

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE					Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 03-05-2021		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis			3. DATES COVERED (From - To) 20-07-2020 to 03-05-2021	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Unambiguous Nature of Strategic Ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait: Inviting Miscalculation or Maximizing Diplomatic Flexibility?				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
				5b. GRANT NUMBER		
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
				5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Michael J. Sullivan Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force				5e. TASK NUMBER		
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint forces Staff College-NDU Joint Advanced Warfighting School 7800 Hampton Blvd. Norfolk, VA 23511-1702				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution is unlimited.						
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Information as of 03 May 2021						
14. ABSTRACT In recent years, as the US-China relationship has trended from cooperation to great power competition, there have been increasing calls from China scholars and pundits for Washington to reassess its Taiwan policy of "strategic ambiguity." However, supporters of the status quo believe that the current conditions in the trilateral relationship do not warrant any significant policy change. Clearly, the opposing arguments for strategic clarity or strategic ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait represent two sides of the same deterrence coin. Yet, none of their arguments for or against strategic ambiguity are firmly rooted in any systematic research, demonstrating how their recommendations will achieve the strategic ends of American grand strategy. A systematic evaluation, however, finds that the wholesale abandonment of the current policy of strategic ambiguity will not strengthen America's ability to deter China from forcibly incorporating Taiwan under its rule and will limit flexibility critical to the execution of the diplomatic instrument of national power. The policy of strategic ambiguity does require updates to ensure it matches the realities of the 21st century and enable advanced operations as needed to show up credibility and to remove obstacles impeding a swift response from Washington in the event of						
15. SUBJECT TERMS China, Taiwan, United States, Taiwan Strait Crisis, Great Power Competition, Deterrence, Ambiguity, Strategic Ambiguity						
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 102	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON	
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) 757-443-6252	

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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE
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**THE UNAMBIGUOUS NATURE OF STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY IN THE
TAIWAN STRAIT:**

Inviting Miscalculation or Maximizing Diplomatic Flexibility?

by

Michael James Sullivan

Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force

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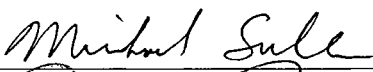
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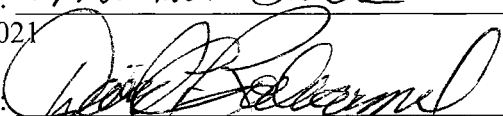
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

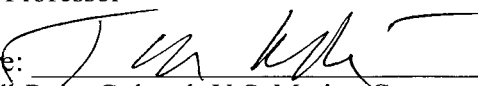
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Abstract

In recent years, as the US-China relationship has trended from cooperation to great power competition, there have been increasing calls from China scholars and pundits for Washington to reassess its Taiwan policy of "strategic ambiguity." However, supporters of the status quo believe that the current conditions in the trilateral relationship do not warrant any significant policy change. Clearly, the opposing arguments for strategic clarity or strategic ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait represent two sides of the same deterrence coin. Yet, none of their arguments for or against strategic ambiguity are firmly rooted in any systematic research, demonstrating how their recommendations will achieve the strategic ends of American grand strategy. A systematic evaluation, however, finds that the wholesale abandonment of the current policy of strategic ambiguity will not strengthen America's ability to deter China from forcibly incorporating Taiwan under its rule and will limit flexibility critical to the execution of the diplomatic instrument of national power. The policy of strategic ambiguity does require updates to ensure it matches the realities of the 21st century and enable advanced preparations are made to shore up credibility and to remove obstacles impeding a swift response from Washington in the event of another Taiwan Strait crisis.

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Acknowledgements

I thank the instructors and professors at the Joint Advanced Warfighting School for their guidance and support throughout the process.

I thank my Seminar 4 classmates for a robust year-long discussion of strategy from which I drew much inspiration.

I thank my family for their patience and love through the long nights and boring weekends, especially to my wife who has always been there to support me.

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I. INTRODUCTION: FROM COOPERATION TO GREAT POWER COMPETITION

The Indo-Pacific region accounts for 60% of the world's population and 38% of global GDP, with estimates that by 2050 the region will add a billion people and represent over 51% of the global GDP.¹ Currently, the Indo-Pacific region is responsible for over two-thirds of global economic growth with over 3.37 trillion dollars of trade, constituting over 33% of global maritime trade flowing through the South China Sea alone.² Given the population and forecasted economic growth, there is no doubt that stability in the Indo-Pacific region will be critical to the stability of the world. The increased emphasis on great-power competition in the American National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Strategy (NDS), and National Military Strategy (NMS), will usher in a new era of uncertainty and heighten the potential for competition to escalate into armed conflict.³

¹ "Population Trends," United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), accessed October 14, 2020, <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/node/15207#:~:text=The%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific,populous%20countries%2C%20China%20and%20India>; "GDP, current prices," International Monetary Fund, accessed October 14, 2020, <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>; Asian Development Bank, *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century* (Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2011), <http://www.iopsweb.org/researchandworkingpapers/48263622.pdf>

² IMF World Economic and Financial Surveys, *Regional economic outlook. Asia Pacific Good Times, Uncertain Times: A time to Prepare* (Washington DC: IMF, 2018), <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/APAC/Issues/2018/04/16/areo0509#:~:text=Asia%20is%20expected%20to%20grow,outlook%2C%20policymakers%20must%20remain%20vigilant>; "How much Trade Transits the South China Sea?" CSIS, accessed October 14, 2020, https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/?utm_content=buffer2dfa4&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer.

³ White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018) <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/National_Military_Strategy_2015.pdf.

As the US-China relationship has trended from cooperation to great power competition in recent years, there have been increasing calls from China scholars and pundits for Washington to reassess its Taiwan policy of "strategic ambiguity." After over forty years of evolving trilateral US-Taiwan-China relations, and the potential economic, diplomatic, and military consequences, some scholars believe the time has come to reevaluate the long-standing policy of strategic ambiguity. They fear that a breakdown in the end-ways-means logic would result in a catastrophic degradation of the policy's deterrence potency.

The history of Washington's policy of "strategic ambiguity" regarding Taiwan traces back to 1971, during the Nixon Administration's secret negotiations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) to begin the slow process of rapprochement and normalization of diplomatic relations with Beijing. The policy seed, planted in the carefully worded 1972 Shanghai Communique, began to take root as Washington's unofficial policy during the normalization of diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1979. The 1979 Joint Communique "acknowledges the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of it," but was quickly followed by Congress passing the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), which all but reestablished official diplomatic relations with Taiwan.⁴

The past forty years of relative stability stand as a profound testament to the effectiveness of strategic ambiguity thus far. The current trend of China's coercive behavior, however, has chipped away at regional stability and diluted Washington's ability to deter Beijing from using its ever-growing and modernizing military power.

⁴ Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, Pub. L. No. 96-8 § 2, 93 Stat. 14 (1979).
<https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/96/8.pdf>.

While most scholars still advocate for maintaining the long-standing American policy of neither supporting Taiwan's *de jure* independence nor permitting forced reunification, there is increasing debate on how exactly to accomplish the task of altering the U.S. position towards Taiwan while ensuring the continued stability in the Indo-Pacific region. And it is unclear if stubborn adherence to the current policy of strategic ambiguity will invite Beijing's miscalculation, or if a sudden change to an unambiguous policy of defense will provoke the very attack that Washington seeks to avoid.

Those who argue for a change to strategic clarity are concerned that the erosion of US military and economic advantage in the region, coupled with more bellicose “wolf warrior” diplomacy emanating from Beijing, signal that ambiguity is no longer a feature of US deterrence policy that Washington can afford.⁵ They also fear that the economic downturn driven by the global pandemic crisis may force Beijing to use the issue of Taiwan for reasons of domestic politics or incentivize a *fait accompli* attack on Taiwan while the world is otherwise preoccupied. In this case, the proponents of strategic clarity view urgency as the driving force for the immediate change necessary to improve deterrence effectiveness.

Those who are arguing for continuing Washington’s policy of strategic ambiguity see the longevity of the status quo policy as evidence of its effectiveness. They also believe that any significant change to the current US policy could be viewed as provocative and used as a catalyst by hardliners in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to advocate for immediate military action. Furthermore, clarifying Washington’s stance would effectively eliminate much of the diplomatic flexibility needed to simultaneously

⁵ Zhiqun Zhu, “Interpreting China’s ‘Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy’,” *The Diplomat*, May 15, 2020 <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>.

deter both the PRC from military action and the Republic of China (ROC) government on Taiwan from a unilateral declaration of independence.⁶ Therefore, supporters of the status quo believe that the current conditions in the trilateral relationship do not warrant any significant policy change.

Clearly, the opposing arguments for strategic clarity or strategic ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait represent two sides of the same deterrence coin. Although a few scholars have mentioned elements of deterrence theory in their dialogue, regrettably, none of their arguments for or against strategic ambiguity are firmly rooted in any systematic research, demonstrating how their recommendations will achieve the strategic ends of American grand strategy. Commentary is essential, but without understanding the underlying mechanisms of deterrence theory, policy suggestions driven by ephemeral opinions can result in unintended consequences.

With China's rise marking the end of American unipolarity, Washington's careful management of diplomatic relations with Beijing will profoundly impact future regional and global stability. Of the many areas of antagonism where conflict could erupt, none is seen as more probable or more dangerous than the possibility of armed conflict across the Taiwan Strait.⁷ The importance of the Indo-Pacific region, with a mixture of adversaries neutrals, and allies, makes it imperative that the US reinvigorates its policies, strategies, and plans to strengthen its resolve and commitment to stabilizing the Indo-Pacific region.

⁶ The Republic of China (ROC) is also referred to as Taiwan and was previously referred to as Formosa.

⁷ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2020) <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

Analysis of the two perspectives on strategic ambiguity, in favor or against, using Coercion Theory suggests the wholesale abandonment of the current policy of strategic ambiguity will not strengthen America's ability to deter China from forcibly reunifying with Taiwan, but instead will limit flexibility critical to the execution of the diplomatic instrument of national power. Yet, the policy of strategic ambiguity does require updates to ensure the end-ways-means logic matches the realities of the 21st century. Also, internal domestic confusion must be cleared up to ensure that advanced preparations are made to shore up credibility and to remove obstacles impeding a swift response from Washington in the event of another Taiwan Strait crisis.

METHODS AND ORGANIZATION

Chapter II will formulate the unofficial policy of strategic ambiguity to infer the logical mechanisms of its operation. Since there exists no official document clearly outlining Washington's policy of strategic ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait. Chapter II is a crucial prerequisite to making any policy adjustments. Policy compilation will be completed by reviewing official documents to include diplomatic correspondence, joint communiques, legislations, government archives, and associated press conference reporting.

Chapter III will conduct a literature review providing the central perspectives pinning those who desire a change to a policy of strategic clarity against those who wish to continue with the status quo policy of strategic ambiguity in Taiwan Strait. Understanding the diametric viewpoints held by the two sides, attempting to tackle the

same issue of deterring violence in the Taiwan Strait, will enable the critical evaluation of the recommended policy changes.

Chapter IV will survey Coercion Theory to determine which variables have the most utility in deterring an adversary *ex-ante* from taking action.⁸ A deeper understanding of these key variables ensures suggested policy changes will indeed have the desired strategic effect. Source material will include relevant books and scholarly journals on deterrence theory or related fields such as game theory.

Chapter V will perform a case study of the execution of Washington's policy of strategic ambiguity on the trilateral US-Taiwan-China relationship and the impact of changing high-utility factors determined from the deterrence theory review conducted in Chapter IV. The case study will include a thorough review of scholarly publications, journals, and books, examine historical polling data, review reputable news reports, and utilize databases focused on calculating national economic and military power to compare the effectiveness of varying levels of strategic ambiguity during the 1954, 1958 and 1995 Taiwan Strait crises. The chapter culminates by determining, based on the tenets of deterrence theory, the likelihood of strategic ambiguity having the same deterrence effectiveness today as it did during the Taiwan Strait crises.

Based on Chapter V's findings, Chapter VI will summarize this study's conclusion and make recommendations for US policy in the Taiwan Strait to better serve American grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific region.

⁸ *Ex-ante* is differentiated from reacting *post-ante*, where *post-ante* would involve demanding the cessation of activities already taken.

II. CORE ELEMENTS OF US POLICY OF STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT

There is debate on precisely when the US formulated its policy of strategic ambiguity with Taiwan. Some scholars posit that the strategy's history reaches as far back as the early 1950s when President Truman ordered the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait to thwart Chairman Mao's plans to invade Taiwan two days after North Korea invaded South Korea on June 27, 1950.¹ Elements of the dual deterrence nature of contemporary US strategic ambiguity began to emerge as Truman, in the same statement committing the Seventh Fleet, announced, "As a corollary of this action I am calling upon the Chinese Government on Formosa to cease all air and sea operations against the mainland. The 7th Fleet will see that this is done."² Others argue that the policy only began to coalesce when rapprochement negotiations precipitated a secret meeting between National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and PRC Premier Zhou Enlai on July 9, 1971.³ However, there is a general consensus that Washington's policy of strategic ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait began in 1979 when the US severed official diplomatic ties and its mutual defense treaty with the ROC and formally recognized the PRC as China's legitimate government.

¹ Bruce A. Elleman, *High Seas Buffer: The Taiwan Patrol Forces, 1950-1979* (Newport RI: Naval War College, 2012).

² "Statement by the President, Truman on Korea," June 27, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Public Papers of the Presidents, Harry S. Truman, 1945-1953. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116192>

³ Winston Lord, "Memcon of Your Conversations with Chou En-lai," (official memorandum, Washington, DC: The White House, 1971), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-34.pdf>; Winston Lord, "Conversations with Chou En-lai: July 10, afternoon sessions," (official memorandum, Washington, DC: The White House, 1971), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-35.pdf>; Winston Lord, "MemCons of the Final Session with the Chinese," (official memorandum, Washington, DC: The White House, 1971), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-36.pdf>.

Unlike the Cold War policy of "containment," where scholars can point to George Kennan's famed "Long Telegram" or National Security Council Report (NSC 68) to mark the official start of American policy, there exist no such documents to signal the conscious initiation of the policy of strategic ambiguity. Instead, the policy of strategic ambiguity coalesced from a series of pragmatic decisions made over the past seven decades, which slowly formed into a vague policy.

EVOLUTION OF US POLICY OF STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

Many important events, including the Taiwan Strait crises of 1954 and 1958, have transpired to shape the strategic environment since Chiang Kai-shek's retreat to Taiwan in 1949.⁴ However, the genesis of official documentation concerning Washington's policy of strategic ambiguity can be traced back to the US-China rapprochement effort in 1971. President Richard Nixon, who campaigned on the promise of ending the Vietnam War through "peace with honor," sought a new strategy that hoped to rebalance the status-quo Cold War powers.⁵ In efforts to take advantage of the widening Sino-Soviet split and entice the PRC away from the Soviet sphere of influence, Nixon authorized his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, to initiate a secret dialogue with PRC Premier, Zhou Enlai. Amid the conversations that took place during Kissinger's covert three-day visit to China in July 1971, Zhou clarified five conditions for diplomatic normalization: 1) PRC's recognition as "the sole legitimate government representing the

⁴ Chiang Kai-shek led his political party, 国民党 which has two romanizations. Pinyin, used in Mainland China, transliterates the phrase into *Guomindang* (GMD), but Wade-Giles, used in Taiwan, transliterates the phrase into *Kuomintang* (KMT). These two phrases are used to describe the same political party.

⁵ Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 137.

Chinese people,” 2) American acknowledgment that Taiwan belongs to China and “is an inalienable part of China,” 3) American rejection of a “Two Chinas” or a “One-China, One-Taiwan” policy, 4) American renunciation of any Taiwanese independence movements, and 5) redeployment of American forces stationed on Taiwan within a fixed date.⁶ While Kissinger assured Zhou that Nixon would have Congressional support to meet the last four conditions, PRC’s formal recognition would have to wait until a later date.⁷ To which Zhou responded, “But there will be a contradiction in this, which I don’t know how you will solve.”⁸ “There is no question,” replied Kissinger, “that the course I have outlined will present us with a dilemma and a surface contradiction.”⁹ It is evident from the start that ambiguity would be implicit in the bilateral relationship.

During President Nixon’s visit to China six months later in February 1972, he reaffirmed his commitment to the five principles, reiterating American support for “any peaceful resolution of the Taiwan Issue that can be worked out.”¹⁰ Yet, at the same time, he informed Zhou of the necessity of ambiguity in navigating domestic politics, explaining, “The problem here, Mr. Prime Minister, is not in what we are going to do, the problem is what we are going to say about it. . . . What we say here may make it impossible for me to deliver on what I can do.”¹¹ The result of the successful meeting

⁶ Winston Lord, “Memcon of Your conversations with Chou En-lai” (official memorandum, Washington DC: White House, 1971) <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-34.pdf>; Winston Lord, “Conversations with Chou En-lai; July 10, afternoon session” (official memorandum, Washington DC: White House, 1971), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-35.pdf>; Winston Lord, “MemCons of the Final Sessions with the Chinese” (official memorandum, Washington DC: White House, 1971), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-36.pdf>.

