US ARMY WAR COLLEGE
SSI
STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE PRESS

MONOGRAPH SERIES

DETERRENCE GAP

Avoiding War in the Taiwan Strait

Jared M. McKinney
Peter Harris

DECISIVE POINT
The USAWC Press Podcast Companion Series

STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
"The Army's Think Tank"

The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) is the US Army's institute for geostrategic and national security research and analysis. SSI research and analysis creates and advances knowledge to influence solutions for national security problems facing the Army and the nation.

SSI serves as a valuable source of ideas, criticism, innovative approaches, and independent analyses as well as a venue to expose external audiences to the US Army's contributions to the nation. It acts as a bridge to the broader international community of security scholars and practitioners.

SSI is composed of civilian research professors, uniformed military officers, and a professional support staff, all with extensive credentials and experience. SSI's Strategic Research and Analysis Department focuses on global, transregional, and functional security issues. Its Strategic Engagement Program creates and sustains partnerships with strategic analysts around the world, including the foremost thinkers in the field of security and military strategy. In most years, about half of SSI's publications are written by these external partners.

Research Focus Arenas

Geostrategic net assessment—regional and transregional threat analysis, drivers of adversary conduct, interoperability between partner, allied, IA, commercial, and Joint organizations

Geostrategic forecasting—geopolitics, geoeconomics, technological development, and disruption and innovation

Applied strategic art—warfare and warfighting functions, Joint and multinational campaigning, and spectrum of conflict

Industrial/enterprise management, leadership, and innovation—ethics and the profession, organizational culture and effectiveness, transformational change, talent development and management, and force mobilization and modernization

Deterrence Gap: Avoiding War in the Taiwan Strait

Jared M. McKinney
Peter Harris

January 2024

UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE PRESS
Carlisle Barracks, PA
STRENGTH and WISDOM

Strategic Studies Institute

******

Comments pertaining to this publication are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, US Army War College, 47 Ashburn Drive, Carlisle, PA 17013-5244.

******

ISBN 1-58487-851-7

Cover Image Credits

Front and Back Covers

Image Description: Red and black stroke banner background

Image by: BiZkettE1 on Freepik

Image Link: https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/red-black-brush-stroke-banner-background-perfect-canva_19564593.htm

This image has been designed using assets from Freepik.com.

Table of Contents

Foreword

Will the People's Republic of China invade Taiwan? How can it be stopped from doing so? These questions are some of the most urgent ones facing US defense planners today. Ever since the normalization of Sino-American relations in the 1970s, Washington's policy has been to promote stability in cross-Strait relations and to oppose the use of force. It is therefore concerning that so many analysts are now openly speculating that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan could be imminent.

In this monograph, Jared McKinney and Peter Harris assess the chances of a Chinese attack on Taiwan happening in the coming decade. They offer a stark assessment: Almost all the deterrents that once dissuaded Beijing from attempting an invasion of Taiwan have decayed with the passage of time. Meanwhile, China's leaders now expect to derive fewer benefits from exercising restraint than they did in the past—the result of developments within China, shifts in Taiwanese politics, and the deterioration of Sino-American relations. Their analysis points to a grim conclusion: A Chinese invasion of Taiwan should be considered likely in the next 10 years.

Can deterrence be restored and war avoided? For McKinney and Harris, the answer is yes, but only if officials grasp what has caused deterrence to decay in the first place. They argue that a combination of constraints on the People's Republic of China and incentives for it to act with restraint can sustain the status quo across the inevitable crises that will plague cross-Strait relations in the coming years. McKinney and Harris recommend Taiwan and the United States develop multiple, interlocking strands of military deterrence. They also argue that Taiwan and the United States should labor to create political and economic conditions that render an invasion too costly, and peace too attractive, for Beijing to contemplate overturning the status quo.

If interlocking deterrents can be developed for the short, medium, and long terms, and peace reinvigorated, war may yet be avoided.

Carol V. Evans

Dr. Carol V. Evans
Director, Strategic Studies Institute
and US Army War College Press

Executive Summary

In this monograph, the authors argue that the risk of the People's Republic of China invading Taiwan has been increasing for two reasons: a constellation of discrete deterrents that once constrained Beijing from invading Taiwan has decayed and, simultaneously, the incentives for China to exercise restraint toward Taiwan have decreased. The first part of this argument, which draws upon established work on deterrence, is novel in that the authors explain how instruments of deterrence face challenges owing to the passage of time. The second part of the argument is more common in the sense that others have already explained why China is becoming more confident vis-à-vis conquering Taiwan. Whereas much of the existing literature offers subjective analyses of Chinese attitudes and psychology (for example, surmising the existence of growing risk acceptance in Beijing), the authors of this monograph focus on objectively analyzing concrete trends. Specifically, they identify four interrelated variables that have changed (and continue to change) in the direction of making an invasion more likely this decade. These four variables are the de facto erosion of One China as a viable discursive framework within which to reconcile the competing political interests of China, Taiwan, and the United States; slowing economic growth in China; the severance of China from the global semiconductor supply chain and US silicon onshoring; and a closing window of opportunity for China to launch a successful attack on Taiwan, which is driven by the balance of military power.

Careful review of the two overall shifts—decaying constraints and reduced Chinese restraint—suggests that a major invasion of Taiwan is not only possible within the next 10 years in the sense it could happen (as 63 percent of experts thought in a recent survey) but *probable* in the sense that an invasion is likely to happen (as only 10 percent of surveyed specialists thought). Per the language the US Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend for use, "likely" in this context means a 51–80 percent probability. The authors place their estimate at the higher end of this range and believe the evidence warrants moderate confidence in this assessment. In other words, they make the case specialists need to reconsider their views, and generalists are right in their growing feeling the situation is becoming dangerous. While this is an alarming assessment, the authors are not fatalistic. Leaders in Taiwan and the United States can establish policies to lower the risk of invasion (to say nothing of Beijing's obvious potential to rule out war as an option). In this way, alarming prognoses can reverse trends, allowing preferable paths to emerge—in this case, pathways to a stable peace across the Taiwan Strait.

This is the monograph's second purpose: to deduce sound policy recommendations for deterring China. Just because an invasion is becoming more likely does not mean Taiwan, the United States, or any other entity should treat war as inevitable. It matters why war is becoming more likely and what can be done about it. Armed with good answers to these questions, actors interested in preserving the peace can implement policies designed to uphold the status quo. Regrettably, this essential point is often overlooked in the existing discourse. But major events such as wars are never preordained; actors have agency and can work together or as individuals to lessen the chances of a catastrophic series of events unfolding. Of course, the people with the most influence over China's future military policies are the members of the Chinese Communist Party Politburo Standing Committee. If the Party's top brass would renounce the use of force as a means to achieve cross-Strait unification (and make credible moves to reassure Taipei, Washington, and others China does not plan to launch an invasion), then the prospects of a war across the Taiwan Strait would decrease precipitously. From the authors' view, this outcome would be ideal. Unfortunately, however, hoping the Chinese Communist Party will make such efforts to achieve peace is unrealistic. At least, policymakers outside Beijing cannot endeavor to bring about the Chinese Communist Party's renunciation of force. In a world where the China's leaders are immovably committed to the political objective of reunification with Taiwan, status quo–oriented actors must consider what they can do from the outside to secure peace by focusing on deterrence.

The authors' analysis generates several insights into how to deter China effectively. Most importantly, they argue that deterrence works best—in theory, and in the specific case of Taiwan—when it is the product of multiple, interlocking, and concurrent deterrents. Currently, they find that few deterrents are in place to deter China from attempting to invade Taiwan. The lack of existing deterrents leads them to conclude that the situation facing Taiwan is dire—more serious, even, than some of the most alarmist proponents of conventional wisdom allow. Restoring deterrence across the Taiwan Strait will require a combination of short-term fixes and long-term planning. Crucially, the authors argue that Taiwan must serve as the deterrer-in-chief in dissuading China from attempting an armed attack. Bolstering the credibility of US-based deterrents (for instance, threats of war against China) is possible but cannot be easily completed on a short timeline, and these efforts might always be plagued by intrinsic commitment problems. The authors identify the mid-to-late 2020s as a potential period of high risk and demonstrate even this level of risk is not immune to interventions from adroit policymakers in Taiwan, the United States, and elsewhere. In short, the chances of war are increasing, but sound foreign and defense policies can still reduce the odds.

Introduction

It has become the conventional wisdom in the United States—among military, diplomatic, and intelligence officials, as well as political commentators—that the People's Republic of China is growing ever more likely to invade Taiwan.[1] For some, this view is rooted in an assessment of Xi Jinping as reckless and risk acceptant in comparison to his recent predecessors. Whereas China's past leaders were content to defer cross-Strait unification, the argument goes, Xi has staked his political legacy on the promise of reclaiming Taiwan; if he does not deliver in his third or fourth term as paramount leader, he will sacrifice his chance of making an indelible mark on Chinese history and might even be overthrown.[2] In a slight variation, Admiral Philip Davidson, US Navy retired, has stated the choice to use force "becomes much more probable within the next six years because of the potential for Xi Jinping's transition in 2027, as his political future is determined principally by himself, and his ability to garner some support for that may depend on that 2027 timeline."[3]

Another popular view is the balance of military power across the Taiwan Strait is making a Chinese invasion more likely. According to

The authors would like to acknowledge Micah Sun and Matthew McGee, who supported Chinese language translation for this monograph. They would also like to thank Lukas Filler, who offered extensive feedback on an early draft; Robb Dunlap and Jon Bell, who developed the original graphics and cover concept; Bob Lawrence, who took an interest in the manuscript from the beginning; as well as the anonymous reviewers and the many students and colleagues who pushed us to refine the manuscript. The usual caveat applies.

