



# Energy Is the Achilles' Heel of Taiwan's National Security

June 11, 2024 **Walker Robinson** *Newsweek*

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As Russia continues to target Ukraine's energy infrastructure and Europe seeks to decouple from Russian oil, governments around the world have rightly refocused on energy security as an integral part of their national security. Taiwan is one such nation whose situation is dire and under immense external threat. The island's reliance on foreign energy imports is a tremendous threat to its national security—one that needs to be addressed immediately.

The picture is grim. Taiwan relies on imported fossil fuels for 97.7 percent of its energy supply, making it highly vulnerable to global supply chain disruptions and interruptions caused by conflicts in places like the Middle East, or as a result of China's machinations. With the growing likelihood of a move by Beijing against Taiwan's independence, its energy insecurity has become apparent. In the event of a quarantine, blockade, siege, or outright invasion, China would quickly have a chokehold on Taiwan's energy supply.

Taiwan did not always depend so heavily on foreign energy imports. In the 1980s, it was a major nuclear energy producer making up more than half of the island's electricity production. Since then, however, Taiwanese energy security has been in steady decline.

Many Taiwanese associate all things nuclear with the island's previous military dictatorship, which once led a drive for nuclear energy and atomic weapons. Japan's 2011 Fukushima disaster also led to mass protests against nuclear power in Taiwan and became a major focus of the island's 2016 presidential elections.

Nuclear energy remains a hotly debated topic in Taiwan today. The leading Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the majority of the island's population continue to favor phasing out the technology despite its potential as a clean and reliable energy source. The DPP reaffirmed its commitment to "a nuclear-free homeland" after the most recent presidential election.

Instead, electricity production has become Taiwan's central energy focus, constituting over 80 percent of the island's internal energy generation, with coal and natural gas as its primary fuel sources. Nuclear and renewable energy, primarily solar and wind, now contribute much less. But the energy the island itself produces is simply not enough. Taiwan heavily relies on imported crude oil to meet its energy production requirements, with the majority of its imports coming from the Middle East. This dependency makes the island extremely vulnerable to any event that could disrupt energy imports.

That includes invasion. China has regularly threatened to take Taiwan by force, prompting the island to invest heavily in its defensive capabilities. Should China decide to take action and invade or blockade the island, the island would quickly find itself struggling to keep the lights on.

Taiwan has worked for years to establish an energy reserve to mitigate this state of affairs. The results, however, are decidedly modest. The island's current stocks only comprise about 39 days of coal and 11 days of natural gas—considerably short of what would be necessary to defend the island effectively.

Even if China doesn't decide to move against Taiwan, other threats could adversely impact its energy security. For instance, the ongoing conflicts in Israel, Houthi rebels in Yemen targeting shipping lanes in the Red Sea, attacks by Iranian-backed proxy groups, and Europe's decoupling from Russia all have the potential to significantly impair Taiwan's ability to import energy.

So, what can Taiwan do? A logical first step would be to increase its energy stockpiles. Given the volatility of the current international environment, mitigating the potential risks that an interruption of energy flows would cause should be a top priority for Taipei.

A sound second step would be diversification. While it has historically been volatile, the Middle East has emerged in recent months as a major flashpoint, owing to attacks on maritime commerce by Yemen's Houthi rebels as well as the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas. In light of this turbulence, Taiwan would do well to seek energy from more reliable and stable regions—or at least from more places.

Finally, Taiwan should invest in green energy technology and infrastructure as a way of reducing its present reliance on foreign energy. If it developed sufficient solar and wind capabilities, the island would significantly alleviate its current energy security deficit.

America is in a position to help on all of these fronts. Washington can use its sway with foreign suppliers to ramp up oil and natural gas deliveries to the island and ensure that those supplies come from different—and hopefully more secure—places. U.S. investments can also jump-start Taiwan's interest in renewable and green energy technologies.

U.S. policymakers have rightly focused on the need to turn Taiwan into a "porcupine"—that is, giving it sufficient weaponry to deter potential Chinese aggression. However, the island's current insecure energy status is a potentially fatal vulnerability as well—one that, if left unaddressed, might invite hostility from Beijing. Eliminating that flaw should be a top priority in both Taipei and Washington.