⁷ Winston Lord, “Conversations with Chou En-lai; July 10, afternoon session.”

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation at the Great Hall of the People, Peking” (official memorandum, Washington DC: White House, 1972), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB106/NZ-1.pdf>.

¹¹ “Memorandum of Conversation.”

culminated in the release of the so-called Shanghai Communique on February 28, 1972, of which the following excerpt is of note:

The Chinese side reaffirmed its position: the Taiwan question is the crucial question obstructing the normalization of relations between China and the United States; the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government of China; Taiwan is a province of China which has long been returned to the motherland; the liberation of Taiwan is China's internal affair in which no other country has the right to interfere; and all U.S. forces and military installations must be withdrawn from Taiwan. The Chinese Government firmly opposes any activities which aim at the creation of "one China, one Taiwan," "one China, two governments," "two Chinas," an "independent Taiwan" or advocate that "the status of Taiwan remains to be determined."

The U.S. side declared: The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves. With this prospect in mind, it affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and military installations from Taiwan. In the meantime, it will progressively reduce its forces and military installations on Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes.¹²

The joint communique was an essential step towards rapprochement, but both sides' eagerness to accelerate toward normalization took on a restrained tone. Washington maintained ambiguity in the question of Taiwan's sovereignty by merely acknowledging that while differences between Beijing's and Taipei's interpretations of "One China" existed, the US would abstain from challenging either side's interpretation. Had it not been for Watergate, Nixon's landslide re-election victory in November 1972 would have cemented the political capital necessary to expedite rapprochement and normalize diplomatic relations with China.¹³ Instead, it was left up to President Gerald Ford, who

¹² "U.S.-PRC Joint Communique (1972)," American Institute in Taiwan, accessed October 17, 2020, <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/u-s-prc-joint-communique-1972/>.

¹³ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 292.

made an unproductive trip to China in December 1975. With the death of Premier Zhou Enlai and Chairman Mao Zedong in rapid succession in 1976 and the temporary purging of Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping shortly thereafter, US-China relations entered a period of uncertainty.¹⁴ It would not be until the reemergence of Deng Xiaoping from his second exile in 1977 that the effort to advance US-China relations would resume. After successfully defeating the infamous "Gang of Four" and wresting power away from Mao's interim successor, Hua Guofeng, Chairman Deng was able to consolidate power and push through his "open up and reform" (改革开放, gaige kaifang) agenda.¹⁵

President Jimmy Carter, hoping to revive the stalled normalization talks, twice sent his Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski to meet with their counterparts in Beijing in July 1977 and again in May 1978 with much success. The discussions built upon the 1972 Shanghai Communique to raise three conditions for normalization between the two countries, "namely the severance of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Taiwan, the withdrawal of all the U.S. forces and military installations from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait; and the abrogation of the so-called Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and Taiwan."¹⁶ While the terms were acceptable on both sides, what was fiercely debated during the bilateral talks but not included in the conditions for normalization was the opposing views on the use of force in reunification. The PRC vehemently maintained that the issue of Taiwan was an

¹⁴ Ibid, 316-329.

¹⁵ Dorothy Grouse Fontana, "Background to the Fall of Hua Guofeng," *Asian Survey* 22, no. 3 (March 1982): 237-260. As described by Fontana, "The Gang of Four, headed by Mao's wife Jiang Qing, originated from an academic and cultural orientation and favored mass mobilization through anarchistic decentralization as a means to achieve political consciousness." The other three members were Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen and Yao Wenyuan and together, they were blamed for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, purged from the CCP, and imprisoned in 1981.

¹⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XIII, China*, eds. David P. Nickles and Adam M. Howard (Washington DC: United States Printing Office, 2013), Document 109.

internal matter, which "did not exclude the forceful liberation of Taiwan under military means."¹⁷ Standing equally steadfast, the Carter Administration insisted that although Taiwan was indeed an internal matter, unification must be concluded in a peaceful manner.¹⁸ In the end, an unspoken agreement to table the issue allowed for the 1979 Joint Communiqué and the normalization of official diplomatic relations between the US and China, compounding future ambiguity.

Besides officially establishing diplomatic relations and reaffirming the principles listed in the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, there is very little substance in the remaining document. The same ambiguous statement of which the US "acknowledges the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China" does little to clarify Washington's commitment in deterring a change in Taiwan's *de facto* independence by military force.¹⁹ Furthermore, differences in the PRC's translation of the word "acknowledge" only added to the ambiguity. Instead of using the more appropriate characters, 认识, the PRC opted to use 承认 which more closely translates into "recognize," and slightly alters the meaning of the sentence, which could be misconstrued as a change to the American status quo stance on the matter.²⁰

Although congressional leaders were supportive of Carter's December 15, 1978 announcement to normalize diplomatic relations with the Mainland, there remained

¹⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XIII, China*, eds. David P. Nickles and Adam M. Howard (Washington DC: United States Printing Office, 2013), Document 50.

¹⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XIII, China*, eds. David P. Nickles and Adam M. Howard (Washington DC: United States Printing Office, 2013), Document 110.

¹⁹ "Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China (Normalization Communiqué), American Institute in Taiwan, January 1, 1979," <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/u-s-prc-joint-communiqué-1979/>.

²⁰ Shirley A. Kan, *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the "One China" Policy – Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei*, CRS Report No. RL30341 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 39, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30341.pdf>.

considerable concern about the people of Taiwan and their continued security. Senator Jacob Javits, the ranking Republican in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, summarized the conflicted feelings felt by both Congress and the American people: "We could no longer operate under the fiction that the government in Taipei was the government of all China, but neither could we ignore the fact that the people of Taiwan had been our friends and allies for decades and we had assisted in protecting them from domination by the communist regime on the mainland."²¹ Unhappy with the lack of prior consultation mandated by law before the abrogation of the US-Taiwan Mutual Defense Treaty and the inadequacy of the Carter Administration's proposed legislation concerning unofficial relations with Taiwan, Congress went to work on drafting legislation to secure both American commercial interests as well as to provide for the defense of the Taiwanese people.²² The resulting Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) passed with overwhelming bipartisan Congressional support and was signed into law on April 10, 1979. The TRA provided guidance and requirements to remedy two key concerns—continued relations with Taiwan and Taiwan's security.

To provide a framework for continued US-Taiwan relations, the TRA established the non-profit organization, American Institute in Taiwan, to serve as the *de facto* US Embassy in all but name. Also, instead of following the standard procedures when recognizing a new government and allowing the PRC to become the successor to all previous agreements made with Taiwan, the US made pragmatic exceptions enabling

²¹ Jacob K. Javits, "Congress and Foreign Relations: The Taiwan Relations Act," *Foreign Affairs* 60, no. 1 (Fall 1981): 54-62.

²² Javits, "Congress and Foreign Relations," 55-58.

Taiwan to retain all previous agreements with the US.²³ Except officially, the arrangements made Taiwan a sovereign nation in many meaningful ways.

Congress meticulously crafted three stipulations into the TRA to ensure Taiwan's security. First, the TRA clarified that Washington's decision to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC was conditioned on "the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means," which also excluded the use of coercion such as boycotts or embargoes as well.²⁴ Second, it mandated that the US "make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability."²⁵ Lastly, the TRA mandated that the US "maintains the capacity . . . to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan."²⁶ While crystal clear in some respects—the expectation of a peaceful resolution and confirmation that Taiwan is of US national interest—the lawmakers engineered plenty of policy wiggle room in the wording and left much up to interpretation. For instance, nothing defines what constitutes a "defensive" weapon, or lists which coercive actions may provoke a US response, or even guarantees US defense of Taiwan. In fact, the only thing that the President *must* do in the event of a threat to Taiwan is to promptly inform Congress.²⁷

One stipulation of the TRA—US arms sales to Taiwan—remained a point of contention and a roadblock to improving US-China relations after normalization.

²³ Ibid., 57.

²⁴ Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, Pub. L. No. 96-8 § 2, 93 Stat. 14 (1979).
<https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/96/8.pdf>.

²⁵ Taiwan Relations Act, Sec. 3 (a).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Hemmed in by the requirements of the TRA, the Reagan Administration was able to negotiate yet another Joint Communiqué in August 1982 to clarify the sticky subject while still leaving significant political maneuvering room:

Having in mind the foregoing statements of both sides, the United States Government states that it does not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and that it intends to reduce gradually its sales of arms to Taiwan, leading over a period of time to a final resolution. In so stating, the United States acknowledges China's consistent position regarding the thorough settlement of this issue.

In order to bring about, over a period of time, a final settlement of the question of United States arms sales to Taiwan, which is an issue rooted in history, the two governments will make every effort to adopt measures and create conditions conducive to the thorough settlement of this issue.²⁸

While the first paragraph seems to tie Washington firmly to a path of gradual arms sales reduction and elimination, careful wording in the second paragraph binding the rapidity with which the preceding paragraph would be implemented to the creation of conducive "conditions" provides implementation flexibility. Since the US interprets the "conditions" to slow or discontinue arms sales to Taiwan to be those required for the peaceful reunification process, the 1982 Joint Communiqué does not represent a significant departure from Washington's previous stance.²⁹ As further proof of his unchanging stance, Reagan issued a classified memorandum concerning the joint communiqué, stating:

The U.S. willingness to reduce its arms sales to Taiwan is conditioned absolutely upon the continued commitment of China to the peaceful solution of the Taiwan-PRC differences. It should be clearly understood that the linkage between these two matters is a permanent imperative of U.S. foreign policy. In addition, it is

²⁸ Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, Central Intelligence Agency, August 17, 1982, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83B00551R000200010003-4.pdf/>.

²⁹ Kan, *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the "One China" Policy*, 44.

essential that the quantity and quality of the arms provided Taiwan be conditioned entirely on the threat posed by the PRC. Both in quantitative and qualitative terms, Taiwan's defense capability relative to that of the PRC will be maintained.³⁰

To reassure Taiwan of Washington's commitment to the status quo, in advance of the August 1982 Joint Communiqué with the PRC, Reagan released his "Six Assurances" to Taiwan in July. In the release, Reagan confirms to the Taiwanese people that the US has neither set a date to terminate arms sales nor made agreements for prior consultation with the PRC concerning arms sales to Taiwan.³¹

Although the 1982 communiqué was the last to be issued jointly, there have been multiple unilateral declarations that have affected the course of Taiwan policy formulation. One example is President William Clinton's controversial "Three No's" statement made on June 30, 1998, during a low-key meeting at the Shanghai Library. During a discussion with a group of Chinese intellectuals, Clinton stated, "We don't support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan-one China. And we don't believe that Taiwan should be a member of any organization for which statehood is a requirement."³² Although implied in previous joint communiqués, Clinton's statement marks the first instance of an Administration's explicit opposition to Taiwanese independence. Furthermore, while the TRA was careful not to cause "the exclusion or expulsion of Taiwan from continued membership in any international financial institution or any other international organization," Clinton clearly envisions no Taiwanese

³⁰ Ibid., 46.

³¹ Susan V. Lawrence, *President Reagan's Six Assurances to Taiwan*, CRS Report No. IF11665 (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), <https://www.americanvoiceforfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Reagans-Six-Assurances-to-Taiwan.pdf>.

³² Michael Y. M. Kau, "Clinton's 'Three No's' Policy: A Critical Assessment," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 6, no. 3 (Summer/Fall 1999): 15-22.

participation in international organizations where statehood is a prerequisite.³³ While the White House and State Department were quick to backtrack and confirm that Clinton's comments were merely a reiteration of long-existing American policy, much of the damage had already been done.³⁴

In a show of discontent, within a month of Clinton's statement, Senate Resolution 107 and House Resolution 301 both passed—92-0 and 390-1, respectively—reaffirming overwhelming Congressional support for the tenets of the TRA and the "strong support of appropriate membership for Taiwan in international financial institutions and other international organization."³⁵ While Presidents George Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump have each made their own interpretation of the Taiwan situation, every deviation from the status quo has been redirected by White House, State Department, and Congressional statements back to a distinguishable set of core tenets that define the US policy of strategic ambiguity in Taiwan.

CORE ELEMENTS OF STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

Five core elements of strategic ambiguity are discernible over the course of the past five decades and the evolution of US policy and engagement:

- 1) Primacy of the status quo
- 2) Dual deterrence

³³ Taiwan Relations Act.

³⁴ Kau, "Clinton's "Three No's Policy," 16.

³⁵ Concurrent Resolution Affirming United States commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act, S. Con. Res. 107, 105th Cong., 2d sess. (July 14, 1998), <https://www.congress.gov/105/bills/sconres107/BILLS-105sconres107rfh.pdf>; Concurrent Resolution Affirming the United States commitment to Taiwan, H. Con. Res. 301, 105th Cong., 2d sess. (July 21, 1998), <https://www.congress.gov/105/bills/hconres301/BILLS-105hconres301rfs.pdf>.

- 3) Agnostic on Taiwanese Sovereignty
- 4) Peaceful Resolution
- 5) Maximize Political Flexibility

ELEMENT 1: PRIMACY OF THE STATUS QUO

Above all, the US prefers to maintain the status quo of *de facto* Taiwanese self-governance over Taiwan's independence and Beijing's forced reunification. Washington's preference sequence—Status quo > *De Jure* independence >> Forced reunification—is in a state of equilibrium while current preference sequences for Taipei—Status quo > *De Jure* independence >> Forced reunification—and Beijing—Status quo > Forced reunification >> *De Jure* independence—are in a state of instability where any significant change to the current circumstance could induce the first two preferences to swap.³⁶ A situation where Beijing prefers forced reunification or where Taipei prefers *de jure* independence over the status quo will lead to armed conflict. Understanding the current preference ranking is vital to understanding the dynamics of the trilateral relationship and how deterrence could possibly fail.

ELEMENT 2: DUAL DETERRENCE

The US is deterring both Taiwan from declaring independence and China from forceful reunification. One country's actions are directly linked to the reaction of the other, so Washington must carefully adjust a single policy to deter both actions from happening. US weapon sales to Taiwan and TRA-mandated American military readiness

³⁶ Note “>” is “better than” and “>>” is “much better than”

are powerful deterrents of Chinese aggression but also present a constant source of aggravation for bilateral US-China relations. Thus, the unique US-Taiwan-China trilateral dynamics exponentially increases the complexity of implementing a successful regional strategy.

ELEMENT 3: AGNOSTIC ON TAIWANESE SOVEREIGNTY

The US reserves the right to treat Taiwan as a sovereign nation but will not comment on Taiwanese sovereignty defined as an independent nation-state. Officially, the US does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation. However, the US-Taiwan bilateral relations have many elements that are traditionally reserved only for relationships between two sovereign nations—diplomatic institutions, trade agreements, high-level diplomatic exchanges, visa reciprocity, direct military arms sales, etc. While these agreements are necessary to preserve pre-1979 business relationships, there are more fundamental reasons for the ambiguity of sovereignty. Westphalian sovereignty is a crucial element of the current international order upheld by the United States.³⁷ Therefore, logic dictates that if the United States were to take the position that Taiwan is the sovereign territory of the PRC, then “surely a concomitant US prohibition on the use of force by the PRC against Taiwan would constitute an abrogation of Chinese sovereignty such that Beijing would feel compelled to directly challenge that prohibition.”³⁸ However, by taking the position that Taiwan is an integral part of China, without explicitly stating which

³⁷ G. John Ikenberry and Amitai Etzioni, “Point of Order: Is China More Westphalian Than the West?” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 6 (November/December 2011): 172-176.

³⁸ Roy Pinsker, “Drawing a line in the Taiwan Strait: ‘Strategic ambiguity’ and its discontents,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 57, no. 2 (2003), 358.

government controls the territory, it provides Washington much-needed space for political maneuvering.

ELEMENT 4: PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

Although the PRC has consistently refused to forsake the use of military force, the only steadfast US condition is for a peaceful resolution. In the future, if Taiwan freely chose to peacefully reunify with the mainland, the US would not prevent that from happening. Some in Washington would probably welcome this outcome as it would both indicate successful political reform in the PRC and alleviate a tremendous burden on the US-China bilateral relationship. Similarly, although unlikely, the US would not oppose Taiwan's independence with Beijing's concurrence. However, the US will continue to fully oppose unification or independence gained through violence or coercion.

ELEMENT 5: MAXIMIZE POLITICAL FLEXIBILITY

Political flexibility is maximized by preferential interpretation of past noncommittal official statements. By not committing to a firm and clear position, each passing administration retains the flexibility necessary to progress bilateral US-China relations. If the past is representative of the flexibility required to maintain stability in future US-China-Taiwan trilateral relationship, any changes to the existing policy of strategic ambiguity must incorporate similar elements of flexibility to allow for face-saving measures and de-escalatory off-ramps.