1. "'The Big One Is Coming' and the US Military Isn't Ready," *Wall Street Journal* (website), November 4, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-big-one-is-coming-china-russia-charles-richard-u-s-military-11667597291; and Helen-Ann Smith, "China 'More Likely' to Invade Taiwan—and Attack Could Come in 2027, Island's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu Warns," Sky News (website), January 18, 2023, https://news.sky.com/story/china-more-likely-to-invade-taiwan-and-attack-could-come-in-2027-islands-foreign-minister-joseph-wu-warns-12789179.

2. Consortium of Indo-Pacific Researchers, The US and Taiwan's Security: Prospects and Challenges, (Montgomery, AL: Consortium of Indo-Pacific Researchers, 2022), YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz1DBUz-jhM; Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2022), 134; Sugeno Mikio and Nagasawa Tsuyoshi, "Xi's Potential 2027 Transition Poses Threat to Taiwan: Davidson," *Nikkei Asia* (website), September 18, 2021, https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Xi-s-potential-2027-transitionposes-threat-to-Taiwan-Davidson; Masahiro Okoshi, "Taiwan Crisis Could Erupt before 2027, US Lawmaker Warns," *Nikkei Asia* (website), June 16, 2023, https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Taiwan-crisis-could-erupt-before-2027-U.S.-lawmaker-warns; and John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, "Xi Jinping Says He Is Preparing China for War," *Foreign Affairs* (website), March 29, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/xi-jinping-says-he-preparing-china-war.

3. Sugeno and Nagasawa, "Xi's Potential 2027 Transition."

proponents of this argument, decades of investment and strategic planning have made People's Liberation Army leaders more optimistic than ever that a successful assault on Taiwan will be possible by 2027 or thereabouts; an invasion is becoming more likely simply because it is becoming more practicable.[4] One version of this narrative is that People's Republic of China leaders learned from Russia's failure to conquer Ukraine that invading powers must show no remorse when launching lightning assaults. From this view, Vladimir Putin's mistake was that he did not hit Ukraine hard enough in the first few days of the Russia-Ukraine War. Having witnessed this apparent shortcoming, Chinese leaders should not be expected to make the same mistake as Putin; they now know to strike Taiwan hard, fast, and sooner rather than later, before Taipei can fortify itself against invasion and while American arms transfers remain focused on Ukraine.[5]

Other theories about Taiwanese vulnerability abound and are united by an augury that the risk of an armed attack on Taiwan is mounting, the implication being that Taipei and its sympathizers abroad must quickly find ways to bolster deterrence across the Strait. Especially in US outlets, the discussion often focuses on how the United States can play its part in deterring China.[6] One common proposal is for Washington to exchange its long-standing policy of "strategic ambiguity," which leaves both China and Taiwan guessing whether the US military would intervene in a war over the island, for a firm US commitment to defend Taiwan against an armed attack ("strategic

4. Gabriel Collins and Andrew S. Erickson, *US-China Competition Enters the Decade of Maximum Danger: Policy Ideas to Avoid Losing the 2020s* (Houston: Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, December 2021), 34; and Joel Wuthnow, "How to Out-Deter China," *Foreign Affairs* (website), March 24, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/deter-china-taiwan.

5. Elbridge A. Colby and Alex Velez-Green, "To Avert War with China, the US Must Prioritize Taiwan over Ukraine," *Washington Post* (website), May 18, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/05/18/taiwan-ukraine-support-russia-china/; and Jared Gans, "Hawley Presses Blinken to Prioritize Arming Taiwan over Ukraine," *Hill* (website), December 6, 2022, https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/3763834-hawley-presses-blinken-to-prioritize-arming-taiwan-over-ukraine/.

6. Mike Gallagher, "Taiwan Can't Wait," *Foreign Affairs* (website), February 1, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-01/taiwan-cant-wait; and Michèle Flournoy and Michael Brown, "Time Is Running Out to Defend Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs* (website), September 14, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/time-running-out-defend-taiwan.

clarity").[7] The logic is simple; no rational Chinese leader would invade Taiwan if doing so was certain to mean a confrontation with the world's sole superpower. Proponents of strategic clarity acknowledge that a war with China over Taiwan would be "disastrous" even if the United States emerged victorious.[8] These proponents insist that only the credible threat to fight such a ruinous war is now enough to maintain peace across the Strait. In effect, the proponents of strategic clarity offer a new version of mutually assured destruction meant to convince China that an invasion of Taiwan would be tantamount to declaring World War III. To be sure, it is also common for analysts in the United States to argue that Taiwan must develop a more powerful conventional military to deter a Chinese invasion. Most of these policy recommendations take some form of the "porcupine" model of national defense.[9] Even so, few in the United States believe that Taiwan can defend itself.[10] For deterrence to be restored, it is assumed, Washington must threaten war with China to some degree.

In this monograph, we agree that the likelihood of a war over Taiwan's political status has increased in recent years. Like others, we attribute the increasing odds of an invasion to a weakening of deterrence across the Strait. We take issue, however, with the causal logics that underpin most analyses of the issue and, as a result, are led to disagree with the usual policy recommendations that focus on what the United States and (to a lesser extent) Taiwan can do militarily to deter China. Our point of departure is that repairing deterrence across the Taiwan Strait requires a clear understanding of why deterrence is failing at the present time and what can realistically be expected to alter Beijing's prospective decision-making calculus. This understanding means avoiding the presumption that the solution to Taiwan's current predicament can only be found in the military realm. Instead, successful instruments of deterrence can be rooted in other elements of national power, too. What matters is the political interests of the adversary being deterred—

---

7. Richard Haass and David Sacks, "American Support for Taiwan Must Be Unambiguous," *Foreign Affairs* (website), September 2, 2020, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/american-support-taiwan-must-be-unambiguous; Richard Haass and David Sacks, "The Growing Danger of US Ambiguity on Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs* (website), December 13, 2021, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-12-13/growing-danger-us-ambiguity-taiwan; Raymond Kuo, "'Strategic Ambiguity' Has the US and Taiwan Trapped," *Foreign Policy* (website), January 18, 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/18/taiwan-us-china-strategic-ambiguity-military-strategy-asymmetric-defense-invasion/; and Joseph Bosco, "End US' Strategic Ambiguity Policy," *Taipei Times* (website), June 2, 2023, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2023/06/02/2003800840.

8. Haass and Sacks, "Growing Danger."

9. James Timbie and James O. Ellis Jr., "A Large Number of Small Things: A Porcupine Strategy for Taiwan," *Texas National Security Review* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2021/2022): 83–93; and William S. Murray, "Revisiting Taiwan's Defense Strategy," *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 3 (2008): 13–31.

10. Kuo, "'Strategic Ambiguity.'"

in this case, the leaders of the People's Republic of China. In sum, we submit that analysts of Taiwanese security have done too little to probe precisely why Taiwan has become more vulnerable to a Chinese invasion and how China's leaders might be returned to the position of believing that an armed attack on Taiwan is incompatible with other core national interests. As a consequence, analysts have erred in their conclusions about what might deter China in the future.

At a minimum, neither of the arguments described above—Xi's impatience and China's growing strength—are enough to justify the seemingly high degree of confidence that now exists in the United States about Chinese intentions to invade Taiwan. Consider, first, the common tendency to focus on President Xi's idiosyncrasies. Of course, an unchecked authoritarian ruler ordering a self-serving war of choice is always possible. Putin's reckless war in Ukraine is an obvious case in point and has spawned a cottage industry of commentary and analysis to suggest that Xi might similarly use his unfettered authority over Chinese military policy to order the conquest of Taiwan. Such analyses are purely speculative. Although Xi (or any subsequent leader) may grow impatient and initiate a war over Taiwan because of personal ambitions, it is equally possible that Xi's remaining time in office will be defined by an acute anxiety to avoid war over Taiwan so that his domestic priorities (such as economic development and common prosperity), supposed achievements (making China a "moderately prosperous society" and projecting China's "voice" globally), and legacy (joining the pantheon of Chinese Communist Party greats, alongside Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping) do not become unnecessarily imperiled. Those who insist that "unifying" China is a necessary move for an aging People's Republic of China leader should recall that similar things were said about Jiang Zemin in the last few years of his leadership (1995–2004).[11] Overall, we agree with Christopher Johnson, a former senior China analyst at the CIA, who has stated he is "confident" there is "no smoking gun" piece of intelligence to justify certitude an invasion will take place by 2024, or even 2027.[12] Bonnie Glaser, another well-known China expert,

11. John F. Copper, "The Origins of Conflict across the Taiwan Strait: The Problem of Differences in Perceptions," *Journal of Contemporary China* 6, no. 15 (July 1997): 214; and Frank Dikötter, China after Mao: The Rise of a Superpower (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 193.

12. Bill Bishop, "20th Party Congress and US-China Relations with Chris Johnson," November 4, 2022, in *Sinocism*, podcast, streaming, 47:00, https://sinocism.com/p/sinocism-podcast-5-20th-party-congress.

has gone so far as to call references to an alleged 2027 timeline "just sloppy."[13] Johnson and Glaser are correct; no hard evidence indicates Xi has staked his legitimacy on the Taiwan question or set a hard invasion deadline. If anything, Xi has emphasized a 2049 timeline for national rejuvenation, not a 2027 timeline, which implies little about what the Chinese government intends to do vis-à-vis Taiwan in the near term and allows plenty of room for Xi (who will turn 96 in 2049) or a successor to implement alternative courses of action.[14]

Nor does any concrete evidence suggest China's growing military might will lead inexorably toward invasion in the near term. The military capabilities of any country must always be understood in the context of risk. Undoubtedly, China's material wealth has grown considerably in recent decades, and the burgeoning resources at Beijing's disposal have been used to purchase a formidable array of weapons, including missile technologies and amphibious assault ships. These military investments mean People's Liberation Army leaders are likely more confident of being able to seize Taiwan by force than they were in the past. Just because a car might go 160 miles per hour, however, does not mean the driver will judge going this speed to be prudent. Likewise, a person owning a gun says little about whether the person will use it recklessly. In other words, the People's Liberation Army has surely become more powerful—and its leadership more confident—but this observation alone is not enough to conclude that Beijing is bound to order an invasion of Taiwan in the very near future at the cost of other national objectives, as General Mark Milley has said.[15] After all, powerful states always have the latent potential to invade and conquer neighboring territories (this is true almost by definition). For the most part, they do not. As M. Taylor Fravel has shown, even the People's Republic of China has

13. Iain Marlow, "'Sloppy' US Talk on China's Threat Worries Some Skeptical Experts," *BNN Bloomberg* (website), November 4, 2022, https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/sloppy-us-talk-on-china-s-threat-worries-some-skeptical-experts-1.1841623.

