

TAIWAN SECURITY ISSUES
Stanford University
Winter Quarter 2026
Version 2.0

Instructor: Kharis Templeman

Email: kharis@stanford.edu

Office: Herbert Hoover Memorial Bldg 311

Office Hours: Tu 1:30-3:30pm & by appt.

Website: www.kharistempleman.com

EASTASN 168/268

Time: T-Th 10:30-11:50am

Classroom: Knight Building Room 201

Canvas site: [W26-EASTASN-168-01/268-01](https://canvas.libraries.stanford.edu/courses/1196/168/268-01)

Description:

Taiwan has carved out a place for itself in the world that far outstrips its geographic size and population. With less than 24 million people, its economy is among the 20 largest in the world today, and Taiwanese firms, including its strategically important semiconductor industry, are key links in the multinational production chains that crisscross the Indo-Pacific. It is a major trading partner and long-standing friend of the United States in an increasingly volatile region. It is also one of the most successful cases in the Third Wave of democratization, and it remains by many measures the most liberal democracy in Asia.

Today, however, Taiwan is threatened by the rise of the authoritarian People's Republic of China (PRC), an economic juggernaut and rapidly modernizing military power which asserts the right to rule over Taiwan and has relentlessly sought to extend the island's diplomatic isolation and economic dependence on the Chinese mainland. As a consequence, Taiwan's long-term security is as imperiled as any democracy in the world.

The cross-Strait relationship is crucial for regional and global security, since it is the only issue that could plausibly draw the United States and the PRC into an armed conflict against one another. Taiwan is also important as a democratic model: it provides a powerful counterexample to the argument that liberal democracy is inappropriate for Chinese-speaking or "Asian values" societies, including the PRC. And as one of the shining political successes of the Third Wave of democracy, its failure would be deeply tragic.

This course will provide a broad overview of Taiwan's place in the security environment of East Asia, review different theoretical approaches for understanding the prospects for war or peace in the Taiwan Strait, and examine contemporary policy debates in the United States over how, or even whether, to continue to provide security assistance to the island.

Topics to be covered include:

- The history of US-Taiwan-PRC relations from 1945 to the present
- Taiwan's contested sovereignty: its ambiguous status in the contemporary inter-state system, and the practical consequences of its diplomatic isolation
- Hard security issues: China's rise, changes in the cross-Strait military balance, the US-Taiwan security partnership, and Taiwan defense and security planning and challenges
- Economic security issues: trends in cross-Strait trade and investment, Taiwan's economic importance to the United States and other advanced economies, and PRC use of economic integration as a political tool
- Sharp power issues: PRC United Front strategy and tactics, "gray-zone" activities, covert and corrupting activities and the threats to democracy in Taiwan

- Taiwan's domestic politics: influence of PRC threats and activities on Taiwan's democratic politics, strengths and weaknesses of Taiwan's contemporary political system, and the impact on its security

Course Materials:

Required Books:

Scott Kastner. 2022. *War and Peace in the Taiwan Strait*. Columbia University Press.

Xin Qiang. 2022. *Mainland China's Taiwan Policy: From Peaceful Development to Selective Engagement*. Routledge.

Other readings will be posted to the Canvas site. Some of the readings are excerpts from books; these will be posted as pdfs or available electronically through Stanford Libraries. Most of the rest are also available online through Stanford University library's various electronic journal databases (e.g. MUSE, JSTOR).

Newspaper Reading

Because we will refer regularly to current events in this course, you are expected to follow the news in Taiwan on a daily basis. I recommend the *Taipei Times*, Taiwan's primary English-language daily newspaper, available online at www.taipeitimes.com, or [FocusTaiwan](http://FocusTaiwan.com), the English-language website of Taiwan's Central News Agency. In addition to these, I have posted a list of other online media resources (both English- and Chinese-language) on the Canvas site under Pages.

