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Taiwan’s Record 2027 Defence Budget : Is ‘Whole-of-Society’ Deterrence Becoming an East Asian Security Doctrine?

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EXECUTIVE BRIEF & KEY FINDINGS

Taiwan’s proposed 2027 defence budget of NT$1.1225 trillion reflects more than an expansion of military spending. It points to a broader shift in Taipei’s approach to deterrence, combining asymmetric military capabilities with civilian preparedness, institutional resilience and the ability to withstand sustained coercion. This article examines the budget alongside Taiwan’s evolving defence posture, procurement priorities and whole-of-society resilience framework. It then compares these developments with security approaches in Japan, South Korea and the Philippines to assess whether a wider regional doctrine is emerging. It argues that, although these countries increasingly recognise the importance of societal resilience beyond conventional military defence, their responses remain nationally distinct. The result is a meaningful regional convergence, but not yet a shared East Asian security doctrine.

1. Introduction

Taiwan has proposed a defence budget of NT$1.1225 trillion for 2027, roughly US$35 billion, or 3.01% of GDP, marking a historic milestone[1].

It is the first time the defence spending has crossed the NT$1 trillion-mark, accounting for nearly 29% of total government expenditure[2]. President Lai Ching-te has already pledged to keep defence above 3% of GDP and push it further towards 5% by 2030[3]. Most discussions focus entirely on the hardware the budget will buy: the missiles, drones and ammunition stocks. This analysis goes beyond the raw numbers. Beneath the budget lines, Taiwan has quietly built a second layer of defence alongside traditional military modernisation, a whole-of-society-defence framework designed to make the island difficult to coerce and disrupt. The real question is what this record spending reveals about Taipei's view of deterrence today.
Is it part of an emerging, shared security doctrine across East Asia, or simply a survival reflex driven by a uniquely hostile neighbourhood?

Three main ideas drive this analysis. First, the numbers only make sense when examined alongside the Ministry of National Defense's procurement plans and legislative pushback, since those political fights determine what gets delivered. Second, since 2022, Taiwan has added a civilian resilience layer to its asymmetric military strategy, aiming to alter an adversary's risk calculations before a conflict even starts. Third, as other East Asian democracies face similar pressures, the analysis explores whether their responses point to a genuine regional doctrine or are merely parallel national reactions to a common problem.

2.Where Taiwan Stands

Taiwan presents a stark paradox in East Asian security. It is an indispensable economic power with a near-monopoly on advanced semiconductors[4]. It is the world's 22nd-largest economy according to the IMF and ranks 8th in the region for economic capability on the Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index[5]. Yet that weight buys little diplomatic cover. Taiwan ranks 24th of 27 for diplomatic influence with a score of just 16.6 out of 100.[6] It has no nuclear deterrent and no mutual defence pact, and it lies barely 160km from a vastly larger adversary. Its security rests not on a binding treaty but on the domestic provisions of the US Taiwan Relations Act.[7]

On raw military strength, Global Firepower's 2026 index ranks Taiwan 22nd of 145 countries and places it in the top ten for reserves, fighter aircraft and frigates (Table 1).[8] Such rankings say little about survivability, maintenance backlogs or modernisation. The same source suggests only about two-thirds of the tank fleet is available at any time, and its figure of 230,000 active personnel compares with roughly 169,000 posts the Ministry has actually filled.[9] The inventory was also built with conventional warfare in mind, whereas the pressure Taiwan faces day to day is grey-zone coercion, blockade and cognitive warfare. The rising defence budget is meant to close that gap.

Category	Stock	World rank (of 145)
Overall Global Firepower ranking	–	22
Reserve personnel	1,657,000	5
Tanks	1,090	20
Fighters	258	8
Frigates	21	2
Submarines	4	13

Taiwan's military strength and world rank, 2026

(*Source: GlobalFirepower.com, 2026. Ranks are by unit count. Other sources put the tank inventory at between 888 and about 1,100.)*

3. What the Number Says

3.1 The Headline and Its Components

The record is real but less dramatic than the headline suggests, and the reason lies in how the total is built. The Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics calculates it using a method similar to NATO's, the same basis it applied to the 2026 proposal.[10] The Ministry of National Defense directly controls only about 62% of the headline figure. The rest is spread across separate arms procurement budgets, special funds, pensions and the Coast Guard (Table 2).

