

FDD Media Call: Findings of Taiwan-China War Game

October 7, 2026

Featuring RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery and Craig Singleton

Moderated by Joe Dougherty

DOUGHERTY: Greetings, and thank you for joining us today for today's media call as FDD experts provide key findings from a recent tabletop exercise simulating how China might stress Taiwan's communication sector to coerce the island. The results of the tabletop were briefed to the president of Taiwan and his national security team.

Greetings. My name is Joe Dougherty, Senior Director of Comms here at FDD. Thank you for joining us today. We have a lot to go over, so we're going to get right to it. Our two experts today, rear Admiral Mark Montgomery. A Senior Fellow focusing on China's regional expansion, Mark served as policy director for the Senate Armed Services Committee, and his flag officer assignments included director of operations at U.S. Pacific Command and commander of the George Washington Carrier Strike Group. Also, Craig Singleton, an FDD Senior Fellow and Senior Director of FDD's China Program. A former US diplomat who focused on China and East Asia issues, Craig is a professor at Stanford University.

The conversation is on the record. We will have time for Q&A. And we will provide a transcript and video of the conversation after the call.

We're going to get started right away. We're going to start off with a question for Mark Montgomery. Mark, can you just brief us on what the purpose of the trip was and also who was there?

MONTGOMERY: I'll go off mute there. Thank you, Joe. And it's good to be here with Craig and I'm glad people were able to join us. This is our third year in a row of coming to do a resilience tabletop exercise in Taiwan. The first year we did financial services, second year we did energy, really focused on LNG and nuclear. And then this third year we did communications resilience. But these are all part of a broader effort to understand the ability of Taiwan, but also its partners, the United States and potentially even Japan, to have sufficient resilience to combat Chinese cyber-enabled economic warfare. It's a two-day tabletop exercise, and Craig will go through how he plays China in this, but that increasingly places increased pressures on all government sectors or all critical infrastructure sectors in Taiwan, but we focus specifically on communications.

There was industry from both sides, there was government personnel, or excuse me, former government personnel from both sides and then think tank personnel as well. So that's how you get the exercise going. And it reveals areas, opportunities for improving resilience alongside President Lai's ongoing national societal resilience initiative. Additionally, myself and Matt Pottinger spoke at the President's annual national cyber, excuse me, national societal resilience conference that was held the weekend before. So it was a good opportunity to be there for a week and then do a series of other meetings, not necessarily related to the exercise. So Joe, that kind of explains what we were doing there. Thanks.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks Mark. And Craig, why should journalists care about this now? Isn't this still a hypothetical scenario?

SINGLETON: Yeah, no, good evening everyone. Thanks for dialing in. I know it's nighttime there. Early morning here. I'm only one coffee in, so bear with me. Like Mark mentioned, last year we gamed out the energy quarantine because we were trying to sort of peek around the corner. Since then, Taiwan has had to confront real LNG supply and price shocks, in part, due to the Middle East War, but for other reasons as well. They've had to confront Chinese disinformation about looming energy shortages and blackouts and cyber activity targeting Taiwanese energy companies. Taiwan is now spending heavily to strengthen energy resilience and to diversify supply.

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And that's exactly why we moved to communications this year. The point of these exercises is to identify the next coercive vulnerability before it becomes a crisis that we are all scrambling to understand. So cable disruptions and satellite dependence, cyber intrusions and maritime activity around critical infrastructure are already appearing in little bits and pieces around Taiwan. And so I think our game asks, well, what happens when Beijing starts to combine all of these things in a deliberate fashion? So if last year's game and question was about energy and a lot of that problem arrived much faster, I think, than any of us really expected, I think Mark and I would agree that communications is probably the next place we need to start looking around the corner.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks Craig. Mark, another question for you. What did you see from Taiwan, US and partner responses?