Additional Readings and Resources

I may occasionally assign other materials, and I will also post additional resources for your course assignments on the Canvas site. I also will make frequent use of the Canvas announcement tool and will keep you up to date on course assignments, activities, and any changes via that system, so double check that you can access your official Stanford email account to ensure you receive these notifications.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation

This course will include a mix of lecture and discussion. In general, I will use Thursday's class to introduce the topic and motivating questions for that week's material, and the next Tuesday's class will be a discussion of the readings. **Assigned readings for each week should be completed before the discussion.**

I expect students to attend every class. Missing a class meeting will have a significant impact on your ability to contribute to the course. More than two unexcused absences (those not due to religious exemptions, COVID-19-related or other major illnesses, or university-approved activities) will lower your participation grade one interval (e.g. A to A-) per absence. In addition, arriving late to class can be disruptive and is an inconvenience to the rest of us; habitual tardiness will likewise adversely affect your grade. If you think you might struggle regularly to attend class, please contact me directly to work out an accommodation.

The simple rule of thumb here: if something outside your control comes up and prevents you from participating in class one day, let me know as early as you can, and we will find a way to get you caught up.

Discussion

As befits an upper-level seminar, student-driven discussion is a central part of this course. To this end, you should come to our weekly discussion class prepared to talk about all the assigned readings. Note that the reading load is moderate-to-heavy, and that we will only hold discussion once a week; please plan accordingly.

Canvas Discussion Posts

Before 8am on the day of our discussion session, please post a one- or-two paragraph question or comment about at least one of the assigned readings or recent news items to the Canvas discussion page. I will use these posts to structure our class discussion around what you find odd, perplexing, controversial, or otherwise worth talking about. This post can ask for a clarification—for instance, about evidence or the argument that you do not understand. Or it can be a substantive issue that you think would be helpful to discuss in class—for instance, how does a reading or recent development in Taiwan relate to something from the lecture? It can even be a critique—say, “this reading sucks, and here’s why!”—or a response to something one of your peers has written. These comments are due before every discussion class (i.e. once a week). You may miss up to two comments before your discussion grade is adversely affected.

I encourage you to use these discussion prompts to engage with each other as well. If one of your classmates posts a discussion question, you can also make your contribution for the week by responding to that question in the forum. This prompt is a chance for you to speak directly with (and argue with—respectfully, of course!) your peers.

A final note here: **if you are responsible for a recap or summary (see next item), you are not required to post a discussion question for that week**—just concentrate on preparing a good recap!

Recaps and Summaries

At the beginning of each discussion class, we will have several students each give a ~5 minute summary of the previous lecture, a supplementary commentary article, or a Taiwan speaker series talk. This presentation should be verbal (so no power points or handouts!)—think of it as a “cliff notes” briefing of the topics discussed in the talk or article. This assignment has a couple objectives: to remind everyone what we previously covered, and to tee up that day’s discussion by presenting a policy debate laid out in the supplementary articles. You will each be responsible for giving one summary to the class. I will distribute a sign-up sheet for this assignment on Thursday, January 8.

Commentary Paper

One of the most common forms of media content about Taiwan is the “commentary,” such as what you will find in online magazines like [The Diplomat](#), [Foreign Policy](#), [The National Interest](#), [The Atlantic](#), and (usually in longer form) [Foreign Affairs](#). These typically take one of two forms (and sometimes both): analysis or advocacy. An *analytical commentary* provides a detailed discussion of a contemporary political or social issue, informed by a theoretical framework that is meant to help the reader better understand what is happening and why. An *advocacy commentary* presents a clear opinion, often with a recommended set of principles, policies, or courses of action that the writer seeks to persuade readers should be followed.

To give you practice writing in this genre, you will write a commentary (1000-1200 words for the 3.0 credit option, 2500-4000 for 4.0 credits) on one of the topics of the course. Your commentary should be on a topic of relevance to contemporary Taiwan security issues and should be clearly related to one of our motivating questions or themes. But you are otherwise free to choose the topic, the analytical framework and the position you wish to advocate for. To help stimulate your thinking, I have included several recent sample commentaries in Canvas.

