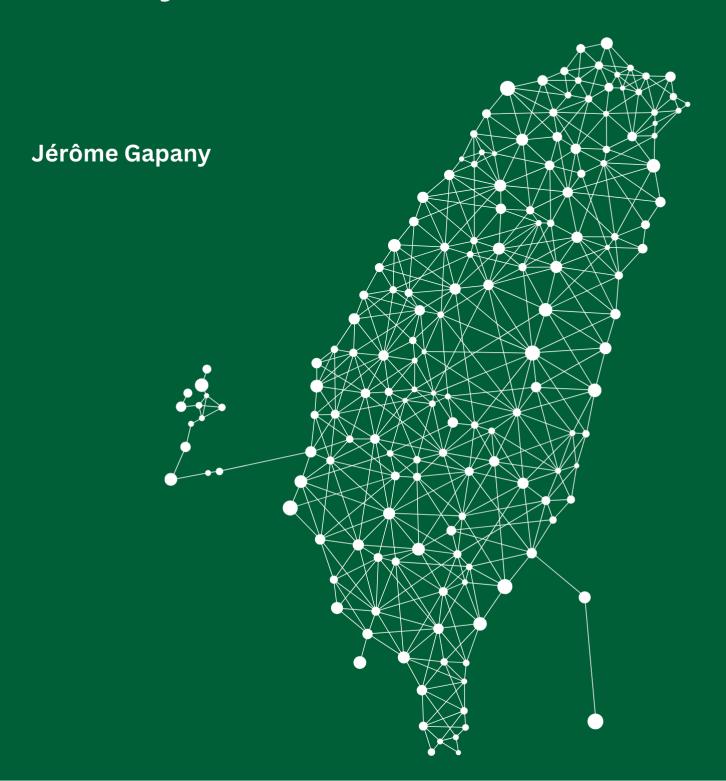# Moving Beyond the Grey Zone: Evidence-Based Policy for Maritime Security in the Taiwan Strait (Part II)

Jérôme Gapany

Moving Beyond the Grey Zone: Evidence-Based Policy for Maritime Security in the Taiwan Strait (Part II)

Executive Summary

This two-part policy paper examines how evolving patterns of maritime activity in and around the Taiwan Strait create escalation risks, and how Taiwan authorities can respond with clearer concepts and more systematic evidence. Part I suggests that the increasingly elastic use of "grey zone" as a catch-all label makes it harder to distinguish between different types of pressure at sea, their indicators and appropriate responses. As an alternative working lens, the paper uses "maritime coercion": the sustained use of non-war maritime activities to influence another actor's choices through pressure or disruption, while remaining short of open conflict. Viewed this way, the Strait appears as a setting of cumulative risk rather than isolated crises. Large-scale exercises, the expanded influence of Chinese Coast Guard authorities, the growing role of militia-type actors and recurrent disturbances affecting subsea cables and other infrastructure all add friction, uncertainty and room for misreading intent. Managing this environment requires the ability to tell routine activity from meaningful change in posture, to connect observable patterns to proportionate, non-escalatory responses, and to communicate facts credibly to domestic and external audiences. Part II, therefore, advances a practical, evidence-led agenda centred on a "Taiwan Maritime Transparency Hub" (TMTH) that would draw together incident data from defence, coastguard and infrastructure operators under common templates and validation rules. It also outlines how a clearer domestic evidence base could feed into status-neutral channels, both regionally and internationally. In combination, the following policy recommendations are intended to make well-documented incidents, rather than contested narratives, the organising principle for how Taiwan tracks maritime risks, calibrates its responses and contributes to wider regional resilience:

1. **Adopt a domain-specific taxonomy of maritime coercion with measurable indicators and proportionate counter-responses**. Define practical categories with observable indicators and thresholds, and link each to pre-agreed operational responses.
2. **Standardise information-sharing and create a single, interoperable reporting platform, or "Taiwan Maritime Transparency Hub" (TMTH).** Fold existing platforms into one interoperable system with common templates, data standards and a single public-facing dashboard.
3. **Establish an expert advisory board to embed scientific peer review in incident analysis.** Require rigorous, routine documentation of incidents; publish methods and datasets where security allows, backed up by a solid domestic and international peer review process to ensure greater visibility and credibility.
4. **Expand and tighten Track-2 and -1.5 cooperation so that Taiwan contributes evidence and expertise within existing international frameworks.** Contribute standardised incident data and join technical working groups with trusted, international and regional bodies to build shared knowledge on, without politicisation of maritime security.
5. **Support and promote UNIDIR's call to create a new UN body focusing on maritime security.** Participate in the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)'s efforts to tackle the lack of a comprehensive institutional framework addressing maritime security challenges.

