

The Dragon and the Clock—2027 as the Turning Point Year Between China and Taiwan

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Many regard 2027 as the year in which the Chinese military could attack Taiwan—especially after former CIA Director [William Burns](#) said in 2023 that “as a matter of intelligence, we know that he [Xi Jinping] has instructed the People’s Liberation Army to be ready by 2027 to conduct a successful invasion of Taiwan.” Western research institutes, including [Brookings](#), have used 2027 as a reference point in their analyses. Likewise, in regional assessments by countries close to China and Taiwan—such as [Japan](#) and [India](#)—2027 repeatedly emerges as a point of departure. This is despite the fact that no official Chinese authority has publicly declared 2027 to be the target year for unification with Taiwan. US intelligence may be correct, or it may not be; therefore, it cannot be stated with certainty that this is indeed Beijing’s target year. Nevertheless, this article analyzes possible reasons for this assessment and discusses what a 2027 contingency would mean for Israel’s security, foreign policy, and economic systems.

The unification of Taiwan with mainland China has long been an important objective of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party), but in recent years [its importance seems to have increased](#), and [it is now presented as part of China’s core national interests](#). However, at the same time, prospects for peaceful unification appear to be receding. In the past, Taiwan viewed itself as the “true China,” destined to reunite with the mainland and rule a unified China, but over the past few decades, this situation has changed. Taiwanese public opinion shows that more and more Taiwanese see themselves as a nation separate from mainland China: 64% in 2008, rising to [75% in 2015](#). According to a Pew Research Survey in 2024, the majority of Taiwanese are not interested in unification ([60% prefer the status quo and about 26% prefer independence](#)). In other words, the trend toward Taiwanese separation is expanding, while the desire for unification is steadily shrinking.

China is attempting to stem this trend and is employing a wide range of methods, including threats of military exercises, influence operations, political warfare, and economic “carrot and stick” measures. In 2024, Taiwanese authorities reported that [more than two million instances](#) of disinformation had been disseminated by China on social media, aimed at shaping public opinion. Despite these efforts, Taiwanese voters elected presidents from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 2016, 2020, and 2024, a party that, to say the least, does not aspire to unification with China.

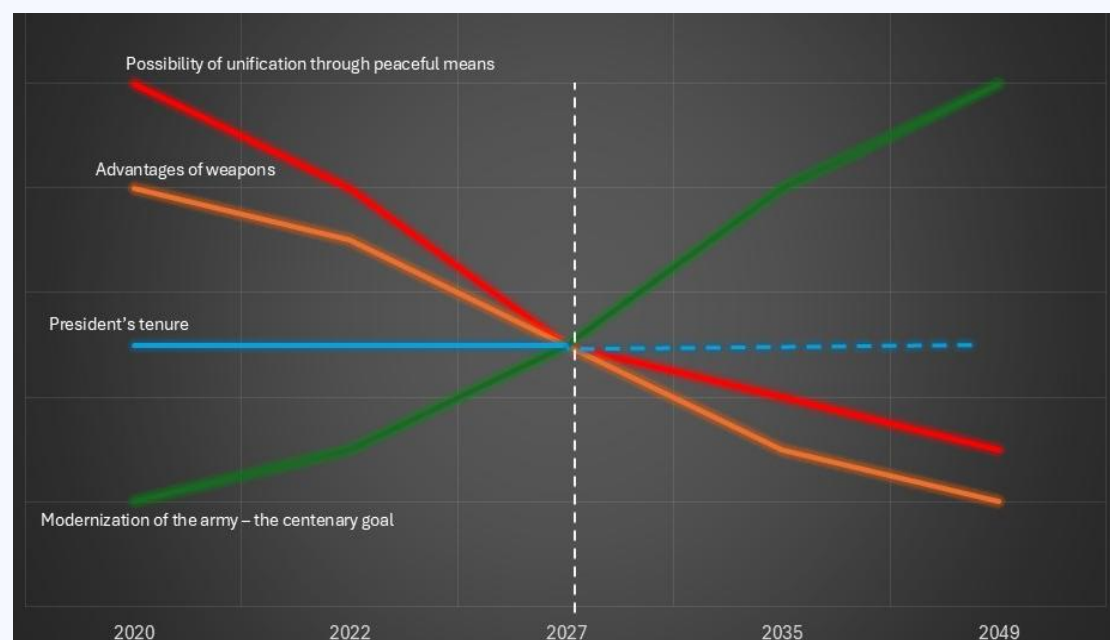
Moreover, in 2025, Taiwan’s President William Lai delivered ten public speeches titled “Strengthening and Uniting the Nation,” in which he defined China as a hostile external threat and even declared that Taiwan possesses all the components of a sovereign state. While serving as Israel’s Defense Attaché in Beijing, the author heard in side conversations that China seems to understand that peaceful unification is unlikely, and Beijing’s patience may be