MONTGOMERY: First and foremost, Taiwan's clearly put a lot of effort into societal resilience. Some of the people online today know that I spent a lot of time in Ukraine and Ukraine's societal resilience is kind of the benchmark. And while Taiwan's not Ukraine, Taiwan is certainly more resilient than the United States across many of these sectors. By the way, not energy, but only because the United States has uniquely invested in becoming kind of an energy exporter over the last eight years, so we're in a different position there. But in the areas that you can reasonably control, Taiwan's made big progress. And I think most of you are aware that in the month preceding this tabletop exercise at the end of Hong Kong exercises, Taiwan actually drastically limited cellular network performance in several urban areas for 30 to 30 minutes plus a little bit, to test the interconnectivity and interrelationships and cross-domain relationships between sectors.

From the engineer point of view, that's a valuable learning experience. In the United States, if you did that as governor or mayor, if you agreed to that, you'd probably be impeached. But in Taiwan, recognizing the severity of the challenge they faced from China, as Craig mentioned, the increasing pressure, the Taiwanese were taking a lot of steps, so first of all, we saw that. On the other hand, there's a recognition of the incredible number of tools that China has on hand to use against Taiwan's communication systems. And certain we have to worry about, is cables, satellites, ground networks, all of these. All of these eventually can be vulnerable to extended Chinese cyber and potentially fifth element or kinetic attacks. And sometimes they can be put at risk by political behavior by China. In other words, influencing an operator to secure services, things like that.

But what we also saw was that if countries like the United States and Japan, ahead of time, had thought of the kind of solutions that would need to be available immediately on hand, if we'd done the preparatory work, we'd be in much better position. Because when you look at communication resilience, it's a question of how do I defend to prevent any kind of attack? And eventually you might get overwhelmed. How do I mitigate the impact of that? How do I have resiliency, redundancy built in? And then how do I recover? How do I set up an alternate system? And so there's areas that partners or allies could assist Taiwan, things like cable repair ships, offboarding your critical information into a cloud that's maintained in a different country, as we did with Ukraine in 2022.

So the bottom line was that while Taiwan probably faces a great deal of risk, there's a great deal of opportunity for Japan and the United States to support them.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Mark. We will be getting to the Q&A portion of the call shortly. I've got one more question for Craig and then we'll get to the Q&A. You can use the chat feature or you can use the raise hand feature if you do have a question and we'll get those sorted out in just a moment.

Craig, back to you. Are you seeing any evidence that Beijing is showing restraint around Taiwan, as Washington tries to stabilize relations with China?

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SINGLETON: Yeah, no, thanks Joe. I mean, at this point, very little restraint. The asymmetry I think is part of the reason this exercise matters now, and I think we'll be able to get a little bit into how China played the game next. But Washington has delayed approval of a roughly \$14 billion arms package for Taiwan while the president seeks to secure a longer lasting trade deal with the Chinese. But Beijing has not answered that restraint with any comparable operational restraint around Taiwan. And Taiwan's defense ministry continues to report near daily PLA activity, air and naval around the island, including just repeated median line crossings. In mid-September alone, we recorded 28 PLA aircraft in a single 24-hour period in Taiwan's ADIZ, 24 of which crossed the median line. So I think the broader lesson is that Beijing can bank restraint on our side while continuing to normalize pressure on its side. And that's exactly why we need to think beyond dramatic invasion scenarios and pay a lot more attention to the coercive tools China is already exercising around the island.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Craig. Okay, we're going to open up to the Q&A portion. Again, you can use the raise hand feature and ask your question yourself or you can drop your question into chat. I do want to get back to Craig real quick. You played China in this exercise. What were the key things that you noticed, perhaps the couple of steps that you took as you tracked to see how Taiwan and its allies would respond?

SINGLETON: Sure. No, my approach as the China player started with a pretty simple question. What is Beijing actually trying to achieve here? I assess China would not take on the risk and cost of a campaign like this to simply knock out cell service or cut a cable. Those are really like tactics, like terrorism is a tactic. China has a political objective, and that's to change Taiwan's behavior, to convince Taipei that the course Beijing opposes carries mounting costs, that outside support can't make those costs disappear indefinitely and that Beijing retains some ability to raise or lower the pressure.