The first draft of your commentary will be due on **Friday, February 13, by 5pm**. I will review these and meet with you to provide feedback on your drafts in a one-on-one meeting in office hours, and you are encouraged to revise them. Final drafts are due on **Tuesday, March 17 at noon**. Submit your commentary by uploading the paper via the Canvas assignment feature. Your draft should be double-spaced and numbered, using 12-point Times New Roman font, with your name, class number, week and date in the upper left-hand corner. For references, it is now standard in these commentaries simply to include links within the text, [like so](#), rather than footnotes or a bibliography.

Credit Units: 3.0 vs 4.0

Important: This course has two credit options: 3.0 vs. 4.0. Students who are registered for 4 credits will be required to submit a longer commentary paper, on the order of 2500-4000 words, versus 1000-1200 for 3 credits. Make sure you are registered for your preferred number of credits: the deadline to make this change is the second week of classes!

Final Exam

On March 5 at the end of class, you will be given a take-home final exam covering all of the material from lectures, discussion, and readings. The final exam will also include a set of essay prompts from which you may choose two to respond to. The final exam is due on March 12 at the beginning of class.

Grading:

Your course grade will be determined as follows:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| • Participation: | | 40% |
| ○ Attendance: | 15% | |
| ○ Discussion (on Canvas & in class): | 15% | |
| ○ Lecture recap or article summary: | 10% | |
| • Commentary: | | 30% |
| ○ First Draft: | 10% | |
| ○ Office Hours: | 5% | |
| ○ Final Draft: | 15% | |
| • Final exam: | | 30% |

Other Stuff:

Privacy and Security Concerns

Some of the topics we will cover in this course may be politically sensitive. Our class sessions will not be open to the public or recorded, and they are accessible only to registered Stanford students and auditors that I have explicitly approved. However, this course will also include the option to attend events sponsored by the Hoover Institution's Project on Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific Region, including the project's speaker series and annual conference. These events will be public. In addition, I may invite special guests with expertise relevant to our course to join our discussions as opportunities arise. I encourage your direct participation in these events and engagement with our guest speakers. But, recognizing that some students may be uncomfortable appearing in public forums, active engagement in these sessions is not required. If you have concerns about privacy or security, please contact me directly.

Email

Email is the easiest way to reach me—I check frequently, and I will do my best to reply promptly. (The one exception is on the weekends, when I do not normally answer email: I will respond on Monday.) I

will also send important class announcements to your email account via the Canvas announcement function, so please make sure you have a working Stanford email address and check it regularly.

Office Hours (Herbert Hoover Memorial Building, Room 311)

Office hours are for your benefit. I urge you to come to my office hours to talk about any questions you may have about the class or to discuss a topic touched upon in class or in the readings. If you cannot make my scheduled office hours, I am happy to schedule individual appointments.

Academic Dishonesty

Per the university Honor Code, academic dishonesty includes “all forms of cheating, falsification, and/or plagiarism.” This includes the use of AI to generate an essay without permission from your instructor, and swapping answers with a classmate during the midterm exam. Simply put, don’t do it. If I suspect that you have plagiarized a paper or cheated on an exam, I will follow university procedures to the letter, up to and including receiving a failing grade for the course and referral to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. Dishonesty has no place in the classroom. If you are not sure what constitutes a violation of this policy, please ask!

I will reserve time in week 3 to discuss in more detail the use of AI tools and expectations for your final exam and commentary.

Special Accommodations

I am happy to work with students who feel they may require an accommodation for observance of religious holidays, for a disability, or for other kinds of personal issues that may arise over the term. If you anticipate needing a special accommodation, please see me during office hours, preferably early in the term.

I also repost this notice from the Office of Accessible Education (OAE):

“Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of the Stanford community. We welcome you to our class.