wearing thin. A senior Chinese military official explicitly stated in 2024 that within two to four years, the Taiwan problem would be resolved.

If unification by force is only a matter of time, why 2027?

In general terms, it can be argued that in 2027 several “clocks” will synchronize for the first time, reinforcing the assessment that China may take military action against Taiwan at that point (see Figure 1). The phrase “military action against Taiwan” is used deliberately because the range of possible operations is broad. They could include selective or extensive missile strikes; a civilian maritime quarantine or a military blockade; the seizure of one of the Kinmen Islands close to China; a special operation aimed at decapitating Taiwan’s leadership; and a full-scale amphibious invasion of Taiwan itself. For the purposes of this article, it is sufficient to assume that some form of military action is plausible in 2027.

Figure 1. Illustration of the Synchronization of the “Clocks”



These “clocks” include China’s growing recognition that peaceful unification is unlikely; President Xi Jinping’s [goal](#) for the military—[to be ready and capable by its centenary in 2027 to achieve a strategic victory over Taiwan](#); the approaching end of Xi Jinping’s third term as CCP general secretary, president of China, and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC); Taiwan’s election cycle, which concludes in January 2028; and Western progress in developing defensive systems against Chinese hypersonic missiles. In addition, there are signs that can be interpreted as indicating China’s willingness to use force to achieve unification with Taiwan. While some of these clocks are not unique to 2027—such as the arms race and the conclusion that unification may only be achievable by force—their convergence with the other drivers occurs for the first time in 2027.

The global effects of such a confrontation would be so severe that it is more appropriate to focus on the nearest plausible date and prepare accordingly, rather than assume that nothing will happen or that it will occur only a quarter-century from now, in 2049.

One of President Xi Jinping’s central moves since assuming office in 2013 has been the reform and modernization of the Chinese military. Among those reforms are the reorganization of

theater commands to promote jointness and the establishment of new forces such as the Strategic Support Force, which in 2024 was dismantled into three separate forces (information, cyber, and space). Xi also defined a goal of transforming the People's Liberation Army (PLA) [into a world-class military by mid-century](#), with 2049 marking the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Within the modernization process, China defined milestones: basic modernization and the ability to win regional wars by 2027, and full modernization of the national security system by 2035. Many experts view the “centenary goal” as effectively referring to the military's readiness to forcibly unify with Taiwan. The view of Xi and the PRC that unification with Taiwan is essential, together with the statement that the PLA must be ready to win a regional war by 2027, leads to the conclusion that the first plausible target year is 2027.

In January 2028, Taiwanese voters will go to the polls to elect a president. A fourth consecutive victory by a leader from the DPP, if it occurs, could reinforce in Beijing the belief that the prospects for unification through peaceful means are steadily fading, especially [in light of Taiwan's socio-political trends](#). Such a conclusion could encourage China to act by force to achieve unification. As in most democratic countries, it will be possible well before the election to assess who is most likely to enter the presidential palace in Taipei. Thus, during 2027, another “clock” will begin counting down toward its endpoint. For this reason, some analysts view the period from 2027 through early 2028 as a window in which China may decide to use force to achieve unification.