Communications, from our perspective, serves three different functions in a course of campaign. The first is, it's a standalone tool, right? You do not need a blockade or a quarantine to start imposing meaningful costs. If cellular service becomes intermittent, if bandwidth becomes really tight, if mobile payments stop working reliably, businesses can't communicate overseas, citizens become, I think, less certain which information channels they can trust and you start to see a real breakdown in normal economic and social activity. And that alone can create pressure.

The second kind of factor here, is that communications can be an amplifier. An electricity problem becomes a lot harder to manage when communications are degraded. A maritime incident, which I know lots of folks on the call are tracking, they become a lot more dangerous when information is incomplete. And so problems that would normally be manageable, they all start to interact with one another.

And third, communications becomes an enabler of sorts, of a much more serious campaign. In a larger crisis, degrading connectivity can complicate government decision making, outside assistance, logistics, military coordination, and Taiwan's ability to communicate with the rest of the world, of course. And so those are our analytic categories that we sort of used as our framing for our game.

And I think they line up really closely with the People's Liberation Army's concept of information deterrence. And that emphasizes a few things, but two factors that I thought were most compelling for our game. The first is this idea of permeability. That means that the effects can spread well beyond the communication system into electricity and finance, transportation, commerce, and affect public confidence. And then the second factor that I think is the most important is ambiguity, of course. That means attribution, right? The intent and even the scope of the disruption can remain uncertain enough to slow decision making and complicate a response. That's sort of the basic logic behind how I got to play China.

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I get to play Xi Jinping. My son Henry, he's 11, says like, "Dad, you're born for this." I think it's maybe pretty true. But on the first day, I would just say I deliberately stay below the most destructive options on the game. The scenario has already given China some pretty significant pressure. The PLA and the Coast Guard have increased their activity around Taiwan. You see some missile closure areas. There's some cellular disruptions, some suspected cyber intrusions involving cable infrastructure and disinformation. So I didn't see a lot of value in immediately producing this spectacular blackout.

I wanted controlled degradation, so I paired local cellular problems with information manipulation. I increased ambiguous maritime activity over submarine cable routes, which is something we're already seeing. I applied limited pressure to the satellite layer that we were looking at. And the point was partly coercive, of course, but also partly informational. I wanted Taiwanese citizens asking like, "Why is this happening? How long is it going to last? Whose explanation should I believe? And are the backups going to work?" And at the same time, I think Beijing can learn from these types of operations. They're figuring out, "Well, who takes charge and how does the traffic get rerouted? And when does Taiwan move more of its traffic onto satellites, for example?"

So if day one is about probing and conditioning and mapping Taiwan's resilience architecture, and I would say that Taiwan handled most of that pretty well, operators responded, like Mark said, to being able to reroute traffic. They had some backup systems in place. And from my perspective as the red player, I got a lot of information. I figured out who they were going to rely on.

Day two is a different problem. It really ramps up to a much more intensive campaign. At that point, multiple substations supporting telecommunications were disabled. Several international cables were cut or severely damaged. A lot of the remaining cable capacity was really at its limits. Microwave backup was under extraordinary demand. This is a really high-tech society. Government and media websites were compromised. And so at that point, I wasn't really asking whether Taiwan had redundancy, which I think they do today. I was asking whether all of those redundancies could function simultaneously at scale for weeks against an adversary that was adapting in real time. That is a much, much harder resilience problem, although I do believe the current Lai administration is focused on addressing it.

I do think that for me at least, I had very little incentive to attack the United States or make Washington a target here. That would risk turning a coercive campaign against Taiwan into a US-China confrontation and potentially solve Taiwan's coalition problem for it. So I was really thinking about it from a different perspective.

But I think the paradox for Beijing here is pretty clear. If a coercive campaign like this causes Taiwan, the US, potentially Japan and commercial providers to build a standing resilience architecture that is already authorized and rehearsed and contracted, I think Beijing could gain leverage in the short term of pursuing something like this while making the same coercive strategy a lot less useful for the next round. And so I think those are just some of the things that we were looking at in the game and sort of analyzing, but looking forward to questions and some of our other big takeaways.

DOUGHERTY: Very good, Mark. Thank you. We do have a question in from Chris Buckley. I'll ask it here. He thanks you both for holding this call.