III. TWO COMPETING PERSPECTIVES

Two articles recently published in *Foreign Affairs* summarize the opposing viewpoints on the issue of whether or not the evolving situation in the Taiwan Strait demands a change from the status quo policy of strategic ambiguity to one of "strategic clarity."¹ One team, comprised of Richard Haass and David Sacks, advocates for adopting a policy of strategic clarity. Another team consisting of Bonnie Glaser, Michael Mazarr, and Michael Glennon argue for only minor revisions to the status quo. While diametrically opposed regarding how to solve the Taiwan problem, ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific region by deterring armed conflict remains the primary mission for both sides.

ARGUMENTS FOR STRATEGIC CLARITY

Most scholars advocating for a change from strategic ambiguity will agree that the strategy has served Washington well over the past four decades, they also offer up many reasons why the policy has run its course. One central argument acknowledges the enormous transformation in relative military advantage across the Taiwan Strait. Financed by decades of rapid Chinese economic growth, the PLA has slowly eroded the tremendous American comparative military advantage, achieving approximate regional military power parity today.² Acknowledging the magnitude and speed of the Chinese

¹ Richard Haass and David Sacks, "American Support for Taiwan Must Be Unambiguous," *Foreign Affairs* (September 24, 2020), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/american-support-taiwan-must-be-unambiguous>; Bonnie S. Glaser, Michael J. Mazarr, Michael J. Glennon, Richard Haass and David Sacks, "Dire Straits," *Foreign Affairs* (September 24, 2020), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-09-24/dire-straits>.

² Eric Heginbotham, Michael Nixon, Forrest E. Morgan, Jacob L. Heim, Jeff Hagen, Sheng Li, Jeffrey Engstrom, Martin C. Libicki, Paul DeLuca, David A. Shlapak, David R. Frelinger, Burgess Laird, Kyle Brady and Lyle J. Morris, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving*

military transformation, President of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Richard Haass and CFR Research Fellow David Sacks warn that "unless the United States devotes significant resources to preparing for a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, it stands little chance of preventing a *fait accompli*."³ In agreement, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Elbridge Colby and former Under Secretary of Defense Walter Slocombe argue that when the policy was enacted many years ago, China lacked the air, land, and sea components required to execute a successful strategic assault, so Beijing had no real alternative to accepting the status quo. But now, the Chinese military advances mean that the US may no longer have a viable option to defend Taiwan from an all-out attack. For this reason, Colby and Slocombe call for strategic clarity to drive changes in spending, force employment, and doctrine to sustain a regional defense posture capable of credible deterrence.⁴

Other scholars advocating for strategic clarity argue that the US no longer needs to deter the Taiwanese from declaring independence because that impulse is now extinct. The scholars point to as evidence recent polling data that indicates fewer than ten percent of the Taiwanese population supports pursuing immediate independence. Other scholars suggest dual deterrence is no longer necessary since Chinese military power alone is already sufficient to deter Taiwanese independence ambitions.⁵

Offering a more nuanced explanation, US Air Force Checkmate strategist Eric Chan contends that the policy of strategic ambiguity only worked because the central

Balance of Power (1996-2017), (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR392.html.

³ Haass and Sacks, "Unambiguous."

⁴ Elbridge Colby and Walter Slocombe, "U.S. 'Ambiguity' on Taiwan Is Dangerous," *Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-ambiguity-on-taiwan-is-dangerous-1464022837>.

⁵ Michael Hunzeker and Mark Christopher, "It's Time to Talk About Taiwan," *Defense One*, February 24, 2020, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/02/its-time-talk-about-taiwan/163291/>.

players—US and China—were both willing to maintain pretenses. As long as China could expect further short-term economic and long-term geopolitical gains from American support for economic development and world-wide market integration, China was willing to shelve the issue of Taiwan in a complicit act of self-deception rather than confront the insurmountable discrepancies of reality.⁶ In the same vein, Beijing chose to look past the conflicts and undertook major economic initiatives intended to draw Taiwan into China's economic orbit. However, years of massive PRC economic investments and integration efforts *vis-à-vis* Taiwan could not prevent the election and re-election of yet another President from the independence-leaning Democratic People's Party (DPP), nor could it reverse the accelerating adoption of a uniquely Taiwanese identity now held by 83% of all Taiwanese citizens.⁷ Beijing's hopes for long-term, gradual absorption of Taiwan, similar to the hope held for Hong Kong's deeper integration with the mainland, were dampened by the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower movement in Taiwan.⁸

Chan suggests that the sweeping national Security law, passed in Hong Kong in June 2020, is a clear sign that Beijing has concluded that "a velvet glove over an iron fist was insufficient."⁹ Adopting a new, more aggressive policy, President Xi Jinping has made it clear that China's patience is wearing thin and that the clock is now running on the previously indefinite timeline of Taiwan's reunification.¹⁰ When taken with evidence

⁶ Eric Chan, "The End of Strategic Ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait," *The Diplomat* (accessed October 5, 2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/the-end-of-strategic-ambiguity-in-the-taiwan-strait/>.

⁷ Chan, "The End of Strategic Ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chris Buckley and Chris Horton, "Xi Jinping Warns Taiwan That Unification Is the Goal and Force Is an Option," *New York Times*, January 1, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/01/world/asia/xi-jinping-taiwan-china.html>.

that "the PLA has developed aggressive operational concepts that are prone to miscalculations," Chan concludes that an American policy clarification would go a long way towards deterring aggressive action.¹¹

Still, others recommend dropping strategic ambiguity to eliminate the constant turmoil in bilateral diplomatic relations experienced upon the passing of each presidential administration as they interpret the geopolitical tea leaves and redefine strategic ambiguity for themselves. When asked if America had an obligation to defend Taiwan against a Chinese attack, President George W. Bush replied, "Yes, we do, and the Chinese must understand that."¹² When questioned about the scale of military force, Bush responded, "Whatever it took."¹³ On the other hand, President Obama was more delicate in his messaging and, for the most part, toed the line on the One China policy narrative to avoid disrupting the status quo of strategic ambiguity.¹⁴ In a marked departure from the status quo policy, President-elect Trump took an unprecedented ten-minute telephone call from President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan.¹⁵ To some proponents of strategic clarity, eliminating the ambiguity would go a long way toward alleviating instability in bilateral US-China relations caused by Beijing's perception of Washington's intentional waffling on an issue of great import to Chinese sovereignty.

¹¹ Chan, "The End of Strategic Ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait."

¹² George F. Will, "George F. Will: 'Strategic ambiguity' about Taiwan must end," *Herald Review*, September 9, 2020, https://herald-review.com/opinion/columnists/george-f-will-strategic-ambiguity-about-taiwan-mustend/article_4548bd92-9913-5caf-abbf-873b8b8bb5d0.html.

¹³ Will, "George F. Will."

¹⁴ Shirley A. Kan, *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the "One China" Policy – Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei*, CRS Report No. RL30341 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 84, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30341.pdf>.

¹⁵ Roberta Rampton and Jeff Mason, "Obama Says China would not take change in U.S. policy on Taiwan lightly," *Reuters*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-obama-china-idUSKBN1452PL>.

ARGUMENTS FOR CONTINUED STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

The proponents of strategic ambiguity suggest that a sudden policy change may betray the underlying relative decline in military strength that a clear pronouncement of military support for Taiwan was meant to hide.¹⁶ Stated differently, the status quo scholars fear that offering Taiwan a *carte blanche* security commitment from the US, without either a credible military force or viable political vehicle to execute, may incentivize the Chinese to mount a preemptive attack.¹⁷ In a sense, making a policy change out of fear of weakness before actually remedying said weakness is like putting the cart before the horse and may even provoke the attack that Haass and Sacks seek to avoid through their proposed strategic clarity.¹⁸ As one pundit asserts, "deterrence's greater infirmity is probably an imbalance in theater capabilities that favors China."¹⁹ Still, an outright declaration of American will without credibility in terms of military forces misses the mark and provides an inconsequential increase in deterrence.²⁰

By abandoning ambiguity, Center for Strategic International Studies senior advisor for Asia Bonnie Glaser suggests, Washington loses the diplomatic flexibility that has been the hallmark of the strategy's successful implementation. "Rather," Glaser recommends, "the United States should reserve the latitude to judge whether Taipei's policies are consistent with U.S. interests—and with the region's peace and security."²¹ While Washington welcomes President Tsai Ing-wen's toned-down approach with

¹⁶ Andy Zelleke, "'Strategic Clarity' Won't Solve the United States' Taiwan Dilemma," *The Diplomat*, October 9, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/strategic-clarity-wont-solve-the-united-states-taiwan-dilemma/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Glaser, Mazarr, Glennon, Haass and Sacks, "Dire Straits."

¹⁹ Zelleke, "'Strategic Clarity' Won't Solve the United States' Taiwan Dilemma."

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Glaser, Mazarr, Glennon, Haass and Sacks, "Dire Straits."

Beijing, Glaser warns that her successors may not act according to US interests. Thus, ambiguity provides Washington with the flexibility required to maneuver against both detrimental Taiwanese and PRC actions.²²

Another central argument against strategic clarity is that such a pronouncement of unambiguous American military support may embolden Taipei to declare independence, which would surely result in armed conflict with China. Armed with June 2020 polling data, pro strategic clarity scholars do not share the same concern since the polling data indicates that only 7.4 percent of Taiwanese wish to seek independence as soon as possible.²³ It is worth noting, however, that the same survey does show that 27.2 percent of Taiwanese wish to maintain the status quo but eventually move towards independence, and 28.7 percent wish to maintain the status quo indefinitely.²⁴ But it is reasonable to assume, if given the unconditional and unambiguous backing of the US military, these preferences might change. And converts from these two groups in significant numbers could easily constitute a pro-independence majority if the matter ever made it into a referendum.

Viewed through a different lens, legal issues could pose a significant hurdle to implementing unambiguous support for Taiwan. In his analysis, Professor of International Law Michael Glennon identifies substantial legal barriers that may contravene the United Nations (UN) Charter, the TRA, and even the US Constitution. First, Glennon argues that UN collective self-defense only applies if a state is attacked by

²² Ibid.

²³ “Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with Mainland (1992/06~2020/06),” Election Study Center national Chengchi University, accessed October 4, 2020, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/course/news.php?Sn=167>.

²⁴ “Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with Mainland (1992/06~2020/06)”

another *state*. Therefore, if China were to attack Taiwan, the UN collective self-defense clause would not justify US intervention.²⁵ The reasoning being that because Taiwan is not officially recognized as an independent *state* by the UN, China's attack on Taiwan would be seen as a domestic issue, placing any US intervention in a legal quagmire. Next, Glennon reasons that since the Senate alone holds power to approve treaties, a Presidential declaration of the type proposed by Haass and Stacks would encroach on congressional powers and thus be considered unconstitutional. Finally, Glennon points out that Section 3 of the TRA requires that both "the President and the Congress shall determine, in accordance with constitutional processes, appropriate action by the United States," and excludes unilateral action by the President.²⁶ While none of the legal barriers may necessarily preclude US military intervention, attempting to clarify the legal issues during a Chinese invasion of Taiwan will only hobble the potential effectiveness of US response when time is of the essence.

The recent scholarly debate about Washington's Taiwan policy is a reminder that strategies are living entities requiring constant deliberation, evaluation, and adjustment to remain relevant under the changing realities of the international environment. Indeed, the past forty years have brought about some changes that would necessitate an evolution in the Taiwan strategy, but meaningful analysis has yet to drive the strategic evolution. While it may not be necessary for the wholesale abandonment of the current policy, adjustments are certainly required if the world wishes to duplicate the previous four decades of regional stability for future generations in the Indo-Pacific.

²⁵ Glaser, Mazarr, Glennon, Haass and Sacks, "Dire Straits."

²⁶ Taiwan Relations Act.

IV. DETERRENCE THEORY

A thoughtful, scholarly examination of the role of ambiguity in deterrence theory is largely nonexistent. When "ambiguity" does show up in deterrence literature, it is mostly used as a synonym for the unknown or unknowable rather than to describe a deliberate element of deterrence strategy. Ambiguity in deterrence is often treated as a mistake or a negative result of unclear communications. In the few instances where ambiguity reveals itself as a purposeful element of deterrence, it is almost exclusively used for describing nuclear strategy.¹ "Waging Deterrence in 21st Century," however, uses a concept called "deliberate ambiguity" to provide some new insights. Although it too was discussing Cold War era nuclear deterrence, the article argues that "deliberate ambiguity about the nature and scope of [a] response to an adversary's attack enhances deterrence by complicating the adversary's calculations and planning."² However, the authors, in the same breath, caution that the utility of an ambiguous deterrence strategy varies drastically between a risk-averse opponent and a risk-acceptant opponent who "might well interpret such ambiguity as a sign of weakness and as an opportunity to exploit rather than a risk to be avoided."³ Schelling also agrees with the careful use of ambiguity, warning "it may make sense to try to keep the enemy guessing as long as we are not trying to keep him guessing about our own motivation."⁴

¹ For example of "deliberate ambiguity" in nuclear strategy, see: Edwin S. Cochran, "Deliberate Ambiguity: An Analysis of Israel's Nuclear Strategy," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 19, no. 3 (September 1996): 321-342; or Umar Hayat Luk, "Strategic Ambiguities in Indian Nuclear Doctrine: Implications for Pakistan's Security," *Policy Perspectives* 13, no. 1 (2016): 5-23.

² Kevin Chilton and Greg Weaver, "Waging Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 32.

³ Chilton and Weaver, "Waging Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century," 32.

⁴ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 201.

EVOLUTION OF DETERRENCE THEORY

The US Department of Defense, *Joint Publications 3-0*, defines deterrence as “the prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits.”⁵ According to Lawrence Freedman, “deterrence is concerned with deliberate attempts to manipulate the behavior of others through conditional threats.”⁶ Patrick Morgan defines deterrence as “manipulating someone's behavior by threatening him with harm . . . as a way of preventing the first use of force by someone else.”⁷ Thomas Schelling defines deterrence by contrasting it against compellence: “The threat that compels rather than deters often requires that the punishment be administered *until* the other acts, rather than *if* he acts.”⁸ Thus deterrence, like potential energy, is stored coercive power whose potency is based on its perceived potential to do harm.

While the concept of coercion has been around for millennia, the origins of modern-day academic formulation of coercion theory can be traced back to Thomas Schelling and his seminal research conducted in the early 1960s.⁹ Schelling further broke down coercion into the concepts of deterrence and compellence, where the former dealt with the power to prevent action while the latter dealt with the power to force an action.¹⁰ With the proliferation of nuclear weapons, deterrence theory became a wildly popular field of study that progressed in three distinct waves.¹¹ The first-wave, led by post-World

⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, JP 3-0 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0ch1.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-160457-910.

⁶ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 6.

⁷ Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 1977), 9.

⁸ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 70.

⁹ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Schelling, *Arms and Influence*.

¹⁰ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 195.

¹¹ Robert Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (January 1979): 289-324.

War II scholars Bernard Brodie, Jacob Viner, and Arnold Wolfers, tackled the implications of nuclear weapons. The exponential increase in the destructiveness of war convinced the first-wave scholars that "the U.S. military must shift its focus from winning wars to averting them."¹² However, their work has been criticized for lacking "the systemization and broad reach of the second wave" and had relatively little impact on building deterrence theory.¹³

The second-wave in the 1960s, led by Thomas Schelling, Glenn Snyder, and Albert Wohlstetter, was much more successful in explaining the logic of coercion. While the first-wave theories fixated on the destructive power of nuclear weapons and therefore focused on first-strike capabilities, the second-wave theorists used a "rational actor" model and game theory to understand that "to deter an attack means being able to strike back in spite of it."¹⁴ Their revelation spawned the concepts of survivable second-strike capability and massive retaliation, which formed the foundation of the US nuclear policy of mutually assured destruction (MAD) and aided the development of the nuclear triad concept.¹⁵

The third-wave in the 1970s, led by Alexander George and Robert Smoke, attempted to correct the perceived deficiencies associated with the second-wave's rational actor model. The rational actor model, grounded in microeconomic theory, characterized states as value-maximizing entities who can rank order choices and select the option with

¹² Sean P. Larkin, "The Limits of Tailored Deterrence," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 63, no.4 (4th Quarter, 2011): 48.

¹³ Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," 291.

¹⁴ Albert Wohlstetter, *The Delicate Balance of Terror*, P-1472 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1958), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P1472.html>.

¹⁵ Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," 301.

the maximum expected utility.¹⁶ According to the third-wave theorists, the second-wave "failed to incorporate critical factors, including variations in the aggressor's risk-taking propensity, utility of rewards in addition to threats, and influence of domestic politics on decision makers."¹⁷ Possibly due to the inherent difficulties of accessing nearly unknowable information, however, the third-wave scholars were unable to correct the errors of second-wave scholars and failed to develop new theories of their own.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War threat of massive nuclear war, which had driven the evolution of deterrence theory since 1945, decreased by an order of magnitude. At the same time, however, the proliferation of nuclear technology increased the number of state and non-state actors desiring to advance their own nuclear weapons programs—India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, South Korea, Iran, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, South Africa, Argentina, Romania, Brazil, al-Qaeda and Taiwan—and deterring conventional threats across the globe added a degree of complexity that gave rise to Tailored Deterrence.¹⁸ Tailored deterrence, developed to correct the deficiencies of the rational deterrence model that the third-wave failed to do, was built upon the concept that each case of deterrence brings with it a unique set of circumstances—cultures, languages, histories, governments, leaders—that requires, "an actor-specific set of deterrence capabilities designed to influence a specific leader or leader's group."¹⁹ Scholars still struggle with what some describe as an "erroneous

¹⁶ Janice G. Stein, "Rational Deterrence Against "Irrational" Adversaries?" in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, ed. James J. Wirtz, Patrick M. Morgan, and T.V. Paul (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 60.