14. Bonny Lin, "Enabling 'Patriots' to Be Masters of the Island: Evolution of Xi's Policy on Taiwan since 2013," *China Leadership Monitor* 73 (Fall 2022): 1–18; Minxin Pei, "Policy Continuity with Rhetorical Escalation: Xi's Political Report to the 20th Party Congress," *China Leadership Monitor* 74 (Winter 2022); Joel Wuthnow, "Xi's New Central Military Commission: A War Council for Taiwan?," *China Leadership Monitor* 74 (Winter 2022); Suisheng Zhao, "Is Beijing's Long Game on Taiwan About to End? Peaceful Unification, Brinkmanship, and Military Takeover," *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 143 (September 2023), 1–22; and Jude Blanchette, Briana Boland, and Lily McElwee, "What Is Beijing's Timeline for 'Reunification' with Taiwan?," Interpret: China (website), May 26, 2023, https://interpret.csis.org/what-is-beijings-timeline-for-reunification-with-taiwan/.

15. Sam LaGrone, "Milley: China Wants Capability to Take Taiwan by 2027, Sees No Near-Term Intent to Invade," USNI News (website), June 23, 2021, https://news.usni.org/2021/06/23/milley-china-wants-capability-to-take-taiwan-by-2027-sees-no-near-term-intent-to-invade.

shown a preference for settling territorial and sovereignty disputes via compromise rather than brute force.[16] Why, then, should it be taken for granted that China will invade Taiwan once leaders in Beijing are in possession of the bare means of doing so? Given the high stakes involved, this question deserves a thorough investigation.

Speculation, conjecture, and subjective psychological analysis are essential tools in the arsenal of China watchers, who often lack reliable data on Chinese intentions, intraregime politics, and strategic planning. Unfortunately, these tools are inadequate foundations for devising successful policies to deter a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. This in adequacy, in short, is the motivation for the present monograph: an uncompromising belief that Taiwanese, American, and allied foreign and defense policies should be built upon falsifiable arguments about what, if anything, might be causing the risk of invasion to tick upward. Otherwise, deterrence will be based on little more than guesswork. In the following chapters, we provide exactly such an argument about what is causing the odds of an invasion to increase and what might be done to contain and roll back the growing risk of war. The overarching goal is to marry international relations theory with policy analysis to produce a set of rigorous recommendations for how actors in Washington, Taipei, and other Indo-Pacific capitals can best contribute to the maintenance of peace across the Strait.

In setting ourselves this goal, we invite readers to understand our work as consistent with the main pillars of Washington's One China policy—as codified in the Three Communiqués, the Taiwan Relations Act, the Six Assurances, and other foundational documents and statements—as well as the related policy of "strategic ambiguity" about whether the United States would join a war against China in defense of Taiwan. While it is important to acknowledge Beijing's claim that Taiwan is part of China and recognize that Chinese Communist Party officials are committed to bringing Taiwan under the control of the People's Republic, we emphatically do not share these positions. Rather, our normative position is the same as that of the US government; any settlement regarding Taiwan's political status should arise from peaceful negotiations between the two sides of the Strait, and, today, such a settlement would require the assent of Taiwan's

16. M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

people.[17] Our scholarly interest is to shed light on the strategic conditions that might allow for such negotiations to take place one day, which would mean finding ways to dissuade both sides from using war as an instrument of dispute resolution.[18] We recognize, of course, that the US government is bound by the Taiwan Relations Act to arm Taiwan with defensive weapons and to retain the capacity to resist forcible attempts to subdue the people of Taiwan. While these commitments must be upheld, we avoid treating the United States as a potential arbiter of the conflict. In the final analysis, US policy is to support a peaceful status quo across the Taiwan Strait until such a time as that the two sides can negotiate a settlement of their dispute.[19] If implemented, the arguments developed in this monograph would further this broad policy framework.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that this monograph does not directly address the possibility that China might initiate provocative, coercive, or limited measures against Taiwan that fall below the threshold of all-out war. We do not provide an argument for how to deter a blockade, for example, or the seizure of Kinmen Island (Quemoy) or Mazu Liedao (Matsu Islands) in the Taiwan Strait. Our reason for abstracting away from such hypotheticals is similar to those noted by Ambassador Chas Freeman Jr.:

> There's no reason for China to take an incremental approach that gives the US ample opportunity to consider options and intervene. That is not what the Chinese would contemplate. If they do move it will be sudden, it will be with maximum force, it will be with great speed, it will involve the decapitation of the leadership in Taipei and the destruction of Taiwan infrastructure simultaneously. It is not going to be a naval blockade, that would be disastrous because it would maximize international support for Taiwan rather than presenting the world with a fait accompli.[20]

17. Luke Bellocchi, "The U.S. One China Policy: A Primer for Professional Military Education Faculty," *Campaigning: The Journal of the Joint Forces Staff College* (website), May 11, 2022, https://jfsc.ndu.edu/Media/Campaigning-Journals/Academic-Journals-View/Article/3026633/the-us-one-china-policy-a-primer-for-professional-military-education-faculty/.

18. Jude Blanchette and Ryan Hass, "The Taiwan Long Game," *Foreign Affairs* (website), December 20, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-long-game-best-solution-jude-blanchette-ryan-hass.

19. Ryan Hass, Bonnie S. Glaser, and Richard Bush, *US-Taiwan Relations: Will China's Challenge Lead to a Crisis?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2023), 19–20.

20. "Interpreting History: Nixon's Translator Talks Sino-US Tensions and Taiwan Invasion Prospects," *Week in China* (website), June 17, 2022, https://www.weekinchina.com/2022/06/interpreting-history/ (webite discontinued).

Not everyone will agree with Freeman's assessment. Some scholars and analysts believe that a Chinese blockade of Taiwan is much more likely than an all-out invasion. Reasonable people can disagree on this point. Even those who disagree, however, must surely accept that we have focused our analysis on the most dangerous scenario facing Taiwan. This scenario, we submit, is an analytic exercise that everyone interested in Taiwanese security should find useful. Those who wish to explore the implications of Chinese moves against Taiwan other than a total invasion are referred to the excellent literature on that topic.[21]

The rest of the monograph is organized as follows. First, we review past deterrents that have arguably kept the peace across the Taiwan Strait since 1949. Second, we explain in theoretical terms why maintaining multiple deterrents at any one time is advisable. Third, we assess the changing political conditions that are pushing China toward invasion in the near term. This chapter is the longest of the monograph, paying attention to shifts in the Sino-Taiwanese-American relationship, slowing economic growth in China, moves to sever the Chinese economy from the global semiconductor supply chain, and the military balance of power. Finally, we deduce theoretically informed policy prescriptions for deterring China in the short and longer terms.

21. *Deterring PRC Aggression toward Taiwan*, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2021) (statement of Lonnie Henley, professional lecturer); Lonnie D. Henley, *Beyond the First Battle: Overcoming a Protracted Blockade of Taiwan*, China Maritime Report no. 26 (Newport, RI: China Maritime Studies Institute, March 2023); and Benjamin Jensen, Riley McCabe, and Adrian Bogart, *"What If . . . Alternatives to a Chinese Military Invasion of Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2022).

— 1 —

Deterring China: 1949 to Present

It is a common misconception that the state of deterrence across the Taiwan Strait can be reduced to the severity and credibility of the US threat to intervene on Taiwan's behalf at any given time. This erroneous belief accounts for why the debate in the United States over Taiwanese security has focused so much in recent years on the question of whether Washington should swap "strategic ambiguity" for "strategic clarity" and why it can sometimes seem as though US-based analysts view the fate of Taiwan as singularly in the hands of the sitting US president. In this chapter, we argue that a disproportionate focus on the United States is a mistake borne of presentism. Even a cursory overview of Taiwan's history since 1949 is enough to show that, in reality, multiple deterrents have been operative over the past seven decades, and that Taiwan itself has often been the primary actor engaged in deterring China.

Before proceeding, it is important to distinguish between two different types of deterrents: constraints and restraints. All deterrents discourage or disincentivize a given action from being taken. As we use the term in this monograph, a *deterrent* can either be manufactured and applied externally—a constraint—or it can inhere in the political, social, or economic fabric of the actor being deterred—a restraint. For instance, a threat by Taiwan or the United States to punish China for invading can be considered a constraint because the threat is a form of external pressure applied on Beijing that is meant to encourage Chinese leaders to view invading Taiwan as a losing proposition. By contrast, fears Beijing might have about the People's Liberation Army's competence or prioritization of more pressing short-term objectives should be considered restraints or "self-deterrents," as Richard Ned Lebow, Janice Gross Stein, T. V. Paul, and others have called such fears.[1] These potential brakes on conflict have more to do with China's internal situation than any external lock devised from the outside. To be sure, deterrers can (and do) take measures that sharpen the (internal) restraints or self-deterrents that hold an adversary back from taking an unwanted action. Such measures might take the form of sowing dissent among an adversary's population, undermining its economic system, working to strengthen the hand of dovish actors inside the target regime, or spreading propaganda or disinformation, to name a few possible actions. These measures are conceptually different from the external locks that characterize constraints because the actions are meant to induce an adversary's leaders to feel restrained by domestic inadequacies rather than constrained by the prospect of facing external punishment.