"Can Mark or Craig tell us their assessment, especially from this TTX of how Taiwan's government agencies, telecoms, Coast Guard, and perhaps military forces respond to events like severing of a major telecom cable? Coordination, sharing information, et cetera, seem to have been problems before. What did you observe from their game and meetings and what improvements are needed?"

Great questions there.

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MONTGOMERY: So I'll answer that kind of broadly, but then also in perspective to the United States because that's the one basis where I've studied the inter-agency in pretty good detail. And what I'd say is Taiwan has work to do on an inter-agency process, but they're probably slightly ahead of the United States, which is sad because we put a lot of effort into inter-agency coordination in many other ways, counter-terrorism and other ones. The United States is in a much improved inter-agency position, but for critical infrastructure protection, we're not. This is really hard.

I would say I have yet to come across a country outside Ukraine that has strong critical infrastructure protection, inter-agency cooperation and smooth transfer across it. So Taiwan's work, I would say working on it, getting there, I think you've noted some of the most important ones, which is there's definitely a navy, coast guard, ministry of digital affairs linkage around the submarine cables.

I will tell you one thing that's interesting about submarine cables, and I'm glad Craig pointed out that they weren't played as much in round one as they were in round two when China's really going for maximum pressure. I'd also say it's not always just a cable cut. A cable cut, you got to be pretty careful with that. You got to be careful whose cable it is you're cutting. They're bundled down there. I mean, some of these are owned by people other than Taiwan companies or Taiwan government. They're owned by international companies. Some people would consider that if it's part of a broader campaign, close to an act of war, whereas cyber attacks on ground stations, unknown plausibly deniable fifth element explosions in a submarine cable facility, there's a lot of different points where you could do this.

And we saw good inter-agency, a good understanding. The Coast Guard and Navy and ministry personnel understood the differences between where the junction boxes are offshore but in territorial waters as opposed to the cable distribution, the facilities which are ashore and whose responsibility was where. So I saw good cooperation on that. That's an area they've really been working on.

I think one of the challenges they're going to have is if they're really, really in extremis and they're down to very limited satellite capability, and you can imagine why they might have trouble with some LEO companies like Starlink, but let's just go fast-forward to a condition where they're on a very limited LEO capability, you now have to distribute that, prioritize that between presidential office communications, ministry of defense communications, and then broader rest of the government and then private sector. That kind of prioritization requires some high-end technology running on top of your systems, integrated across multiple companies and the government. That kind of project is going to be challenging for any country. It's challenging in Ukraine. But Taiwan needs to sort it out because I think it's reasonable.

I don't think Craig was making anything up in this game. There's nothing in this game that I didn't think in my head, "Well, they might eventually do that." So these are the kind of things they have to be prepared for. So inter-agencies, better than the United States, less than they need, but I think on the right arc.

SINGLETON: Yeah, no, I think Mark's right. I mean, I think Taiwan is definitely taking the problem seriously and they have built meaningful redundancy, roaming agreements. They have thought about rerouting traffic. They have some limited satellite backup. They're thinking about emergency power and cyber coordination and thinking about how they could work more closely with partners.

I think in the game, the government and operators generally had an answer to the first move of disruption. I think where we see some gaps is in endurance and integration. And as Mark mentioned, we even confront those things here. A lot of the response still assumes that another network is still available or that backup power lasts, commercial providers cooperate under strain, repair ships can get in, the US or Japan provides some support and mobilize quickly. Some of those I think are reasonable assumptions individually, but under sustained simultaneous pressure, I think those things start to collide.

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And we also saw, I think, unresolved questions around who makes prioritization decisions when capacity gets scarce, like how quickly the government and industry share information and how Taiwan communicates this information credibly with the public when normal channels are compromised.

Another big question, of course, is how international support can be prearranged versus negotiated during a crisis, which is I think one of our biggest takeaways that we have here. And those are exactly the kinds of issues that we were trying to expose in the game. So I think I would say Taiwan has made real progress on redundancy. The next challenge is turning those backups into a system that can endure for potentially weeks of adaptive pressure without requiring a new political or commercial decision every time something fails. And that's really tough.