¹⁷ Larkin, "The Limits of Tailored Deterrence," 51.

¹⁸ Barry Schneider and Patrick Ellis, "New Thinking on Deterrence," in *Tailored Defense: Influencing States and Groups of Concern*, ed. Barry R. Schneider and Patrick D. Ellis (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2011), 1-2.

¹⁹ Schneider and Ellis, "New Thinking on Deterrence," 4; Larkin, "The Limits of Tailored Deterrence," 47.

assumption" that anyone can realistically model an adversary's decision calculus to the fidelity necessary to make reliable and actionable predictions.²⁰

KEY TENETS OF DETERRENCE THEORY

While differences in approach delineated the waves, there have been elements of consistency throughout deterrence theory, especially since the second wave. For example, there are consistent categorizations for deterrence types, each driving their own set of logic for strategy development. Deterrence can be *narrow* to prevent a specific type of military action or *broad* to deter war in general.²¹ Deterrence can be *central* to deter action to one's own country or *extended* to provide a deterrence umbrella for a third party.²² Deterrence can be *immediate* as with a crisis or *general* to cover an indeterminate amount of time.²³ And lastly, deterrence can use *denial* through threats to defeat the enemy or use threat of *punishment* as retaliation for action taken.²⁴ In the specific case of US deterrence in the Taiwan straits, the deterrence categorization is: *broad, extended, general, and denial*.

Most, if not all scholars, agree that several variables significantly impact the efficacy of deterrence strategy, three of which appear consistently among deterrence scholars. The first variable is *motivation*, defined as the will and commitment of both sides of a conflict. Motivation can be measured in differential terms, which is defined as the disparity of will and commitment between the aggressor and deterrer, or in absolute

²⁰ Larkin, "The Limits of Tailored Deterrence," 56.

²¹ Freedman, *Deterrence*, 32.

²² *Ibid.*, 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁴ Larkin, "The Limits of Tailored Deterrence," 48.

terms of the aggressor's motivation.²⁵ Since, in deterrence, perception is reality in the mind of the aggressor, it would be more accurate to define either measure of motivation in terms of the aggressor's *perceived* absolute or differential motivation. If the aggressor perceives that their motivation to take action is much less than the deterrer's motivation to prevent said action, deterrence will most likely succeed. However, if the aggressor perceives that their motivation is much greater than the deterrer's motivation, regardless if it is true or not, the deterrence measures are likely to fail. Patrick Morgan, after a comprehensive analysis of deterrence research, concludes that most studies "agree that challenger motivation is the most important factor in deterrence success or failure, especially if 'motivation' covers both the desire to challenge and a willingness to take risks."²⁶ In a more nuanced perspective, RAND scholar Michael Mazarr suggests, "The degree to which a potential aggressor is dissatisfied with the status quo is one of the most powerful engines of aggressive intent."²⁷ Dissatisfaction with the status quo, also the primary engine for conflict driving power transition theory, can provide an outsized source of motivation for the aggressor to disregard deterrence measures.²⁸

The second variable is the clarity of communications concerning both the object of deterrence and the actions that the deterrer is willing to take.²⁹ When rendered to its essential form, deterrence is simply communication with a sender, a receiver, and a message. The sender must be convincing, credible, clear in both threat and benefit, and avoid any one of a multitude of logical fallacies—mirror-imaging, centralized direction

²⁵ Michael J. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html>.

²⁶ Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 164.

²⁷ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 8.

²⁸ A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 19.

²⁹ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 9.

bias, motivated bias, availability bias, egocentric bias, lack of empathy, and overconfidence, to name a few.³⁰ The message must be logical, clear, and concise, translated correctly, disseminated to the correct receiver(s), read, and understood. The receiver must believe in the authenticity of the message, distinguish the new information from the old, be willing to change existing beliefs based on new information, and overcome the same logical fallacies that plague the sender.³¹

Deterrence is never that simple in practice. One reason for added complexity is the inability to formulate a strategy without fully comprehending that opposing strategies are inextricably interlinked. Freedman believes that since the strategy of the sender depends on the assumptions of the receiver's decision calculus, whose calculus is affected by their perception of the sender's strategy, "there can therefore be no clear-cut distinction between the independent and dependent variable."³² Nevertheless, without clarity in the object of deterrence and the deterrence threat, an already complex strategic calculus will fall victim to false assumptions and faulty logic resulting in miscalculations and inadvertent escalation. As one scholar concluded, "The more ambiguous the demand is, the more chance there is for failure in the deterrent policy."³³

³⁰ Ibid., 54-55. Larkin highlights just a few of the many different biases that the sender fall victim to. The following are his explanations: Mirror-imaging is the assumption that the adversary thinks and operates like the analyst's country. Centralized direction bias is the tendency of the analyst toward viewing the adversary's action as the result of centralized direction and to underestimate other explanations, such as coincidences, accidents, or mistakes. Motivated bias result from subconscious psychological pressure that distorts perceptions. Availability bias is the tendency for people to interpret events in terms of other events they can easily remember. Egocentric bias leads people to overestimate their influence over others and to see cause-and-effect linkages that do not exist. Lack of empathy is the inability to understand how an adversary sees the world. Overconfidence is the tendency for people to overestimate their capacity to make complex judgements.

³¹ Ibid., 55; Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis*, 54. On page 54-55, Morgan relates 13 separate misconceptions highlighted by Robert Jervis.

³² Freedman, *Deterrence*, 44.

³³ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 9.

The third variable is the deterrer's *credibility*, or rather the aggressor's perception of the deterrer's credibility, to carry out deterrence threats.³⁴ Credibility is a combination of capacity—the persuasive ability to do what one is threatening legitimately—and will—the fortitude to carry out the threat. Some scholars believe that credibility depends on the reputation of the deterrer and their history of keeping their word.³⁵ Others believe that the importance of a state's reputation on its deterrent credibility is a debunked myth.³⁶ Still, others have concluded that the strength of the deterrer's reputation, in the mind of the aggressor, is contingent on the specific circumstances of each deterrence scenario.³⁷ What is not up for debate, however, is the importance of the deterrer's perceived capacity and will to inflict the threatened damage. As Bruce Russett concluded, "Deterrence fails when the attacker decides that the defender's threat is not likely to be fulfilled."³⁸ The aggressor arrives at this conclusion when the deterrer's lack in capacity signals a bluff or if a deterrer's will is only anchored on weak rhetoric. As Russett laments and aggressors recognize, "there have been too many instances when 'solemn oaths' were forgotten in the moment of crisis."³⁹

The three variables—motivation, clarity of communication, and credibility—are not mutually exclusive, and deficiencies or strengths in one variable can have a tremendous impact on another. For example, Schelling posits, "As a rule, one must

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

³⁵ Bratton, "When is Coercion Successful?," 101.

³⁶ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 10;

³⁷ Joe Clare and Vesna Danilovic, "Reputation for Resolve, Interests, and Conflict," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 29, no. 1 (February 2012): 3-27; Paul K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates," *Annual Review of Political Science* (1999): 25-48.

³⁸ Bruce M. Russett, "The Calculus of Deterrence," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 29, no. 2 (June 1963), 98.

³⁹ Russett, "The Calculus of Deterrence," 97.

threaten that he *will* act, not that he *may* act, if the threat fails. To say that one *may* act is to say that one *may not*, and to say this is to confess that one has kept the power of decision—that one is not committed."⁴⁰ In this case, a perceived lack of deterrer motivation messaged through weak communications undermined a deterrent threat's credibility. On the other hand, strong and clear communication may still fall on deaf ears if not backed up by persuasive motivation and credibility.

There is an abundance of scholarly research describing methods to strengthen the credibility—capacity and will—of a deterrent threat. Schelling proposes that for one to control credibility, one must enigmatically relinquish the initiative.⁴¹ Referred to as the “rationality of irrationality,” the game of chicken best exemplifies the logic.⁴² With two cars barreling toward each other, if one driver was to remove their steering wheel and blindfold themselves and ensure their adversary is aware of the action, the blindfolded individual, by relinquishing the initiative, forces the aggressor to either swerve or face certain death. From this example, it becomes clearly evident that the most credible threat is the one that places in the mind of the aggressor, no doubt that the deterrer has no alternative but to make good on the threat, even if they would prefer to do otherwise.⁴³ Glenn Snyder recommends similar measures to support the credibility of mutually assured destruction by *automating* the response because “if the response is a matter of free choice, the enemy is likely to suspect that it will not be carried out.”⁴⁴ It is important

⁴⁰ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 187.

⁴¹ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 43.

⁴² Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960), 291.

⁴³ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 43.

⁴⁴ Glenn Snyder, “Deterrence by Denial and Punishment,” in *Components of Defense Policy*, ed. David Bobrow (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), 138.

to note that the concepts used to increase credibility are equally effective in cases of extended deterrence.

Some less drastic measures also exist to demonstrate a high degree of credibility, such as stationing "tripwire" American Forces in contested areas.⁴⁵ A common tactic used across Europe during the Cold War, "tripwire" forces made American deterrence of Soviet attack much more credible by making US military involvement inescapable, ensuring an outpouring of US domestic support, and triggering an undeniable escalation mechanism. Still, other mechanisms exist, such as alliances and coupling—linking the security of the United States homeland to that of allies—but the credibility of those mechanisms tend to be situation dependent. The North Atlantic Treaty is an excellent example of both an alliance and a coupling mechanism prescribed in Article 5: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all."⁴⁶

Reinforcing the notion that deterrence is communication, James Fearon believes that a state can communicate their credibility in one of two ways: by "tying hands" or by "sinking cost."⁴⁷ In both methods, the idea is that those making the threats must incur prohibitive costs to prove they have a stake for deterrence threats to be credible.⁴⁸ The main difference between tying hands and sinking costs is that the former involves loss of face or prestige if forced to back down but costs nothing if the aggressor remains deterred, while the latter includes real costs associated with mobilization, transportation,

⁴⁵ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 6.

⁴⁶ The North Atlantic Treaty, September 20, 1951, UST 1087, pt. 5.

⁴⁷ James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands vs Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (February 1997), 68.

⁴⁸ Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests," 69.

basing, manpower, etc. that are unrecoverable regardless of the success of deterrence. Through game theory, simulation, and historical case studies, Fearon concludes that leaders, on average, have better success deterring by tying hands.⁴⁹ His conclusion comports with Schelling's view that "face"—a country's image and reputation for action—is "one of the few things worth fighting over."⁵⁰ A universal acceptance of the importance of "face" means an equally universal understanding of the credibility inherent to the act of tying hands as a sign of one's commitment to a deterrence threat. Studies have shown that "in most, if not all, instances of coercion, groups or individuals in the target state's government have staked their positions and reputations on the policies or actions that cause the coercion in the first place."⁵¹ The phenomenon ensures that the aggressor almost always confronts deterrence from an entrenched position, explaining why most deterrence strategies against tied-hands aggressors are destined to fail.

Deterrence theory maintains three key variables relative to the most significant impact on the success of any deterrence strategy.

- 1) The aggressor's perception of the *Motivation* (Differential between the aggressor and deterrer and in absolute terms for the aggressor).
- 2) The *Level of Clarity* about the object of deterrence and deterrer's threat
- 3) Aggressor's perception of the deterrer's *Credibility* (capacity and will).

Any argument for a change to the current policy of strategic ambiguity must be firmly established on a foundation of deterrence theory logic. Without understanding the

⁴⁹ Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests," 87.

⁵⁰ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 124.

⁵¹ Patrick C. Bratton, "When is Coercion Successful?" *Naval War College Review* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2005), 105.

mechanism for change driving each strategy amendment, policymakers will continue to run the risk of championing counterproductive changes and overlook second and third-order effects that could prove detrimental to the overall strategic objectives in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

V. CASE STUDY OF THE US, TAIWAN, CHINA TRILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

The three key tenets of deterrence theory highlighted in Chapter IV provide the framework to evaluate the evolving nature of the US-Taiwan-China Trilateral relationship over the years to gauge the deterrent potency of Washington's policy of strategic ambiguity. The case study compares the contemporary situation to the Taiwan Strait crises of 1954, 1958, and 1995 that tested Washington's strategy. While comprehensive knowledge of intent and motivation is a bridge too far, examining the available literature discussing the specifics of key events yields the insight required to judge a deterrent policy's effectiveness. Also, understanding the primacy of individual leaders' actions and reactions, the analyses focuses on PRC leadership's responses during crisis management.¹ By viewing the events through the lens of the primary aggressor, the evaluation of deterrence effectiveness considers the aggressor's perceptions.

1954 AND 1958 TAIWAN STRAIT CRISES: MOTIVATION, CLARITY, AND CREDIBILITY

Chairman Mao Zedong ruled from the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, until his death in 1976. During his reign, Taiwan was never seen as an important immediate territorial objective for the PRC. Instead, for PRC leadership, the island's importance was derived mainly from the presence of their civil war adversary, who had retreated to Taiwan upon their defeat in 1949. Even as far back as the 1680s, there is evidence of a top Qing Dynasty official noting the austerity of the

¹ Morgan, *Deterrence*, 50-51.

“non-Han barbarians” of Taiwan, stating, “Since antiquity, Taiwan has been beyond the reach of the Sinic civilization.”² Therefore, some scholars suggest, had it not been for Chang Kai-shek and his KMT supporters fleeing to Taiwan at the end of the civil war, the first generation of CCP leaders would not have had any nationalistic attachment to the island.³ Early on during Mao’s reign, the purpose of attacking Taiwan was to strike the final blow to the KMT rather than reuniting an island that was never truly seen as lost in the first place. Thus, before being thwarted by the US Seventh Fleet’s deployment into the Taiwan Strait, the CCP framed their planned invasion of Taiwan in 1950 as a military campaign to “liberate Taiwan” rather than reunite a rogue territory.⁴ The end of the Korean War bears further evidence of Mao’s low motivation to immediately regain Taiwan. Given an opportunity to negotiate for Taiwan during the Korean War armistice, Mao instructed his negotiator to drop the matter at the first indication of firm American objections.⁵

It was only later in 1958 that Mao began to realize the utility of manipulating the rhetoric on Taiwan to achieve his domestic agenda. But even then, scholars argue that Mao had little motivation to reunite Taiwan. As one historian points out, the CCP “continually threatened Taiwan and manipulated the passions of the Chinese people in order to advance the political agenda of the CCP leaders,” but “the island’s conquest was a low priority of Mao.”⁶ Thus the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis was seen mainly as a way for Mao to initiate conflict to distract from the crisis born of the “Hundred Flowers”

² Edward Friedman, “China’s Changing Taiwan Policy,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 14, no.2 (October 2007), 120.

³ Friedman, “China’s Changing Taiwan Policy,” 120.

⁴ He Di, “‘The Last Campaign to Unify China’: The CCP’s Unmaterialized Plan to Liberate Taiwan, 1949-1950,” *Chinese Historians* V, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 1-16.

⁵ Friedman, “China’s Changing Taiwan Policy,” 121.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

fiasco and to garner support for his Great Leap Forward (大跃进) initiative. As Chairman Mao elaborated during the peak of the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis, “Besides its disadvantageous side, a tense [international] situation could mobilize the population, could particularly mobilize the backward people, could mobilize the people in the middle, and could therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction.”⁷ Mao’s perpetual revolution depended on the “struggle against American imperialism” narrative for both legitimacy and to mobilize the masses.⁸ For the duration of his rule, using the lightning-rod issue of Taiwan to invoke a patriotic response to manipulate the domestic political environment became Mao’s go-to *modus operandi*.

While the issue of Taiwan remained a substantial roadblock to furthering US-China relations, the significance of the island never reached the rhetorical heights achieved today. During a meeting with Henry Kissinger on November 12, 1973, Chairman Mao suggested, “I say that we can do without Taiwan for the time being, and let it come to us after one hundred years. Do not take matters on this world so rapidly. Why is there need to be in such great haste? It is only such an island with a population of a dozen or more million.”⁹ Although one could argue that Mao’s statements were characteristic of a patient Chinese negotiation strategy, his apparent indifference is consistent with his long-held proclivity of ranking Taiwan low on his list of strategic priorities.

⁷ Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 77.

⁸ Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 242.

⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Henry Kissinger,” November 12, 1973, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, National Security Adviser Trip Briefing Books and Cables for President Ford, 1974-1976 (Box 19). <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118069>.