We acknowledge that our description of restraints as forms of deterrence differs somewhat from how the term *deterrence* is traditionally used in the literature today, which tends to focus exclusively on what we have called constraints. In this sense, this monograph can be considered an effort to revive the notion of self-deterrence noted previously, which was developed during the Cold War to explain why the United States and the Soviet Union never used nuclear weapons against one another. American military readers also should not confuse the distinction we make between constraints and restraints with the usage of these terms in the Joint operation planning process, wherein the "constraint" refers to a requirement from a higher command and "restraint" refers to a prohibition. The Department of Defense's 2006 *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept* very nearly makes the distinction at the heart of our conception of deterrence: "Deterrence operations convince adversaries not to take actions that threaten US vital interests by means of decisive influence over their decision-making. Decisive influence is achieved by credibly threatening to deny benefits and/or impose costs, while encouraging restraint by convincing the actor that restraint will result in an acceptable outcome."[2] We use this framework throughout, with reference both to immediate deterrence, which focuses on a particular crisis, and general deterrence, which focuses on the overall strategic situation.[3]

1. T. V. Paul, "Self-Deterrence: Nuclear Weapons and the Enduring Credibility Challenge," *International Journal* 71, no. 1 (2016): 20–40; Donald M. Snow, "Realistic Self-Deterrence: An Alternative View of Nuclear Dynamics," *Naval War College Review* 39, no. 2 (1986): 60–73; Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Beyond Deterrence," *Journal of Social Issues* 43, no. 4 (1987): 5–71; and Richard Ned Lebow, "Deterrence," in *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies,* 2nd ed., ed. Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Thierry Balzacq (New York: Routledge, 2017), 399–400.

2. Director, Plans and Policy, *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept*, 2nd ed. (Offutt Air Force Base, NE: United States Strategic Command, December 2006), 3.

3. Lebow, "Deterrence," 397–99.

In our view, a definition of deterrence that includes restraints as well as constraints is warranted because it best captures the reality that potential aggressors are often dissuaded from attempting armed warfare because of a mix of internal and external factors. As is well known, the earliest works of deterrence theory tended to focus on constraints, with threats of nuclear reprisals and conventional war being the most common deterrents discussed in the literature.[4] As Glenn Snyder stated, deterrence "is the power to dissuade another party from doing something which one believes to be against one's own interests, achieved by the threat of applying some sanction."[5] From this view, the act of deterring an adversary is essentially a question of "how the calculations of a would-be challenger can best be manipulated from the outside."[6] Yet, scholars of deterrence have long recognized that threats of punishment are not the only tools with which to dissuade adversaries from taking unwanted actions. Indeed, scholars such as Janice Gross Stein have pointed out that military threats sometimes backfire when used against adversaries that, for whatever reason, feel compelled to take certain actions or are otherwise inhibited from exercising restraint.[7] In such circumstances, Stein argues, the provision of positive inducements or encouragement ("reassurance") can succeed at altering an adversary's cost-benefit analysis where coercive threats might fall flat. For deterrence to work, therefore, it is essential to understand an adversary's needs, interests, external environment, and domestic-level pathologies before designing a comprehensive strategy to alter the decision-making calculus of that opponent. Within Department of Defense circles, Keith B. Payne developed this approach as "tailored deterrence."[8] We agree with this basic approach, which is why we find it useful in this monograph to disaggregate the internal and external factors that might discourage China from attempting an invasion of Taiwan.

---

4. Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966); Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Robert Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Samuel P. Huntington, "Conventional Deterrence and Conventional Retaliation in Europe," *International Security* 8, no. 3 (1983): 32–56; and Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977).

5. Glenn H. Snyder, "Deterrence and Power," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4, no. 2 (1960): 163–78.

6. Janice Gross Stein, "Reassurance in International Conflict Management," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (1991): 432.

7. Stein, "International Conflict Management."

8. Keith B. Payne, ed., *Understanding Deterrence* (New York: Routledge, 2015); and Keith B. Payne, "Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait," *Journal of Policy & Strategy* 2, no. 2 (May 2022): 1–30.

Multiple deterrents have been operative since 1949 to deter China from invading Taiwan. Sometimes, these deterrents have taken the form of external constraints placed on China's freedom of maneuver. At other times, Beijing has felt restrained from even considering launching an invasion because of perceived domestic deficiencies. Often, both types of deterrents have operated simultaneously. What is clear from the historical record, however, is that, far from depending upon Washington to provide for its defense, Taiwan has frequently played a decisive role in deterring an attack on itself. Hence, we reject the conventional view that "deterring China's use of force has never depended on Taiwan's capabilities; Taiwan alone cannot deter the mainland."[9] On the contrary, Taiwan has deterred China in the past and can do so again.

Consider, for example, the ability of Taiwan to engage in what international relations scholars call "deterrence by denial." *Deterrence by denial* is when one actor (a deterrer) persuades another (the adversary being deterred) that any attempt at an armed attack would be stopped in its tracks and, so, should not even be attempted.[10] Although difficult to imagine today, Taiwan had the capacity to carry out deterrence by denial from the late 1950s through the early 2000s. In particular, Taiwanese air superiority dissuaded Chinese leaders from attempting an invasion, given that undertaking an amphibious assault on Taiwan without control of the skies would be impossible.[11] In effect, Taiwan's air force, supplied and trained by the United States, which in 1958 had determined that the Republic of China Air Force "should be built up and maintained in such a condition that it is qualitatively superior to the Chinese Communist Air Force," denied Beijing confidence it could achieve superiority in one of the three domains that the People's Liberation Army is known to judge as necessary for an effective military operation to unfold (the "three superiorities" being superiority in the information, air, and maritime domains).[12] Indeed, the first kills with guided air-to-air missiles were achieved by the Republic of China Air Force, which, in 1958, shot down 31 People's Liberation

---

9. Robert S. Ross, "Navigating the Taiwan Strait: Deterrence, Escalation Dominance, and US-China Relations," *International Security* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 82.

10. Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence by Denial and Punishment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1959); and Michael J. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018).

11. York W. Chen, "The Shifting Balance of Air Superiority at the Taiwan Strait and Its Implications on Taiwan's Defense Planning," in *Taiwan's Security and Air Power: Taiwan's Defense against the Air Threat from Mainland China*, ed. Martin Edmonds and Michael M. Tsai, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 61–78.

12. Jacob Van Staaveren, *Air Operations in the Taiwan Crisis of 1958* (Washington, DC: US Air Force Historical Division Liaison Office, November 1962), 14; and *Deterring PRC Aggression*.

Army MiGs and lost just two F-86s in return.[13] As recently as 2004, the Department of Defense assessed that Taiwan maintained "a qualitative edge by possessing three times as many fourth-generation fighters as China."[14] Importantly, deterrence by denial does not hinge upon an adversary believing it is certain to be denied its primary objectives by a well-armed defender. For deterrence by denial to work, an adversary only needs to believe an attack is highly likely to be repelled for the attack to become inadvisable. Taiwan has met this threshold in the past.

Even when Chinese leaders might have judged an invasion of Taiwan to be barely possible, the prospect of incurring massive losses in a fight for the island has long constituted a separate but related deterrent—a form of "deterrence by punishment."[15] This form is when deterrers credibly threaten their adversaries with reprisals (military or nonmilitary) that, if meted out, would inflict costs to outweigh the expected benefits of a given action. Leaders on the Mainland must always weigh the benefits of conquering Taiwan against the expected costs of carrying out a successful invasion. If Taiwanese leaders can convince their Chinese counterparts that the process of fighting a war over Taiwan would result in anticipated losses (military, economic, and political) that would exceed the perceived benefits of victory, then deterrence by punishment can be said to exist. Although knowing for sure whether Chinese Communist Party leaders have been deterred by the costs of war in the past is impossible, the historical record has shown that Taiwanese politicians have portrayed confidence that deterrence by punishment was alive and well. For instance, when the People's Republic of China warned Taiwan not to "underestimate the courage and force of the Chinese people" after Lee Teng-hui advanced "special state-to-state relations" in 1999, Lee is said to have replied, "Where is the means to willy-nilly take action against Taiwan?"[16] Lee's point was that China's threats against Taiwan should be treated as bluffs: Beijing would have been foolish to invade Taiwan, Lee reasoned, because the costs of attempting such an invasion would far outstrip the expected benefits.

13. Thomas Newdick, "The Legendary Sidewinder Missile Made Its First Kill over the Taiwan Strait," Drive (website), September 28, 2021, https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/42544/the-legendary-sidewinder-missile-made-its-first-kill-over-the-taiwan-strait.

14. Department of Defense, *Military Power of the People's Republic of China*, *2004* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2004).

15. Snyder, *Deterrence*; and Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*.

16. Catherine Sung, "China's New Demands 'Unfounded,'" *Taipei Times* (website), September 10, 1991, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/1999/09/10/0000001547.

As we discuss later in the monograph, the potency of Taiwanese military threats against China has diminished over time. Certainly, Taiwan's ability to practice unilateral deterrence by denial has decayed. Deterrence by punishment might still be possible, depending upon Mainland China's stomach for a war in which Taiwanese forces might enjoy significant advantages as defenders.[17] Although Taiwan could surely acquire the capabilities to impose huge costs on an invading Chinese force, the level of these costs, the willingness of Taiwanese society to impose them, and Beijing's cost-benefit calculus are all uncertain. Thus, today, Taiwan deterring China by virtue of its own military might is doubtful.