DOUGHERTY: You both mentioned allies and international cooperation.

Mark, from your perspective, how important was it? You'd mentioned Japan, for example. And then Craig, from your perspective, how does Beijing see the importance of this cooperation for good or ill for them?

Mark, over to you first.

SINGLETON: I don't know if Mark froze there.

DOUGHERTY: Mark may have frozen. Over to you, Craig.

SINGLETON: I'll take it. Yeah, no, I mean look, internationalization of the crisis was one of my biggest concerns, frankly, during the exercise. As the Beijing player, I have worked aggressively to isolate Taiwan internationally from international organizations or even have scared regional countries around the world or in the region as well as countries and parts of Europe to think twice about deepening their ties with Taiwan, whether that's, of course, something as sensitive as military support, but also for basic civil resilience measures in the private sector where countries in Europe are well attuned to these risks because of Russian hybrid warfare and have lessons to learn. I've sort of made clear as the China player in the game, but also I think it mirrors China's broader coercive behavior is to let those countries know that something could happen to them if they decide to get in the game.

So I was seeking to really sideline everybody. There's a tendency in some of the war games that Mark and I have supported in the government or outside of government, because you think it's a war game and I have to win, but we don't think that's the way war games should be played. It's about what's probable, not what's possible.

And in this game, I think one of my core objectives is to keep Washington out. So it's frustrating to European players and DC players that I continue to go really below the threshold that's going to trigger a crisis and trigger their involvement. They get a little frustrated during the game because I haven't given them a reason to get in. And I think that China has mastered that sort of geopolitical gaslighting, if you will, to the extent that even if you look at the extent of today's crisis around Taiwan, we are seeing a rather muted response from other countries, but also the United States. I think that's by China's design. But yeah, that's sort of how I would see it. I see Mark's back on. Mark, I don't know if you have any thought on that question as well.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. Thanks. Sorry about that. I guess the Chinese didn't really want me to answer that question. There's slight loss of power in our office here. So look, this to me is the critical issue. It's across all three games. Craig and I noticed this in financial services, we've noticed it in energy, we've noticed it here. The key to success, and I think Craig alluded to this, is having a working relationship on the issue beforehand with allies and partners, particularly because of Taiwan's unique diplomatic status with most of these countries. So it's my opinion that Japan could help Taiwan in a financial services crisis or a energy crisis or a communications crisis if they had preexisting agreements. There is a fisheries agreement between the countries. I mean, that might be a template for how you move forward on these kind of things, but you have to have that.

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I think the second issue has to do with the United States. And with any country, it is very hard to respond when you don't have your traditional diplomatic relations. That limits both your relationships, but also the processes that are in place to conduct crisis management. And this is a bipartisan issue, it's been going on for 30 years, this challenge. And what I would gently say is no company would invest in another company, no venture capital would invest in a company if they weren't allowed to routinely talk to the leadership of that company. Yet somehow in the United States, despite the fact that Taiwan is just an extremely important partner to us economically and security-wise, we have chosen for 40 years to not have traditional military or civilian relationships where you talk to each other. Our president, we haven't had an elected president speak to a Taiwan-elected president in decades.

I mean, this is a flaw and that flaw gets exposed in a crisis. And the first way to mitigate it is change that policy. The second way to mitigate it is have preexisting agreements that say, look, if there's a typhoon or a hurricane or some other crisis, we'll support LNG shipments with shipments from Japan and convoy operations supported by the United States through these known maritime transit schemes. Everything I just described doesn't exist, and those things have to be built over time. And so I think what this game exposes is just one more sector where we would benefit from having preexisting agreements and we would super-duper benefit from having pre-existing relationships.

SINGLETON: Yeah, I want to add onto that because I think Mark raises some really serious points about the idea of getting ahead of a crisis. We have looked a lot obviously here at the Salt Typhoon and Volt Typhoon operations against US telecommunications providers and critical infrastructure operators, and that absolutely informed how we thought about this scenario. The lesson from both of those operations is that China increasingly values persistent access to networks, but also pre-positioning. So getting inside critical systems before a crisis, learning how they work, rather than waiting until the crisis begins. And so in our earlier energy game, we explicitly use that logic to think about access to these grid-facing systems and the psychological effect of making operators and the population wonder what China could reach or disrupt next.