If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit oae.stanford.edu.

If you already have an Academic Accommodation Letter, we invite you to share your letter with us. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so we may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course.”

And this statement of the University’s Campus Disruption Policy (adopted in 1967):

“Because the rights of free speech and peaceable assembly are fundamental to the democratic process, Stanford firmly supports the rights of all members of the University community to express their views or to protest against actions and opinions with which they disagree.

All members of the University also share a concurrent obligation to maintain on the campus an atmosphere conducive to scholarly pursuits, to preserve the dignity and seriousness of University ceremonies and public exercises, and to respect the rights of all individuals.

The following regulations are intended to reconcile these objectives.

It is a violation of University policy for a member of the faculty, staff, or student body to:

- 1. Prevent or disrupt the effective carrying out of a University function or approved activity, such as classes, lectures, meetings, interviews, ceremonies, the conduct of University business in a University office, and public events.*
- 2. Obstruct the legitimate movement of any person about the campus or in any University building or facility.*

Tentative Schedule

0. Introduction: Taiwan and Its Place in the World

Tuesday, January 6. Introductions, Overview of Course, Historical Background

Readings:

1. Kastner, *War and Peace in the Taiwan Strait*, Introduction

1. The “Taiwan Problem” in the Inter-State System

Thursday, January 8. Lecture

Required Readings:

1. Kastner Ch. 1
2. Stephen D. Krasner, 2001, “Problematic Sovereignty,” Ch. 1 in *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities*. Columbia University Press.
3. Robert Madsen, 2001, “The Struggle for Sovereignty between China and Taiwan,” in *Problematic Sovereignty*

Commentaries:

- Eliot Cohen, “Telling the Truth about Taiwan,” *The Atlantic*, October 2023.
- Michael Swaine, “The Worrying Erosion of the One China Policy,” *The National Interest*, February 2023.

Supplementary Readings:

- Hoopes and Brinkley, 1997, *FDR and the Creation of the UN*, excerpts
- Chengxin Pan, 2012, “Normative Convergence and Cross-Strait Divergence: Westphalian Sovereignty as an Ideational Source of Conflict,” in *New Thinking about the Taiwan Issue*.
- Jessica Drun and Bonnie Glaser, “The Distortion of UN Resolution 2758 and Limits on Taiwan’s Access to the United Nations,” German Marshall Fund report, March 2022.
- David Lake, 2009, “The State and International Relations,” *Oxford Handbook of International Relations*.

Tuesday, January 13. Discussion

Unless otherwise noted, the format for discussion class will be the following:

- Student summaries of commentaries, followed by recap of previous lecture
- Instructor-led discussion of required readings

2. Systemic Explanations of War: The Security Dilemma across the Taiwan Strait

Thursday, January 15. Lecture

Required Readings:

1. Kastner Ch. 2

2. Jack S. Levy, 2008, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China," in *China's Ascent*.
3. Adam Liff and Ikenberry, 2014, "Racing Toward Tragedy?: China's Rise, Military Competition in the Asia-Pacific, and the Security Dilemma." *International Security* 39(2): 52-91.

Commentaries:

- Andrew Nathan, "Beijing Is Still Playing the Long Game on Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs*, June 2022.
- Bonny Lin, John Culver, and Brian Hart, "The Risk of War in the Taiwan Strait Is High—And Getting Higher." *Foreign Affairs*, May 2025.

Supplementary readings:

- Kenneth Waltz, 1988, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory." In Rothberg and Rabb, *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*.
- Robert Jervis, 1978, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*
- Stephen Van Evera, 1998, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," *International Security*

Tuesday, January 20: Discussion

*****January 20 (Tu), 12:00-1:15pm. Optional APARC Taiwan Program Speaker Series Event*****

Wen-chin Wu

"From Invisible toward Invincible: Taiwanese Public Opinion on National Security"

Philippines Conference Room, Encina Hall

3. Hierarchies, Alliances, and Security Cooperation: Taiwan as a Client State
--

Thursday, January 22. Lecture

Required Readings:

1. Kastner, Ch. 3
2. Keren Yarhi-Milo, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper, 2016, "To Arm or To Ally?: The Patron's Dilemma and the Strategic Logic of Arms Transfers and Alliances," *International Security* 41(2): 90-139.
3. Richard Bush, "A One China Policy Primer," East Asia Policy Paper 10, Brookings Institution, March 2017.