Of course, China does not only have to worry about fighting Taiwan. For decades, Chinese leaders have also contended with the prospect of sparking a conflict with the United States, a treaty ally of Taiwan during the 1955–79 period and Taiwan's de facto patron ever since. At times, the United States has even threatened China with nuclear war.[18] For example, some scholars credit President Dwight Eisenhower's threats to use nuclear weapons as helping to defuse the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises (in 1955 and 1958, respectively), though the most comprehensive examination has found that Mao Zedong, far from being deterred, adroitly used these threats to further his political ends.[19] Either way, Chinese elites recall bitterly six different cases of nuclear coercion they believe the People's Republic of China suffered at the hands of the United States throughout the Cold War.[20] Although threats to use nuclear weapons during a war over Taiwan have always been difficult to make credible (especially after China developed nuclear weapons in the 1960s and a secure second-strike capability by the 1990s), the United States has gone

17. Eugene Gholz, Benjamin Friedman, and Enea Gjoza, "Defensive Defense: A Better Way to Protect US Allies in Asia," *Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (October 2019): 171–89.

18. Bruce A Elleman, *Taiwan Straits Standoff: 70 Years of PRC-Taiwan Cross-Strait Tensions* (New York: Anthem Press, 2021); Huei Pang Yang, *Strait Rituals: China, Taiwan and the United States in the Taiwan Strait Crises, 1954–1958* (Pokfulam: Hong Kong University Press, 2019); and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *The China Threat: Memories, Myths, and Realities in the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

19. Gregory Kulacki, "Nuclear Weapons in the Taiwan Strait Part I," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 3, no. 2 (July 2020): 310–41; and Gregory Kulacki, "Nuclear Weapons in the Taiwan Strait Part II," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 3, no. 2 (July 2020): 342–65.

20. Chas W. Freeman, "US-China Military Relations: From Enmity to Entente and Maybe Back Again," in *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*, ed. Anne F. Thurston (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 58, 9n.

to lengths to make its nuclear threats somewhat believable.[21] These measures included the stationing of US nuclear weapons on Taiwan as late as 1974.

Needless to say, US leaders today are more reluctant to threaten China with nuclear weapons. A nuclear exchange between the United States and China would obviously be calamitous for each state (and the rest of the world). The dangers of nuclear war have not stopped US leaders from threatening China with a conventional military response in the event of an invasion though. Until 1979, the United States maintained a mutual defense pact with Taiwan that stipulated that an attack "in the West Pacific Area" would trigger a response to "meet the common danger," and US naval ships patrolled the Taiwan Strait almost continuously between 1950 and 1980.[22] Since then, the threat of a US intervention against China has been more ambiguous. American combat forces are no longer stationed on the island of Taiwan, no US naval vessels patrol the Taiwan Strait as a matter of routine, and no defensive pact obligates a US intervention in the event of war. Yet, US leaders have intentionally left whether, when, and how US forces would intercede on Taiwan's behalf an open question. Even in this ambiguous form, the possibility of having to wage war against the United States has constituted a significant deterrent from the perspective of China. At times, leaders in Beijing doubted they would be able to win a war against the combined forces of Taiwan and the United States along with its closest allies (deterrence by denial); at other times, the political and strategic benefits of conquering Taiwan might not have been worth the anticipated costs of fighting a major war with the United States (deterrence by punishment). The People's Republic of China's fear of a US intercession on Taiwan's behalf reached an apogee in the late 1990s due to the combined effect of US signaling in the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, the US intervention in Kosovo, and the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.[23] More recently, 100 percent of experts interviewed in an authoritative survey believed that, in the event of an invasion, Beijing would have already factored the cost of war with the United States

21. Liping Xia, "China's Nuclear Doctrine: Debates and Evolution," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (website), June 30, 2016, https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/china-s-nuclear-doctrine-debates-and-evolution-pub-63967; 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): 50–92.

22. Elleman, *Taiwan Straits Standoff*.

23. David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders Its National Security: "The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999"* (Arlington, VA: CNA Corporation, 2000).

into its cost-benefit equation.[24] Such unanimity on any major question of international politics is significant.

So far, we have described multiple constraints that external powers (Taiwan and the United States) have sought to impose upon Beijing as forms of deterrence. There have also been restraints. Leaving aside whether Chinese leaders historically expected to fight a conventional or nuclear war over Taiwan the problem of incorporating Taiwan into the People's Republic of China, for instance, seems to have constituted a powerful (self-)deterrent in its own right. In other words, China has refrained from invasion because of internal doubts about the country's ability to complete a successful annexation in social and political terms. As late as the 1970s, leaders in Beijing expressed reluctance to absorb Taiwan because of the challenges doing so would pose. For example, referring to Taiwan in a back-and-forth with Henry Kissinger, Mao confided, "If you were to send it [Taiwan] back to me now, I would not want it, because it's not wantable. There are a huge bunch of counter-revolutionaries there."[25] Although this statement might sound like pretense, given the context of the Cultural Revolution's chaos, Mao's analysis of the Taiwan problem was actually reasonable; it is not at all clear that the People's Republic of China in the 1960s or 1970s was robust enough to survive the forced incorporation of Taiwan. And as Mao's health continued to decline, whether Taiwan would remain a top priority for the People's Republic of China was also unclear. In 1972, as he was working toward Sino-American normalization, Kissinger told James C. H. Shen, the Republic of China ambassador at the time, "[w]ithin a matter of three to five years, both Mao and Chou would most likely pass away and the entire mainland might be thrown into chaos."[26] In this uncertain context, Taiwan did not face imminent risk, even in the possible absence of a US defense commitment (which was bargained away in the effort to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China).

Reputational concerns, another form of restraint, might also have served to deter a Chinese invasion of Taiwan at various junctures since

24. Bonny Lin et al., *Surveying the Experts: China's Approach to Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], September 2022).

25. Mao Zedong to Henry A. Kissinger, memorandum, "Memorandum of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Henry A. Kissinger," October 21, 1975, National Security Advisor Trip Briefing Books and Cables for President Ford, 1974–76 (box 19), Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

26. Alan D. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy toward Taiwan and US-PRC Relations* (Washington DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), 37n41.

1949. Conquering, subduing, and governing an island of millions cannot be done without offending international opinion. Again, this example of self-deterrence is a classic one. The People's Liberation Army's invasion of Tibet in 1950 is still a stain on China's reputation abroad (especially in neighboring India), as are the more recent attempts to quell dissent in Hong Kong and eliminate Uyghur culture in Xinjiang, which human rights organizations have described as "crimes against humanity."[27] To be sure, fear of alienating foreign audiences most likely did not deter Chairman Mao during the 1950s and 1960s; already disliked by Western powers, Mao took pride in elevating himself as a revolutionary opponent of the established order. Yet, in more recent decades, China's leaders have attached much greater importance to cultivating the country's international image and standing. Thus, fighting a bloody war of choice over Taiwan would not rank highly on China's list of foreign policy objectives. After leaving office, Taiwan's former president Lee was a vocal proponent of this view. Lee argued in public that Taiwan should embrace pro-independence policies during the period 2005–10 precisely because, according to him, Beijing would be too preoccupied with its global image in advance of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the 2010 Shanghai Expo to contemplate an unprovoked attack on Taiwan.[28] Taiwan, in short, could exploit Beijing's perceived "period of strategic opportunity" in which conflict was not supposed to occur.

Finally, economic considerations have also deterred China from invading Taiwan in the recent past. Economic factors have incentivized restraint and created potential constraints. China's rise has been fueled by exports shipped to the United States and its allies and partners as well as imports of raw materials (especially oil, gas, and minerals). China has immeasurably benefited from a "decent and cooperative world order that encourages the enlightened pursuit of national interests."[29] This order allows wealth to be created and redistributed through large-scale organized competition rather than large-scale organized violence, which is history's other, more common alternative.[30] The current "Chinese dream" of national rejuvenation involves metrics

27. Human Rights Watch, *"Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots": Chinese Government Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims* (Human Rights Watch, 2021), 12–48.

28. Scott L. Kastner, "Does Economic Integration across the Taiwan Strait Make Military Conflict Less Likely?," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6, no. 3 (2006): 319–46.

29. G. John Ikenberry, "The Next Liberal Order: The Age of Contagion Demands More Internationalism, Not Less," *Foreign Affairs* (website), August 2020, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-09/next-liberal-order.

30. Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).

for doubling per-capita gross domestic product from 2020 to 2035 (from about $10,000 to about $20,000), which is only possible as long as China is part of this global economic order.[31] As long as a great power has positive expectations about continuing to participate in the economic order and trading system—thereby continuing to increase its comprehensive national power—the great power is incentivized to restrain itself from actions that cause the order to break down.[32] Of course, an overall policy of restraint does not preclude the pursuit of some combative and even confrontational behavior, which, in China's case, is summarized well as follows: "China seeks not only to maintain and expand the trade and investment flows tying it to the rest of the world, but also to ensure that those links incorporate more Chinese bargaining power and contribute to national security and economic interests."[33] Positive expectations about economic cooperation should, in the aggregate, reduce the likelihood a country—such as China—will risk upending the entire order, which would be the case with an invasion of Taiwan.

When expectations of future trade turn negative, however, long-term benefits can be expected with less confidence, and interdependence is increasingly seen through the lens of geopolitical vulnerability rather than economic efficiency. In such circumstances, a great power's satisfaction with the established economic order can be expected to evaporate. The Trump administration's 20 percent tariff on most Chinese imports is a recent case in point. Although Sino-American trade has continued to increase despite the Trump tariffs, future expectations in China have increasingly turned negative. Official Chinese Communist Party discourse increasingly talks about "hegemonism," "decoupling," "unilateralism," and "protectionism."[34] Xi has increasingly emphasized how "[h]eavy dependence on imported core technology is like building our house on top of someone else's walls: No matter how big and how beautiful it is, it won't remain standing

31. Yongjun Zhang, "China Has Potential to Realize 2035 Goal," *China Daily* (website), March 4, 2021, https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202103/04/WS60401fd1a31024ad0baac916.html.

32. Dale C. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

33. Barry Naughton and Briana Boland, *CCP Inc.: The Reshaping of China's State Capitalist System* (Washington, DC: CSIS, January 2023).

