



CRISIS COMMITTEE

HabsMUN 2026

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTATION

Taiwan Strait Crisis, March 2026

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL - FOR DELEGATE USE ONLY

THE COMMITTEE QUESTION

Resolution of the Taiwan Strait Crisis

This committee convenes in response to the most dangerous confrontation between major powers since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The immediate question before delegates is how to bring about a cessation of hostilities in the Taiwan Strait and establish a durable framework for the resolution of Taiwan's political status without triggering a broader conflict that could escalate to nuclear exchange.

Delegates are expected to negotiate across bloc lines, to defend their national interests while recognising that no outcome short of comprehensive agreement will prevent further catastrophe, and to produce a resolution that is simultaneously acceptable to China and to the international community whose citizens and economies are already bearing the consequences.

PART ONE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1 Origins of the Taiwan Question: 1945 to 1949

The Taiwan question is, at its core, the unresolved legacy of the Chinese Civil War. Following Japan's surrender in 1945, Taiwan was restored to the Republic of China (ROC), which at that time governed mainland China under Chiang Kai-shek's

Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang, or KMT), but the Civil War between the KMT and Mao Zedong's Communist Party never truly ceased and by 1949 the People's Liberation Army swept to victory across the mainland. On 1 October 1949, Mao proclaimed the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing, while Chiang and approximately 1.2 million ROC soldiers, officials and civilians retreated to Taiwan, taking with them the institutions of the Republic of China including its government, gold reserves and cultural artefacts.

Neither side accepted the legitimacy of the other. The PRC claimed sovereignty over all of China including Taiwan, while the ROC government in Taipei claimed to be the legitimate government of all China and held China's UN Security Council seat until 1971, when the General Assembly voted to transfer recognition to the PRC under Resolution 2758 and Taiwan was excluded from the UN altogether.

KEY CONCEPT: The One China Principle

The One China Principle holds that there is only one sovereign Chinese state, that Taiwan is an inalienable part of that state, and that the PRC is its sole legitimate government. This principle is the foundation of Chinese foreign policy on Taiwan and a condition of diplomatic relations with Beijing for the vast majority of the world's states. It is distinct from the United States' One China Policy, which acknowledges rather than endorses the PRC's position - a deliberate ambiguity that has defined American engagement with Taiwan for over four decades.

1.2 The One China Policy and Cross-Strait Relations

Since 1979, Washington operated under a policy of strategic ambiguity, acknowledging rather than recognising the Chinese position that there is one China and Taiwan is part of it, while simultaneously maintaining robust unofficial relations with Taipei through the American Institute in Taiwan and supplying Taiwan with defensive arms under the Taiwan Relations Act. This deliberate ambiguity aimed to deter both a Chinese attack and a Taiwanese unilateral declaration of independence, though the practical effect was to bind all parties in a legal and diplomatic holding pattern that grew progressively harder to sustain as Chinese military capabilities increased and Taiwanese political identity diverged ever further from the mainland.

Cross-strait relations fluctuated dramatically over the following decades. Periods of economic interdependence and political dialogue, particularly under President Ma Ying-jeou between 2008 and 2016, alternated with severe tension, and the election of Tsai Ing-wen and her Democratic Progressive Party in 2016 effectively suspended official communication channels between the two governments. Under Xi Jinping, who has made national rejuvenation and the resolution of the Taiwan question central

pillars of his political legacy, the rhetorical and military pressure on Taiwan has intensified sharply, with PLA operations around the island moving from occasional demonstrations to near-continuous grey zone activity.

1.3 The Military Dimension

Taiwan's defence rests on three pillars: its own armed forces, which have invested heavily in asymmetric capabilities including anti-ship missiles, drone warfare and coastal defences; American arms sales and the implicit security guarantee embedded in the Taiwan Relations Act; and the sheer geographic difficulty of a cross-strait amphibious operation across 180 kilometres of unpredictable water, which made a Taiwanese invasion one of the most logistically demanding military operations conceivable. These pillars were, however, progressively eroded by the pace of Chinese military modernisation.

The PLA has undergone the most dramatic transformation in its history during the Xi era, fielding the world's largest navy by vessel count, a rapidly expanding carrier force, advanced anti-access and area denial systems designed to keep US forces at distance, and a nuclear arsenal that roughly doubled in size in a decade. PLA Air Force incursions into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone have become near-daily occurrences after 2020, peaking at 56 aircraft in a single day in October 2021, and the cumulative cost to Taiwan in scrambles, maintenance and aircrew fatigue was precisely what former President Tsai Ing-wen described as cognitive warfare: a strategy of exhaustion designed to wear down readiness without triggering a formal military response.

