

Reconsidering Attacks on Mainland China

LT COL BRIAN MACLEAN, USAF

In 1962, American military leaders planned to conduct surprise air strikes in Cuba after discovering ballistic missiles there. However, Pres. John F. Kennedy ultimately decided such an attack would impose unacceptable risks to America's security.¹ Against the advice of his top generals, President Kennedy decided to limit American military power against Cuba to minimize escalation toward nuclear war and preserve the integrity of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Such a declination of recommended military action could realistically occur again during a crisis between the United States and China over Taiwan. In a Taiwan conflict scenario, military planners should anticipate the possibility that America's civilian leaders will restrict strikes on China's mainland and require military options that do not involve such strikes.² While a few unclassified academic studies minimize the potential for nuclear escalation, others point to significant risks; America's civilian leaders could adopt the views of the latter, determining that strikes on China's mainland are too risky or provocative for the stakes involved.³ If this is true, then military services should ensure they are prepared to present viable options that offer lower risks of miscalculation and escalation alongside options which rely heavily on mainland strikes.⁴ Failing to do so could leave US leaders with too few options in the event of a crisis, and insufficient time for necessary military capabilities to be developed and fielded.

Despite this possibility, a few academic defense studies have minimized the potential for nuclear escalation in their analyses of a future conflict with China. One notable (unclassified) analysis conducted by RAND Corporation in 2016 assessed the potential scope and scale of a China conflict in the 2015–2025 timeframe: "It is unlikely that nuclear weapons would be used: even in an intensely violent conventional conflict, neither side would regard its losses as so serious, its prospects so dire, or the stakes so vital that it would run the risk of devastating nuclear retaliation by using nuclear weapons first."⁵

The study appears to assume the United States can strike mainland China extensively without provoking nuclear escalation, despite China suffering massive damage to its defense infrastructure and significant degradation of its economy. While such an academic assumption may be reasonable and valid on the surface (nuclear escalation *would* be unlikely), taken too far, it could lure military personnel into committing to strategies, war plans, and weapons acquisitions that are not

useful to America's civilian leaders during a time of crisis. Civilian leaders in the future may not be inclined to strike China's mainland, and China could easily prove academic assumptions wrong during actual combat. Military strategists, planners, and force requirements developers should anticipate America's civilian leadership needing effective military options short of mainland attacks on China. RAND analysts seem to appreciate the risks of homeland attacks, suggesting that "as low as the probability of Chinese first [nuclear weapons] use is, even in the most desperate circumstances of a prolonged and severe war, the United States could make it lower still by exercising great care with regard to the extensiveness of homeland attacks and by avoiding altogether targets that the Chinese could interpret as critical to their deterrent."⁶

Former US Director of National Intelligence and former commander of US Pacific Command, retired US Navy admiral Dennis Blair debated the likelihood of nuclear escalation in the pages of *Foreign Affairs* with Caitlin Talmadge, an associate professor of security studies at Georgetown University.⁷ Blair stated "the odds are somewhere between nil and zero" despite mainland attacks, based on his confidence that military planners and targeting experts could adequately distinguish between mainland nuclear and nonnuclear forces.⁸ While they seem to agree that the likelihood of "Chinese nuclear escalation is not high in absolute terms," Talmadge is more concerned about overall risk: "the danger is of high consequence, not high probability."⁹ Blair and Talmadge also seem to agree that the closer America comes to "victory" in a Taiwan scenario, the more China might look to escalate to nuclear employment. Blair states that "the real danger of escalation in these conflicts would be when a Chinese attempt to capture a disputed island . . . was failing."¹⁰ Such a failure "would undermine the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party and could make Beijing desperate enough to threaten the use of nuclear weapons."¹¹ It is impossible to predict any exact probability, consequence, or risk of nuclear escalation in this debate; it is important to recognize, however, that such predictions become increasingly difficult as crises unfold, and similar debates would likely occur during a real crisis.¹² In such a case, civilian leaders may call for military options that avoid striking mainland China.