34. China Media Project, "China's Political Discourse February 2023: A Balloon Comes to Symbolize High-Altitude Tensions; Chinese Modernization; TikTok," Sinocism (website), March 25, 2023, https://www.sinocism.com/p/chinas-political-discourse-february2023.

during a storm."[35] When leaders increasingly fear "storms," trade interdependence has historically generated "blockade-phobia": relentless drives on the part of threatened states to achieve economic autarchy.[36] Most notably, Imperial Japan chose to wage a war it knew it likely could not win rather than accept the reality of such dependence on foreign powers.[37] The bottom line: although it has functioned as a restraint in the past, massive Sino-American trade interdependence might begin to function as an accelerant to conflict today.[38]

Even so, US financial and economic leverage is still a constraint on China's objectives. If Chinese banks were prohibited from using the US dollar and cut out of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, the costs would be hard to calculate. China's foreign exchange reserves could also be seized. Top leaders in Beijing cannot ignore these potential costs. Meanwhile, the likelihood and seriousness of a global economic boycott of China is also likely to weigh heavily on the minds of Chinese leaders. The severity and credibility of such threats has waxed and waned in the past; when China was less integrated into the world economy, threats of boycotts or sanctions carried less significance, even if they were possible. Now, with China an economic powerhouse, such threats are far less credible than they once were, even if they would be ruinous if implemented. The dominance of the US dollar and the American banking system, however, are still potential, if difficult-to-use, tools for deterring Chinese aggression, even if positive trade expectations are not incentivizing restraint.[39]

The growth in Sino-Taiwanese commerce from the early 1990s onward has had a complex effect on China's incentives vis-à-vis Taiwan. On the one hand, cross-Strait trade and investment has functioned as a restraint by contributing to the perception that peace is more attractive than

35. "Core Technology Depends on One's Own Efforts: President Xi," *People's Daily* (website), April 19, 2018, http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0419/c90000-9451186.html.

36. Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 226–58.

37. Edward S. Miller, *Bankrupting the Enemy: The US Financial Siege of Japan before Pearl Harbor* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007).

38. Dale C. Copeland, "The Limits of Interdependence: China, Russia, and the Limits of Interdependence," *Foreign Affairs* (website), August 23, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/when-trade-leads-war-china-russia.

39. Gerard DiPippo and Jude Blanchette, "Sunk Costs: The Difficulty of Using Sanctions to Deter China in a Taiwan Crisis," CSIS (website), June 12, 2023, https://www.csis.org/analysis/sunk-costs-difficulty-using-sanctions-deter-china-taiwan-crisis.

war. Because China would suffer substantial economic costs if it invaded Taiwan, self-interested Chinese leaders have powerful incentives to avoid a needless disruption in trade and capital flows, especially as long as they hold positive expectations about future connectedness.[40]

More than 400,000 Taiwanese live and work in the People's Republic of China, and, since 2004, over half of all Taiwanese outward investment has flowed to the Mainland.[41] The scale of these economic relationships has been such that, for the most part, Deng Xiaoping's 1979 policy of "peaceful unification" (which replaced Mao's much more militant "liberation" strategy) could plausibly be viewed as justified along the corridors of power in Beijing. Even during turbulent periods in Sino-Taiwanese (and Sino-American) relations, burgeoning cross-Strait economic relations were cause for optimism among Chinese proponents of peaceful unification.[42] To be clear, the restraint engendered by growing positive expectations for interdependence transcended pure "profit" motivations for Beijing: Economic interdependence was a strategy of bringing about unification—one that called for seizing "a twenty-year window of strategic opportunity at the beginning of the 21st century, during which we persist in using economic means as our central strategy, attempting as much as possible to avoid war."[43]

This approach intended to "trade space for time" in a kind of "protracted war" that focused on "building up small victories into large ones, and creating conditions for national unification."[44] Gradually, as China became the core of Asia economically, which was facilitated by joining the World Trade Organization in 2001, the country would also rediscover and reinvent its Chinese essence culturally and philosophically, allowing the People's Republic of China "to exert cultural influence leading

40. Shelley Rigger, *The Tiger Leading the Dragon: How Taiwan Propelled China's Economic Rise* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021); and Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War*.

41. Chad P. Brown and Yilin Wang, "Taiwan's Outbound Foreign Investment, Particularly in Tech, Continues to Go to Mainland China despite Strict Controls," Peterson Institute for International Economics (website), February 27, 2023, https://www.piie.com/research/piie-charts/taiwans-outbound-foreign-investment-particularly-tech-continues-go-mainland.

42. Scott L. Kastner, *War and Peace in the Taiwan Strait* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 31–35.

43. Shigong Jiang, "台海变天？北大教授：还有一场决定性的暗战要拿下" [The rise of a great power and the revival of civilization: The Taiwan issue and the 'enduring war of civilization'], trans. David Ownby, *Beijing Cultural Review* (website), August 6, 2022, https://www.readingthechinadream.com/jiang-shigong-on-the-taiwan-problem.html.

44. Shigong Jiang, "The Rise."

to the unification of hearts and minds."[45] Restraint, in other words, might make Beijing rich and fulfill its great ambitions for the "reunification" of China.

Nevertheless, economic interdependence—most notably, in the microchip market—has placed constraints on the People's Republic of China. This phenomenon is called the "Silicon Shield."[46] The original Silicon Shield formulation was that Taiwan's key position in the global information technology supply chain would act analogously to Kuwait's oil—that is, as a commitment device that would pull the United States into resisting any attempt by the People's Republic of China to dominate Taiwan.[47] Especially once Taiwan had transitioned into a full democracy, the hypothesis was that Washington would not stand by and watch a democratic beacon and economic powerhouse be brought under the control of a hostile People's Republic of China. Over time, the logic of the Silicon Shield shifted. Instead of operating as a device to ensure the United States' commitment to Taiwan's defense, the Taiwanese chip industry became more of an economic doomsday device—an industry that, if attacked and destroyed during war, would wreak havoc upon the Chinese economy (as well as the rest of the world).[48] In 2021, the People's Republic of China imported $421 billion in semiconductors, most of which were manufactured in Taiwan.[49] Without these chips, which require a global supply chain to make, China's internal technology market and its exports would collapse. The Silicon Shield, then, was supposed to make a Chinese invasion of Taiwan so disruptive in economic and technological terms that it would only take place in the most extreme of circumstances.

Understandably keen to avoid being vulnerable to economic coercion, the People's Republic of China worked to create its own chip manufacturing capacity. Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation, China's champion in this regard, opened China's first 12-inch

---

45. Shigong Jiang, "The Rise."

46. Craig Addison, *Silicon Shield: Taiwan's Protection against Chinese Attack* (Nashville: Fusion Press, 2001).

47. Craig Addison, "The Evolution of Taiwan's Silicon Shield," *Semiwiki* (blog), March 22, 2023, https://semiwiki.com/china/314669-the-evolution-of-taiwans-silicon-shield/.

48. Craig Addison, dir. *Silicon Shield 2025*, 2022; Hong Kong: Dragon Horse Films.

49. Nigel Inkster, Emily S. Weinstein, and John Lee, "Ask the Experts: Is China's Semiconductor Strategy Working?," *China Dialogues* (blog), September 1, 2022, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2022/09/01/is-chinas-semiconductor-strategy-working/; and Doris Yu, "China's Technology Imports Reach $449B, Semiconductor Accounts for 70%," *China Money Network* (blog), November 7, 2019, https://www.chinamoneynetwork.com/2019/11/07/chinas-technology-imports-reach-449b-semiconductor-accounts-for-70.

wafer (the industry standard) fabrication plant in 2004.[50] Demand increased faster than supply, and China has remained dependent on imports for 80 percent or more of the country's integrated circuit needs.[51] The Trump administration used China's dependence on chip imports as part of its trade war, imposing aggressive sanctions on ZTE Corporation and Huawei in 2019 and 2020. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, which lost 15–20 percent of its revenue, was forced to cooperate in these sanctions, seemingly indicating Taiwan's overall political alignment despite its conflicting economic interests.[52]

If Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company and Taiwan's wider semiconductor industry were already being weaponized to serve US trade interests, perhaps Taiwan's leaders could weaponize China's dependence to protect Taiwan's autonomy. In this context, we originally argued that Taiwan should make clear to the People's Republic of China that in the event of an invasion, Taiwan would deny the invaders access to Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's technology. In combination with newly invigorated defense preparations, a preplanned resistance campaign were People's Liberation Army troops to make it to Taiwan, and a precoordinated regional response that included the automatic imposition of hefty economic sanctions, we argued, this weaponization would be sufficient to deter a Chinese invasion, even without a US decision to fight a great-power war in defense of Taiwan. We called this a "broken nest" strategy of deterrence, which would sharpen China's fears of losing access to Taiwanese-made chips by raising the level of certainty in Beijing that Taiwan's semiconductor industry would be completely disabled in the event of an invasion.[53]

Since 2021, when our original article was published, the viability of this version of the Silicon Shield has been undermined in two ways. First, in October 2022, the United States imposed unprecedented export controls on the People's Republic of China, a move that threatened

50. "The First 12-Inch Wafer Fab in China Mainland Starts Production Successfully," Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (website), September 25, 2004, https://www.smics.com/en/site/news_read/4194.

51. Mark LaPedus, "China Speeds Up Advanced Chip Development," Semiconductor Engineering (website), June 22, 2020, https://semiengineering.com/china-speeds-up-advanced-chip-development/.

52. Ting-Fang Cheng and Lauly Li, "TSMC Halts New Huawei Orders after US Tightens Restrictions," *Nikkei Asia* (website), March 18, 2020, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Huawei-crackdown/TSMC-halts-new-Huawei-orders-after-US-tightens-restrictions.

