



Illustration: Liu Rui/GT

## DPP squanders money on the 'Emperor's New Clothes' of 'Taiwan independence'

By Hai Feng

When viewed together, today's news stories reveal the two sides across the Taiwan Straits are moving in fundamentally opposite directions.

On one side, despite relentless US encirclement and containment, the Chinese mainland's technological development has far from stalled; instead, it has been spurred into even greater self-reliant innovation. According to a Saturday report by Japanese media citing the Science and Technology Indicators 2026 published by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, total R&D expenditure by Chinese enterprises and universities reached 97.1 trillion yen (about \$650 billion) in 2024, surpassing the US figure of 95.3 trillion yen to rank first in the world. The US blockade on China's semiconductor sector was intended as a "stranglehold," yet it ultimately forced China to accelerate indigenous research and development – turning external pressure into internal momentum.

On the other side, what are the Taiwan authorities doing? Rather than directing funds and resources toward industrial upgrading, public welfare, and social governance, they continue to squander taxpayers' hard-earned money to gloss over their "Taiwan independence" narrative, package so-called "diplomatic breakthroughs," court illusory external support, and sustain an increasingly hollow and costly political illusion.

The most glaring example of this is TaiwanPlus. A Saturday editorial in Taiwan's United Daily News called it out directly, stating that TaiwanPlus should have been retired long ago. Launched in 2021 with the goal of "making Taiwan's voice heard in the international community," the platform relies entirely on government subsidies, with its personnel and operations tightly controlled. After burning through 5 billion New Taiwan dollars (around \$156 million) over several years, it has yielded nothing but marginal utility and endless controversy – so much so that even Li Yuan, the leader of the island's culture authority, conceded that it has been a "disaster."

Put simply, the problem with TaiwanPlus goes beyond "poor execution"; it was fundamentally misplaced from its inception. Nominally a voice to the international community, it is in reality a propaganda engine for "Taiwan independence"; nominally telling the "Taiwan story," it is in reality a vehicle to package the political narrative of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Five bil-

lion New Taiwan dollars poured down the drain, only to produce a growing laughingstock. Yet this farce is hardly unique to TaiwanPlus; it permeates the entire playbook of Lai Ching-te's authorities.

Over the years, the DPP has become adept at diverting resources that should have been used to solve problems in order to manufacture emotions; taking public funds that should have served the people and putting them at the service of ideology; and turning policies that should have reduced risks into tools for escalating confrontation. On issues like toxic oil, driving under the influence of drugs, public safety, and wages – problems that directly affect ordinary people – they are slow, sluggish, and perfunctory. But when it comes to topics like "anti-China" and "relying on foreign forces to seek independence," the budget is immediately ample, the actions are immediately swift, and the propaganda quickly floods everywhere. This is not governing Taiwan; it is consuming Taiwan. This is not building Taiwan; it is overdrawing Taiwan.

The most ridiculous thing about "The Emperor's New Clothes" is that there is clearly nothing there, yet everyone is made to pretend they can see it. What the DPP authorities are doing today is precisely "Taiwan independence's new clothes": Clearly there is no real "diplomatic breakthrough," yet it is packaged as a major victory; clearly there is no substantive rise in "international status," yet it is described as "the world embracing Taiwan"; clearly the money is not being spent where it matters, yet people are told this is an "investment in soft power"; clearly it is drumming up support for "Taiwan independence," yet it must be framed as "letting the world hear Taiwan's voice."

But Taiwan's reality is ultimately not the DPP's press releases, and Taiwan public opinion is not the DPP's propaganda film. The money comes out of the pockets of Taiwan's residents, and the bill will eventually have to be paid; if peace is treated as fuel for elections, the cost will eventually have to be repaid. No matter how gorgeous "Taiwan independence's new clothes" may be, they cannot conceal the increasing hollowing out of Taiwan society, its growing anxiety, and its ongoing drain of vitality.

If the DPP continues to use the people's hard-earned money to sustain the illusion of "Taiwan independence," then in the end both the "Taiwan independence" narrative on which the DPP relies and the DPP itself will be torn apart by reality.

## What message has the Mecca defense pact sent to Washington?

By Xia Wenxin

On Friday in the holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey signed a major deal that is already shaking up global public opinion.

Some Western media wasted no time slapping a familiar label on it: the "NATO-style" pact. The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement is intended to strengthen collective deterrence against any act of aggression and stipulates that an armed attack against any one of the three would be regarded as an attack on all, according to Reuters.

Yet, comparing this agreement to NATO is way too soon. As Ding Long, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times, the Mecca Agreement remains, for now, a framework of political intent, since it lacks the integrated military command structures, joint logistics, and institutional machinery that define a true, battle-tested alliance like NATO.

"The term 'NATO-style' is more of a rhetorical label that reflects both the strategic wariness of the West and some other non-Muslim countries regarding the first-ever appearance of such collective defense provisions in the Islamic world, and the narrative intent to frame it as a tool for confrontation between specific blocs," he added.

Scratch beneath the surface, however, and the true weight of the agreement becomes impossible to ignore. As the Associated Press laid out, this trio brings together an oil-rich country (Saudi Arabia), a nuclear power (Pakistan) as well as NATO's second-largest army and a rapidly growing defense industry (Turkey).

Amid the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, the trilateral defense agreement is essentially a turbocharged evolution of last year's mutual defense pact between Riyadh and Islamabad. The defense pact is open to other regional countries, and it remains to be seen how many will join in the future.

Granted, this blueprint is bound to redraw the regional map. It pushes Gulf capitals away from rigid, single-pole dependence and toward a multi-source balancing act. At the same time, although it throws up a much-needed shield against Iran, it also risks cornering Tehran into far more unpredictable countermeasures.

Step back, and a much bigger picture comes into focus: As Middle East conflicts spiral, regional countries are waking

up to the fact that they can no longer rely solely on US security guarantees, even if an alliance with the US is unlikely to crumble in the near future.

For decades, the playbook in the Gulf was simple and almost transactional: write big checks, outsource your survival, and let a superpower across the ocean keep the peace. But when real war finally came knocking, that safety net turned out to be an illusion. Instead of getting shielded, Gulf states watched US forces scramble just to save their own skin, all while dragging the entire neighborhood deeper into the crossfire. This brutal reality has left US allies across the region fundamentally questioning the traditional security paradigm of relying on Washington for security.

For Washington, the message coming out of Mecca is a bitter pill. The trust deficit that's been brewing for years has finally cracked wide open. Rather than keeping its faith in a US umbrella that leaks whenever it storms, Riyadh has decided to hedge its bets by stitching together an independent security arrangement with Ankara and Islamabad – a blunt, public verdict on just how much the US security umbrella is truly worth today.

This leaves Washington backed into a classic geopolitical dilemma: Double down with ironclad security guarantees, and the US completely torpedoes its own strategy of military retrenchment. Look the other way and shrug, and its remaining grip on the region slips through its fingers, leaving the US to watch a multipolar Middle East spin permanently out of reach.

Then again, Washington might just have to get used to the view. A multi-polar world is the stubborn reality of an age where major regional players refuse to be treated as disposable pawns on someone else's chessboard. When the very "protector" you relied on becomes the source of risk, you stop putting your faith in empty promises and start keeping your security in your own hands.

The Mecca Agreement is merely the latest shockwave of such a global shift rippling across the Gulf. With the deal now signed in Mecca, the pendulum of Middle East geopolitics has officially swung toward self-reliance and multi-polarity.

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