In comparison, Mao perceived the US and Taiwanese motivation to deter PRC aggression across the Taiwanese Strait as high, although that was not always the case. Initial Chinese calculations before 1950 estimated correctly that Taiwan ranked low on the list of American priorities.¹⁰ After all, President Truman and Secretary of State Acheson openly excluded Taiwan from the American “Pacific defensive perimeter.”¹¹ However, the PRC leadership failed to understand Taiwan's renewed significance as the Korean War broke out and were caught by surprise when the US Seventh Fleet sailed into the Taiwan Strait.¹² Since then, the US has repeatedly demonstrated its resolve to defend Taiwan, starting with the signing of a US-Taiwan Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) in 1954. Although purposely ambiguous, the US-Taiwan MDT provided a clear mechanism for the American defense of Taiwan's main island.¹³ While Mao used the MDT to foment patriotic feeling domestically, he concluded that “the US-Taiwan defense treaty was defensive in nature, intended to leash rather than unleash Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek].”¹⁴ Mao’s conclusion suggests that he correctly interpreted Washington’s intended deterrence message, but Mao would continue to probe American commitment.

A month after its signing, on January 2, 1955, the PRC attack on the Dachen Islands put the MDT to the test.¹⁵ Steadfast American resolve was evidenced by the near-unanimous passing of the “Formosa Resolution” on January 29, 1955, which authorized

¹⁰ Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 153.

¹¹ He Di, “The Last Campaign to Unify China,” 8.

¹² Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 22-23; and Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 87.

¹³ Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of China; December 2, 1954, TIAS 3178; 6 UST 433-438.

¹⁴ Liu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 167.

¹⁵ The Dachen Islands (大陈群岛), also referred to as Tachen Islands and are a grouping of small islands located off the coast of China, across from Taizhou, approximately 200 miles north of Taiwan.

President Eisenhower to “employ the Armed Forces of the United States as he deemed necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa and the Pescadores against armed attack.”¹⁶ Furthermore, if the PRC had amphibiously attacked the islands of Quemoy (Kinmen) and Matsu, President Eisenhower intended to launch atomic weapons and made sure the Chinese were aware of his decision.¹⁷

Fortunately, the US was able to accomplish its strategic ends without the need for direct armed conflict. After convincing Chang Kai-shek to abandon the indefensible Dachen Islands, the US executed Operation KING KONG, during which a team of Marines evacuated “over 15,000 civilians, 11,000 military, 125 vehicles, 53 tons of materials, 7600 tons of ammunition, and 165 artillery pieces.”¹⁸ To support the evacuation, Washington committed an overwhelming armada of seventy warships, including air support from seven aircraft carriers, and demonstrated clear American resolve to Taiwan’s defense.¹⁹ The strong deterrent message was clear and understood by the PRC leadership, allowing the American operation to conclude successfully with zero casualties.²⁰

During the subsequent Taiwan Crisis, commencing with PLA shelling of Quemoy on August 23, 1958, the US and Taiwan again demonstrated their resolve. By committing nearly one-third of his entire combat-capable forces to defend Quemoy and

¹⁶ Joint Resolution Authorizing the President to employ the Armed Forces of the United States for protecting the security of Formosa, the Pescadores and related positions and territories of that area, Pub. L. No. 4 § 69 Stat. 7 (1955). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-69/pdf/STATUTE-69-Pg7.pdf>

¹⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 168.

¹⁸ Elleman, *High Seas Buffer*, 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

Matsu Island, Chiang Kai-Shek locked in his commitment to the islands' defense.²¹ In deploying an irrational portion of his best military forces to the offshore islands, Chiang also guaranteed US support via stipulations in the Formosa Resolution instructing the President to secure and protect all friendly-held territories.²² Although the US went to great lengths to avoid direct US-China conflict, the American military show-of-force and support was overwhelming. The deployment of seven aircraft carrier groups positioned around Taiwan was a clear signal of American credibility.²³

Additionally, Washington armed the Nationalist F-86s fighter aircraft with advanced AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles, giving the Republic of China Air Force (ROCAF) air superiority capabilities that allowed them to down ten MiGs in a single air battle without a loss.²⁴ However, the most strategically significant message sent to the PRC was the publicized deployment of several eight-inch howitzers on Quemoy, with the capability of firing nuclear shells.²⁵ Taken together with the nuclear-capable Matador surface-to-surface missiles deployed to Taiwan the year prior and the 144 atomic capable aircraft and missiles within striking range, the PRC clearly understood Washington's resoluteness in using nuclear weapons to counter the PLA's numerical superiority.²⁶

²¹ Morton H. Halperin, *The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis: A Documented History*, RM-4900-ISA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1966) https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4900.html.

²² Joint Resolution Authorizing the President to employ the Armed Forces of the United States for protecting the security of Formosa, the Pescadores and related positions and territories of that area.”; and Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 43.

²³ Elleman, *High Seas Buffer*, 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁶ Melvin Gurtov, “The Taiwan Strait Crisis Revisited: Politics and Foreign Policy in Chinese Motives,” *Modern China* 2, no. 1 (January 1976), 68; and Morton H. Halperin, *The 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis: A Documented History* RM-4900-ISA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1966), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4900.html.

At the same time, it was important to Washington that the PRC leadership understood that the threat of nuclear strike was to deter an invasion of Taiwan and the Taiwanese-controlled offshore islands.²⁷ On October 23, 1958, Washington and Taipei released a Joint Communiqué, clarifying that “under the present conditions the defense of the Quemoy, together with the Matsus, is closely related to the defense of Taiwan,” and covered by the MDT.²⁸ With a clear understanding of America’s commitment, Premier Zhou Enlai rationalized, “The United States knows that we are not preparing to do battle with it . . . we do not even intend to liberate Taiwan in the near future.”²⁹ Zhou’s carefully chosen words indicate the PRC leadership clearly understood Washington’s motivation, deterrence, and credibility.

While there is little question of the credibility of US forces, the credibility of the Taiwanese forces at the time should not be overlooked. After World War II, the US had continued to support the Nationalist forces, still fighting a civil war, to the tune of over \$2 billion, including the transfer of 131 naval vessels.³⁰ The aid added to the \$1.395 billion worth of goods the US provided to the KMT during World War II via the Lend-Lease and other assistance programs in the form of trucks, oil, tanks, artillery, aircraft, and armament to equip thirty-nine divisions and eight air force wings.³¹ Through the 1950s, the US provided an additional \$2.5 billion in military aid while at the same time, Chiang

²⁷ Appu K. Soman, “‘Who’s Daddy’ in the Taiwan Strait? The Offshore Island Crisis of 1958,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1994), 398.

²⁸ “Joint Communiqué,” US Department of State Office of the Historian, accessed November 7, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v19/d209>.

²⁹ Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 235.

³⁰ William H. Mott IV, *Military Assistance: An Operational Perspective*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 140.

³¹ William H. Mott IV, *Military Assistance: An Operational Perspective*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 122-126.

expended between nine and eleven percent of Taiwan's GNP on defense.³² At its high watermark, Taiwan's defense spending consumed eighty-five percent of the total annual budget.³³ Although unlikely to defend against a full-on PLA attack on the offshore islands, the massive US aid and expenditures built Taiwan a military that was arguably capable of fending off any realistic amphibious assault of the main island that the PLA could muster. Scholars note that the PLA lacked critical airlift and sealift capacity in any quantity that would make a successful amphibious assault on Taiwan even remotely feasible.³⁴

Regardless of the logistical realities, the maturing ROC Air Force (ROCAF) would have made the 100-mile journey a treacherous one for any invasion force. In 1951, Washington established the Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) Taiwan. By 1954 the US was supplying the ROCAF with their first jet fighters to replace the obsolete piston-driven P-47s vastly outmatched by the PRC's Russian MiG-15s.³⁵ By 1958, of the 826 aircraft in the ROCAF inventory, an astounding 450 were jet fighters.³⁶ Although not enough to match one-for-one against the total PLA inventory of 1,785 jets fighters, the ROCAF maintained cross-strait superiority against the region's 200 fighters

³² Min-Hua Chiang, "The U.S. Aid and Taiwan's Post-War Economic Development, 1951-1965," *African and Asian Studies* 13, no. 1/2 (January 2014), 107.

³³ Chiang, "The U.S. Aid and Taiwan's Post-War Economic Development, 1951-1965," 107.

³⁴ Earl C. Ravenal, "Approaching China, Defending Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs* 50, no. 1 (October 1971), 51. Ravenal notes, "The communists can airlift only 5,000 troops, and have amphibious vessels for only 30,000 in the first, or assault, wave. There is, of course the legendary 'junk threat;' Red China could, in theory, assemble enough local shipping to carry 350,000 troops across the 100-mile Strait. But even these troops would not be assured of landing. In such attacks the advantage is with the defender by a ratio of 3:1, and there are 320,000 nationalist army troops and 36,000 marines on Taiwan. In addition, the nationalist air force and navy could inflict serious losses on an invading force, both during its staging and its deployment."

³⁵ Eric Stezekorn, "Eisenhower's Mutual Security Program: Taiwan as a 'Strategic Bargain'," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 23, no. 1 (March 2016), 49.

³⁶ Halperin, *The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis*.

maintained in the Fujian Province.³⁷ Factor in the might of the American naval, air, and strategic nuclear forces and the PRC understood they had little chance of conducting a successful Taiwan invasion.³⁸

In summary, during the two Taiwan Strait Crises, the evidence indicates that PRC leadership, Chairman Mao in particular, was deterred from mounting an attack on Taiwan's main island. While general deterrence of a PRC attack on the offshore islands failed, immediate deterrence of an amphibious assault on Taiwan—Washington's primary objective—proved successful. Mao's low prioritization of "liberating" Taiwan meant that the PRC's absolute motivation was lacking in the face of overwhelming opposition from the US. The conditions provided a fertile environment for effective deterrence. In a conversation with Henry Kissinger in 1975, Mao admitted, "If you were to send [Taiwan] back to me now, I would not want it, because it's not wantable [*sic*]. There are a huge bunch of counterrevolutionaries there."³⁹

Public and Politburo communications suggest that Mao and the PRC leadership clearly understood the specific actions the US was trying to deter as well as the promise of military force, to include tactical nuclear weapons, which the US was willing to commit. While initial miscalculations led to the breakdown of general deterrence for the offshore islands, decisive military response reinforced the credibility of US and ROC

³⁷ Jacob Van Staaveren, *Air Operations in the Taiwan Crisis of 1958* (Washington DC: USAF Historical Division Liaison Office, 1962), <https://nautilus.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Air-Operations-in-the-Taiwan-Crisis-of-1958.pdf>; and Halperin, *The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis*.

³⁸ Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 187.

³⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Henry A. Kissinger," October 21, 1975, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, National Security Adviser Trip Briefing Books and Cables for President Ford, 1974-1976 (Box 19). <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118072>.

military power and paved the way for successful immediate deterrence of an attack on Taiwan.

1995 TAIWAN STRAIT CRISIS: MOTIVATION, CLARITY, AND CREDIBILITY

Much had changed since the end of the second Taiwan Strait crisis in 1958. In 1969, seeing a window of opportunity to widen the Sino-Soviet split, the Nixon Administration chose a new strategy of rapprochement with the PRC. As relations with Beijing thawed, Washington took measures to signal a willingness to cooperate in good faith. For example, the US unilaterally reduced the deployment of the Taiwan Patrol Force—a permanent fleet in charge of neutralizing the Taiwan Strait since 1950—to an intermittent basis before completely ending its mission in 1979.⁴⁰ To decrease tensions further, Congress repealed the Formosa Resolution in 1974, and the President ordered the removal of all nuclear weapons from Taiwan.⁴¹ With the conclusion of the Vietnam War in 1975, Washington began to reduce its military footprint in Taiwan from a peak of 30,000 military members. When Washington shifted formal recognition of the Chinese government from Taipei to Beijing, completing Sino-US rapprochement in 1979, the termination of the US-Taiwan Mutual Defense Treaty a year later marked the end of the MAAG Taiwan mission and the permanent presence of US military forces on the island.⁴²

⁴⁰ Elleman, *High Seas Buffer*, 139-140.

⁴¹ CJCS, “Changes in US Force Levels in Taiwan,” (official execution message, Washington DC: Department of Defense, 1974), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/news/19991020/02-01.htm>; and State Department/USIA Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1975, Pub. L. No. 93-475 § 88 Stat. 1439 (1974). <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/93/475.pdf>.

⁴² Seth Robson, “US military history on Taiwan rooted in confrontation with China,” *Stars and Stripes*, December 18, 2016, <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-military-history-on-taiwan-rooted-in-confrontation-with-china-1.445146>.

The redeployment of US forces from Taiwan meant removing the “tripwire” automation mechanism and a reduction in America’s deterrence credibility. The removal of nuclear forces from Taiwan, however, did not signify a significant loss in nuclear deterrence since technological advances in both range and precision provided a survivable global strike capability. But with the PRC’s successful nuclear bomb test on October 16, 1964, and the growth of the PRC’s inventory to an estimated 234 nuclear warheads by 1995, the nuclear option became even more untenable.⁴³ US deterrent credibility did receive an enormous boost from the dramatic display of American military might during Desert Storm, which was broadcast live by CNN to a shocked PRC and PLA leadership. The technological advancement of the US military, created by the steady implementation of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) doctrine during the Reagan Era, enabled the US-led coalition to decimate the relatively modern Iraqi army within 100 hours. “China’s High command was stunned to realize just how far behind modern militaries the People’s Liberation Army had fallen,” and the realization played a significant role in the minds of decision-makers as they confronted a much deadlier American military than imagined.⁴⁴

The softening US military posture was not only the price for improving relations with Beijing and the overall reduction of tension in the Asia-Pacific but also a consequence of frenetic worldwide diplomatic and economic transformation. But the post-rapprochement upward trajectory of US-China relations took a nosedive after the June 4, 1989, Tiananmen Square Incident. President George H.W. Bush suspended all

⁴³ Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories, 1945-2013,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 69, no. 5, (2013), 78.

⁴⁴ David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 1-3.

military activities and arms sales under the Foreign Military Sales program.⁴⁵ The real damage of the Tiananmen Square Incident would be to taint the image of China both in Congress and in the minds of an entire generation of American people. Along with the collapse of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991, went some of the justification for closer US-China ties as a balance against a diminishing Soviet threat. The Tiananmen Square incident further politicized US-China relations. The loss of a cooperative incentive, derived from a shared enemy, meant that deterrence communication would become further complicated and more difficult to trust.

Juxtaposed against the sheer brutality of the Tiananmen Square incident, the political reforms on Taiwan after the death of Chiang Kai-shek led to the transformation from “soft authoritarianism” to liberal democracy at all levels of governance by August 1994.⁴⁶ “For the United States, Taiwan’s evolution from a hardcore anti-Communist authoritarian state to a liberal democracy gave the island a much stronger purchase on American sympathy and support, and raised the cost to American politicians of turning their backs on the island.”⁴⁷ At the same time, Taiwan’s societal expectations now shifted

⁴⁵ Kevin Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management: Assessing the Military-to-Military Relationship*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004), 14, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG143.html>; James Mann, *About Face: A History of America’s Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 141-142. Mann states, “Over the next-decade, China acquired a series of American weapons systems. It paid \$22 million for American help in modernizing its factories to produce artillery ammunition and projectiles. China spent an additional \$8 million for American torpedoes, \$62 million for artillery-locating radar and more than \$500 million for American help modernizing its jet fighters...China also entered into several commercial transactions, in which it bought American hardware directly from U.S. defense firms. The most notable of these was the purchase of 24 Sikorsky S-70C helicopters from United Technologies Corp.”

⁴⁶ John W. Garver, *Face Off: China, the United States and Taiwan’s Democratization*, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 22.

⁴⁷ Richard Bush and Shelley Rigger, *The Taiwan Issue and Normalization of US-China Relations* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Taiwan-Issue-and-the-Normalization-of-US-China-Relations-Bush-Rigger1.pdf>

from national unification to prioritizing Taiwan's autonomy and participation within international organizations.⁴⁸

In large part, the shift in Taiwan's governance and priorities, precipitated the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis. During Chiang Kai-Shek's rule, it was illegal to form political parties and advocate for Taiwan's Independence, but reforms in 1987 allowed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to establish itself based on a platform promoting Taiwanese Independence.⁴⁹ In the run-up to Taiwan's first-ever democratic presidential elections in 1996, sitting president and KMT candidate Lee Teng-hui was granted a US visa to give a speech at his alma mater Cornell University. During the speech, he declared that "communism was dead or dying" and promoted Taiwan as a "comprehensive model for democracy" of the "Chinese nation."⁵⁰

Beijing reacted harshly to Lee Teng-hui for three reasons. First, the US departed from the status quo of denying Taiwanese leaders entry visas. Second, Lee's speech confirmed the growing sentiment amongst the PRC leadership that a democratic Taiwan would ultimately desire an independent Taiwan. And third, combined with lingering PRC allegations of America's role in the Tiananmen Square incident, Lee's visit to the US seemed to confirm Beijing's increasing suspicions of a coordinated effort by

⁴⁸ Bush and Rigger, *The Taiwan Issue and Normalization of US-China Relations*; and Stephen Uhalley Jr., "Taiwan's Response to the Cultural Revolution," *Asian Survey* 7, no. 11 (November 1967), 824. During the New Year's Day message in 1967, Chiang Kai-shek admits, "political action is a more effective facet of the war at this stage."