53. Jared M. McKinney and Peter Harris, "Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan," *Parameters* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2021–22): 23–36, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol51/iss4/4/.

to sever interdependence between China and Taiwan for high-tech silicon products.[54] The Silicon Shield only functions as a constraint on a Chinese invasion if China is either dependent on Taiwan's information technology industry or interdependent with it. The Huawei restrictions in 2020 in combination with the export controls of 2022 have weakened this interdependence for the trade the People's Republic of China's leaders care most about—the leading node technologies the country needs to power "innovation-driven development."[55] Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's sales in China as a percentage of total revenue were halved following the restrictions going into effect (see figure 1-1).[56] Even more importantly, the costs of export controls must be understood as operating on an annualized sliding scale in which they become more costly every year as technology advances and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's portfolio of advanced nodes expands.

Although the People's Republic of China still imports lower-end chips, it will increasingly meet this demand with its own production lines. At the same time, Taiwan's leaders have said that Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's fabrication plants would not be destroyed—at least not intentionally—in response to an invasion by the People's Republic of China, potentially turning a shield against aggression

54. Matt Sheehan, "Biden's Unprecedented Semiconductor Bet," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (website), October 27, 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/10/27/biden-s-unprecedented-semiconductor-bet-pub-88270.

55. Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *Outline of the National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy*, trans. Center for Security and Emerging Technology (Beijing: Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and State Council of the People's Republic of China, May 2016).

56 Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), *TSMC Annual Report 2009 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2010); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2010 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2011); TSMC, *Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Ltd. Annual Report 2011 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2012); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2012 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2013); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2013 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2014); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2014 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2015); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2015 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2016); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2016 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2017); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2017 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2018); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2018 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2019); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2019 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2020); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2020 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2021); TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2021 (I)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2022); and TSMC, *TSMC Annual Report 2022 (1)* (Hsinchu, TW: TSMC, March 2023).

into a magnet for aggression.[57] This transformation of a constraint into an incentive is a case study in how deterrents decay.

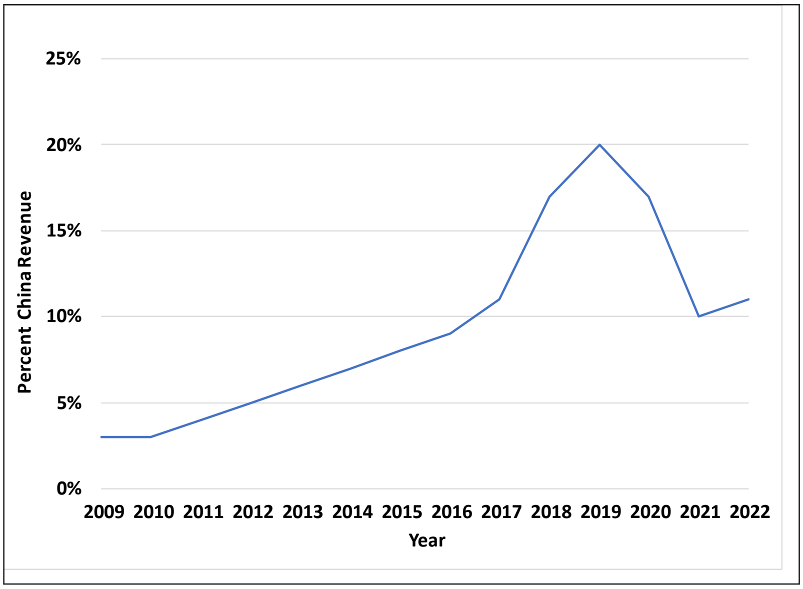

Figure 1-1. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company revenue by region

Figure 1-2 graphically depicts how various US and Taiwanese constraints and Chinese restraints have operated over time. Importantly, until recently, multiple logics of deterrence were constantly operating—internal Chinese restraints and externally imposed constraints. Given the challenge of measuring the effectiveness of individual deterrents, the presence of multiple interlocking deterrents, some imposing constraints, and some inducing restraints is the best explanation for why the People's Republic of China has not invaded Taiwan at any point since 1949 (the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises notwithstanding).

The problem is that, one by one, the deterrents that might once have worked in concert to stave off a Chinese invasion have decayed with the passage of time. Deterrent decay was not a problem in the past because when one strand of deterrence weakened, at least one other strand of deterrence existed to take the strain, and others soon emerged. As we explain

57. Sarah Zheng and Cindy Wang, "No Need to Blow Up TSMC in China War, Taiwan Security Chief Says," *Bloomberg* (website), October 12, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-12/no-need-to-blow-up-tsmc-in-china-war-taiwan-security-chief-says; and Jared M. McKinney and Mark Rosenblatt, "Revive Taiwan's 'Silicon Shield,'" Real Clear Policy (website), July 28, 2022, https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2022/07/28/revive_taiwans_silicon_shield_844814.html.

later in the monograph, deterrent decay has become a much bigger problem for Taiwan as the number of deterrents has dwindled. Today, whether sufficient deterrents exist to deter such an invasion is increasingly doubtful. This lack of sufficient deterrents is a primary cause of Taiwan's present insecurity.

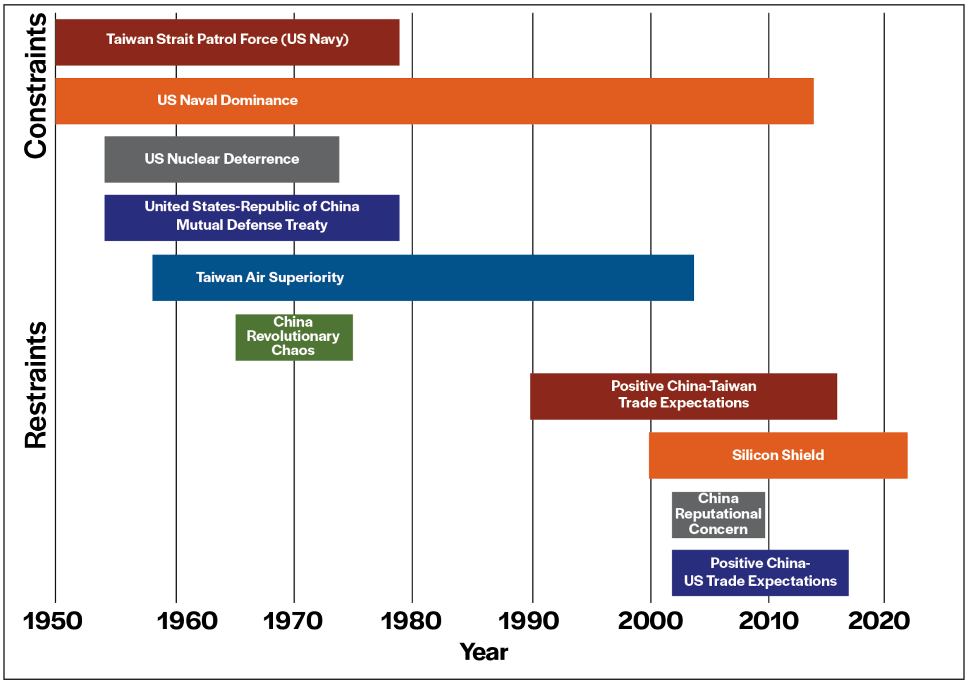

Figure 1-2. Illustration of past interlocking constraints and restraints

As a methodological point, it is important to acknowledge that we cannot be sure of the precise causal weight that should be assigned to each of these inferred deterrents. Using the available qualitative data and counterfactual reasoning, we can only observe traces of a deterrent in operation (for example, via the contemporaneous assessments of statesmen and scholars) infer a causal relationship between each deterrent's existence and the absence of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan; and identify the direction of that relationship (that is, we can argue with some confidence that a given set of deterrents contributed to China's observed decision against invading Taiwan). We cannot provide a quantitative measure of each deterrent's effectiveness nor confidently compare the significance of one strand of deterrence to another. Indeed, no analyst of deterrence can provide quantitative measures of how much of an impact any single deterrent has on the calculus of an adversary—an effect that is, after all, fundamentally unobservable and only ever theorized. What we can say, though, is that the complete or near-complete absence of credible deterrents would leave Taiwan in a perilous situation.

We fear that Taiwan now finds itself in exactly these circumstances—circumstances we encourage Taipei, Washington, and other status quo–oriented powers to overturn through adroit foreign and defense policies.

— 2 —

Deterrents and Decay: The Trend toward Taiwanese Vulnerability

How is deterrence achieved? In theoretical terms, the effectiveness of any deterrent is a function of its perceived severity, certainty, and celerity, meaning an adversary must be convinced of the following three things.

1. The deterrer has at its disposal the capability either to stop a hostile move in its tracks (deterrence by denial) or to inflict harsh enough penalties that the benefits of achieving a desired objective are certain to be outweighed by the costs of doing so (deterrence by punishment).

2. The deterrer has the motivation to carry out its threats to retaliate against a hostile move and will not back down in the face of aggression (otherwise known as the time inconsistency problem or the commitment problem).

3. The costs being threatened by the deterrer will be imposed quickly enough such that punishment cannot be escaped.

This last factor is often overlooked in the international relations literature but matters for preventing a fait accompli, which, as we explain below, is a principal way by which target states can undermine deterrents (especially in the case of Taiwan).

In generic terms, deterrence works best when it is the product of multiple deterrents because, as should be fairly easy to intuit, few deterrents endure the passage of time unscathed in terms of their perceived severity, credibility, or celerity. On the contrary, almost all forms of deterrence tend to decay. This decay can happen for several reasons. First, the adversary (the actor being deterred) can change in ways that render those engaging in deterrence ineffective or less severe. This change can occur serendipitously or by way of deliberate actions to erode the effectiveness of a deterrent via circumvention. After all, the targets of deterrence have an obvious interest in maximizing their freedom of action and resisting a deterrer's influence over them and thus can be relied upon to implement policies designed to overcome the deterrents leveled against them. In such circumstances, deterrents decay because they become maladapted to influencing the evolving decision-making calculus of the adversary.