Part II – Introduction

As described in Part I of this policy paper, Taiwan's maritime security environment is shaped increasingly by cumulative patterns of maritime coercion – from PLA signalling, constabulary assertive behaviour and pressure on critical, subsea infrastructure – rather than by flashpoints of so-called grey zone activities. Managing these dynamics requires not only conceptual clarity about coercive behaviour at sea but also credible mechanisms for documenting, verifying and sharing incident data in real time.

This document constitutes Part II of a two-part policy paper and builds directly on the conceptual framework developed in Part I of this policy paper (accessible here). While Part I refined the taxonomy of maritime coercion and identified observable patterns of maritime coercion in the Taiwan Strait, Part II turns to the institutional and diplomatic architecture required to operationalise an evidence-led approach to deterrence. It outlines how Taiwan can consolidate existing datasets into a unified "Taiwan Maritime Transparency Hub" (TMTH), and how this evidence base can be projected into status-neutral regional and international mechanisms. The emphasis throughout is on practical, transferable procedures that reduce uncertainty, strengthen crisis management and enhance resilience in the Strait.

1. Data over Drama: Evidence-led Deterrence in the Taiwan Strait

Turning conceptual distinctions into policy-relevant categories requires a methodologically robust evidentiary system capable of capturing, validating and communicating incidents across all operational, maritime domains. As argued in Part I of this policy paper, security risks in the Taiwan Strait are now driven less by singular "flashpoint" events than by cumulative patterns of military signalling, constabulary encounters and pressure on critical infrastructure, particularly subsea cables. In such an environment, stability depends not only on the balance of capabilities and the clarity of political red lines, but increasingly on how information about incidents is generated, checked and communicated. Traditional channels of deterrence remain indispensable, yet they operate today through a fog of competing narratives, inflammatory statements and increasingly nebulous intentions and claims. This raises the premium on a complementary form of deterrence: one anchored in verifiable data, transparent procedures and routinised, collaborative analysis, so that crises are managed based on shared understanding of facts rather than contested storylines – hence the choice of title for this section.

Recent studies of maritime security analysis underline why such an evidentiary turn is necessary. Bueger and Edmunds identify three broad families of frameworks: [1] law of the sea and other law-centric approaches, state-centric approaches, and interpretive approaches. Nonetheless, they also stress that each carries significant limitations when applied in isolation. Indeed, law-centric perspectives presuppose a legal solution that can be accepted by all parties involved in a dispute, yet experience has shown that reaching common assent over arbitration or ruling cases is not always possible. State-centric approaches, by contrast, tend to allocate de facto responsibility for maritime security to the most powerful actors, thereby normalising a "rule of the strongest." Interpretive approaches focus closely on the meanings and practices of specific communities or sectors but can become absorbed in microlevel analysis and struggle to connect to wider strategic questions. In the South and East China Seas, these weaknesses are sharpened by the contested legacy of recent arbitration cases and by the growing military ambitions and assertiveness of regional powers, above all China. [2] If the aim is to prevent conflict rather than to secure definitive legal closure, the analytical centre of gravity must therefore shift towards localised processes and routines: how incidents arise, are recorded and are managed in real time. That, in turn, makes the construction of credible standards for data and rigorous documentation of ongoing issues and incidents a core instrument of deterrence, rather than a technical afterthought.

In what follows, we advance a two-step proposal for an evidence-led approach. In section 1.1, we argue for the consolidation of Taiwan's existing monitoring, reporting and analytical practices into a permanent "maritime transparency hub," designed to standardise incident documentation across operational signalling, on-scene constabulary practice and infrastructure disruptions. The goal is not to suggest additional bureaucratic reorganisation,

but the construction of a coherent, methodologically robust evidentiary platform at home. Section 1.2 explores how that domestic evidence base can then be projected outward through status-neutral track-2 and track-1.5 channels, both regionally and globally. In combination, these steps seek to strengthen deterrence and crisis management in the Strait by making reliable data, rather than theatrical displays of resolve, the organising principle of both national practice and international engagement.

1.1. Create a "Taiwan Maritime Transparency Hub" (TMTH): Urgent Need for Coordination, Evidence-building, and Centralisation of Knowledge

The Coast Guard Administration (CGA) maintains patrol tracks, boarding records and radio logs from day-to-day law enforcement patrols; the Ministry of National Defense (MND) compiles the recognised maritime and air picture used for operating alert and defence systems; and infrastructure providers and regulators – especially in the energy and telecommunications sectors – hold the telemetry, failures and maintenance histories that reveal when cables, pipelines or other assets are under stress.