A third countdown clock is personal. Xi Jinping's dominance as leader of the CCP and of China increasingly resembles that of Mao Zedong more than his two predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin. Today, the conceptual basis for all policy is “Xi Jinping Thought” on various subjects—whether “Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military in the New Era” or “Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics.” Xi has succeeded in changing the party's constitution and incorporating changes that serve him personally, such as formally recognizing himself as the “core of the party.” He was also successful in abolishing the de facto two-term limit for the general secretary and was re-elected for his third term in October 2022. The emphasis on Xi's central leadership is striking—no official speaks or gives interviews publicly without mentioning loyalty to Xi's strategies and vision or underscoring his great contribution. The *People's Daily*, the party's official newspaper, features the president's image and quotations on its front page, while Xinhua, China's central news agency, devotes a prominent section of its homepage to his activities. It is therefore reasonable to assess that Xi's desire to leave a significant legacy through unification with Taiwan and to place himself alongside Mao and Deng Xiaoping is of great importance. Xi is expected to conclude his third term in 2027, and unification with Taiwan is presented as [one of the central pillars of his legacy](#). While there is no indication that he plans to step down and pass the baton, this moment nonetheless constitutes another milestone at which an additional clock synchronizes for the first time.

The arms race between China and the United States may also be creating incentives for China to accelerate military action. As of 2025, China enjoys a significant advantage with its missile arsenal, such as the YJ-21 and DF-21D, missiles that are considered hypersonic and pose a serious threat to the US aircraft carrier fleet—an asset of decisive importance for the ability of the United States to fight far from its shores. Development of countermeasures is not yet

complete, and [optimistic assessments place basic operational capability around 2029](#). This constitutes a game-changing weapon. The ability to prevent US intervention is a central pillar of China's "anti-access" strategy, known in the West as A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial), and it is therefore entirely plausible that China would not want to lose such a significant advantage for its ability to carry out military action against Taiwan.

Beyond these clocks, which are indeed circumstantial in nature, numerous actions undertaken by China—and especially by the Chinese military—can be interpreted as preparations for military action.

First, the PLA's force build-up is largely focused on military contingencies against Taiwan. In force organization, as part of reforms initiated in 2017, the PLA converted six infantry brigades into amphibious brigades and, according to unverified reports, is converting additional ground forces into marine units. Even more decisive is the issue of weaponry. The PLA has been observed to possess at least six [landing platforms](#) designed to bridge coastal obstacles and facilitate the transfer of forces and equipment ashore, even without a functioning port. The Chinese navy has eight older Type 071 amphibious ships and four newer Type 075 ships, each capable of transporting battalion- to brigade-sized forces along with multiple landing craft, armored vehicles, and troops. The navy has begun constructing an even larger new model, [Type 076](#), which has additional capabilities such as launching light aircraft and UAVs. The first ship of this class is planned to enter service in 2026.

Investment in preparations for a Taiwan operation is evident. Reports indicate that relevant forces conduct amphibious landing training on a monthly basis. Some exercises include training with [large civilian roll-on/roll-off ferries](#), which significantly enhance sealift capacity without the need to build additional military vessels. Since Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022, the PLA has conducted several large-scale joint exercises simulating a blockade of Taiwan, strikes on the island, and other operations that would improve readiness for military action.

Infrastructure is another important subject. The PLA has constructed a full-scale model of [Taipei's government district](#) for ground force training, and it was reported that it recently added the judicial authority building. Israel's painful lesson from October 7, 2023, is that an organization that invests extensive resources—training, money, time, and attention—does so with the intention of employing those capabilities, not merely to boost morale. It therefore appears that this force build-up is part of the PLA's efforts to meet the centenary mission defined by President Xi Jinping.

Second, military and semi-military actions toward Taiwan are steadily escalating. A January 2025 study by the US-based Jamestown Foundation showed that [Chinese military harassment in the Taiwan Strait](#) had escalated. In 2021, 240 aircraft crossed the median line; in 2022, the number rose to 269, then 271 in 2023, and 313 in 2024—an increase of 30% over three years. In February 2024, following an incident between Chinese anglers and the Taiwanese Coast Guard, China announced that its Coast Guard would patrol waters near the Kinmen Islands, located just two kilometers from China's Fujian Province—contrary to previous understandings between mainland China and Taiwan. China ostensibly employs semi-military policing forces, but in practice, the Coast Guard is subordinate to the Central Military Commission (via the People's Armed Police). Escalation is also evident in unilateral changes to

the M-503 flight route, which runs over the median line of the Taiwan Strait. Under previous understandings, flights were shifted six nautical miles toward the mainland, and connecting routes from airports in provinces adjacent to Taiwan were suspended. These arrangements helped expand Taiwan's warning time and space and somewhat calmed tensions. Beginning in 2024, China canceled these understandings, allowing aircraft to approach Taiwan more closely and to take off from airports adjacent to military bases.

As part of the "Three Warfares" concept—legal warfare, public opinion warfare, and psychological warfare—China is also advancing a regulatory and legislative campaign designed to create a legal framework for the use of force against Taiwan when Beijing chooses. Examples include laws expanding Coast Guard enforcement powers, including the use of force; the Anti-Secession Law, which grants broad legal and judicial authority against actions that the authorities themselves define as "secession"; the 2023 update to the anti-espionage law expanding the definition of espionage; and the law restricting the publication of military-related information online without authorization, updated in 2025.

In the industrial-economic sphere as well, China appears to be preparing for the consequences of military action against Taiwan—namely Western sanctions, disruption of supply chains, and a halt or reduction in foreign direct investment. A 2024 study outlines China's "anti-sanctions" measures, such as [stockpiling and procurement](#). In addition, China has also been increasing its gold reserves as another means of coping with Western sanctions: By September 2025, the Chinese central bank had recorded [ten consecutive months of gold purchases](#), reaching a peak holding of 74.02 million ounces, worth nearly \$270 billion. To some extent, the trade war between China and the United States—which has intensified since the start of President Trump's second term—can be seen as preparation for a kinetic confrontation, with China demonstrating its leverage over the United States in the export of rare earth elements and minerals.

Even the partial thaw in China–India relations can be viewed as another indicator of preparations for military action against Taiwan. This includes the renewal of the border disengagement agreement in October 2024 and the [resumption of direct flights](#) between China and India in October 2025, as well as the meeting between President Xi and Prime Minister Modi in August 2025. A military operation against Taiwan would require the concentration of effort by most of the PLA, along with other sectors of Chinese governance, including the economy, the legal system, and public order. The border with India constitutes a significant challenge for China due to India's power, force structure, and determination to defend its interests vis-à-vis China (as demonstrated, for example, in the 2020 clashes). Accordingly, Beijing has an interest in calming and stabilizing the western border to enable the [concentration of effort that China needs for such an operation](#).

It should be emphasized that some of the processes described above are long-term and are not necessarily meant to culminate in 2027. Preparing the Chinese economy or building military power are long, ongoing, and never-ending processes. However, the first point at which all these axes converge is 2027, and therefore most policymakers treat this year as a target date requiring preparation.

Implications for Israel

Israel, too, should treat these developments seriously and prepare for the possibility of a significant escalation between China and Taiwan in 2027. A Chinese military move against Taiwan would have global impact potential. At the kinetic end of the spectrum lies the possibility of a full-scale war between China and the United States; at the “softer” end, one can expect disruptions to trade routes, supply chains, damage to the global semiconductor market, economic shocks, and price increases. Second-order effects could include a reshaping of the world order if China succeeds in conquering Taiwan and the United States chooses not to prevent it or fails to do so.

Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Israel required time to formulate a coherent policy and position itself between Western demands and the need to avoid friction with Russia. In the event of a China–Taiwan confrontation, tensions would likely be even sharper since the United States would likely press Israel not to remain neutral or provide only limited support. Every option along the spectrum of possible responses would have significant implications for Israel, underscoring the need to be prepared.

Israel should therefore conduct a professional internal dialogue on how to respond if the United States were to demand active Israeli participation in a campaign, for example, through the use of intelligence capabilities or other means—while taking into account that China is the world’s second-largest power and Israel’s third-largest trading partner. Israel must decide on a position that considers its economic interests in maintaining ties with China while simultaneously honoring its commitment to its most important ally, the United States. After formulating its position, Israel should engage in dialogue with the United States and coordinate between the positions of the two countries.

Israel must also prepare for the likely scenario in which the United States does not request active Israeli participation but instead diverts attention and resources from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. In such a case, Israel would require greater independence, particularly in the use of military force, with an emphasis on intelligence collection capabilities, munitions, and spare parts. Accordingly, Israel should already examine which steps can be undertaken today to strengthen industrial resilience, secure supply chains, and address procurement.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurz, Eldad Shavit and Ela Greenberg