One determinant of the likelihood of nuclear escalation is whether China's leaders decide to initiate hostilities in the first place (for example, by invading Taiwan). Could deterrence fail? If China views reintegration and defense of Taiwan as critical to its regime survival, then China's leaders may seek opportunities to impose its party's rule over Taiwan, by force, at a time when the perceived benefits of doing so outweigh the costs.¹³ China's leaders may perceive such an opportunity in the future as their country establishes regional military hegemony, and American defense analysts admit the United States may not win a war with

China; any doubt about whether the United States would use nuclear weapons in a war with China over Taiwan could make an apparent opportunity even more appealing.¹⁴ As China gains local military advantages over the United States, its leaders may conclude that America lacks the resolve to go to war with China over Taiwan.¹⁵ According to Sam Goldsmith, an Australian defense research consultant, “Chinese leadership appears unconvinced that the U.S. would risk a conflict with China—one that could escalate to a nuclear war—over disputes concerning territories that geographically are distant from the U.S. mainland and seemingly are unrelated to core U.S. national security interests.”¹⁶ Sulmaan Khan, an assistant professor of foreign relations at Tufts, wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that “China had concluded from U.S. inaction in 1995 that Washington did not care much about Taiwan.”¹⁷ If China’s leaders one day view the United States as lacking the capability and resolve to impose military costs on China over Taiwan, they may assume the United States will not engage China militarily. As a result, China may elect to invade Taiwan based on misperceptions about US weakness or disinterest. China may also be prompted by growing perceived costs of delay: rising forces of democratization in Taiwan, a declaration of formal independence there, or a prospective economic downturn in China could make any perceived “opportunity” appear fleeting.¹⁸ Deterrence could fail.¹⁹

While many experts now doubt that nuclear escalation is likely, once conflict begins, the perceptions, misperceptions, psychological biases, miscalculations, and domestic pressures that could lead either country toward escalation are well documented.²⁰ Once deterrence fails, perceptions among China’s leaders will become a primary determinant of whether nuclear weapons are used. They will also have made assumptions about the degrees to which the United States will intervene, degrade China’s defenses, threaten its political regime, or deny its takeover of Taiwan. If any of these assumptions fail and China’s leaders are surprised or disoriented, the chances of miscalculation become higher; China could deviate from past plans and conduct a limited nuclear employment to deter the United States from pressing its intervention further, to weaken US resolve, or to maintain escalation dominance.²¹ Once China’s leaders commit to a political outcome they view as critical to the survival of their regime, surprising them could alter the trajectory of the conflict in unpredictable ways, nullifying past assumptions by prompting them to “take new risks even against long odds.”²² According to Joshua Rovner, an associate professor of foreign policy at American University, “it is not difficult to see how mainland strikes could cause Chinese leaders to take enormous risks to avoid a humiliating and rapid defeat.”²³ Aaron Friedberg, a professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University, recounted Chinese analysts saying publicly that “in some instances,” the People’s Liberation Army

“might be prepared to use nuclear weapons in retaliation to conventional attacks.”²⁴ In 2016, RAND analysts examined

the circumstances in which the risk of nuclear war, however low, could be at its highest. In a prolonged and severe conflict, it is conceivable that Chinese military leaders would propose and Chinese political leaders would consider using nuclear weapons in the following circumstances:

- Chinese forces are at risk of being totally destroyed.
- The Chinese homeland has been rendered defenseless against U.S. conventional attacks; such attacks are extensive and go beyond military targets, perhaps to include political leadership.
- Domestic economic and political conditions are growing so dire that the state itself could collapse.

U.S. conventional strikes include or are perceived to include capabilities that are critical to China’s strategic deterrent—notably intercontinental ballistic missile[s] (ICBMs), ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), strategic C2—which the Chinese interpret as preparation for a U.S. first strike or intended to leave China vulnerable to U.S. nuclear coercion.²⁵

Sources of misperception and miscalculation can render supposedly “valid” assumptions at the beginning of a conflict invalid as a conflict grows more prolonged—heightening the risk of unwanted escalation.²⁶ Though academics acknowledge that homeland-based Chinese antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) systems raise “risks of escalation,” some seem to downplay the unpredictable effects of significant military losses that China and the United States stand to suffer in the “contested” A2/AD environment, especially in a prolonged conflict.²⁷ In the United States, large-scale Chinese attacks on American fielded military forces and remote bases may result in such high attrition that America’s leaders are prompted to escalate in ways they did not initially anticipate; foreign policy strategist Graham Allison suggests that “if a single U.S. carrier were sunk . . . in a showdown today, the deaths of 5,000 Americans could set the United States and China on an escalatory ladder that has no apparent stopping point.”²⁸