Commentaries:

- Andrew Erickson, Gabriel Collins, and Matt Pottinger, "The Taiwan Catastrophe: What America—and the World—Would Lose If China Took the Island." *Foreign Affairs*, February 2024.
- Stephen Wertheim and Jennifer Kavanagh, "The Taiwan Fixation: American Strategy Shouldn't Hinge on an Unwinnable War." *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2025.

Supplementary Readings:

- David Lake, 2011, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, introduction
- James Morrow, 1991, "Alliances and Asymmetry," *American Journal of Political Science*
- James Morrow, 1993, "Arms versus Allies," *International Organization*

- Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, 1990, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks,” *International Organization*

Tuesday, January 27. Discussion

4. Domestic Influences on Foreign Policy: Democracy in Taiwan

Thursday, January 29. Lecture

Readings:

1. Kastner, Ch. 4
2. Kharis Templeman, “Taiwan’s Transition to Democracy and Beyond (1986-2024),” pp. 51-67 in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Taiwan*.
3. Yu-shan Wu, 2005, “Taiwan’s Domestic Politics and Cross-Strait Relations,” *The China Journal*

Commentaries:

- Matt Kroenig, “Taiwan Is Getting Serious about Self-Defense,” *Foreign Policy*, May 2025.
- Kelly Grieco and Hunter Slingbaum, “Taiwan’s Squandered Defense Potential,” Field Note, Stimson Center, September 2025.

Supplementary readings:

- Kenneth Schultz, 2013, “Domestic Politics and International Relations,” Sage Handbook
- James Lee Ray, 1998, “Does Democracy Cause Peace?” *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Michael W. Doyle, 1986, “Liberalism and World Politics,” *American Political Science Review*

Tuesday, February 3. Discussion

5. Rationalist Explanations of War: Information Asymmetries and Commitment Problems across the Taiwan Strait

Thursday, February 5. Lecture

Readings:

1. Kastner, 2022, *War and Peace in the Taiwan Strait*, Ch 5-8.

Commentaries:

- Hal Brands, “U.S. Deterrence in Taiwan is Failing,” *Foreign Policy*, September 2023.
- Bonnie Glaser, Thomas Christensen and Jessica Chen Weiss, “Taiwan and the True Sources of Deterrence,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 2023.

Supplementary Readings:

- James Fearon, 1995, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization*
- Robert Powell, 2002, “Bargaining Theory and International Conflict,” *Annual Review of Political Science*
- Robert Powell, 2006, “War as a Commitment Problem,” *International Organization*

Tuesday, February 10. Discussion

6. Economic Security: Is Taiwan Protected by a “Silicon Shield”?

Thursday, February 12. Lecture

Readings:

1. Xin Qiang, 2022, *Mainland China's Taiwan Policy*, Ch. 1-3.
2. Yuan-Kang Wang, 2023, “China's Economic Statecraft in the Taiwan Strait,” *Asian Security*
3. Kharis Templeman and Oriana Mastro, “Deepening U.S.-Taiwan Cooperation through Semiconductors.” Chapter 5 in *Silicon Triangle: The United States, Taiwan, China, and Global Semiconductor Security*.

Commentaries:

- Alejandro Reyes, “Is the Arizona Tech Oasis a Mirage?: Taiwan's Pushback on Tech Production Underscores Continued U.S. Dependency.” *Foreign Policy*, October 2025
- Christopher Vassallo, “The ‘Silicon Shield’ Is a Danger to Taiwan and America.” *The National Interest*, May 2022.

