

Fortifying Taiwan: Making the Case for Allied Missile Defense Support

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The People's Republic of China (PRC) has been ratcheting up its military presence around Taiwan, raising alarm bells that these activities could indicate preparation to invade the island—especially after Xi Jinping's July 1, 2021 speech in which he [stated](#) that “Resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China's complete reunification is a historic mission and an unshakable commitment of the Communist Party of China.” If true, inaction by Taiwan's allies, especially the United States, could encourage the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to move forward with its various invasion plans. A layered air and missile defense (MD) system could stop and reverse this concerning trend by conducting *defensive* actions that signal to the PRC and the world that Taiwan is not going the way of Hong Kong, Xinjiang, or Tibet.

As recently as March 2021, the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense (MND) [acknowledged](#) that it needed “to build a high-altitude missile defense network.” Specifically, to enhance Taiwan's defense the President of the United States should request the Secretary of Defense to conduct a missile and air defense threat analysis of Taiwan in cooperation with Taiwan's MND. Simultaneously, at least one US Navy AEGIS-capable ship should be sent to the waters near Taiwan, and at least one US Army Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system should be deployed to the island. Additional necessary defense assets could be deployed once the threat analysis is complete.

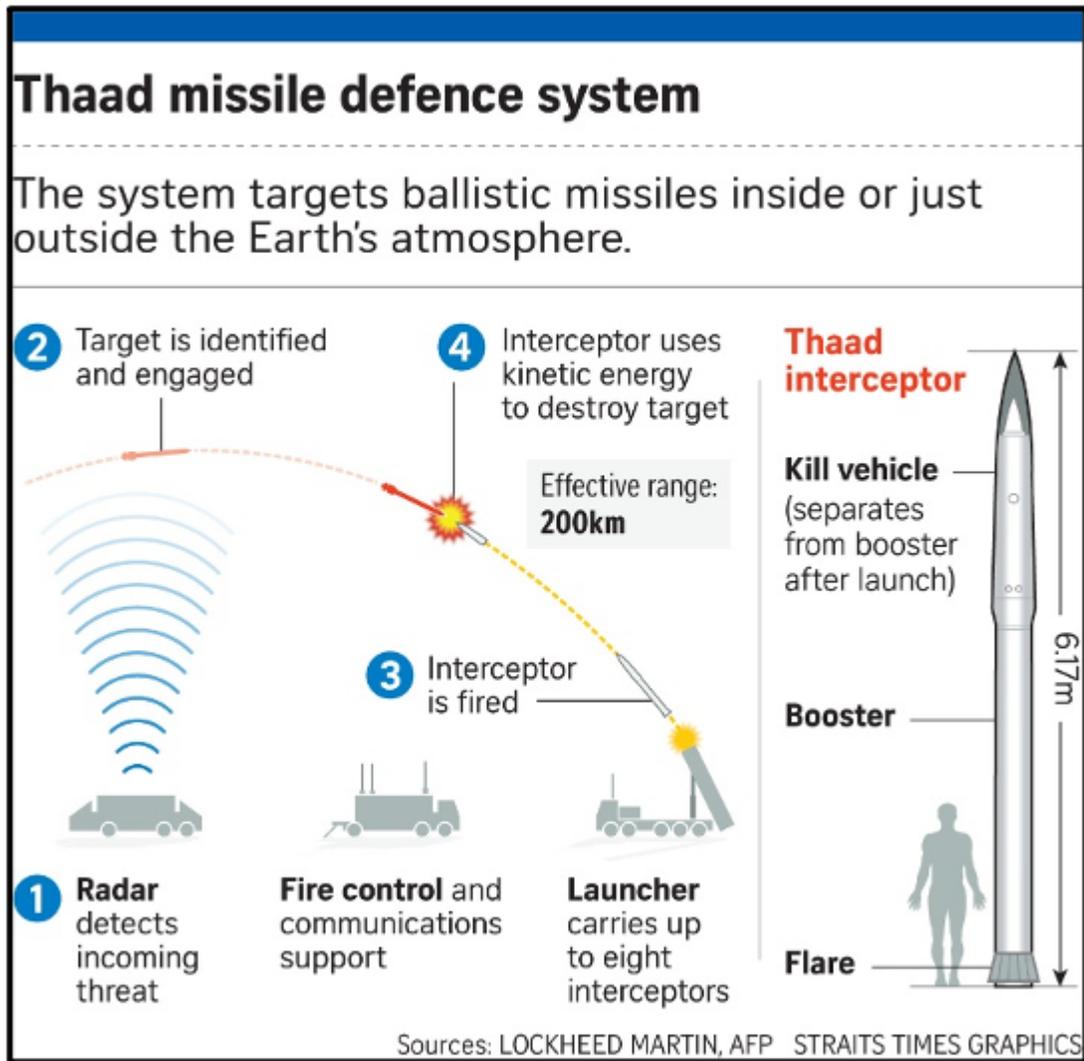


Image: THAAD Missile Defense System (Source: [The Straits Times](#))