The creation of a Taiwan Maritime Transparency Hub (TMTH) could close these gaps by fusing existing datasets into a single, interoperable platform for documenting incidents and security trends. Its purpose is not to reorganise ministries but to harmonise procedures under a common incident vocabulary and validation rules. Incidents should be logged quickly with time-stamped, georeferenced details and only released once the information has been cross-referenced and verified against defence, coastguard and commercial sources. Besides, a bilingual (Chinese/English) monthly digest would allow domestic and international partners to track patterns without disclosing sensitive details. To guarantee credibility, oversight should rest with a small academic expert committee spanning maritime law, oceanography, information systems and security studies. The committee would audit sampling methods, terminology and publication criteria, ensuring that outputs remain empirically robust and politically neutral.

Such a hub would inevitably face institutional and political frictions. Ministries and agencies accustomed to guarding operational or sensitive data – such as the Ministry of National Defense or law enforcement agencies – are likely to resist routine sharing of information beyond existing reporting channels. At the same time, commercial operators may be reluctant to publicise disruptions or failures that could affect liability, insurance or market standing. To be workable, the architecture therefore has to build in both constraint and reassurance: a tiered access model that separates a "high-fidelity internal feed" from a more selective public digest; clear legal and policy guarantees on how data can be used, retained and anonymised; and oversight arrangements that give contributing agencies and operators a degree of control over dissemination standards. Coupled with modest but tangible incentives for timely reporting, such as streamlined regulatory treatment, shared analytical products or structured

feedback into operators' own risk assessments, this can reduce the political cost of participation and make the hub a support to, rather than a perceived intrusion into, existing mandates.

Fortunately, recent steps seem to point in the right direction. For instance, the RISK initiative – Risk mitigation, [3] Information sharing, Systemic reform and Knowledge building – launched in 2025 in Taipei as a global initiative on undersea cable security, has already shown the value of structured, technical transparency. To consolidate its gains, however, RISK should be institutionalised as the analytical arm of a newly created Maritime Transparency Hub, linking data on undersea incidents to wider maritime security monitoring. Aligning this effort with the CGA's incident management systems, the MND's authoritative threat assessment, and the National Communications Commission's infrastructure oversight would provide the administrative backbone for Taiwan's contribution to regional transparency.

The added-value of a TMTH lies in providing a single, methodologically consistent record across the three fronts that shape risk in the Strait – operational signalling, constabulary activity and infrastructure incidents – so patterns become visible to practitioners at home, and intelligible to partners abroad. Establishing that capability in Taiwan would make its evidence collection not only credible domestically but usable abroad, creating a stable platform for subsequent track-2 and -1.5 cooperation.

1.2. Prioritising Track-2 and -1.5 Pathways to Increase International Collaboration

Once Taiwan's evidence-building framework is consolidated, its findings will be able to feed into status-neutral international mechanisms. Switzerland-based UNIDIR's Securing the Seas Programme offers a comprehensive and balanced framework for this engagement. Its agenda calls for "global assessments and reporting […] to better evaluate the state of maritime security in individual countries and regional seas," a move specifically intended to "allow technical assistance to be better targeted and assist with the identification of trends and risks." [4] These priorities align with what the maritime transparency hub can provide: verified, methodologically transparent records on maritime incidents and subsea disruptions.

Subsea communications offer a particularly concrete and much-needed avenue to exploit. Indeed, UNIDIR highlights the importance of "thresholds for incident and outage reporting and approaches to subsea cable incident classification; […] [and the] avail of new platforms such as the International Advisory Group led jointly by the ITU and the ICPC." [5] The ICPC – of which Taiwan's Chunghwa Telecom stands as a participating organisation under the appellation of Chinese Taipei – acts as the central professional community for this sector and maintains widely used recommendations for cable protection, repair and resilience. [6] Taiwan's recent experience with anchor drag incidents and repair window management fits directly within this operational focus. Contributing anonymised case records and regulatory insights

through these channels would present Taiwan as a responsible, technically grounded participant in the management of a globally relevant public good.