Supplementary Readings:

- Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, 2019. “Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion,” *International Security*
- Audrye Wong, 2024, “Bringing Domestic Politics Back into Economic Statecraft.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Geoeconomics and Statecraft*.
- Phillip Lipsy and Hallie Na-Kyung Lee, 2019. “The IMF As a Biased Global Insurance Mechanism: Asymmetrical Moral Hazard, Reserve Accumulation, and Financial Crises.” *International Organization*.
- Stan Kwok-wei Wong and Nicole Wu, 2016, “Can Beijing Buy Taiwan?” *Journal of Contemporary China*

***** Commentary Drafts Due, Friday, February 13, 5pm *****

Tuesday, February 17. Discussion

****One-on-one meetings with the instructor to discuss your commentary drafts will take place the week of February 16-20 by appointment in office hours***.*

7. Sharp Power: Non-Military Coercion across the Taiwan Strait

Thursday, February 19. Lecture

Readings:

1. Xin Qiang, *Mainland China's Taiwan Policy*, Ch. 4 and Conclusion
2. Dan Blumenthal and Richard Kagan, “China's Three Roads to Controlling Taiwan,” American Enterprise Institute, March 2023.

3. David Stilwell, 2020, “Covert, Coercive, and Corrupting: Countering the Chinese Communist Party’s Malign Influence in Free Societies,” remarks delivered at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Commentaries:

- David Sacks, “China’s Gray-Zone Offensive against Taiwan Is Backfiring: Washington and Taipei Must Prepare for Further Escalation.” *Foreign Affairs*, November 2024.
- Daniel Byman and Seth Jones, “How To Toughen Up Taiwan: America Must Help the Island Deal with China’s Gray-Zone Tactics,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 2025.

Supplementary Readings:

- David A. Baldwin, 2013, “Power and International Relations,” Sage Handbook
- Christopher Walker, Shanti Kalathil, and Jessica Ludwig, 2020, “The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power,” *Journal of Democracy*

Tuesday, February 24. Discussion

8. Taiwan’s Democracy: Bulwark or Weak Link?

Thursday, February 26. Lecture

Readings:

- Richard Bush, 2021. *Difficult Choices: Taiwan’s Quest for Security and the Good Life*. Excerpts.
- Kharis Templeman, 2020, “How Taiwan Stands Up to China,” *Journal of Democracy*
- T.Y. Wang and Huang Chi, 2023, “The Chinese Threat and Changes of Identity in Taiwan,” *Asian Survey*.

Commentaries:

- Isaac Kardon and Jennifer Kavanagh, “How China Will Squeeze, Not Seize, Taiwan: A Slow Strangulation Could Be Just as Bad as War,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 21, 2024.
- Lev Nachman and Wei-Ting Yen, “Taiwan’s Democracy is in Trouble: How Polarization Undermines Security,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 1, 2025.

Supplementary Readings:

- Kharis Templeman, 2022. “How Democratic Is Taiwan?: Evaluating Twenty Years of Political Change.” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*
- Matt Pottinger, ed., *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan*. Part II: Taiwan’s Job Now.
 - Ch. 4. “A New Military Culture for Taiwan”
 - Ch. 5. “Countering China’s Use of Force”
 - Ch. 6. “Countering China’s Gray-Zone Activities”

Tuesday, March 3. Discussion

9. Wrap Up: Review and Final Exam
--

Thursday, March 5 – IN CLASS REVIEW FOR FINAL EXAM

*****Final exam will be distributed at the end of class*****

Tuesday, March 10. NO CLASS – Work on your final exam

Thursday, March 12. Last Class – Wrap Up

*****Final exams due at the beginning of class*****

Tuesday, March 17. FINAL COMMENTARY PAPER DUE AT NOON, UPLOADED TO CANVAS

**GOOD LUCK ON FINALS AND HAVE A GREAT
SPRING BREAK!**