⁴⁹ Paul H.B. Godwin and Alice L. Miller, *China's Forbearance Has Limits: Chinese Threat and Retaliation Signaling and Its Implications for a Sino-American Military Confrontation*, Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs Institute for National Strategic Studies China Strategic Perspective, No. 6 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2013), 38, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-6.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Lee Teng-hui, "President Lee Tenghui Cornell Commencement Address," East Asia Peace & Security Initiative, June 9, 1995, https://www.eapasi.com/uploads/5/5/8/6/55860615/appendix_80_-_president_lee_tenghui_cornell_commencement_address.pdf.

Washington to foment domestic unrest for the ultimate goal of toppling the communist regime in China.⁵¹ Mutual distrust began to fill the void of bilateral discourse, which initially made deterrence communication unreliable.⁵²

Beijing decided to communicate their displeasure by conducting an underground nuclear bomb test on May 16, 1995, and through a series of provocative missile tests starting on July 21, 1995, with the launch of six CSS-6/M-9 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) into the waters approximately 90 miles north of Taiwan.⁵³ Yet, the manner of the PLA advanced messaging of the exercises signaled caution. Before the SRBM firing on July 21 and subsequent missile tests and military exercises on August 15, August 18, and March 1996, the PLA provided sufficient advance notice to reduce miscalculation and avoid escalation.⁵⁴ In response to the proactive missile test inching closer to Taiwan, the US sailed the Nimitz carrier battle group through the Taiwan Strait on December 19, 1995. Although the Navy used poor weather east of Taiwan as a reason for the route selection, scholars agree that the Nimitz “sent a sharp signal to Beijing to not interfere in Taiwan’s domestic politics.”⁵⁵

During the time of crisis, both sides sent public and private messages of deterrence. In an attempt to muzzle escalation, a high-level PRC official was reported to

⁵¹ Nicholas D. Kristof, “Better relations Depend on U.S., Deng Tells Nixon,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1989. <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/01/world/better-relations-depend-on-us-deng-tells-nixon.html>. The article has Deng Xiaoping, referring to the Tiananmen Square incident, stating, “Frankly speaking, the US was involved too deeply in the turmoil and counterrevolutionary rebellion that occurred in Beijing not long ago.”

⁵² Barton Gellman, “U.S. and China Nearly Came to Blows in ‘96,” *Washington Post*, June 21, 1998, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/06/21/us-and-china-nearly-came-to-blows-in-96/926d105f-1fd8-404c-9995-90984f86a613/>.

⁵³ “Chinese Conduct Nuclear Bomb Test,” *New York Times*, May 16, 1995, Section A, Page 13, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/16/world/chinese-conduct-nuclear-bomb-test.html>; and Douglas Porch, “The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996,” *Naval War College Review* 52, no. 3 (Summer 1999), 19.

⁵⁴ Porch, “The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996,” 19.

⁵⁵ Bruce A. Elleman, *Taiwan Straits: Crisis in Asia and the Role of the U.S. Navy* (New York: Roman & Littlefield, 2015), 130.

have placed a secret call to President Lee Teng-hui's top aide, Tseng Yung-hsien, providing advance notice of missile tests and instructing Taiwan not to "panic."⁵⁶ The tipoff's secrecy suggests that while the PRC desired to influence the Taiwanese people to elect a less pro-independence candidate, they did not seek a direct military conflict across the strait. In a secret letter to PRC leader Jiang Zemin in August 1995, Clinton clarified the US position in his "Three No's" statement avowing the US would (1) 'oppose' Taiwan independence; (2) not support 'two Chinas' or one China and one Taiwan; and (3) not support Taiwan's admission to the United Nations.⁵⁷ The newly-refined "Three Noes" signified the first time that the dual deterrence aspect of Washington's policy of strategic Ambiguity rose in significance as the threat of Taiwan's unilateral declaration of independence destabilizing the tenuous peace became a real possibility.

When the March 8, 1996 missile tests began landing within twenty miles of Taiwan, Secretary of Defense William Perry, Secretary of State Christopher Warren, and National Security Advisor Anthony Lake met with China's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Liu Huaqiu "to deliver a crystal-clear. . .strong and unambiguous message" to cease the provocative military actions.⁵⁸ When the warning was not heeded, with the Chinese announcing further missile tests in March, President Clinton deployed the USS Independence, USS George Washington, and USS Nimitz carrier battle groups to Taiwan in the most massive demonstration of US naval power in the region since 1950.⁵⁹ US

⁵⁶ "A secret phone call assured Taiwan President Lee of safety during Third Taiwan Strait Crisis: report." *Taiwan News*, April 3, 2019, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A581033168/STND?u=wash60683&sid=STND&xid=aed2e926>.

⁵⁷ Shirley A. Kan, *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the "One China" Policy - Key Statements from Washington, Beijing and Taipei*, CRS Report No. RL30341 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 11, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30341.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Porch, "The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996," 20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

congressional support was also unambiguous with the near-unanimous passage of a resolution condemning the missile tests and military exercises.⁶⁰ While some PRC military exercises continued in the presence of the American armada, tensions quickly abated after the conclusion of the Taiwanese elections on March 24, 1996, where Lee Teng-hui won in a landslide victory.

While some argue that the increased credibility of deploying US forces was yet another example of successful deterrence against PRC aggression, others suggest that an attack on Taiwan was never really the PRC's intent in the first place. Instead, the PRC hoped that the use of military coercion against Taiwan would “create a political crisis *without* bringing in the United States [emphasis added].”⁶¹ Adding credence to this conclusion was the fact that when the election concluded, so did the PRC's coercive military exercises. While some excitable PLA leadership wagered that the US would not intervene because American leaders “cared more about Los Angeles than they do about Taiwan,” their statements held little weight when compared to Jiang's policy expressed in the PRC's 1993 White Paper on Taiwan in which he states: “We shall work steadfastly for the great cause, adhering to the principles of peaceful reunification and ‘one country, two systems.’”⁶² The PRC's willingness to reopen critical lines of communication and

⁶⁰ A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress regarding missile tests and military exercises by the People's Republic of China, H. Con. Res. 148, 104th Cong, 1st sess. (March 21, 1996), <https://www.congress.gov/104/bills/hconres/148/BILLS-104hconres148eas.pdf>.

⁶¹ Arthur Waldron, “Back to Basics: The U.S. Perspective on Taiwan-PRC Relations,” in *Crisis in the Taiwan Strait*, ed. James R. Lilley and Chuck Downs (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997), 334.

⁶² Barton Gilman, “U.S. and China Nearly Came to Blows in '96,” *Washington Post*, June 21, 1998, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/06/21/us-and-china-nearly-came-to-blows-in-96/926d105f-1fd8-404c-9995-90984f86a613/>; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China*, (Beijing, China: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 1993), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ljzg_665465/3568_665529/t17792.shtml.

engage in clear signaling was instrumental in cutting through the rhetoric emanating from all sides.⁶³

Details from a book titled, *Can China's Armed Forces Win the Next War?* written by the PLA and meant only for internal distribution, provide an unfiltered peek behind the curtain of PLA perceptions and decision-making logic.⁶⁴ Discovered on accident by a foreign diplomat and authenticated by the Foreign Policy Research Institute in 1994, the book reveals the PLA's clear understanding of the US positions. The book also revealed that the PLA clearly believed that "the U.S. Armed Forces would enter the conflict and fight alongside Taiwan," concluding that "the use of force would be a really unwise decision" in attempting to unify with Taiwan.⁶⁵ The evidence seems to suggest that the PRC leadership, assumed to have also read the book, would have assessed that an invasion of Taiwan was futile and would never have made it a part of their plan in the first place.

Diplomatic and military were not the only instruments of national power to experience tremendous change. The immense economic development in the decades leading up to 1995 kept pace with the rapid growth in the international environment. With Deng Xiaoping at the helm, and later with Jiang Zemin, military conflict and continuous internal revolution took a back seat to the PRC's overwhelming priority of economic development.⁶⁶ During Deng's time, one scholar ranked Taiwan's "liberation"

⁶³ Gary Klintworth, *Crisis Management: China, Taiwan and the United States—the 1995-96 Crisis and its Aftermath*, Research Paper No. 14 1996-97 (Australia: Information and Research Services, 1997), https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/EOC30/upload_binary/EOC30.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=%221990s%201997%20publications%22.

⁶⁴ Ross H. Munro, "Eavesdropping on the Chinese Military: Where It Expects War—Where it doesn't," *Orbis* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1994), 355-373.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁶⁶ Barry Naughton, "Deng Xiaoping: The Economist," *The China Quarterly*, no. 135, (September 1993), 502.

as the PRC's seventh out of seven priorities, with the first and second priority being "Soviet pressure" and "economic development/modernization," respectively.⁶⁷ The prioritization demonstrated itself in practice when Deng overruled his Ministry of Foreign Affairs' proposal to retaliate over President George H. W. Bush's sale of 150 F-16 fighters to the ROC in 1992.⁶⁸ As for Jiang Zemin, he convinced the PLA leadership that "if China has two more decades of peaceful development, both its comprehensive national strength and the PLA's high-tech inventory will decisively alter the balance of power between the mainland and Taiwan in the mainland's favor."⁶⁹ Thus, the low prioritization of the Taiwan issue and the primacy of economic development meant that the PRC's motivation to "liberate" Taiwan remained low, especially under the threat of inevitable international backlash, guaranteed to devastate the PRC's nascent economy.

The Chinese economy grew exponentially after the US lifted its trade embargo in 1972 and US-China bilateral trade grew from nothing in 1958 to \$60.5 billion by 1995.⁷⁰ Thus the promise of increased economic development replaced cooperation against a common enemy as the carrot of deterrence.

Economic growth became a priority for the Taiwanese as well. By 1965, Taiwan had weaned itself off American financial aid and developed the makings of a vibrant

⁶⁷ King C. Chen, "Peking's Attitude toward Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 17, no. 10 (October 1977), 915.

⁶⁸ Ning Lu, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 160.

⁶⁹ You Ji, "The Supreme Leader and the Military," in *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang*, ed. Jonathan Unger (New York: Taylor & Francis 2015), 292.

⁷⁰ Xin-zhu J. Chen, "China and the US Trade Embargo, 1950-1972," *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 13, no. 2 (October 2006), 169; and "World Integrated Trade Solution," World Trade Organization, November 8, 2020, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/USA/Year/1995/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>.

economy.⁷¹ As one of the “Four Asian Tigers,” Taiwan’s economy grew at a blistering pace, averaging over nine percent annual GDP growth between 1968 and 1995, amassing \$49.2 billion in bilateral trade with the US.⁷² But more importantly, Taiwan’s economic investment into China, especially during the post-Tiananmen era of international economic sanctions, helped a struggling PRC economy and began to illuminate a path to a viable *modus vivendi*.⁷³ Taiwan established the private Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) on March 9, 1991.⁷⁴ In kind, the PRC established the unofficial organization Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) on December 6, 1991, to explore options for economic cooperation.⁷⁵ On April 29, 1993, the two sides were able to table political differences and make agreements to “establish a channel for liaison and negotiation to resolve problems evolving from cross-straits private exchanges, and to bolster economic, cultural, and technological interaction,” thus growing the PRC’s economic deterrence carrot.”⁷⁶

The 1995 Taiwan Strait crisis ended with the successful deterrence of the PRC against a forced unification of Taiwan, even in the face of a rapidly changing international environment. US deterrence motivation and credibility decreased with the withdrawal of “tripwire” forces stationed on Taiwan. With China’s modernizing military capabilities, especially in nuclear weapons and missile technology, the PLA began to

⁷¹ Chiang, “The U.S. Aid and Taiwan’s Post-War Economic Development, 1951-1965,” 108.

⁷² “World Integrated Trade Solution,” World Trade Organization, November 8, 2020, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/USA/Year/1995/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>.

⁷³ Friedman, “China’s Changing Taiwan Policy,” 124.

⁷⁴ Hungdah Chiu, “Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARTS) (Established in the People’s Republic of China) – Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) (Established in the Republic of China): Agreements Concerning Cross-Strait Activities,” *International Legal Materials* 32, no. 5 (September 1993), 1217.

⁷⁵ Chiu, “ARTS – SEF: Agreements Concerning Cross-Strait Activities,” 1217.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1217.

close the gap against the American and Taiwanese military capabilities across the strait. However, as Richard Lebow asserts, “Wars rarely start because one side believes that it has a military advantage. They occur when leaders become convinced that force is necessary to achieve important goals.”⁷⁷ In this case, the PRC’s prioritization of economic development over military “liberation” of Taiwan meant that the “important goals” were economic growth and could only be achieved peacefully. To do otherwise would risk being ostracized by the international community upon which Chinese economic growth depended.

A shift of Chinese perceptions of Washington’s meddling also began to take place as one scholar posits: “Beijing increasingly counts on the United States to restrain Taiwan’s separatist tendencies. While still harboring some lingering suspicions, Beijing leaders—through witnessing Washington’s preventive diplomacy and crisis management—have become increasingly convinced that the U.S. is not disingenuous about its pledge of “not supporting Taiwan independence.”⁷⁸ Even with two decades of military modernization, PLA and PRC leadership still perceived the military option untenable. Thus, combined with the low motivation and clear deterrence communications emanating from both the American legislative and executive branches, deterrence was ultimately effective.

⁷⁷ Richard Ned Lebow, “Misconceptions in American Strategic Assessment,” *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (Summer 1982), 197.

⁷⁸ Yun-han Chu, “Taiwan’s National Identity Politics and the Prospect of Cross-Strait Relations,” *Asian Survey* 44, no. 4 (July/August 2004), 494.

MODERN ERA: HAS MOTIVATION, CLARITY, AND CREDIBILITY CHANGED?

Motivation has fluctuated tremendously over the years. In the early 1950s, Mao needed to conquer Taiwan to end the civil war and eliminate any future possibility of KMT's reemergence as an existential threat to the CCP legitimacy.⁷⁹ But neither motivation nor the clarity of communication could have changed the fact the PLA simply lacked the military capacity to execute a successful amphibious attack. The PLA's October 25, 1949 attempt to assault the tiny island of Quemoy, a mere 6 miles off the coast of Xiamen, ended in disaster with the annihilation of three PLA regiments—9,086 soldiers—and 350 fishermen whose boats had been commandeered for the assault.⁸⁰ In comparison, as far as the PLA was concerned in 1954 and 1958, Taiwan, located 90 miles off the coast, might as well have been on Mars. Begging the question, is it fair to classify US action in the Taiwan Strait Crises of 1954 and 1958 as deterrence? After all, can an enemy be deterred from doing something they are incapable of doing? The answer to this question may force a reexamination of whether or not the much-touted “longevity” of Washington's policy of strategic ambiguity is a sham.

Until the Korean War began in June 1950, Taiwan didn't even register on Washington's list of top priorities. In fact, Secretary of State Dean Acheson was ready to cut all ties with the KMT whom he characterized as “incompetent and deceitful” for the prospects of improving relations with China's new government.⁸¹ However, when the Chinese People's Volunteer Army streamed across the Yalu River in October 1950,

⁷⁹ He Di, “The Last Campaign to Unify China”: The CCP's Unmaterialized Plan to Liberate Taiwan, 1949-1950,” *Chinese Historians* 5, no. 1 (1992), 2.

⁸⁰ Maochun Miles Yu, “The Battle of Quemoy: The Amphibious Assault that Held the Postwar Military Balance in the Taiwan Strait,” *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2016), 93.

⁸¹ Steven M. Goldstein, *The United States and the Republic of China, 1949-1978: Suspicious Allies* (Stanford, California: Institute for International Studies, 2000), 6.

Taiwan regained significance for American strategists. For Washington hard-liners, “unleashing” Chiang Kai-shek was an opportunity to open up another front against China without committing more US forces, which is precisely what President Eisenhower did on February 2, 1953.⁸² And he would do so with popular American support, with more than sixty-one percent of Americans supporting Chiang by providing more ships and aircraft for attacking the PRC.⁸³ After the Korean War armistice, during the 1954 and 1958 Taiwan Strait crises, opposing the PRC became a part of Eisenhower’s communist containment strategy but remained low on the list of American strategic priorities for the duration of his administration.

By 1995, Chinese motivation to unite Taiwan by force had decreased from the existentially-driven levels of the early 1950s into something for which the PRC leadership was willing to wait. The prioritization of economic growth and prosperity meant that while the PRC would violently message opposition to any change in the status quo, such as any movement towards Taiwan’s independence, the direct military option remained an option of last resort. While having the military capabilities to successfully invade Taiwan’s offshore islands and strike Taiwan with ballistic missiles in 1995, the PLA still lacked the logistical capacity to mount a successful amphibious assault. The logistical realities were especially true when blocked by two carrier battle groups with one more on the way.