The communications version of that I think is very similar. If an adversary is already in your networks, if they already understand them, its dependencies, its fallback pathways, I think disruption can become much more targeted and a lot more adaptive. And so one thing, I think one key takeaway that we had was potentially artificial intelligence could help defenders detect anomalies and correlate some of these incidents across networks and triage cyber events and maybe even spot coordinated information operations a lot faster, but this is still a relatively new tool in this context. And the harder question is really whether those types of AI systems remain useful when the data is so incomplete or manipulated, and there's certainly tools that can't be deployed at the last minute amidst a crisis. And so I think those Typhoon assaults kind of teach us the same basic lesson and it applies. It's like the crisis starts long before the first outage because the access and understanding needed to exploit the system is built in advance and we need to inoculate on the other side when it comes to Taiwan and its partners.

DOUGHERTY: Thank you, Craig and Mark. Again, you can ask questions through the Q&A feature, or you can use your raised hand and ask the question yourself. Craig, let's talk about resiliency in Taiwan. Were you surprised at how resilient Taiwan was in this, at least on the first day, and did you see any areas to exploit?

SINGLETON: I think the current Lai administration has put pretty substantial political capital behind resiliency, and they've made it a core of his administration. The president himself chairs very frequent resiliency commission meetings, and I think we all realize that in any government, but particularly in Asia, if the president isn't in charge and holding people accountable, these sorts of initiatives can either die on the vine or not reach their potential. But the fact that the president has so closely, has taken this issue and really made it part of his personal brand and conditioning the public to the likelihood that we will see an increase in Chinese coercive pressure, I think is really not only warranted, but also in this case, probably really beneficial so that the population can slowly seem to understand what might be coming their way.

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That initial web of inter-agency collaboration and public-private partnerships is starting to take shape. And I think if you look at the regulations and the systems and the structures they have put in place in the last 18 months or so are leaps and bounds beyond what existed before. The question is they require lots of care and feeding. They have to be adaptive to what the adversary is deploying. In the case of China, I'm watching this in real time, and while the rest of the world is focused on lots of different issues, taking Taiwan as a historic mission for the Chinese Communist Party and deeply tied to Xi Jinping's historical mandate as the party chairman.

So this is where they focus almost all of their time and all of their effort. So I think from the China perspective, I would say Taiwan is relatively well-equipped to handle some of those initial attacks when, I think as Mark and I mentioned, when they become simultaneous, any system will break. Our system would break. The question is, can you outlast these attacks and then begin to think about imposing costs on China? And I think we're still at the beginning of that conversation, but again, the scenario that we have articulated wasn't a 2026 scenario. It's a few years in the future where we think coercion around the island is really going to pick up, especially before the next presidential election.

DOUGHERTY: Mark, one of the things that Craig noted was from his red team perspective, trying to keep his actions below a certain threshold to not bring the US and allies in. Was that frustrating on your part and how did you respond?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah, it is for the Taiwan and US teams because if you realistically play in the United States, first you need to attribute everything. So in an early move, in a lower-level pressure campaign, attribution's difficult on occasion, especially in this one where a lot comes from cyber disinformation operations, economic pressure. I mean, the attribution's harder and it's hard to recognize that this is the event that's building towards an eventual full-scale effort by the Chinese to coercively collapse Taiwan's societal resilience. And what I mean by that is, let's say you respond, you really over-respond, you jump in, then Craig or China just backs off. I mean, the beauty of working in this world is he can come up, he can come down, he can come up. And if you assume that you're going to respond aggressively each time, after a while you get a boy who calls wolf scenario where you're like, wait a minute, I'm not going to jump in this. Or you run out of effort, of bandwidth to handle this kind of issue jumping up and back.