In 1976, Robert Jervis, a professor of international politics at Columbia University, observed that attempts to coerce a state into halting aggressive actions can backfire and spiral out of control unpredictably, despite initial intentions to limit the scope of violence.²⁹ Steven Pinker, a psychologist, later found that innate human biases (known as “moralization gaps”) can lead actors to perceive their own provocations as “justified” and “mere acts of deterrence,” but to view their opponent’s actions as unjustified and intolerably aggressive.³⁰ In crises and conflicts,

decision makers do not share common “sight-pictures” of pertinent facts and events with their adversaries. Instead, they will tend to overestimate the righteousness of their own actions and the wickedness of their adversaries’ aggression.³¹ They will tend to view their own escalatory acts of deterrence as rational and justified to “even the score,” just as their adversaries will have the opposite perspective, viewing such acts as provocative and warranting counterdeterrence in return.³² These asymmetric perspectives can (and likely will) lead to mutual escalation—despite the best intentions on all sides to prevent it.³³ Talmadge believes that “amid the fog and suspicion of war, China’s view of both U.S. intentions and nuclear deterrence could change radically.”³⁴ These cognitive distortions could drive “levels of violence, duration,” and costs “that might appear unjustifiable in times of peace” to become possible after hostilities begin.³⁵

Known risks of misperception and escalation still may not deter nuclear-armed actors from quarreling over even small-stakes issues, as Michael O’Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, explains in *The Senkaku Paradox*.³⁶ As with most complex phenomena, initial conditions are rarely deterministic, and assumptions can become fragile as conflicts grow more protracted. American military planners have experienced this in past wars; for example, their early expectations of “humane” daylight precision aerial bombardment in World War II were set aside in favor of fire-bombing cities at night and eventually nuclear attack. RAND analysts recognize the high likelihood of a protracted conflict with China, predicting that “once either military is authorized to commence strikes, the ability of both to control the conflict would be greatly compromised.”³⁷ They assert “the assumption that a Sino-U.S. war would be over quickly is not supported by evidence that either side would rapidly exhaust its war making capacity” (emphasis added).³⁸ As each state commits greater levels of blood and treasure to achieving an outcome, they may become less likely to seek compromise, end the conflict, or accept anything short of total victory over their adversaries. As a conflict grows more prolonged, the probabilities of misperception only intensify.³⁹ According to Rovner, “there are clear pathways to both nuclear escalation and protracted war.”⁴⁰

Military planners should anticipate the possibility that during a crisis, America’s civilian leaders might be more sensitive to risks of escalation than precrisis academic assessments had indicated they should be. Leaders may question the predicted effects of conventional military action the way President Kennedy did during the Cuban missile crisis (1962); he demurred from launching large-scale conventional attacks on Cuba to avoid escalation toward nuclear war and approved a naval blockade instead. A recent article by John Meyers, an assistant policy researcher at RAND, reviewed historical cases where American presidents

rejected such strikes due to concerns about unbounded risk.⁴¹ According to Meyers, “the president will balk. Even in the midst of a full-scale war, he or she would reject mainland strikes for fear of precipitating a nuclear exchange.”⁴² To avoid escalation in the past, the United States refrained from attacking the territories of China and present-day Russia during the Berlin crisis (1948), the Korean War (1950–1953), and the Vietnam War (1964–1973); the United States likely avoided confrontation with Russian forces during Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (2014) for the same reason.⁴³

Following America’s virtually unrestrained military campaigns in World War II (including the world’s first and only employment of nuclear weapons), and the subsequent acquisition of nuclear weapons by America’s adversaries, something changed about America’s strategy in later conflicts with opponents backed by nuclear-armed patrons.⁴⁴ Mark Clodfelter, a professor of military strategy at the National War College, notes that in the Korean and Vietnam wars, the United States was no longer willing to employ unrestrained violence due to risks of expanding the scope of conflicts and escalating toward total or nuclear war.⁴⁵ In analyzing the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, Clodfelter distinguished America’s *positive* objectives from *negative* objectives. Positive objectives included unifying Korea and securing South Vietnam from the North’s aggression, while *negative* objectives emphasized avoiding total war with China and the Soviet Union. In the Korean and Vietnam wars, these negative objectives changed the course of American military strategy because they began to impose significant constraints on applications of force (such as restricting attacks on China and the Soviet Union).⁴⁶ Historical examples like these should lead military planners to expect their leaders to ask for military options that avoid striking a nuclear-armed aggressor’s homeland if America’s credibility is one day tested.⁴⁷ Similar to American leaders in the Korean and Vietnam wars, current leaders could view America’s ability to halt aggression wholly within third-party countries as beneficial for reducing risks of escalation toward nuclear war while preserving American credibility.