Similar to questions raised concerning the 1954 and 1958 Taiwan Strait crises, experts debate whether the US really deterred a PRC invasion during the 1995 Taiwan Strait crisis. China expert Andrew Scobell frames the crisis as a case of PRC coercive

⁸² Elleman, *High Seas Buffer*, 60.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 60.

diplomacy to counter the Taiwanese democracy-driven independence movement in the form of “an elaborately orchestrated and scripted Chinese opera” in line with China’s strategic preference “to avoid actual combat and use dramatic theatrical displays to overawe the enemy.”⁸⁴ American and Taiwanese military assessments seem to support the conclusion as well. After a quick review of the PLA’s actions and committed forces, both the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John M. Shalikashvili, and the ROC Ministry of National Defense confidently ruled out the possibility the PLA was mounting an amphibious invasion of Taiwan.⁸⁵ While it is almost impossible to prove the negative, the seemingly successful case of American deterrence in 1995 may prove to be a false interpretation based on a faulty assumption of PRC intent.

As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. Some scholars suggest that American actions taken during the 1995 Taiwan Strait crisis removed any pretense of ambiguity from Washington’s Taiwan Strait policy in the eyes of PRC leadership. Quoting PRC officials, one scholar notes, “Chinese leaders believe that the deployment of the two carrier groups increased the U.S. commitment to defend Taiwan, tying U.S. credibility to Taiwan’s security. They are now convinced that mainland-Taiwan conflict will compel the United States to intervene.”⁸⁶ The conclusion is also supported by Congressional Resolution 148, passed on March 21, 1996, stating, “The United States is committed to military stability in the Taiwan Strait and the United States should assist in

⁸⁴ Andrew Scobell, “Show of Force: Chinese Soldiers, Statesmen, and the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis,” *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 233.

⁸⁵ Gellman, “U.S. and China Nearly Came to Blows In ’96.”

⁸⁶ Ross, “The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation,” 120.

defending the Republic of China (also known as Taiwan) in the event of invasion, missile attack, or blockade by the People's Republic of China.”⁸⁷

While the menace of US military technological and operational superiority may have deterred PLA aggression and altered PRC leadership behavior, it also provided motivation to improve Chinese military capabilities. Some scholars posit, “PLA generals have vested interests in flexing military muscles in order to get more budgetary allocations” and have done so to great success.⁸⁸ The PLA military budget in 1994 was estimated to be a paltry \$6.1 billion, more than fifty percent smaller than Taiwan's defense budget of \$9.8 billion and just over two percent of the US defense budget of nearly \$255 billion.⁸⁹ However, in 2020, the PLA's opaque military budget ballooned to \$178.6 billion, with some estimates exceeding \$260 billion, closing the gap from two percent to twenty-four percent of the US defense budget and towering over Taiwan's minuscule budget of \$15.24 billion.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress regarding missile tests and military exercises by the People's Republic of China, H. Con. Res. 148, 104th Cong., 2d sess. (March 21, 1996), Affirming the United States commitment to Taiwan, H. Con. Res. 301, 105th Cong., 2d sess. (July 21, 1998), <https://www.congress.gov/104/bills/hconres/148/BILLS-104hconres148eas.pdf>.

⁸⁸ You Ji, “Making Sense of War Games in the Taiwan Strait,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 6, no. 15 (1997), 295.

⁸⁹ Richard A. Bitzinger and Chong-Pin Lin, *The Defense Budget of the People's Republic of China*, (Washington, DC: Defense Budget Project, 1994), 2, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a338621.pdf>; and Craig Murray and Kyle Churchman, *Taiwan's Declining Defense Spending Could Jeopardize Military Preparedness*, (Washington, DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2013), 2, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Taiwan%E2%80%99s%20Declining%20Defense%20Spending%20Could%20Jeopardize%20Military%20Preparedness_Staff%20Research%20Backgrounder.pdf; and Office of the Department of Defense Comptroller, *National Defense Budget Estimates – FY 1994*, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1994), https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Selected_Acquisition_Reports/NationalDefenseBudgetEstimatesFY1994_May1993.pdf.

⁹⁰ Joe Gould, “Pentagon finally gets its 2020 budget from Congress,” *Defense News*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2019/12/19/pentagon-finally-gets-its-2020-budget-from-congress/>; and Bonnie S. Glaser and Matthew P. Funaiolo, “Breaking Down China's 2020 Defense Budget,” *CSIS*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/breaking-down-chinas-2020-defense-budget#:~:text=Chinese%20officials%20revealed%20on%20Friday,7.2%20percent%20and%208.1%20percent;andDavidBrunnstrom,“U.S.saysTaiwanmilitarybudgetboostinsufficientfor‘resilientdefense’,”>

The increase in the PRC's defense budget has equipped what the US has defined as China's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy. The A2/AD strategy was formulated soon after the 1995 Taiwan Strait crisis to "develop the capabilities that avoid impotence in the face of American naval—and particularly carrier—deployments in China's nearby waters."⁹¹ With massive investments, especially in anti-satellite capabilities, ballistic missile technology, and cyber warfare capabilities, China's modernized military has successfully achieved or exceeded regional military power parity with the US at China's periphery. In 2015, RAND conducted a study comparing the US and Chinese military capabilities in a Taiwan conflict scenario, at seven-year intervals, starting from 1996 and projecting out to 2017. In 1996, the study's results concluded that the US maintained "major advantages" over China in six of nine operational areas, with only one disadvantage in "counterspace operations."⁹² However, with rapid PLA modernization focused on advanced A2/AD capabilities, by 2017, the US no longer held a single "major advantage" in any category, with slight "advantages" in three operational areas but "disadvantages" in two and "approximate parity" in the remaining four operational areas.⁹³ With further PLA advancements in blue water navy capabilities, fifth-generation fighters, hypersonic missiles, artificial intelligence, and drone

Reuters, October 6, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-taiwan-china/u-s-says-taiwan-military-budget-boost-insufficient-for-resilient-defense-idUSKBN26R3SH>.

⁹¹ Christopher P. Twomey, "What's in a Name: Building anti-Access/Area Denial Capabilities without Anti-Access/Area Denial Doctrine," in *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, ed. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Travis Tanner (Washington, DC: The United States Army War College Press, 2014), 131.

⁹² Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996-2017*, RR-392-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 318; and Singer, J. David, and Small, Melvin. Correlates of War Project: International and Civil War Data, 1816-1992. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, November 11, 2020, <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities>. The finding of the Correlates of War Project, according to the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) used to calculate the war-making strength of a nation, indicates that the China overtook the US as early as 1995.

⁹³ Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard*, 318.

technology, it is safe to assume that the situation has become even graver for the US military.

A report from the US Department of Defense confirms the regional military trend of PRC's growing military advantage, stating: "China has already achieved parity with—or even exceeded—the United States in several military modernization areas, including shipbuilding, land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles, and integrated air defense systems."⁹⁴ With Xi Jinping's goal of "complete national defense and military modernization by 2035" and the complete transformation of the PLA into a "world-class military by the middle of the century," regional military power dynamics will most likely continue trending in China's favor.⁹⁵ This negative trend will most likely prove permanent if the US maintains the status quo force posture and fails to innovate and compete both technologically and doctrinally.

The shrinking disparity in military capabilities will erode the credibility of US deterrence policy, but it also raises the probability of escalation—a cost that the PRC must be willing to pay if it decides to take military action across the strait. Rear Admiral Lou Yuan, a PLA policy influencer as the deputy head of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences, fails to consider escalation risk when making his bellicose statements: "What the United States fears the most is taking casualties," Luo stated, before implying that Americans would be too "frightened" to fight after seeing two of their aircraft carriers going down, along with 10,000 crewmembers.⁹⁶ In the same logic that deters the

⁹⁴ Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020*, 38.

⁹⁵ M. Taylor Fravel, "China's "World-Class Military" Ambitions: Origins and Implications," *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2020), 85.

⁹⁶ Jamie Seidel, "Sink two aircraft carriers': Chinese Admiral's chilling recipe to dominate the South China Sea," *News Corp Australia Network*, January 2, 2019,

use of tactical nuclear weapons for fear of triggering a strategic nuclear response, the US is likely to respond violently to the loss of a carrier and its 5,000 sailors, making escalation a foregone conclusion.⁹⁷

The cost of escalation would not only be borne militarily but economically as well. According to a 2016 RAND study, if an isolated conflict triggered an expanded war between the US and China, Chinese military losses would be huge, but the economic losses would be catastrophic when compared to the US. The study estimates that after one year of severe war, Chinese GDP would decline by 25-35 percent compared to a 5-10 percent reduction for the US.⁹⁸ PRC leadership must consider the potential economic damage before determining if an attempt at *fait accompli* is worth the risk of escalation.

The Chinese leadership is aware of the devastating impact that war would have on their developing economy, and they are taking steps to mitigate the risk. It is important to remember, “Coercion, it is argued, is a dynamic process; because the target is not static, it can attempt both to neutralize coercive pressures and coerce the coercer in return.”⁹⁹ While the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can be seen as a way to expand global markets to support their “Made in China 2025” initiative, it is worth noting that much of the “road” passes through nations outside the reach and influence of the United States.¹⁰⁰ For example, China has pledged over \$70 billion to Islamabad to develop the

<https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/military/sink-two-aircraft-carriers-chinese-admirals-chilling-recipe-to-dominate-the-south-china-sea/news-story/aaa8c33d57da62e7d5e28e791aa26e0f>.

⁹⁷ Jeff Schogol, “Why there’s no such thing as ‘tactical’ nuclear weapons,” *Task & Purpose*, September 19, 2020. <https://taskandpurpose.com/pentagon-run-down/no-tactical-nuclear-weapons>.

⁹⁸ David C. Gompert et al., *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable*, RR-1140-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), 47,

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1100/RR1140/RAND_RR1140.pdf.

⁹⁹ Patrick C. Bratton, “When is Coercion Successful?” *Naval War College Review* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2005), 110.

¹⁰⁰ Li Ming Jiang, “The Belt and Road Initiative: Geo-economics and Indo-Pacific Security Competition,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020), 183-184; and Wayne M. Morrison, *The Made in*

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and \$400 billion in investments into Iran's oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors.¹⁰¹ In return, Beijing desires to construct a 2,300-kilometer gas pipeline linking Tehran directly to Urumqi, the capital of China's Xinjiang Province. The overland pipeline will include an agreement to complete all transactions without the US dollar, thus effectively bypassing both the risk of naval blockade and US economic sanctions.¹⁰² As China finds more ways to diversify its economic portfolio, the economic risks of a potential war with the United States will also decrease, and with it, so will the effectiveness of the economic deterrence carrot.

China's risk mitigation measures have expanded beyond the economic realm. In late 2003, China adopted a new strategy called the 'Three Warfares' strategy—psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare.¹⁰³ "Legal warfare refers to a struggle for legal superiority by mobilizing domestic and international law to gain the political initiative and military victory."¹⁰⁴ As an example of legal warfare, China codified the assertion first made in the 2000 White Paper on "The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue" into law with the passing of the Anti-Secession Law on March 15, 2005, which states in Article 8:

In the event that the 'Taiwan independence' secessionist forces should act under any name or by any means to cause the fact of Taiwan's secession from China, or that major incidents entailing Taiwan's secession from China should occur, or that possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted, the state

China 2025 Initiative: Economic Implications for the United States, CRS Report No. IF10964 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019), https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2019-04-12_IF10964_dd395694c899d614c40b1e5d293511731ffd4ae2.pdf.

¹⁰¹ Simon Watkins, "China and Iran Flesh out Strategic Partnership," *Petroleum Economist*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/politics-economics/middle-east/2019/china-and-iran-flesh-out-strategic-partnership>.

¹⁰² Watkins, "China and Iran Flesh out Strategic Partnership."

¹⁰³ Sangkuk Lee, "China's 'Three Warfares': Origins, Applications, and Organizations," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 2 (2014), 199.

¹⁰⁴ Lee, "China's 'Three Warfares,'" 203.

shall employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹⁰⁵

The statute provides the PRC a legal avenue to forcibly resolve the issue of Taiwan at a time of their choosing and legally frames any interference as external forces illegally meddling in internal Chinese matters. Thus, the PRC is finding ways to mitigate risk in the international arena of public opinion while at the same time increasing the strength of their deterrence measure against US support of Taiwan through tying hands.

With the transition from cooperation to great power competition, the US has also increased deterrence credibility by tying the issue of Taiwan to its credibility as an ally and security partner in the Indo-Pacific region. According to the 2018 NDS: “Mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to our strategy, providing a durable asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore the maintenance, protection, and defense of the strategic advantage is a fundamental core national interest. In the Indo-Pacific region, the US enjoys collective defense agreements with six nations—Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand—and comprehensive strategic partnerships with an additional four nations—Singapore, India, Vietnam, and Indonesia.¹⁰⁷ While the importance of alliances has waned during the Trump Administration, the subsequent administrations must do their best to clearly communicate to China the unwavering link between Washington’s support

¹⁰⁵ “White Paper—The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue,” People’s Republic of China, February 21, 2000, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/twwt/White%20Papers/t36705.htm>; and “Anti-Secession Law,” People’s Republic of China, March 15, 2005, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/999999999/t187406.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 8.

¹⁰⁷ William Tow, “The United States’ Regional Alliances and Partnerships,” in *Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2020 : Key Developments and Trends*, ed. Tim Huxley, Lynn Kuok and William Choong (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 2020), 40.

of Taiwan and American credibility in the greater Indo-Pacific region.¹⁰⁸ While this poses the risk of a double-edge sword—where a China armed with this knowledge may see a two-birds-with-one-stone scenario and attack Taiwan as a means to expose weakness in American security alliances—clarifying the strategic importance of Taiwan may bolster deterrence.

Clarity as to the object of deterrence has been surprisingly consistent throughout the years. The Chinese have clearly understood that the US seeks a peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue. In fact, China parrots the sentiment in their 2019 Defense White Paper stating, “China adheres to the principle of ‘peaceful reunification’ and ‘one country, two systems’ for Taiwan.”¹⁰⁹ Even Article 1 and Article 5 of China’s Anti-Secession Law promotes “peaceful reunification” with Taiwan.¹¹⁰ At the same time, China has been very clear about what they consider “red lines” that would trigger the use of force to unify Taiwan.¹¹¹ Listed in the Department of Defense’s 2020 annual report to Congress, of the seven circumstances under which the PRC has historically warned it would intervene with force, five seem the most realistic today: (1) Formal declaration of Taiwan independence; (2) Undefined moves toward Taiwan independence; (3) Indefinite delays in the resumption of cross-Strait dialogue on unification; (4) Foreign intervention in

¹⁰⁸ Tow, “The United States’ Regional Alliances and Partnerships,” 41.

¹⁰⁹ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s National Defense in the New Era* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd., 2019), 3, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2019/china-national-defense-new-era_20190724.pdf.

¹¹⁰ “Anti-Secession Law,” People’s Republic of China.

¹¹¹ For more on China’s “core interests” see: Jinghan Zeng, Yuefan Xiao and Shaun Breslin, “Securing China’s core interests: the state of the debate in china.” *International Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2015): 245-266; and Caitlin Campbell, Ethan Meick, Kimberly Hsu and Craig Murray, *China’s “Core Interests” and the East China Sea* (Washington, DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2013), <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China's%20Core%20Interests%20and%20the%20East%20China%20Sea.pdf>.

Taiwan's internal affairs, and; (5) Foreign forces stationed on Taiwan.¹¹² Their presence in the DOD's document is clear evidence that the US has received China's message.

What the US decides to do with this information will prove crucial in the coming years.

¹¹² Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020: Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2002), 112, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the five essential elements to Washington's strategy of strategic ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait, determined in Chapter II, the scholarly arguments for or against strategy change only involve two elements: dual deterrence and political flexibility. In other words, neither side is arguing to change from the status quo of *de facto* Taiwanese independence, to revise the status of Taiwanese sovereignty, or to advocate for anything other than a peaceful resolution of the issue of Taiwan. Therefore, the first level of analysis will be to determine if the scholarly suggestions for change, discussed in Chapter III, would positively affect Washington's ability to execute dual deterrence or increase political flexibility. In short, the answer is a resounding "no."

Taiwan poses a wicked problem for which there is no simple solution, but Washington's transition from a policy of strategic ambiguity to one of strategic clarity will not fundamentally improve deterrence or resolve the trilateral diplomatic issues. If the past is any indication of the future, the importance of the dual deterrence aspect of also suppressing a Taiwanese independence movement will return to prominence. There is no way to guarantee that Taiwan has forever forsaken its desire to seek *de jure* independence, and discounting the endemic Taiwanese drive could prove perilous. While strategic ambiguity may do nothing to improve the situation, strategic clarity would only remove barriers to conflict, making war more probable.