Because Taiwan's international status remains contested and is not formally recognised by many UN member states, a pragmatic, expertise-first posture enables formal participation in an advisory competence grounded on technical expertise rather than political recognition. To limit veto-like reactions or attempts at agenda capture, meetings should be method-focused and, where possible, co-hosted with a neutral regulating organisation, such as the ICPC, or academic/research institution partner. For sensitive or potentially contentious issues, anonymised incident templates should be circulated in advance and discussions framed around comparative practice rather than specific country cases. Keeping participation and outputs centred on standards, indicators and institutional workflows allows for solid knowledge-building processes, while mitigating Taiwan's lack of official recognition. There are also regional models that could support collaboration and evidence building. The Singapore-based Information Fusion Centre (IFC), for example, is a trusted, status-neutral platform blending naval, coastguard and commercial reporting. Its Voluntary Community Reporting (VCR) scheme gives ships a straightforward channel to flag maritime security-related incidents, [7] and keep track of anomalous behaviours out at sea. Taiwan could share short incident digests in IFC-compatible formats, provide pointers to cable repair safety zones, while producing regular updates drawn from its "maritime transparency hub." These steps would reinforce situational awareness without focusing on political overtones.

In summary, global platforms such as UNIDIR matter for Taiwan not because they promise sympathetic audiences or formal recognition, but because they reward disciplined evidence and transportable methods. UNIDIR's emphasis on coherence, mutual learning and the transfer of best practice aligns with what Taiwan can credibly supply: clean incident records, defensible investigative techniques and honest assessments of risk, understood as a global/regional maritime security common rather than a domestic issue. Combined with a push for regularised comparative reporting, this creates a track-2 and track-1.5 lane in which Taiwan's participation is anchored in expertise rather than recognition politics, and in which practical improvements – better seamanship, quicker repairs, clearer thresholds – follow from shared data rather than contested narratives.

2. Step-by-Step Policy Recommendations

This policy paper advances five mutually reinforcing recommendations designed to strengthen Taiwan's capacity to monitor, interpret and respond to cumulative maritime risks in the Taiwan Strait. Collectively, they support a transition from narrative-driven assessments to a disciplined, evidence-based maritime security posture. While each recommendation addresses a distinct functional gap, they are intended to operate as an integrated architecture linking domestic analytical reforms with status-neutral international engagement.

1. **Adopt a domain-specific taxonomy of maritime coercion with measurable indicators and proportionate counter-responses.** Taiwanese authorities should formalise a concise, operationally usable taxonomy that distinguishes among military signalling, constabulary pressure, state-linked civilian activity and subsea interference. Each category should rest on observable indicators, pre-agreed thresholds and escalation ladders. This taxonomy would provide a shared evidentiary language across ministries and operators, improving both incident detection and the calibration of proportionate responses.

2. **Standardise information-sharing through a unified "Taiwan Maritime Transparency Hub" (TMTH).** Existing datasets held by the Ministry of National Defense, Coast Guard Administration, and critical infrastructure operators should be fused into an interoperable reporting platform governed by common templates, data standards and validation rules. The TMTH should issue rapid, time-stamped incident notices and a bilingual monthly digest that aggregates trends without revealing sensitive operational data. This single evidentiary platform would replace fragmented reporting practices and form the administrative backbone of Taiwan's evidence-led deterrence posture.

3. **Establish an expert advisory board to ensure scientific peer review in incident analysis.** Crucially, a small and independent advisory board spanning maritime law, security studies, oceanography and information systems should oversee the methodological robustness of the TMTH. The board would audit sampling practices, terminology, coding rules and publication criteria, and would ensure that incident analysis remains empirically rigorous and evidence-based. Where security constraints permit, methods and datasets should be published to enhance transparency, therefore increasing international credibility.

4. **Expand and tighten Track-2 and -1.5 cooperation to integrate Taiwan's evidence into international frameworks.** Once consolidated, Taiwan's domestic evidence base should be projected through status-neutral mechanisms and technical working groups. Engagement with trusted bodies such as the ICPC, regional information-fusion centres or research-driven multilateral forums would allow Taiwan to contribute standardised incident data and best practices without politicisation. This approach positions Taiwan as a provider of reliable information and expertise, rather than as a claimant seeking formal recognition.

5. **Support and promote UNIDIR's call for a new UN body dedicated to maritime security.** UNIDIR's "Securing the Seas" initiative highlights the global need for coherent institutional oversight of maritime security. Taiwan should actively support these efforts, contribute to UNIDIR's analytical work and engage in its technical consultation process. Doing so gives Taiwan a more proactive role within emerging multilateral frameworks and enables its incident data, methods and regulatory insights to inform discussions on global maritime resilience.

Taken together, these recommendations aim to build a coherent evidentiary foundation on maritime coercion in Taiwan, while simultaneously reinforcing its profile as an indispensable contributor to international maritime security. They rest on the premise that cumulative maritime risk is best managed globally, through solid incident reporting mechanisms, transparent procedures and routinised cooperation. Implemented in sequence, this agenda offers Taiwan a credible, practical route to enhance maritime resilience while strengthening its role in regional and global security governance.