So what happens is you tend to underreact to the lower-level pressure campaign, and then by the time you realize that this is the time that they're pushing for a comprehensive one, you haven't done the significant spade work that's needed to help defend and mitigate attacks on a infrastructure. And what it leaves you with is just recovery. And so it is important that we understand how do we help recovery? That's finishing Craig's last thought on what happens in part two of the game when they really take it up and you do fail, your systems do fail, how can you recover? And that gets into one of the big issues I think out there is how we watched Ukraine recover from the loss of Viasat was with the Starlink system. Over time, there began to become political limitations on the Starlink system as owned by Elon Musk, who has many other interests in authoritarian countries and very specifically China. And it's been a political tool. Even today, there's fights in Ukraine. The Ukraine is requesting coverage over Russian sovereign territory and not getting it. So there's politics involved in those kind of decision making.

Taiwan's going to have to figure out a satellite-based recovery system over time. And it may be that Starlink's not the right answer. It might be something like Starshield or it might be something like Amazon Leo. There's several options in there. There's other options besides that, but there's a number of options in there.

That's what the game kind of ... When I say there's opportunities, it leads to these kind of opportunities of what's your opportunity for recovery networks, things like that, and how do you exploit them? And I think Taiwan's doing a very good job. The Taiwan government, I don't think our discussion of that was revealing to them in the sense that they knew this was an issue. I think it's frustrating to all of us that Starlink isn't just an obvious response to a significant loss of undersea cables.

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SINGLETON: Yeah, no, I think Mark raises great points, and I agree. You know, satellite-based systems are obviously a really important part of Taiwan's resilience, especially if the subsea cables or these terrestrial networks are degraded. But they're a fallback. They're obviously not a silver bullet. And we all know terminals can be disrupted and ground stations can be attacked. Software can be compromised and capacity can really become pretty scarce very quickly if large amounts of traffic suddenly shift onto satellite networks.

And I think the lesson from the game was that Taiwan needs a really layered satellite architecture, LEO, MEO, GEO, terrestrial networks, microwave, undersea cables with capacity and authorities that are arranged and advanced. And the danger for me, and I think it became apparent in the game, is simply moving from dependence on one network to dependence on another, including a satellite provider. And so I think that's why I'm sort of cautious about assuming Starlink would solve these problems. I think Taiwan needs options they can actually count on in a crisis and that's going to require a layered response.

DOUGHERTY: So what is next with this report that you're going to have coming up later this year, early next year, and for future TTXs with Taiwan?

MONTGOMERY: Well, you alluded to the fact, I think our report's going to take a while to get out. You know, we're going to work it right, plus we have a holiday period, so probably the beginning of next year.

But I think Craig and I would like to see ... You know, we've studied cyber-enabled economic warfare, all the different tools, cyber attacks, information, disinformation, diplomatic, military, economic pressures, even military feints, illegal warfare. I mean, Craig's used all these tools over three years of tabletops. But we then tend to drive down to just one sector at a time. Not that there aren't other problems going on in the tabletop that don't allow you easy solutions, we do do that, but I think it would be valuable to do a comprehensive one where all elements, all critical infrastructures are being looked at simultaneously while this comprehensive attack is going on. It'd take a little more effort, but kind of getting at that simultaneity issue in terms of critical infrastructure, I think would be valuable.

And so I think that's where Craig and I are thinking about heading next.

SINGLETON: Yeah, I think the cross domain, seeing all these pieces come together and being able to measure how much progress Taiwan has made in three years would be a really exciting project for next year, bringing it all together. Like what happens when pressure in one system really just starts to cascade into the others? Like communications into energy, energy into logistics, cyber into finance. You know, we've looked at these kind of as standalones, but bringing them together would be really exciting.

And I think also a lot of this connects to the work that Mark's team and my team are doing here in Washington on things like import controls and technological dependence, like Chinese drones and robotics and LiDAR and batteries, inverters and other systems that can be embedded in critical infrastructure. A lot of them are being embedded in Taiwan's infrastructure.

And so we have the same sort of underlying question here as we do in Taipei, and that's where has dependence accumulated, how could Beijing exploit it in a crisis and what can we do now to reduce that leverage? And so I think the broader project is really about identifying these pressure points before China starts to use them.