The GDP denominator matters too. Measured against the August 2025 GDP forecast used for 2026 (about NT$28.6 trillion), the same spending would equal 3.93% of GDP, and on the larger forecast now used for 2027 (NT$37.3 trillion) it equals 3.01%.[11] The 2027 share is therefore lower than the 3.32 % recorded for 2026.[12] The record is a nominal one.

Component	NT$ billion	Share
Ministry of National Defense budget	691.9	about 62%
Special budgets (large weapons purchases)	218.2	about 19%
Military pensions and Coast Guard	151.7	about 14%
Non-operating special funds	60.7	about 5%
Total	1,122.5	100%

What the NT$1.1225 trillion contains

(*Source: Focus Taiwan (CNA), 20 August 2026. Shares are the author's calculation.)*

3.2 A Sustained Rise, and a Smaller Leap Than It Looks

Taiwan's proposed 2027 allocation continues an earlier trend rather than marking a sudden spike. Spending rose under Tsai Ing-wen from 2% of GDP in 2017 to 2.5% in 2023.[13] The 2026 budget then jumped by 22.9% to NT$949.5 billion.[14] The 2027 proposal sounds dramatic at 18% , but that is measured against the initial 2026 baseline of NT$949.5 billion.[15] Against the full 2026 budget of NT$1.0748 trillion, which includes special procurement budgets, the actual expansion is 4.4% .[16]

The growth is nonetheless real. The fairest description is a steady rise that has steepened, with a headline inflated by definition and the choice of the baseline. The 5% of GDP defence target remains a steep climb, one that will test Taiwan's fiscal capacity and its political consensus alike.

3.3 What the Ministry Set Out to Buy

The Ministry of National Defense's public report to the Legislative Yuan of 20 April 2026 set out a NT$1.25 trillion, eight-year plan in seven categories.[17] It is heavily redacted, and the English version is a machine translation, but it is the best available primary document.

The Ministry's seven-category procurement plan (April 2026)

Category	Value (NT$)	Disclosed items
1. Precision artillery	~81 bn	60 M109A7 self-propelled guns; 4,080 precision rounds; 60 ammunition carriers; 13 recovery vehicles
2. Long-range precision strike	~160 bn	82 HIMARS launchers; 1,203 boxes of precision rockets; 420 tactical missiles
3. Uncrewed systems and countermeasures	~335 bn	208,200 coastal attack drones; 1,446 coastal reconnaissance drones; 1,320 suicide uncrewed surface vessels; 32 Rui Yuan II maritime UAVs; 478 ALTIUS-600 and 1,554 ALTIUS-700M; 635 man-portable counter-UAV sets
4. Air defence, anti-ballistic and anti-armour	~550 bn	Strong Bow mid-layer system (2 sets, 128 missiles); 70 Javelin sets (1,050 missiles); 24 TOW-2B sets (1,545 missiles); three further items redacted
5. AI-assisted and C4ISR	~10 bn	AI decision support (redacted); 120,191 Taiwan Tactical Network and Team Awareness Kit devices
6. Sustained combat capacity	~50 bn	New ammunition, battery, propellant and armoured-vehicle production lines; 23,500 120mm and 60,000 105mm tank rounds; 260,000 30mm rounds; 356 motorised barrier sets
7. Taiwan–US co-developed systems	~64 bn	Entirely redacted in the public version

The Ministry's seven-category procurement plan (April 2026)
(*Source: Ministry of National Defense, public report to the Legislative Yuan, 20 April 2026)*

3.4 Priorities and Procurement

Three ideas sit behind the growing budget. The first is deterrence. Announcing the proposal on 17 August 2026, President Lai argued *that investing in defence is investing in peace.*[18] The second is the threat. Pitching the special budget to lawmakers, the defence ministry pointed to relentless PLA joint drills as proof that readiness cannot wait.[19] The third is credibility with allies. The United States expects Taiwan to share the burden, and a larger spending package signals to US officials that Taipei takes burden-sharing seriously.[20]

These aims translate into three procurement priorities.