Final Remarks – Joint conclusion to Parts I and II

In sum, Parts I and II of this policy paper have argued that managing risks in the Taiwan Strait requires both a clearer conceptual vocabulary and a disciplined information architecture. By drawing together the main policy implications described in this policy paper, we can make the following conclusions: First, replacing "grey zone" with operational categories strengthens three things: detection (via specific metrics), decision making (by aligning mechanisms and instruments), and coordination (through shared evidence standards). The Taiwan case shows that a "data over drama" approach – centred on an evidence hub, neutral incident notices, and status-neutral cooperation pathways – is both politically feasible and quickly deployable. The next steps are to publicly design and test incident notice templates, publish a blueprint of cohesive, standardised indicators, and share the output with and integrate it into interagency procedures. An expertise-first strategy – centred on transparent, shareable evidence; routinised multilateral participation; and practical subsea resilience – offers the best chance to reduce escalation risk while incrementally restoring control over Taiwan's maritime and information commons.

These measures are deliberately modest and non-exhaustive. They are intended as a starting point rather than definitive guidelines. The next step is to test, challenge and refine them through existing academic and professional forums, ensuring that the hub evolves from current practice instead of generating overlapping initiatives. Disputes over intent and the risk of politicising incidents will persist, but durable de-escalation depends on narrowing uncertainty about facts. A centralised "Taiwan Maritime Transparency Hub" would strengthen incident records and accountability domestically; alignment with UNIDIR would give those records a recognised international frame; ICPC practice would translate general concern about subsea cables into clearer regulatory guidance and faster charting and repairs; and steady contributions to regional initiatives such as the IFC would ensure that information reaches those who most need it, while reinforcing a shared maritime security commons. In short, the framework set out here should be treated as iterative rather than directive: a set of routines to be adjusted in light of experience, not a fixed template.

Further refinement will depend on how agencies and operators use the system in practice. Monitoring how quickly incidents are verified, how consistently templates are applied and

how effectively information circulates across agencies will help determine where adjustments are needed. More broadly, integrating quantitative metrics of maritime coercion into risk assessment models would greatly benefit the conduct of evidence-led deterrence, thereby dampening the grey zone dynamics it seeks to manage. Ultimately, the outcome conveyed by these policy recommendations is not a grand bargain, but a shift in professional habits: deal with the event in front of you on the basis of evidence, share that evidence through credible channels, and let technical communities – rather than political theatre – shape the response.

---

[1] Bueger, Christian and Edmunds, Timothy (2024). Understanding Maritime Security, Oxford University Press, pp. 30-59. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197767146.001.0001. URL

[2] CSIS (2023). 'Arbitration Support Tracker,' Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative URL; Permanent Court of Arbitration (2013-2016). 'The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People's Republic of China)' URL

[3] See: '2025 Taiwan–Europe Undersea Cable Security Forum — Taiwan Launched "RISK Management Initiative on International Undersea Cables" to Strengthen the Democratic Digital Frontier,' Research Institute for Democracy, Society, and Emerging Technology (DSET), October 30 2025. URL; also: 'Taiwan unveils undersea cable security initiative,' Taipei Times, 29 October 2025. URL; and : Sub Sea Cables 'Taiwan Launches Undersea Cable Defense Plan,' October 28, 2025. URL

[4] Bueger, Christian; Edmunds, Timothy; Stockbrugger, Jan (2024). Securing the Seas - A Comprehensive Assessment of Global Maritime Security, UNIDIR, p. 10. URL

[5] Kavanagh, Camino; Franken, Jonas; He, Wenting (2025). Achieving Depth – Subsea Telecommunications Cables as Critical Infrastructure, UNIDIR, p.9. URL

[6] See the 'ICPC Recommendations' (updated December 12, 2026), accessible here: URL

[7] See the Information Fusion Centre (IFC)'s 'Guidelines on Voluntary Community Reporting (VCR),' accessible here: URL

About the Author

Jérôme Gapany holds a joint master's degree in Asian studies from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and the University of Geneva. After his graduation, he joined the Laboratory of Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Lausanne, where he focused on state-led urbanisation in coastal China and cross-Strait politics. Alongside this work, he spent time conducting fieldwork and gained proficiency in Chinese and Russian, allowing him to engage with original language materials and situate his research within its regional context. Since May 2023, Jérôme Gapany has been working at the Military Academy at ETH Zurich, where he conducts research in strategic studies while completing a PhD in Chinese Studies at the University of Zurich. His current work examines Chinese military doctrine and the wider geostrategic developments shaping the Asia-Pacific region.