As the US military renews its strategies for deterring and, if necessary, defeating its adversaries, it is worth reviewing the range of alternatives for achieving military objectives on the peripheries of nuclear-armed states. Since the early years of the Cold War, American strategists have appreciated the value of superior conventional military capabilities and limited war as important components of deterrence in the nuclear age. National Security Council memo 68 (declassified in 1975) stated that in the event of Soviet “mischief,” the United States “should take no avoidable initiative which would cause it to become a war of annihilation, and if we have the forces to defeat a Soviet drive for limited objectives it may well be

to our interest not to let it become a global war.”⁴⁸ If today’s leaders worry as the National Security Council did in 1950 that “the risk of having no better choice than to capitulate or precipitate a global war” puts us “continually at the verge of appearing and being alternately irresolute and desperate,” then robust conventional options may provide more-flexible alternatives to risky strikes on mainland China.⁴⁹ This article avoids the sensitive task of prescribing such options but instead merely provides academic arguments for their existence along with supporting capabilities that America’s civilian leaders may require. While there are many possible approaches to a military conflict over Taiwan with varying degrees of risk, two examples that avoid mainland strikes are “maritime denial” and “offshore control.” Maritime denial would employ multi-domain combat power to deny China’s military use of maritime capabilities locally (including preventing a Chinese amphibious landing on Taiwan).⁵⁰ Recognizing the potential escalatory effects of mainland strikes on China, Thomas Hammes, a distinguished research fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies, saw a need for operational approaches like offshore control that avoid mainland strikes to minimize risks of nuclear war.⁵¹ *Offshore control* is essentially a distant blockade that would strangulate imports of critical resources to China, while halting exports of commodities vital to China’s economic viability.⁵² The success of such approaches would likely depend on strengthening Taiwan’s defenses.⁵³

While the United States modernizes its nuclear and conventional strike forces to strengthen deterrence, it should not neglect the types of forces required for options that avoid striking the homelands of nuclear-armed adversaries.⁵⁴ Critics of this idea may argue that creating less-risky military options could signal a reduction in America’s willingness to pursue more dangerous courses of action, making a Taiwan invasion appear less risky to China. This argument has a basis in deterrence theory originating in the 1960s: Thomas Schelling, a nuclear strategist, believed that states signal commitment to achieving political outcomes by eliminating their own escape routes from further escalation if provoked (essentially backing themselves into a strategic “corner”), while leaving any “last clear chance” to avoid further escalation for an adversary to act upon.⁵⁵ Such an approach could be attractive to America’s leaders if they believed their willingness to escalate to mainland strikes (rather than avoiding them) was credible in the minds of China’s leaders; however, if America’s leaders instead suspected China may doubt their willingness to aggressively strike China’s mainland, lacking other options could actually weaken deterrence.⁵⁶

Deterrence could fail if China’s leaders believed—mistakenly or not—they could exploit “gaps” they perceive in America’s options and willingness to escalate; in this case China could attempt a regional *fait accompli* in Taiwan without

fearing a risky American response.⁵⁷ Similar thinking was behind language in the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review*, where the US Secretary of Defense directed development of a low-yield warhead to “counter any mistaken perception of an exploitable ‘gap’ in US regional deterrence capabilities.” This would strengthen America’s nuclear deterrence posture by shaping Russia’s perceptions and discouraging Russia from undertaking mistaken acts of aggression.⁵⁸ If America’s military options were limited to aggressively striking China’s mainland or doing little else to halt an invasion of Taiwan, China could confidently behave more aggressively if it believed America would choose the latter over the former. Military options that avoid or minimize mainland attacks provide civilian leaders a broad range of choices beyond devastating mainland strikes and doing little to prevent a *fait accompli* in Taiwan. Such options would leave China no room for confidence and would strengthen deterrence.