- **Air and missile defence:** The layered ‘T-Dome’, or Taiwan Shield, is meant to speed up detection and interception and to protect civilians and property. Defence Minister Wellington Koo said the Chiang Kung system had cleared trials and been funded, though the network is still incomplete. Units will also get man-portable counter-drone kit. Koo conceded that firing multimillion-dollar Patriots at cheap commercial drones is unsustainable.[21]

- **Uncrewed mass and networked strike:** The emphasis is on volume over exquisite platforms, with more than 200,000 strike drones and more than 1,300 uncrewed boats, expanded munitions plants and joint research with the United States.[22]

- **Sustainability and domestic manufacturing:** Planners expect a long blockade, so the budget includes additional ordnance, spare parts, and reserves to keep frontline units supplied during the opening weeks. Koo argued that annual allocations leave local suppliers living hand-to-mouth, whereas a multi-year special budget provides the certainty needed to invest in factories and tooling.

The political path has been rougher than the plan. The Ministry’s original special programme of NT$1.25 trillion became a NT$780 billion act after the legislature removed items.[23] The drone and domestic-industry elements were taken out and are now moving through the annual budget and a supplementary request.[24]

4. How Taiwan’s Security Posture Evolved, 2000–2026

Taiwan’s present emphasis on whole-of-society resilience developed slowly and was not a sudden departure. This section draws mainly on John Dotson’s survey of Taiwan’s defence policy.[25] Under Chen Shui-bian (2000–08) and Ma Ying-jeou (2008–16), Taiwan moved towards a smaller all-volunteer force, cutting conscription from two years to one and then to four months. Chen’s ‘Decisive Battle Offshore’ favoured air and naval power. Ma’s ‘Hard ROC’ stressed asymmetric advantage, robust infrastructure and stockpiles, ideas that anticipate today’s resilience debate.[26]

Under Tsai Ing-wen (2016–24) spending rose by about 5 % a year from 2019 to 2023, reaching around 2.5 % of GDP. One-year conscription, announced in December 2022, formally began in January 2024.[27] The focus on indigenous defence production also increased; for instance, the *Sea-Air Combat Power Improvement Plan Purchase Special Regulations* provided a five-year supplemental budget of NT$240 billion (2022–2026) to produce domestic anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems and naval vessels.[28]

Civilian resilience developed alongside, probably prompted by the war in Ukraine and the crackdown in Hong Kong.[29] Tsai’s 2022 National Day address, ‘Island of Resilience: A Better Taiwan for the World’s ,made it a national priority. The All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency, authorised in May 2021, began work on 1 January 2022 by merging the mobilisation office and the reserve command.[30] In September 2022 the National Security Council began studying other countries’ resilience initiatives, including incident-response centres, civilian training, stockpiling, digital resilience, civil air defence and evacuation models.[31] Lai Ching-te (2024–) brought continuity with a reformist touch, notably a civilian defence minister, Wellington Koo.

Underneath sits a strategic dispute. Admiral Lee Hsi-min's Overall Defence Concept (ODC) put dispersed, mobile, asymmetric forces first. The official alternative, 'Resolute Defence, Multi-Domain Deterrence', is criticised as too vague to set procurement priorities.[32] Part of the split is about the threat. Washington tends to plan for a conventional invasion, whereas Taipei lives with daily grey-zone coercion, cognitive warfare and blockade pressure.

5. Whole-of-Society Resilience in Taiwan: Enhancing Asymmetric Capabilities

5.1 Definitions and Logic

There is little agreement on what 'resilience' means, and definitions tend to follow the mandate of whoever uses them. For NATO *it is the ability to keep performing essential functions during and after an attack**[33]**, with baseline requirements that include continuity of government, resilient energy, food and water, and civil communications and transport*.[34] RAND's working definition for *Taiwan is the ability of civil society to anticipate, prepare for, mitigate and survive an act of war, and to rebuild afterwards*.[35] The Presidential Office frames it simply: g*overnment and society must be able to maintain normal operations in a national emergency or natural disaster.*[36]

Whole-of-society defence is a claim about how resilience relates to deterrence. The logic is denial applied to society. If a state can show that its population, infrastructure and government will keep working under pressure, the adversary's expected gain from coercion or attack falls. Brookings calls the resilience effort a substantial part of Taiwan's approach to defence and deterrence.[37]

Chan and Murphy of the Global Taiwan Institute argue that a resilient society denies an aggressor victory through shock and paralysis, which raises the perceived cost and duration of conflict.[38] They name two assumptions in Beijing's calculus that resilience is meant to break. The first is that force alone can create panic among the people. The second is that seizing territory or removing the leadership will induce capitulation. Recent conflicts, including Ukraine and the Iran-Israel conflict, showed that national survival cannot rely on forward defence alone. [39] On this reading, resilience has moved from a supplement to a pillar of deterrence.

5.2 The Architecture

Taiwan's civil defence strategy rests on two lessons. The first is the Cold War 'total defence' model used by small states such as Sweden, Finland and Singapore, where societal resilience forms part of national deterrence.[40] The second is Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which showed how much civilian endurance and volunteer networks can shape the outcome of a war.[41] Sweden's phased revival of conscription is one recent example.[42]

In Taiwan the idea first took shape under President Tsai, in the Overall Defence Concept of Chief of the General Staff Lee Hsi-min. It envisaged using civilian resources to support military operations, but its core aim was to defeat an enemy in the littorals by asymmetric means, and civilian participation in a territorial defence force was a last resort. The rest of the Ministry of National Defense never fully accepted the concept, so the civilian role it envisaged never materialised.[43]

The All-Out Defense Mobilisation Agency, created in 2022, has as its main mission the organisation of reservists, with civil defence second. Its most visible civil defence act was a handbook published after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. [44] A more concrete step came under President Lai, who in June 2024 set up the Whole-of-Society Defense

Resilience Committee (WSDRC) and chairs it personally.[45]

5.3 The Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee

The WSDRC has 27 members. The President is convener, with three deputy conveners and 23 representatives of government, industry, civil society and expert bodies. NT$150 billion (about US$5 billion) is earmarked for national resilience and territorial defence.[46] Its purpose is to keep government and society functioning in a national emergency or disaster, and its mandate covers natural disasters as well as military operations such as blockade or missile strikes.[47] Its objectives and pillars are set out in Table 4.

Objectives	Pillars
Ensure continuity of government operations	Civilian training
Sustain critical social services and core functions of society	Strategic material stockpile and distribution
Provide civil support to military operations when necessary	Critical infrastructure, including social welfare, medical care and evacuation
	Information systems, communications and financial networks
	Transportation resilience

WSDRC objectives and pillars



Figure 1: Flowchart of the structure of the Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee, Taiwan . Source: Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), "About the committee" (organization chart)

5.4 From Reassurance to Rehearsal

The first operational benchmark was a field exercise on 27 March 2025. The newly established WSDRC mobilised around 1,500 personnel across municipal departments, critical infrastructure operators and civic groups such as the *Tzu Chi Foundation and the Presbyterian Church* in Taiwan.[48] Officially it was framed around natural disasters. The scenarios combined an earthquake and tsunami with infrastructure disruption.[49]

Before 2025 the national Han Kuang exercise relied on scripted coastal firing demonstrations aimed at domestic reassurance. Han Kuang 41 in July 2025 broadened the integration considerably. The military extended its live-fire phase to ten continuous days and nine nights, replaced set-piece beach displays with unscripted urban warfare and called up more than 22,000 reservists.[50]

An urban resilience exercise merged the Wan An air-raid protocols with Min An disaster response. Community integration was tested in real time. Retail staff in selected supermarket chains such as PX Mart guided shoppers to basement shelters and gave first aid under simulated missile strikes.[51]

The April–August 2026 exercise cycle introduced higher-intensity, conflict-driven scenarios with public rationing posts and triage stations, and a Central Joint Emergency Operation Centre was also established .[52]

Alongside Han Kuang 42, command posts in New Taipei, Yilan, Kaohsiung and Pingtung tested regional capacity to withstand simultaneous grey-zone disruption, including undersea cable cuts, power grid failures and drone harassment. Taiwan's civil defence has moved from symbolic reassurance to mass sheltering and, increasingly, to testing state continuity under pressure.[53]

6. Is It a Regional Doctrine?

Barry Buzan's regional security complex theory says that neighbouring states whose security problems are closely linked must be studied together.[54] Taiwan and Japan sit along the same island chain and face pressure from the same source, China's grey-zone coercion and blockade risk.[55] South Korea's main threat is North Korea, but it faces similar pressure on its homeland.[56]. These states share a problem, and each already holds many of the building blocks of societal resilience, including shelters, evacuation planning, civil protection law and civilian training. What differs is how the pieces are framed, joined together and rehearsed. Taiwan presents them as one deterrence concept. Japan and South Korea run them under other labels and for other threats. The result is convergence of threat and, in part, of function, with wide variation in design.

The threats converge, but the answers do not. Each state deals with the problem in its own way, shaped by its geography, laws, and politics. A concept is a national doctrine when it is officially *stated, institutionalised and exercised* in practice . It is a regional doctrine only if the states concerned also form a security complex and coordinate the concept among themselves.

Taiwan meets the first and third conditions. The concept is officially stated and was first exercised in a field drill on 27 March 2025.[57] Institutionalisation is partial. The Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee rests on presidential authority, President Lai has called for codification, and resourcing is still taking shape. Japan and South Korea face related pressures but have taken different routes (Table 5).

State	Articulation	Institutionalisation	Practice	Orientation
Taiwan	Whole-of-society resilience (2024–)	Presidential committee; mobilisation agency; funding partial	Yes (2025–26)	Blockade, grey zone, invasion
Japan	National resilience; economic security (2022)	Economic Security Promotion Act; Civil Protection Law (2004); Sakishima guidelines	Local civil protection drills, no deterrence framed exercise yet.	Supply chains; south-west islands
South Korea	Civil defence (1975)	Framework Act; Civil Defence Corps	Nationwide civil defence dills , no deterrence framed exercise yet	North Korea and weapons of mass destruction

Whole-of-society concepts against the national-doctrine tests

Japan : *The Economic Security Promotion Act of 2022* sets up four systems covering critical supplies, essential infrastructure, key technologies and secret patents.[58] The Civil Protection Law of 2004 covers evacuation and relief in armed attack situations, and local governments train under it.[59]For the south-west islands, the government has planned shelters designed for stays of about two weeks in five Sakishima municipalities, and in March 2025 it published a plan to move about 120,000 people off the islands.[60] The functions are therefore present. The limits lie in the trigger, since the plan assumes a predicted armed attack, and the government has not defined what would set it off.

These measures are framed as civil protection and economic security.

South Korea has a more mature civil defence system than Taiwan, built on the 1*975 Framework Act and the Civil Defence Corps, with* about 3.28 million registered members, and nationwide drills.[61] The system has been extended to cover weapons of mass destruction, and in 2023 President Yoon revived the central integrated defence council to link government, military, police and civilians.[62] The framework is directed above all at the threat from the northern borders , North Korea.[63] A Carnegie assessment noted the absence of a whole-of-government review.[64]

The verdict is mixed. Taiwan meets articulation and, newly, practice, but it is not yet fully institutionalised and its resourcing is still taking shape. Convergence comes from the pressure. Bachmann reads Taiwan's model as a response to cable cutting, air defence zone incursions, maritime militia exercises and quarantine or blockade signals, backed by Beijing's 'three warfares'.[65] This pressure falls on society and infrastructure as much as on the armed forces, so resilience sits alongside hardware.[66] A shared problem produces similar ideas, if not identical, ideas.

The link to the budget is conceptual. Hardware answers the 'defeat' end of Beijing's options and resilience answers the 'squeeze' end, and both aim at denial.

Conclusion

Taiwan's record 2027 defence budget is real and consequential. It continues with a steady and steepening rise, with a broad definition and an early baseline enlarging the headline figure, and it is best read alongside two other developments. The first is a change in how Taiwan thinks about deterrence, from military capability alone, through the limited civilian role in the Overall Defence Concept, to the resilience of the whole society under sustained pressure. The second is a procurement process in which a NT$1.25 trillion plan became a NT$780 billion special programme, with the drone and domestic-industry elements now moving through the annual budget and a supplementary request.[67]

Is whole-of-society deterrence, then, becoming the new East Asian security doctrine? Not in the strict sense. Japan, South Korea and the Philippines have not adopted a common concept, common institutions or joint planning. Each works through its own framework, from economic-security law to civil defence to maritime defence. What they share is a common problem. Facing coercion that falls short of war, each is looking, to a different degree, beyond the conventional idea that defending a country is a task for the armed forces alone. That is a real and significant convergence. On the opening question, Taiwan's effort is more than a survival reflex, since it is formally stated and exercised, but it is not yet a shared regional doctrine.

Taiwan is running the region's most advanced and closely watched experiment in whole-of-society deterrence, and its outcome will shape how its neighbours think about their own vulnerabilities. Its value will be decided less by the number in the budget than by modest, measurable questions: what is contracted, what is delivered and what is rehearsed.

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