Current US government policy, in accordance with the [1979 Taiwan Relations Act](#), is to “provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character” and “maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.” Pursuant to this legal obligation, MD capabilities as aforementioned should be immediately deployed to Taiwan for several reasons:

1. To signal to the PRC that the United States will not stand by while China harasses and intimidates Taiwan, and that the United States will deploy additional forces, as needed and when needed.
2. To show US allies that the United States will adhere to its treaty and other obligations, and to encourage other countries to work with the United States and its allies to encourage free trade, enforce freedom of the seas, and oppose PRC hegemony.
3. To encourage like-minded countries to support Taiwan. For example, multiple US allied countries, including Japan and South Korea, possess Aegis-capable ships and other missile and air defense capabilities that could be deployed to defend Taiwan. Several countries and international organizations have recently recognized that Taiwan is being threatened by PRC actions. Japan and Australia, in in a [joint statement](#) issued on

June 9, “confirmed the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and concurred to encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.” G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, and the United States) and the EU [advocated](#) a “peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues” on June 13, 2021.

Increasing PRC Military Intimidation Directed at Taiwan

Recently, the PRC has [stepped up aggression](#) intended to weaken Taiwan’s security and its social and economic system. A 2020 Federation of American Scientists (FAS) [report](#) described the history of PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) violations (over 4,000 from 2013–2020) with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, including the incursions across the median line between the PRC and Taiwan:

In July 1999, Chinese aircraft intentionally crossed the median line following what China perceived to be pro-independence remarks by then-President Lee Teng-hui. Contemporary reports indicate this was the first intentional intrusion since the line was established in the 1950s. Public accounts suggest the next intentional crossing came twenty years later. On March 11, 2019, two PLAAF J-11 fighters crossed 43 miles over the median line in the southwestern area of the Taiwan Strait.

The PLAAF’s ADIZ violations beginning in March 2019 probably [resulted](#) from the Trump Administration [informally approving](#) to sell 66 F-16V fighters to Taiwan and upgrade 166 older F-16s.

On 15 June 2021, 28 PLAAF aircraft [intruded](#) into the Taiwan ADIZ, the largest number of PLA aircraft flown towards the island since the Taiwan MND started [publishing](#) these violations (pictured below). This PLAAF aggression was most likely the PRC’s expression of disapproval against the June 13 G7 official announcement on human rights in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

The June 15 series of incursions was not unique. In the past six months, the PLAAF and PLA Navy (PLAN) have conducted more aggressive flights into the Taiwan ADIZ than in prior years. Moreover, the PRC has deployed an extensive ballistic missile, cruise missile, and UAV threat against Taiwan: according to the 2020 DOD annual report on [Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic](#), more than a [thousand PLA missiles](#) are aimed at Taiwan.

The Potential Benefits of Missile Defense Systems

A THAAD battery and an AEGIS-capable US Navy ship would be the best-suited systems to help Taiwan enhance its defense against the Chinese missile threat. The US military should deploy these systems until Taiwan develops and deploys its own layered MD system. AEGIS and THAAD are defensive weapon systems.

The US Navy AEGIS is a shipborne system [designed](#) to protect ships, sea platforms, and land areas from ballistic missile threats as well as air threats. Depending on the [types](#) of missiles on-board, the weapon system can intercept short-, medium-, and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MD mission) and/or shoot down aircraft and anti-ship cruise missiles (air defense mission).

THAAD is the US Army's [deployable](#) area defense BMD system that can protect an area with a diameter of about 240 miles. THAAD radar is a non-rotating phase-array X-band radar (AN/TPY-2) and has been deployed to the Middle East and Asia. One to two THAAD radars could cover most of the island of Taiwan (which is 245 miles long, and 90 miles wide across its widest point). The THAAD missile is designed to defend against short-, medium-, and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, and has a [range of 200 km and altitude of 150 km](#).

Taiwan should plan to purchase these or similar systems. In the meantime, Taiwan could make a request to the United States and other allies to provide immediate MD capabilities. THAAD has already been exported to the United Arab Emirates (two batteries), and is currently being sold to Saudi Arabia (seven batteries). Currently, [Japan](#) is the only ally that has a BMD capable AEGIS naval system. The US government approved a \$1.7 billion defense [purchase](#) by Canada in May 2021 for four BMD-capable AEGIS ships. South Korea, Australia, Norway and Spain all have AEGIS systems that are [air defense only](#) and could be used to protect US and Japanese AEGIS BMD capable ships from the PLAAF threats. These allies could participate in the air and missile defense of Taiwan as part of an allied operation. Poland and Romania have [purchased and deployed](#) an AEGIS ashore capability. Japan had planned to purchase two AEGIS ashore systems; however, domestic concerns [reversed](#) this decision in June 2020. The US Congress plans to [fund an AEGIS ashore system](#) on Guam. However, an AEGIS ashore on Guam cannot defend Taiwan due to extended distance (over 1700 miles).

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense is currently working to [upgrade the missile systems](#) fielded by the island's armed forces. Taiwan's MD defense capabilities are designed for point defense and [consist](#) of the following: Patriot PAC-2, PAC-2/GEM; Avenger Air Defense System; Hawk; Sky Bow; Sky Sword 2; and Sea Oryx (soon to be deployed) systems. For example, with a range of [60 miles](#) for the PATRIOT PAC-2 system, these point defense systems are designed to protect a small area such as a city or a strategic site.

The PRC will present at least three objections to Taiwan's deployment of Aegis and THAAD systems. First, it will object saying that the US is interfering with PRC's efforts to deal with an *internal* problem—the lost “Taiwan.” Second, it will argue that sending US Army or US Navy personnel to Taiwan violates the US-PRC agreement on Taiwan. Finally, China will protest on grounds that the THAAD radar will be able to “see” deep into the PRC, thus violating the PRC's sovereignty.

Taiwan needs its allies to demonstrate that they oppose a belligerent PRC that is increasingly threatening to the island democracy, and THAAD and AEGIS systems would undoubtedly support Taiwan's defense. THAAD has been deployed to [Hawaii \(2009\)](#), [Guam \(2013\)](#), [South Korea \(2017\)](#) and other parts of the world, including [Israel \(2019\)](#). The United States has

deployed the THAAD system to South Korea to send a similar message to North Korea and its patron, the PRC. The UAE (UAE is [2.3 times](#) the size of Taiwan) purchased two THAAD batteries and Saudi Arabia is in the process of purchasing seven batteries. Why do they need THAAD? Because Iran, an [ally of the PRC](#), threatens both of them with its massive ballistic missile program. Saudi Arabia has been a victim of attacks from Iranian armed drones, as well as ballistic and cruise missiles. Similarly, Taiwan faces an [enormous PLA missile threat](#) that THAAD and AEGIS could help mitigate.

Taiwan has deployed an MD radar—the US-designed AN/FPS-115 Precision Acquisition Vehicle Entry Phased Array Warning System (PAVE PAWS), located on [Mount Lu Chang](#) (鹿場大山) in the island's northwest, at over 2,500 meters above sea level. PAVE PAWS can [detect](#) ballistic missiles over 3,000 miles away; 360-degree threats; and aircraft, cruise missiles and ships. PAVE PAWS can also see farther than the AN/TPY-2 (which detects threats from only one direction). PAVE PAWS thus provides early warning and cueing to Taiwanese MD units for incoming missiles. (In April 2021, press reports [indicated](#) that Taiwan is looking into a second radar to cover the southern part of the Island, but this option won't be discussed by Taiwan's legislature until 2022.) Integrating PAVE PAWS, AN/TPY-2, and AEGIS radars, along with other Taiwanese MD radars and longer range anti-ballistic missiles, would provide Taiwan with an enhanced defensive shield and demonstrate US resolve to protect Taiwan from PRC aggression.

In conclusion, PRC aggression must be met with deterrent actions, and President Biden should direct immediate deployment to Taiwan of a THAAD battery, as well as a US Navy AEGIS ship. In doing so, President Biden would remind the PRC to follow its agreement to not interfere militarily with Taiwan. At the same time, Taiwan should also purchase at least one THAAD battery and several MD AEGIS systems to ensure that it has the capabilities to defend itself against the PRC should it go it alone. Moreover, Taiwan should encourage its allies to participate in patrolling its shores with AEGIS capable ships to keep the PRC in check.

The main point: The US military should deploy at least one US Navy AEGIS capable ship to the waters near Taiwan, and at least one US Army's THAAD system to Taiwan's mainland, to defend against increasing PRC aggression.