KEY CONCEPT: Grey Zone Warfare

Grey zone warfare refers to the use of coercive tools - military exercises, cyber operations, economic pressure, disinformation - that fall below the threshold of armed conflict as defined by international law, deliberately exploiting the ambiguity between peacetime competition and open war. China's sustained ADIZ incursion campaign against Taiwan is the paradigm example.

The strategy forces the target to expend resources responding without providing a legal basis for a military counter-response, and it has been central to PLA doctrine since at least 2015.

1.4 The Economic Dimension: Semiconductors

Taiwan occupies a position of extraordinary strategic importance in the global economy that far exceeded its physical size and formal diplomatic status. The Taiwan

Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), headquartered in Hsinchu, manufactures approximately 90% of the world's most advanced semiconductors, the chips that powered smartphones, data centres, advanced weapons systems and artificial intelligence, and there is no short-term substitute for its capacity anywhere in the world. Any conflict that damages or halts TSMC's operations would trigger a global economic shock of unprecedented severity, potentially costing trillions of dollars and crippling military production on all sides simultaneously. This would create a profound deterrence paradox: China wanted Taiwan but could not afford to destroy it, the United States depended on Taiwan's factories but could not be seen to prioritise commercial supply chains over democratic sovereignty. Taiwan itself has increasingly understood that TSMC was simultaneously its greatest vulnerability and its most potent deterrent.

1.5 The Political Trajectory: Identity and the 2026 Election

Perhaps the most significant long-term shift was in Taiwanese public opinion itself. Surveys conducted by the Election Study Centre at National Chengchi University consistently showed a dramatic rise in Taiwanese identity: by 2025 over 64% of respondents identified as exclusively Taiwanese rather than Chinese, up from around 17% in 1992, and support for immediate independence grew while support for unification with the mainland fell to historic lows. The DPP's Lai Ching-te, elected President in January 2024, represented the most independence-leaning figure to hold the office in Taiwanese history, openly describing himself as a pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence, a phrase that triggered immediate outrage in Beijing. His administration accelerated Taiwan's international engagement, deepened security cooperation with the United States and Japan, and pursued EU recognition efforts, all of which Beijing regarded as deeply provocative. The 2026 Taiwanese legislative elections, held in February 2026, returned a strengthened DPP majority, and emboldened by both the result and mounting public anger at Chinese military intimidation, the Lai government issued the ultimatum that was to change the world.

DAY 0 - SATURDAY 14 MARCH 2026

Pre-release background | To accompany the opening news broadcast

PART TWO: THE KEELUNG INCIDENT

2.1 The Crash

At 16:04 local time on Saturday 14 March 2026, a Chinese Chengdu J-10C Vigorous Dragon multirole fighter aircraft, tail number 1078 of the PLA Air Force's 3rd Aviation Brigade, crossed into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone on what Beijing later described as a routine patrol and did not return. Radar tracking recorded the aircraft descending sharply approximately twelve minutes after entry, and at 16:16 it impacted a commercial district in Keelung, Taiwan's second largest seaport located 25 kilometres northeast of Taipei, destroying fourteen buildings, killing eleven Taiwanese civilians and injuring a further thirty-eight. Footage shared on social media within minutes showed a column of black smoke rising over the Qiding district, and Taiwan's National Rescue Command confirmed the death toll within the hour.

Analysis of recovered wreckage, conducted jointly by Taiwanese and American technical teams, confirmed the aircraft as a J-10C, a type exclusively operated by the People's Liberation Army Air Force. There was no Mayday call and no response to air traffic control communications, and the cause of the crash - whether mechanical failure, pilot incapacitation or deliberate action - was not officially established. Beijing did not comment.

INTELLIGENCE NOTE - WRECKAGE ANALYSIS

US and Taiwanese analysts assessed with high confidence that the J-10C suffered catastrophic avionics failure consistent with an electronic warfare event, though whether that event was externally induced or the result of a systems malfunction remains classified. The significance of this ambiguity should not be underestimated: it provided Beijing with plausible deniability while simultaneously generating maximum political pressure on Taipei.