To be clear, this article is not suggesting any reduction in capabilities or preparation for mainland strikes; such options fit together with all others to ensure deterrence is credible across the entire spectrum of conflict.⁵⁹ Just as America’s civilian leaders may have interest in options that avoid mainland strikes during a crisis, they will also likely have interest in other options that are more escalatory; deterrence requires that America’s forces are ready to present them all. Designing, organizing, training, and equipping future military forces to provide such options requires decades of effort among all military services. To maximize their relevance, such deliberate processes should account for all possible leadership perspectives—foreign and domestic—that could materialize during a crisis rather than building forces and strategies tailored for particular government administrations. The composition and temperament of future Chinese and American leaders cannot be known; therefore, military options—and the forces that provide them—should be flexible enough to provide relevant effects regardless of who is in office. In 2005, a Chinese general called for nuclear retaliation against the United States if America were to strike China’s mainland during a Taiwan intervention; planners should consider the possibility that China could adopt such a policy in the future.⁶⁰

While nuclear escalation in a Taiwan conflict would be unlikely, the severity of such an event is great enough to warrant a diverse array of options, yielding varying degrees of risk. America’s leaders may call for such options if deterrence fails, including those that avoid or minimize attacks on China’s mainland to halt its aggression. China may one day see a net benefit in testing America’s resolve and the strength of its commitments by marginally expanding its borders; such a test would simultaneously threaten America’s credibility, the strength of America’s alliances, the survival of distant democracies, regional stability and arms control, and civilized life on Earth (if nuclear weapons are used). Demonstrating resolve

and maintaining deterrence will rely heavily on America's nuclear posture and its leaders' demonstrated willingness to attack the homelands of adversaries conventionally to rapidly halt acts of aggression. However, in the cases where America's adversaries doubt or test the credibility of the foregoing sources of deterrence, America's ability to project military power into contested regions without attacking homelands of nuclear-armed adversaries provides some flexibility in denying acts of aggression and demonstrating resolve—without increasing the chances of nuclear war. ☉

Lt Col Brian MacLean, USAF

Colonel MacLean is an Air Force pilot and currently serves as a staff officer at Air Mobility Command Headquarters.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following individuals for their helpful input while writing this essay: Maj Gen Mark Camerer, Brig Gen (ret) Martin Chapin, Col Shanon Anderson, Col Timothy Mach, Col (Ret) Larry Chodzko, Mr. Benjamin Brown, Maj Ian Shelley, Maj Tyler Smith, Mr. Jim Holder, Mr. Kelly Conrad, and Mr. Craig Lundy. All errors contained herein are my own.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. government. The public release clearance of this publication by the Department of Defense does not imply Department of Defense endorsement or factual accuracy of the material.

Notes

1. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy 1958–1964: The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 230, 233–35, 238–39; and Sheldon Stern, *Averting the Final Failure: John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003). 121, 128–30, 137, 151–52, 156–58.

2. Derek Grossman and John Speed Meyers, “Minding the Gaps: US Military Strategy toward China,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Winter 2019), 107. A prominent military operating concept known as “Air-Sea Battle” features mainland strikes.

3. Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 113–115. Grossman and Meyers provide a useful summary of the historical debate on this topic. Also see: David Ochmanek, “Sustaining U.S. Leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region,” *Perspectives*, PE-142-OSD, 2015, 11, <https://www.rand.org/>.

4. Joshua Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe: Nuclear Escalation and Protracted War in Asia,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 5 (Spring 2017), 723–24; Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 106; and Thomas Hammes, “Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict,” *Strategic Forum* 278 (June 2012), 3.

5. David Gompert, Astrid Cevallos, and Christina Garafola, *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), ix.
6. Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, *War with China*, 31.
7. Dennis Blair and Caitlin Talmadge, letters to the editor, *Foreign Affairs* 98. no. 1 (Spring 2019), 217–19.
8. Blair and Talmadge, letters to the editor, 217.
9. Blair and Talmadge, letters to the editor, 217–219.
10. Blair and Talmadge, letters to the editor, 217–219.
11. Blair and Talmadge, letters to the editor, 217–219.
12. See: Aaron Friedberg, *Beyond Air–Sea Battle: The Debate Over US Military Strategy in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2014), 87.
13. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 704, 708; and Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 109.
14. Sydney J. Freedberg, “US ‘Gets Its Ass Handed to It’ In Wargames: Here’s A \$24 Billion Fix,” *Breaking Defense*, 7 March 2019. “In our games. when we fight Russia and China,” RAND analyst David Ochmanek said this afternoon, “blue gets its ass handed to it.” See also: Eric Heginbotham et. al, *The U.S. China Military Scorecard* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015).
15. Heginbotham et. al. *The U.S.–China Military Scorecard*, xxix.
16. Samuel Goldsmith, “U.S. Conventional Access Strategy: Denying China a Conventional First Strike Capability,” *Naval War College Review* 72 no. 2 (Spring 2019), 3.
17. Sulmaan Khan, “How to Avoid a War Between America and China: The Lessons of Past Crises,” *Foreign Affairs*, 3 December 2018.
18. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 713; and “Taiwan’s China-Sceptic President, Tsai Ing-Wen, May Win Again.” *The Economist*, 2 January 2020.
19. Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 105; and Ochmanek, “Sustaining U.S. Leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region,” 3.
20. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 701.
21. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 700, 704; and Friedberg, *Beyond Air–Sea Battle*, 86; and Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 115; and Caitlin Talmadge, “Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in A Conventional War with The United States” *International Security* 41, no. 4 (Spring 2017); Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, 2018, 32; and Joseph Kahn, “Chinese General Threatens Use of A-Bombs if U.S. Intrudes,” *New York Times*, 15 July 2005.
22. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 701, 720; and Friedberg, 121.
23. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 707.
24. Friedberg, *Beyond Air–Sea Battle*, 85.
25. Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, *War with China*, 29–30.
26. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 722; and Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 114–15.
27. Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, *War with China*, 16; and Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 719.
28. Friedberg, *Beyond Air–Sea Battle*, 87; and Graham Allison, “The Next Great War,” *Washington Post*, 9 November 2018.

29. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), xii–xiv, 58–113. See also: Stephen Van Evera, “The ‘Spiral Model’ v. The ‘Deterrence Model’” (essay, September 1997), 1, <http://web.mit.edu/>.
30. Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 34, 511, 565.
31. Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, 537–38.
32. Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, 537–38.
33. Friedberg, *Beyond Air–Sea Battle*, 87.
34. Talmadge, letter to the editor, 217–19.
35. Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, *War with China*, 27; and Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 700.
36. Michael E. O’Hanlon, *The Senkaku Paradox: Risking Great War Over Small Stakes* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2019), 1–18; and Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, 515.
37. Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, *War with China*, xiii; and Hammes, “Offshore Control,” 3.
38. Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, *War with China*, 7.
39. Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, *War with China*, 700.
40. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 719.
41. John Speed Meyers, “The Real Problem with Strikes on Mainland China,” *War on the Rocks*, 4 August 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/>.
42. Meyers, “The Real Problem with Strikes on Mainland China.”
43. Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 31. Luckily, Ukraine was not a NATO member, but if it had been, America would have benefited from power-projection capabilities that could operate effectively without needing to attack forces in Russian territory.
44. Hammes, “Offshore Control,” 4. According to Hammes, “previous wars have not seen nuclear powers face each other except through proxies.”
45. Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 13, 19, 42–43.
46. Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power*; and Hammes, “Offshore Control,” 4. According to Hammes, “the United States must accept that China’s nuclear arsenal imposes restrictions on the way American forces might attack Chinese assets.”
47. Rovner, “Two Kinds of Catastrophe,” 707.
48. National Security Council, NSC-68: *United States Objectives and Programs for National Security* (Washington DC, 7 April 1950), 12; <https://fas.org/>.
49. National Security Council, NSC-68, 36.
50. Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 108; and Ochmanek, “Sustaining U.S. Leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region,” 11–12. Also see: Friedberg, *Beyond Air–Sea Battle*, 90, 116–18, 125.
51. Hammes, “Offshore Control,” 4–6; and Friedberg, *Beyond Air–Sea Battle*, 105–07.
52. Hammes, “Offshore Control,” 4–6, 12–13.
53. Ochmanek, “Sustaining U.S. Leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region,” 9, 15; and Hammes, “Offshore Control,” 5, 12–13.
54. Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, *War with China*, xvi. “The United States should try to reduce the impact of Chinese A2AD by investing in more-survivable weapons platforms and in its own A2AD capabilities.”

55. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 44–45.

56. Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle*, 90; and Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 109. According to Grossman and Meyers, “no empirical evidence supports the supposed ability of a mainland strike strategy to better deter large-scale aggression.”

57. Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle*, 122.

58. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, 2018, XI–XII, 6–9.

59. Grossman and Meyers, “Minding the Gaps,” 108–09. Grossman and Meyers point out that “claims about which strategy deters more often amount to no more than theoretical logic without supporting evidence or appeals to scholarly authority.” They observe that there are good reasons to maintain options and forces for striking China’s mainland: “the threat of conventional strikes on the Chinese mainland, which might force Beijing to consider nuclear escalation, could strengthen conventional deterrence because Chinese leaders will not want to breach the nuclear threshold.” Also see: Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle*, 138.

60. Joseph Kahn, “Chinese General Threatens Use of A-Bombs if U.S. Intrudes,” *New York Times*, 15 July 2005

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents..