KMT-TPP joint presidential ticket is unlikely to capture the entirety of each candidate's support base. An alliance risks alienating voters who are reluctant to accept divergent views on cross-strait issues given the centrality of cross-strait relations to the election narrative. Hou Yu-ih's support of the 1992 Consensus stands in contrast to Ko Wen-je's reluctance to identify with the stigmatized term. Support for the parties and Taiwanese statehood are also divided along demographic lines. A September voter poll by Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF) reveals a demographic divide on opinions toward Taiwan's status vis-a-vis China. A majority of voters aged 44 and below favor an independent Taiwan over maintaining the status quo or cross-strait unification, whereas voters 45 and up show comparatively stronger support for the status quo and unification.[7] The meaning of independence in Taiwan refers to a governing framework different from the current Republic of China. The Republic of China (Taiwan) is already an independent state apart from the People's Republic of China.

- The age discrepancy is also reflected in each party's support base. An excerpt from a September TPOF poll notes Ko has a distinct advantage among voters aged 44 and below, while Hou finds stronger support with voters 54 and up.[8] This suggests young green voters supporting the TPP may struggle to accept a joint ticket with the outspokenly anti-independence KMT.

ISW assess that the CCP holds the following leverage points over each of the Taiwanese presidential candidates:

TAIWAN: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE KEY POLICY VIEWS AND CCP LEVERAGE POINTS

This chart highlights the cross-strait and US-Taiwan policy positions for the candidates running in Taiwan's 2024 presidential election. This chart also lists the leverage points the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) could exploit under the "war vs peace" election narrative.

Terminology: 1992 Consensus: a disputed cross-strait policy formulation supported in different formations by the CCP, KMT, and Terry Gou that acts as a precondition to cross-strait dialogue. The CCP views the term as meaning there is one China, the PRC, which includes Taiwan. The KMT views the term as meaning that there is one China, the ROC. The KMT views the 1992 Consensus as recognizing that the CCP and KMT each hold different interpretations of one China. The TPP does not align with the 1992 Consensus because it has been "smeared" in Taiwan. The DPP does not support the 1992 Consensus as it views the alleged agreement as a threat to ROC (Taiwan) sovereignty. The United States takes no official position on the 1992 Consensus.

Candidate (Party)	Cross-Strait Policy	US-Taiwan Policy
Lai Ching-te (Democratic Progressive Party - DPP) 民主進步黨 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centering campaign narrative on preserving Taiwanese democracy against CCP authoritarianism.¹⁴ Does not support the 1992 Consensus.¹⁵ <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framing Lai as responsible for cross-strait tension due to his refusal to engage in dialogue with the CCP based on the 1992 Consensus. 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> United States and Taiwan are democratic partners engaged in a larger struggle against China.¹⁶ <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framing ongoing US-Taiwan security and economic cooperation as provocative policies that endanger Taiwanese security.
Ko Wen-je (Taiwan People's Party - TPP) 台灣民眾黨 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes cross-strait dialogue but does not align with the 1992 Consensus because it has been "smeared" in Taiwan.¹⁷ <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Push Ko to accept the 1992 Consensus as necessary for cross-strait talks and peace. 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> US-Taiwan alignment should not be unnecessarily hostile to the CCP.¹⁸ Calling for the United States to help Taiwan enter regional economic organizations.¹⁹ <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frame deeper economic and security cooperation with the United States as "provoking" the CCP.
Hou Yu-ih (Kuomintang - KMT) 中國國民黨 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes cross-strait exchanges and dialogue with the CCP.²⁰ Supports 1992 consensus.²¹ <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framing cross-strait economic integration and political dialogue on the party's terms as necessary to the maintenance of peace. 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports an unspecified "very good alliance with the United States."²² <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushing for avoiding unofficial US-Taiwan engagements, which would further isolate Taiwan internationally, as a means to achieve cross-strait peace.
Guo Taiming (Independent) 無黨籍 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes "cross-strait peace consultation" with the CCP.²³ Supports 1992 Consensus.²⁴ <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Push agreements degrading Taiwanese economic and security independence from the PRC through the "cross-strait peace consultation" office. 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand technology investment and partnerships with the United States.²⁵ Opposed buying "lots of" US weapons in 2019.²⁶ Present view on US-Taiwan relationship: "don't just talk politics and buy weapons."²⁷ Wary of "unhealthy dependency" on the United States.²⁸ <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushing for the reduction of economic and security collaboration with the United States as necessary for cross-strait negotiations.

ISW assesses that a joint Ko-Hou presidential ticket would have the following implications for CCP leverage points over the Taiwanese presidential candidates:



TAIWAN: CCP LEVERAGE POINTS IN A POTENTIAL KMT-TPP JOINT PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

This chart highlights the cross-strait and US-Taiwan policy positions for the candidates running in Taiwan's 2024 presidential election in the unlikely event of a Ko-Hou unity ticket. The chart also lists the leverage points that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) could exploit under the "war vs peace" election narrative.

Terminology: 1992 Consensus: a disputed cross-strait policy formulation supported in different formations by the CCP, KMT, and Terry Gou that acts as a precondition to cross-strait dialogue. The CCP views the term as meaning there is one China, the PRC, which includes Taiwan. The KMT views the term as meaning that there is one China, the ROC. The KMT views the 1992 Consensus as recognizing that the CCP and KMT each hold different interpretations of one China. The TPP does not align with the 1992 Consensus because it has been "smeared" in Taiwan. The DPP does not support the 1992 Consensus as it views the alleged agreement as a threat to ROC (Taiwan) sovereignty. The United States takes no official position on the 1992 Consensus.

Candidate (Party)	Cross-Strait Policy	US-Taiwan Policy
<p>Lai Ching-te (Democratic Progressive Party - DPP) 民主進步黨</p> 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centering campaign narrative on preserving Taiwanese democracy against CCP authoritarianism. Does not support the 1992 Consensus. <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framing Lai as responsible for cross-strait tension due to his refusal to engage in dialogue with the CCP based on the 1992 Consensus. 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> United States and Taiwan are democratic partners engaged in a larger struggle against China. <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framing ongoing US-Taiwan security and economic cooperation as provocative policies that endanger Taiwanese security.
<p>Ko Wen-je and Hou Yu-ih (Taiwan People's Party - TPP, Kuomintang - KMT) 台灣民眾黨 中國國民黨</p> 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote cross-strait dialogue with conceptual support for the 1992 Consensus. <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frame cross-strait economic integration and political dialogue on the party's terms as necessary to the maintenance of peace. 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for a productive alliance with the United States that avoids being "unnecessarily hostile" toward the CCP. <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frame economic and security cooperation with the United States as "provoking" the CCP and preventing cross-strait dialogue.
<p>Guo Taiming (Independent) 無黨籍</p> 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes "cross-strait peace consultation" with the CCP. Supports 1992 Consensus. <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Push agreements degrading Taiwanese economic and security independence from the PRC through the "cross-strait peace consultation" office. 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand technology investment and partnerships with the United States. Opposed buying "lots of" US weapons in 2019. Present view on US-Taiwan relationship: "don't just talk politics and buy weapons." Wary of "unhealthy dependency" on the United States. <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushing for the reduction of economic and security collaboration with the United States as necessary for cross-strait negotiations.

KMT member and former ROC President Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016) proposed that the United States encourage the ROC to “hold peace talks” with the PRC during an October 16 New York University event. Ma stated that the ROC government adhering to the alleged 1992 Consensus and the United States encouraging ROC-PRC “peace talks” would produce cross-strait stability.[9] He did not provide further specific details on the “peace talks.” The ROC Mainland Affairs Council characterized Ma’s suggestion as caving to CCP pressure.[10] Ma’s suggestion that the ROC enter “peace talks” aligns with similar late August proposals by independent presidential candidate Terry Gou. Negotiations as proposed by Ma or Gou, regardless of intent, could provide an avenue for delivering concessions on ROC sovereignty to the PRC.

- The 1992 Consensus is a disputed cross-strait policy formulation supported in different formations by the CCP and KMT that acts as a precondition to cross-strait dialogue. The CCP views the term as meaning there is one China, the PRC, which includes Taiwan. The KMT interprets the term as meaning that there is one China, the ROC and acknowledges that the CCP and KMT each hold different interpretations of one China. The DPP does not support the 1992 Consensus as it views the alleged agreement as a threat to ROC sovereignty. The United States takes no official position on the 1992 Consensus.
- Gou announced his support for “One China, respective interpretations” or that Taiwan affirms it is part of “One China” but not the PRC in his May “Kinmen Peace Declaration.” He also called for Kinmen to become the permanent site of new rounds of negotiations between the ROC and PRC.[11] Gou stated in late August that he would fund the “Kinmen Peace Initiative Foundation” with \$20 million of personal funds to develop eight major projects, including a “cross-strait peace consultation” office and an accompanying peace-oriented think tank.[12]

The Taiwanese media outlet *China Times* spread rumors that the Republic of China (Taiwan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs told an ROC national stranded in Israel to “book his own flight” home.[13] The *China Times* is a media outlet that receives editorial oversight from People’s Republic of China’s Taiwan Affairs Office on sensitive articles pertaining to cross-strait relations, according to a 2019 *Financial Times* report.[14] The ROC state-backed *Central News Agency* (CNA) reported that unspecified online forums repeated this narrative.[15] The ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied these claims and labeled the rumors as a cognitive warfare tactic targeting Taiwan.[16] The rumors are consistent with the CCP propagated narrative that ROC government is neither capable of governing effectively nor protecting its citizenry.[17] The CCP spreads this false narrative in order to undermine the confidence of the ROC populace in their own government. A main effort of the CCP coercion campaign to unify with Taiwan through means other than invasion is degrading the confidence of the ROC populace that its government can govern.

Chinese Communist Party Coercion

The CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD) held the Taiwanese Association Forum in Beijing on October 16 to undermine the sovereignty of the ROC (Taiwan). The UFWD messaged that the CCP harbors a sincere interest in peace across the Taiwan Strait and opposes “Taiwan independence” activities because the two sides of the strait are “one family.”[18] The conference coincided with a group of participants alleging to represent Taiwan attending a propaganda event where the CCP’s Taiwan Affairs Office lit up a field with Chinese messages claiming to promote cross-strait peace and unification.[19]

- The forum claimed the attendance of Taiwanese youth at the ceremony to project the inaccurate image of ROC unification with the PRC as the way of the future.[20] The language of

“Taiwan independence” and “one family” incorrectly frames the ROC as a PRC province rather than the sovereign and independent polity it currently is under the status quo.

- The CCP claims to promote cross-strait peace are also factually inaccurate because of the People’s Liberation Army military exercises in response to meetings between ROC and United States officials in August 2022 and April 2023.[21] The People’s Liberation Army normalizing violations of Taiwan’s air defense identification zone with military aircraft over the past three years provides further evidence to dispel this inaccuracy.[22] The party disingenuously portrays itself as seeking cross-strait peace in order to exculpate itself from blame for exacerbating cross-strait tensions with military coercion.

Chinese Communist Party and People’s Liberation Army Decision Making

Reuters reported on October 13 that General Liu Zhenli could become the next Minister of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China.[23] The appointment of Liu to replace the purged Li Shangfu as National Defense Minister would come ahead of the Xiangshan Forum from October 29 to 31, an annual defense conference held in Beijing.[24] Appointing a defense minister is a means to project PRC governmental stability and competency in advance of this dialogue, which unspecified United States Department of Defense representatives will attend.[25] Liu’s past experience as PLA Ground Force commander (June 2021 – December 2022) and Chief the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission (Between January and March 2023 - Present) indicates that he has the skill set to coordinate between military theaters and services.[26] The absence of American sanctions targeting Liu, unlike Li, will help facilitate any future bilateral military talks. The United States sanctioned Li in 2018 for activity with Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport.[27] These sanctions stayed in place throughout Li’s tenure as National Defense Minister.[28]

[1] <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/5020118>

[2] <https://www.tpof.org/%e5%9c%96%e8%a1%a8%e5%88%86%e6%9e%90/%e9%80%b2%e5%8f%a3%e9%9b%9e%e8%9b%8b%e9%a2%a8%e6%9a%b4%e3%80%81%e6%94%bf%e9%bb%a8%e7%ab%b6%e7%88%ad%e8%88%872024%e7%b8%bd%e7%b5%b1%e5%a4%a7%e9%81%b8%ef%bc%882023%e5%b9%b49%e6%9c%8826%e6%97%a5%ef%bc%89>

[3] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/china-taiwan-weekly-update-october-5-2023>

<https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/china-taiwan-weekly-update-october-13-2023>

[4] <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/5020118>

[5] <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/03/11/2003795926>

[6] <https://udn.com/news/story/123307/7510447?from=redpush>

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[7] <https://www.tpof.org/%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E6%94%BF%E6%B2%BB/%E5%9C%8B%E5%AE%B6%E8%AA%8D%E5%90%8C/%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E4%BA%BA%E7%B5%B1%E7%8D%A8%E5%82%BE%E5%90%91%E7%9A%84%E6%9C%80%E6%96%B0%E7%99%BC%E5%B1%95%EF%BC%882023%E5%B9%B49%E6%9C%881%E6%97%A5%EF%BC%89/>

[8] <https://www.tpof.org/%E9%81%B8%E8%88%89/%E7%B8%BD%E7%B5%B1%E9%81%B8%E8%88%89/%E7%B8%BD%E7%B5%B1%E9%81%B8%E6%B0%91%E7%9A%84%E6%8A%95%E7%A5%A8%E5%82%BE%E5%90%91%EF%BC%9A%E7%95%B6%E4%B8%89%E4%BA%BA%E7%AB%B6%E7%88%AD%E6%99%82-2023%E5%B9%B49%E6%9C%8826%E6%97%A5%EF%BC%89/>

[9] <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3238280/us-should-be-peacemaker-between-beijing-and-taipei-ma-ying-jeou-says>

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[10] https://www.mac.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=05B73310C5C3A632&sms=1A40B00E4C745211&s=23C80A2A12BC5DF2

[11] <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aipl/202308220103.aspx>

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[13] <https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20231011005532-260407?chdtv>

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[14] <https://www.ft.com/content/036b609a-a768-11e9-984c-fac8325aaa04>

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[16] <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aipl/202310120337.aspx>

[17] <https://english.news.cn/20230913/1c114458322e45d6922e662a9aa4e5a1/c.html>

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