2.2 The Pattern of Intimidation

The Keelung crash did not occur in a vacuum, but rather represented the most dramatic single incident in an eighteen-month campaign of escalating grey zone pressure that military analysts in Washington, Tokyo and Canberra have documented in increasing detail. PLAAF intrusions into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone were, by early 2026, the most intense and sustained in recorded history: in the first ten weeks of the year alone Taiwan scrambled its fighters on 94 occasions, an average of nearly ten times per week, and the flights progressively moved closer to Taiwan's coastline, with several instances of aircraft crossing the median line of the Taiwan Strait that both

sides historically respected. By forcing Taiwan to scramble ageing F-16s and Mirage 2000s at enormous operational cost, the PLA systematically degraded Taiwan's air combat readiness, wearing out airframes, exhausting pilots and depleting maintenance reserves in a manner consistent with the grey zone doctrine of applying maximum pressure while remaining technically below the threshold of armed conflict.

Three incidents in the eighteen months prior to the crash brought the two sides particularly close to direct confrontation: a near-collision over the Pratas Islands in September 2024; an incident in January 2025 in which PLA naval vessels locked targeting radar on a Taiwanese frigate; and a PLAAF incursion in November 2025 that penetrated to within forty kilometres of Taipei before turning back. Each time, Beijing denied any provocative intent, each time the international community issued statements of concern, and each time nothing changed.

2.3 President Lai's Ultimatum

The Keelung crash produced a political earthquake in Taipei, confronting the Lai government with a pivotal decision to make. Within six hours of the crash, President Lai Ching-te addressed the nation in a broadcast that the international community widely characterised as the most significant statement by a Taiwanese leader in decades, citing the crash as evidence that Chinese military pressure crossed an unacceptable threshold and issuing a direct ultimatum to Beijing.

PRESIDENT LAI CHING-TE - NATIONAL ADDRESS, 14 MARCH 2026, 22:00 TST

“Taiwan is happy to have exchanges and cooperation with China as long as there is reciprocal dignity. However, yesterday in Keelung, this dignity was subverted, and the lives of innocent Taiwanese civilians are now at risk. I call upon Beijing to immediately cease their military flights over Taiwan immediately.

Should the flights continue, I will propose to parliament a motion to call a legally binding referendum on declaring ourselves as a legally recognised sovereign nation state.

Taiwanese society believes in the goodness of people. I am committed to peace because it is priceless and war has no winners. But when it comes to seeking peace, one cannot fall prey to dreams or illusions.”

Early polling conducted by the Cross-Strait Relations Research Centre in Taipei within 36 hours of the address indicated 84% approval for such a referendum among Taiwanese adults, a figure without precedent in the survey's history, and legal experts at National Taiwan University confirmed that the Referendum Act as amended in 2022

provided a clear legislative pathway for such a vote. The machinery of democracy was in place and the question was whether Beijing would allow it to proceed.

2.4 The International Reaction

The international response to the Keelung crash was swift and sharply divided, a preview of the fault lines that would define the crisis to come. In Washington, the White House issued a statement expressing deep concern and calling for a full and transparent investigation, while simultaneously ordering the USS Theodore Roosevelt carrier strike group to conduct freedom of navigation exercises in the Philippine Sea and the State Department summoned the Chinese Ambassador. The European Union, whose Parliament passed a resolution in January 2026 expressing support for Taiwan's democratic aspirations, convened an emergency session of the Foreign Affairs Council and produced a communiqué that stopped short of endorsing independence but explicitly supported Taiwan's right to determine its own future through democratic means, with Baltic, Polish and Czech pressure proving decisive in securing even that formulation.

Beijing, for its part, maintained a studied silence for twenty-four hours before releasing a terse statement through the Xinhua state news agency asserting that the aircraft suffered technical difficulties and expressing deep regret for the loss of life, with no mention of the ultimatum, no apology and no commitment to any change in policy. Chinese military exercises in the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait were quietly but measurably intensified in the hours that followed.

INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT - FOR DELEGATE BACKGROUND ONLY

Western intelligence agencies assessed with high confidence, within 48 hours of the Keelung crash, that the PLA Eastern & Southern Theatre Commands were placed on elevated readiness and that satellite imagery confirmed unusual movements of amphibious assault vessels at Fujian Province ports.

The assessment concluded that while an immediate military response was not imminent, a Chinese military operation would become highly probable if Taiwan proceeded with any formal independence referendum or declaration. Beijing's silence on the ultimatum was interpreted as deliberate: not a refusal, but a preparation.