Besides, the case study analysis suggests that China respects power, not words, so an unambiguous verbal commitment, suggested by pundits, will do little to sway Chinese leadership who are already conducting military planning assuming US intervention. Therefore, clarity in American commitment to Taiwan's defense only serves to handcuff

diplomatic flexibility—the key to successful US-China relations during the turbulent past—with nothing to show in return. Instead, it would be more beneficial to retain maximum diplomatic flexibility with a façade of ambiguity but present the PLA with an operational planning nightmare for which there is no alternative recommendation other than to avoid military conflict across the strait altogether.

Deterrence theory supports the conclusion as well. The history of the US-China-Taiwan crisis, analyzed *vis-à-vis* the key tenets of deterrence theory from Chapter IV, suggests that a simple policy change alone would be insufficient to significantly increase deterrence. The case studies conducted in Chapter V shows that the single most crucial factor for the success of deterrent action—aggressor motivation—is something the US has little to no control over. As for the second key tenet of successful deterrence—clear communication—the case study also shows that the object of deterrence has been well communicated and clearly understood by both sides. While ambiguity does exist in the *threat* of deterrence, this has been to the benefit, not detriment, of the deterrence effect. Chilton and Weaver point out that “Risk-averse decision makers tend to see ambiguity about an enemy’s response as increasing the risk associated with the action they are contemplating, thus such ambiguity tends to enhance deterrence.”¹ For all of their bellicose rhetoric, the history of Chinese leadership’s decisions betray their underlying risk aversion.² The Taiwan Strait crisis case studies are replete with situations demonstrating how Chinese leadership avoided direct armed conflict with the US, and more often than not, chose to deescalate when presented with the opportunity to do so.

¹ Chilton and Weaver, “Waging Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century,” 32.

² Bonnie S. Glaser and Melissa E. Murphy, “Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: The Ongoing Debate,” in *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States*, ed. Carola McGiffert (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), 11.

While other factors may change PRC's risk preference in the future, it may be more effective to stave off this change rather than voluntarily relinquish critical political flexibility.

With a clearly communicated understanding of the object of deterrence, the only remaining variable to affect is credibility. And of the two elements of credibility—capacity and will—actions taken to increase capacity represent the most overt and expeditious way for the US to bolster deterrence credibility. After all, improving the capacity for action not only improves the credibility of deterrence but also enables the US to better handle the conflict in the event deterrence fails. In a way, increasing capacity has the secondary effect of increasing will by “sinking costs” and signaling commitment to the deterrence effort. While directly influencing Beijing's risk preference remains dubious, increasing US deterrent credibility will influence Chinese decision-making calculus towards maintaining the status quo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The US should continue executing its policy of strategic ambiguity, but much work is still required to shore up the policy's deterrence potency. Those who advocate for keeping the status quo policy purely based on its venerated longevity must rethink their logic. The case study reveals that in the past, China either was unable to attack Taiwan or lacked the motivation to do so, which means that the US was not actually deterring anything. As Henry Kissinger cautioned, “Since deterrence can only be tested negatively, by events that do *not* take place, and since it is never possible to demonstrate why something has not occurred, it becomes especially difficult to assess whether the

existing policy was the best possible policy or just a barely effective one. Perhaps deterrence was even unnecessary because it was impossible to prove whether the adversary ever intended to attack in the first place.”³

Without pinpointing the exact date when China reached the minimum military capability to accomplish a successful amphibious assault on Taiwan, it is safe to say that if they didn’t have the capabilities by the early 2000s, China has that capability today. Therefore, at best, the history of US deterrence policy across the strait is only twenty years long but most likely much shorter. In any case, it is not the seventy years that some would assume. Adopting the mentality that the deterrence policy begins today will frame Washington’s mindset and refocus efforts to solving the problem as it relates to the current cross-strait environment, leaving three recommendations: 1) Focus initial efforts towards the prevention of a *fait accompli* attack; 2) Resolve all domestic and international legal roadblocks that would hinder intervention; 3) Stay engaged diplomatically.

The most likely scenario of a direct assault on Taiwan would be a *fait accompli* before the US or the rest of the international community even has an opportunity to react. The Chinese quick, direct assault option is made all the more attractive in light of Russia’s successful annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014.⁴ According to retired PLA Lieutenant General Wang Hongquang, “The PLA is capable of taking over Taiwan within 100 hours with only a few dozen casualties.”⁵ The trifecta of speed, ease, and low casualties of how an assault on Taiwan would conclude is a broadly shared belief

³ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 608.

⁴ Dan Altman, “By Fait Accompli, Not Coercion: How States Wrest Territory from Their Adversaries,” *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (December 2017), 882.

⁵ Seidel, “Sink two aircraft carriers.”

amongst PLA leadership. In that case, a *fait accompli* may become too attractive to pass up. Therefore, it will become increasingly important to strengthen Taiwan's standalone capability to blunt an attack while increasing America's ability to deny PLA access to the seas and skies within the Taiwan Strait.

With fiscal constraints both in the US and in Taiwan, building capacity must be targeted and optimized to levy an unbearable cost on any PLA attempt to invade Taiwan. Contrary to popular western misconceptions of unlimited Chinese manpower, there is evidence to suggest that the PRC leadership's tolerance for casualties is relatively low. There are reports that PRC leadership deemed one estimation of 21,000 PLA killed during a Taiwan invasion as an unacceptable figure.⁶ While a capacity to win would be the goal, a capacity to inflict high casualties would be sufficient for deterrence purposes. As a recent RAND study confirms, "Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses agree that deterrence can succeed without a favorable local balance and can fail with such a favorable balance. Local military balances therefore emerge as an important but not always decisive factor in determining deterrence success or failure."⁷

For the ROC military to "resist the enemy on the other shore, attack the enemy on the sea, destroy the enemy in the littoral area, and annihilate the enemy on the beachhead," Taiwan must adopt their own anti-access/area-denial strategy to transform it into a bristling porcupine of formidable layered defense.⁸ Taiwan's Overall Defense

⁶ Norman Friedman, "World Naval Developments," *Proceedings* 131, no 11 (November 2005), <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2005/november/world-naval-developments>.

⁷ Michael J. Mazarr et al., *What Deters and Why: Exploring Requirements for Effective Deterrence of Interstate Aggression*, RR 2451-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), 53, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2451.html.

⁸ Ministry of National Defense, *2017 Republic of China Quadrennial Defense Review* (Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of National Defense, 2017), 39, <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2000/01/2017-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>.

Concept (ODC), introduced by ROC Chief of General Staff Admiral Lee Hsi-min in 2017, is a step in the right direction. In it, Admiral Lee calls for “embracing an effective asymmetric defense posture and incorporating tactical asymmetric capabilities to compensate for Taiwan’s disadvantage on paper and prevent the PLA from getting boots on the ground.”⁹ Taiwan’s recent purchase of 66 F-16C/D block 70 fighter aircraft and 108 M1A2T Abrams main battle tanks to support ROC symmetric warfare capabilities have been accompanied by a growing number of corresponding asymmetric warfare procurements.¹⁰ The purchases include an assortment of mobile and man-portable surface-to-air missile systems, torpedoes, mobile ground attack artillery rocket systems, anti-ship coastal defense systems, and electronic warfare suites aimed to exacerbate PLA war planning efforts.¹¹ Additionally, Taiwan has invested billions of dollars towards building eight indigenous diesel-electric submarines, twelve littoral missile corvettes, and

⁹ Lee Hsi-min and Eric Lee, “Taiwan’s Overall Defense Concept, Explained,” *The Diplomat*, November 3, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained/>.

¹⁰ “News Release: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – M1A2T Abrams Tanks and Related Equipment and Support,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2019, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/tecro_19-22_0.pdf; and “News Release: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – F-16C/D Block 70 Aircraft and Related Equipment and Support,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2019, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/tecro_19-50.pdf.

¹¹ “News Release: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – SM-2 Block IIIA Standard Missile and Components,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2017, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/tecro_16-67.pdf; “News Release: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – AN/SLQ-32 V23 Upgrade,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2017, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/tecro_16-70.pdf; “News Release: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – Stinger Missiles and Related Equipment and Support,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2019, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/tecro_19-21.pdf; “News Release: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – MK 48 Mod 6 Advanced Technology (AT) Heavy Weight Torpedo (HWT),” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2020, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/taiwan_20-07_0.pdf; “News Release: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – AGM-84H Standoff Land Attack Missile-Expanded Response (SLAM-ER) Missiles,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2020, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/Taiwan_20-69.pdf; “News Release: Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – RGM-84L-4 Harpoon Surface Launched Block II Missiles,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2020, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/Taiwan_20-68.pdf.

sixty stealth missile boats to further complicate an already perilous amphibious assault.¹² One study showed that sixty stealth missile boats, equipped with two indigenous anti-surface warfare missiles, could effectively counter a PLAN force size of forty major surface combatants.¹³

Taiwan will not be able to outspend China, but the US could provide assistance with direct military aid. In 2016, the US signed a 10-year security assistance Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Israel agreeing to provide \$3.8 billion a year for ten years, exceeding the previous 10-year commitment made in 2007 for \$3 billion a year.¹⁴ So while Israel is set to receive over \$68 billion in military aid over a twenty-year period, Taiwan has had to pay full price for their defense. The prevention of war in the Indo-Pacific is arguably as important, if not more so than preventing war between Israel and the surrounding Arab nations. While Congress has submitted legislation in an attempt to correct the deficiencies in US support of Indo-Pacific allies, direct military aid to Taiwan is missing from their proposals.¹⁵ If Taiwan is a core

¹² Thomas Newdick, "Taiwan is Finally Set to Build the New Diesel-Electric Submarines It Desperately Needs," *The Drive*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/37840/taiwan-is-finally-set-to-build-the-new-diesel-electric-submarines-it-desperately-needs>; Lawrence Chung, "Taiwan begins mass production of home-grown missile corvettes, minelayers," *South China Morning Post*, May 25, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3011795/taiwan-begins-mass-production-home-grown-missile-corvettes>; Keoni Everington, "Taiwan Navy begins research into fleet of 60 'stealth mini-missile boats'," *Taiwan News*, January 24, 2018, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3348868>.

¹³ Liu Shuchang, "Micro-Class Missile Assault Boat Swarm Tactics Effectiveness in the Taiwan Strait" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), 45, https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/64009/19Dec_Liu_Shuchang.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

¹⁴ "Factsheet: Memorandum of Understanding Reached with Israel," The White House, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/14/fact-sheet-memorandum-understanding-reached-israel>.

¹⁵ To amend the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018 to require the Secretary of Defense to carry out the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, S. 4300, 116th Cong., 2d sess. (July 23, 2020), <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s4300/BILLS-116s4300is.pdf>; Indo-Pacific Deterrence Initiative, H.R. 6613, 116th Cong., 2d sess. (April 23, 2020), <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr6613/BILLS-116hr6613ih.pdf>.

national interest for which Washington has determined it is willing to kill and die for, then Congress should also be willing to fund capabilities that will either deter conflict, allow Taiwan's successful self-defense, or increase the probability of victory in the event US intervention is required.

To bolster counter-A2/AD capabilities, Washington should seriously consider the \$20 billion wish list submitted to Congress by the head of US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) in his six-year USINDOPACOM Investment Plan.¹⁶ In it, Admiral Phil Davidson enumerates the investments required to field “an integrated Joint Force with precision-strike networks, particularly land-based anti-ship and anti-air capabilities along the First Island Chain; integrated air missile defense in the Second Island Chain; and an enhanced force posture that provides for dispersal, the ability to preserve regional stability, and if needed sustain combat operations.”¹⁷ Furthermore, with the termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty, the US is now free to develop ground-launched ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers to counter growing Chinese missile superiority in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁸

Military upgrades alone will not improve credibility if both domestic and international legal hurdles remain to frustrate timely intervention. Domestically, Washington should strongly consider passing the Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act currently being debated in the House of Representatives. The bill, if passed, would

¹⁶ United States Indo-Pacific Command, *National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2020 Section 1253 Assessment Executive Summary: Regain the Advantage* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/6864-national-defense-strategy-summ/8851517f5e10106bc3b1/optimized/full.pdf>.

¹⁷ USINDOPACOM, *NDAA 2020 Section 1253 Assessment*.

¹⁸ Michael R. Pompeo, “U.S. Withdrawal from the INF Treaty on August 2, 2019,” The State Department, Aug 2, 2019. Accessed November 26, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-withdrawal-from-the-inf-treaty-on-august-2-2019/>.

“authorize the President to use military force for the purpose of securing and defending Taiwan against armed attack, and for other purposes.”¹⁹ While in no way guaranteeing US intervention, the act would provide specific statutory authorizations as required by the War Powers Resolution, eliminating the requirement in section 5(b) restricting the President’s use of the armed forces to only sixty days.²⁰ Another bill titled “Taiwan Defense Act,” simultaneously introduced in both the House and the Senate, aims to “maintain the ability of the United States Armed Forces to deny a *fait accompli* by the People’s Republic of China against Taiwan.”²¹ Again, while this Act would not guarantee US intervention, it would congressionally mandate the DOD to prioritize defeating a *fait accompli* by the PRC against Taiwan and to report to Congress on their progress.

Internationally, the US should clarify regarding the legality of allies support, specifically concerning the use of overseas basing in a Taiwan Straits intervention scenario. For example, the September 19, 2015 reinterpretation of the ninth article of the Japanese Constitution allows the Japanese to participate in collective self-defense in support of the US-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) and Section V of the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation that outlines provisions for the “cooperation in situations in areas surrounding Japan.”²² Although ambiguous as to precisely what the

¹⁹ Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act, H.R. 7855, 116th Cong, 2d sess. (July 29, 2020), <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr7855/BILLS-116hr7855ih.pdf>.

²⁰ War Powers Resolution, H.R. 542, 93d Cong., 1st sess. (October 4, 1973), <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0019/4520942.pdf>

²¹ Taiwan Defense Act, S. 3936, 116th Cong., 2d sess. (June 10, 2020), <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s3936/BILLS-116s3936is.pdf>; Taiwan Defense Act, H.R. 7423, 116th Cong., 2d sess. (June 30, 2020), <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr7423/BILLS-116hr7423ih.pdf>.

²² “Japan’s Security Policy,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, April 12, 2016, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000084.html; “The Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 27, 2020, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/guideline2.html>.

Japanese Self Defense Force is able to do in situations not recognized as a direct attack on Japan, there exist no equivalent agreements between the US and other nations who also have signed MDTs, namely South Korea and the Philippines. Restrictions to basing locations could greatly complicate operational and logistical planning and preclude the employment of 28,500 troops and regional weaponry. Assuming full access and operational usage of currently occupied bases for intervention in the Taiwan Straits could have tragic consequences, something Washington could avoid with preemptive diplomatic coordination.

Finally, to avoid armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait, Washington must remain fully engaged with Beijing. The threat of escalation is real and something Herman Kahn describes as the “Rationality of Irrationality war”: “The Rationality of Irrationality war corresponds to a situation in which neither side really believes the issue is big enough to go to war but both sides are willing to use some partial or total committal strategy to force the other side to back down; as a result they may end up in a war that they would not have gone into if either side had realized ahead of time that the other side would not back down even under pressure.”²³ Meaningful diplomatic engagement is the only way to prevent such a high magnitude of miscalculation. If there is any hope for a peaceful resolution, the US must ensure open lines of diplomatic communication between Taipei and Beijing. Successful deterrence requires more than a threat. As Mazarr suggests, “A major requirement for effective deterrence is therefore not merely—or at all—making violent threats against a potential aggressor, but rather managing their threat profile and perception of risks and opportunities so that they do not get to the point of seeing no

²³ Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*, 293.

alternative to war.”²⁴ The PRC must be convinced there remain viable solutions and significant benefits to seeking a diplomatic solution. Because as Kissinger reminds us, “The future of Asia will be shaped to a significant degree by how China and America envision it. . . The leaders on both sides of the Pacific have an obligation to establish a tradition of consultation and mutual respect so that, for their successors, jointly building a shared world order becomes an expression of parallel national aspiration.”²⁵

²⁴ Michael J. Mazarr, et al., *What Deters and Why*, 53.

²⁵ Kissinger, *On China*, 529.

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Vita

Prior to attending the Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Sullivan was the Commander, 42nd Electronic Combat Squadron, Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, which is the sole airborne electronic attack Formal Training Unit in the Air Force. Originally from Iowa, Lt Col Sullivan entered the Air Force in May 2003 as a distinguished graduate of the United States Air Force Academy. After completing an assignment as a Charles Stark Draper Laboratories Fellow, he completed pilot training and qualified in the EC-130H Compass Call. Lt Col Sullivan is an Evaluator Pilot with more than 2,500 flying hours and nearly a thousand combat hours in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. In 2012, Lt Col Sullivan was selected as an Olmsted Scholar and assigned to Beijing, China, where he attended Tsinghua University. Upon his return to the United States, he served as Chief of Electronic Warfare Operations at the 25th Air Force and the Director of Operations of the 42nd Electronic Combat Squadron. Lt Col Sullivan holds a Bachelor's degree in Engineering Mechanics from the United States Air Force Academy (2003), a Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Rice University (2005), and a Master's degree in International Relations from Tsinghua University (2015).