MONTGOMERY: Yep. One other thing, Joe, I'd say as we kind of wrap here is the idea of ... Craig and I also run these exercises for our congressional members and staffs and for executive agencies. It is disappointing the degree to which Washington is focused on running war games about a cross-strait invasion and determining what's the likely casualty rates, how many harpoon missiles are needed, how many this.

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Look, I think the Department of Defense works that thing pretty hard, classified and unclassified, internal to DOD and with RAND and other high-end military associated think tanks. And I'm glad they're doing that. What is disappointing is that this kind of most likely scenario associated with some kind of coercion campaign is not worked to the same degree.

And so Craig's led an effort with the Congress and I have with the executive agencies to try to run this exercise for them so that they can see the results and start to understand where the United States has opportunities. And so we'll see how that goes with ... You know, we've done it in the past and we'll try to do it with this communications exercise as well.

DOUGHERTY: Excellent. Mark and Craig, I'm going to give each of you about a minute at the end here to summarize your thoughts and maybe to just raise a story idea or two for the journalists on the call, something that they should be looking forward to thinking ahead.

In the meantime, just a quick reminder that FDD is a nonpartisan research institute focused on national security and foreign policy. You can find all of our research at fdd.org. If you'd like to talk with Mark or Craig independently, please reach me at press@fdd.org and I'll be happy to arrange that conversation.

Special thanks to Krystal Bermudez and the FDD team and comms for their great work behind the scenes to make sure everything went smoothly.

If the timing of this call was helpful to you, please shoot me a note. We'd love to hear that. Or if you have any other suggestions on how to improve it, warmly welcome those. You can reach me at press@fdd.org.

Let us wrap things up. Mark, we'll start with you and conclude with Craig.

MONTGOMERY: Well, first of all, I think I showed extreme communications resilience by coming off my computer and onto my phone when the power went out in the building here.

Hey look, I think the most important thing here, and I've said this to some of the reporters online before, that the one thing I think is missing sometimes is an understanding in America of how important these types of issues are. Taiwan's value to the United States is an economic partner. You know, they're our third-largest importer in the United States. They've passed China, just behind Canada and Mexico, a small island nation of 23 million. Sometimes Americans don't quite understand just how important that is.

And what they sell us, it's not farm goods, it's not retail, it's compute. \$175 billion plus of semiconductor logic chips that power almost everything we build that you turn on and off, from F-35s to F-150 trucks to fridges. It covers all those things. It drives a significant amount of our annual GDP. You know, probably around 10% could be tied back to these chips.

So from my perspective, it's pretty darn important that we support the resilience of Taiwan so Taiwan can support the economic prosperity of the United States. That's what relationships and partnerships are built on.

You know, added benefit, it's a vibrant democracy with free and fair elections and freedom of the press, and all the other elements that we like to see in our allies and partners in a legal system that we can work with. Those are all really critical, but that economic prosperity angle is vital. And so it's important for the United States to understand this. And so I think sometimes running these war games is helpful because you show the end result as if societal resilience were to crumble in Taiwan is that the United States economy is a victim.

SINGLETON: Yeah, I mean, I think I'll agree with all those points.

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You know, the story for me is that Chinese pressure around Taiwan is changing. It's becoming less episodic and more persistent. And I think our tracker and these exercises show a very steady rhythm of military, maritime, cyber and economic pressure rather than where there are meaningful periods of restraint. It is a new normal. And so the individual incidents can look manageable in isolation, but the strategic shift is that Beijing is increasingly able to keep several forms of pressure running at once. They're learning from Taiwan's responses and they're seeking to normalize a much higher baseline of coercion.

And I think that's the story. Gray zone activity is starting to look less like a series of discrete crises and more like the infrastructure of a sustained coercive campaign. And that's going to have really serious implications for Taiwan, but also really serious implications for the US and its regional allies as well.

DOUGHERTY: Craig and Mark, thank you for your terrific analysis. To the journalists on the call, thank you for joining us this evening. This does conclude today's call.