Second, changes in the underlying interests of the deterrer, whether real or wrongly perceived, can raise doubts about the credibility of threats made at an earlier point in time. In other words, the deterrer (not just the adversary) could change, or be perceived to have changed, such that the deterrer following through on threats made at an earlier point in time becomes less credible.

Third, signaling intentions for extended periods of time (in the case of Taiwan, for several generations) is inherently difficult; at some point, signals sent by a deterrer may break down because they are either neglected, misinterpreted, or ignored. Indeed, the longer a deterrer is required to convey an intention to impose punishments quickly and severely upon an adversary, the greater the chances a breakdown of communication will occur. The upshot is that, via one or more of these mechanisms, the effectiveness of any given deterrent will likely fluctuate over time; no deterrent can be assumed to have a consistent effect upon the decision-making calculus of the actor being deterred.

To ensure deterrence holds firm regardless, deterrerents are best served if they can rely upon more than one deterrent at any given moment. This used to be the case in the Taiwan Strait. However, all the deterrents described in the previous chapter can be said to have decayed for all the reasons given previously. Consider, first, Taiwan's capabilities to engage in military deterrence against China. This deterrent has crumbled because it has been circumvented by China's deliberate decision to invest in more and better weaponry. The People's Republic of China has worked to overcome its weaknesses in the air domain by developing mobile conventional ballistic missiles that could, in effect, replace air superiority.[1] China also initially decided to develop aircraft carriers because its land-based aircraft could not sustain operations on the far side of Taiwan.[2] The result is that Taiwan's armed forces have become less of a threat than they previously were. China has adopted a similar method to overcome US threats of nuclear or conventional warfare: Beijing has developed its own nuclear weapons and invested in conventional forces (especially missiles) that now render US threats of intervention less credible than they were in the past. Recently, the People's Republic of China has expanded its strategic deterrent from "minimum" to "limited" to beef up this capability.[3]

At the same time, China might be forgiven for perceiving changes in Taiwanese (and American) resolve when it comes to fighting for the future of the island. Although the evidence on this point is mixed, opinion polls suggest that Taiwan's public has been reluctant to support a whole-of-society effort to defeat a Chinese invasion, something only seemingly changing after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[4] Even then, although it has been popular, re-upping the conscription period from four months to one year has been handled with trepidation by Taiwan's president, who "passed the buck" on implementation to her successor.[5] Since 2016, the Democratic Progressive Party has spent its political capital on cutting military pensions and undermining the privileged status of the armed forces, while devoting defense outlays to making high-profile arms purchases from the United States rather than training or modernizing Taiwan's military forces, which have fallen in size from

1. Christopher D. Yung, "Sinica Rules the Waves? The People's Liberation Army Navy's Power Projection and Anti-Access/Area Denial Lessons from the Falklands/Malvinas Conflict," in *Chinese Lessons from Other Peoples' Wars*, ed. Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College Press, 2011), 140.

2. Ji You and Yufan Hao, "The Political and Military Nexus of Beijing-Washington-Taipei: Military Interactions in the Taiwan Strait," *China Review* 18, no. 3 (August 2018): 103.

3. Baohui Zhang, *China's Assertive Nuclear Posture: State Security in an Anarchic International Order*, China Policy Series no. 38 (New York: Routledge, 2015); Henrik Stålhane Hiim, M. Taylor Fravel, and Magnus Langset Trøan, "The Dynamics of an Entangled Security Dilemma: China's Changing Nuclear Posture," *International Security* 47, no. 4 (January 2023): 147–87; Hans M. Kristensen, Matt Korda, and Eliana Reynolds, "Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2023," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 79, no. 2 (March 2023): 108–33; and Caitlin Talmadge and Joshua Rovner, "The Meaning of China's Nuclear Modernization," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (website), May 31, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2212871.

4. Keoni Everington, "30% More Taiwanese Willing to Fight for Country after Russian Invasion of Ukraine," *Taiwan News* (website), March 2022, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4476140.

5. Huizhong Wu, "Taiwan Extends Compulsory Military Service to 1 Year," Associated Press (website), December 27, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-politics-china-tsai-ing-wen-7a5cef695fa4b3585411921c19d91606; and Dexter Filkins, "A Dangerous Game over Taiwan," *New Yorker* (website), November 14, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/11/21/a-dangerous-game-over-taiwan.

almost 500,000 troops in the 1990s to under 200,000 today.[6] Under both Democratic Progressive Party and Nationalist Party administrations, Taiwan has failed to match Beijing on defense spending and procurement. For two full decades, as Chinese spending increased annually at double digits (reflecting China's meteoric rate of economic growth), Taiwanese outlays remained static and fully uncorrelated with the People's Liberation Army's relentless modernization. See figures 2-1, 2-2, and 2-3 for comparisons of Chinese and Taiwanese military spending.[7]

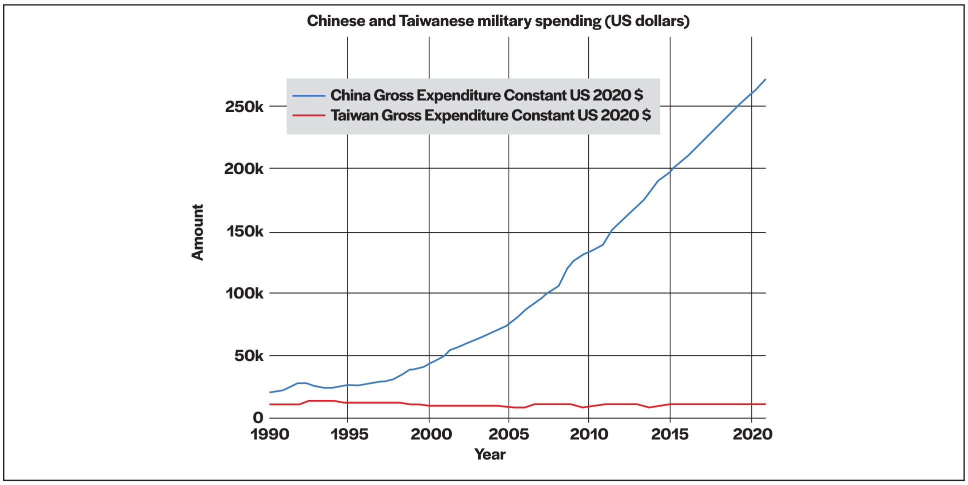

Figure 2-1. Chinese and Taiwanese military spending (US dollars)

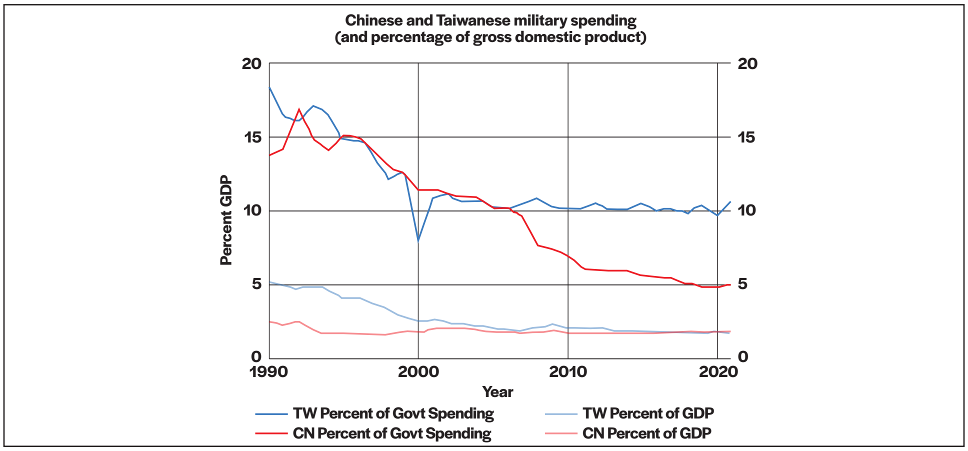

Figure 2-2. Chinese and Taiwanese military spending (and percentage of gross domestic product)

6. Wei-Chin Lee, "Charting the Way Forward: Taiwan's Civil-Military Relations after 2016," in *Democratic Governance in Taiwan*, ed. John Fuh-sheng Hsieh and Robert Henry Cox (New York: Routledge, 2023), 144–62.

7. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Military Expenditure by Country as Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, 1988–2021* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2023).

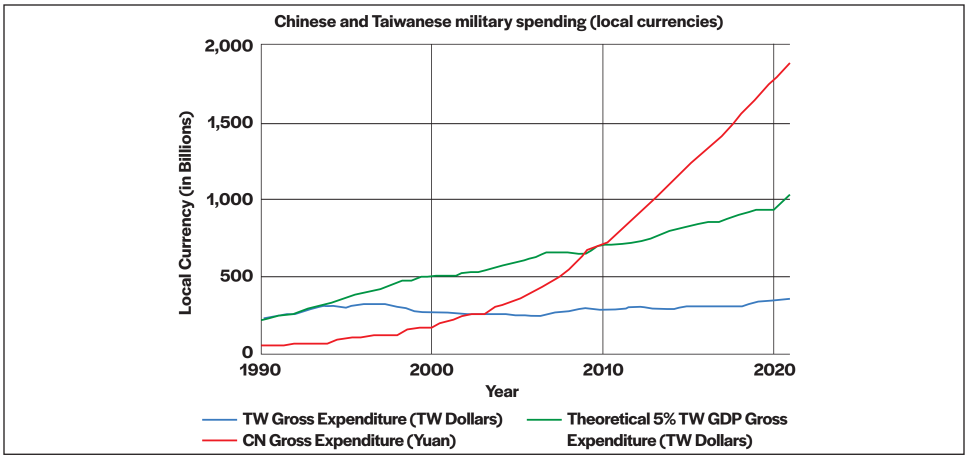

Figure 2-3. Chinese and Taiwanese military spending (local currencies)

Given defense spending is a costly signal of intent, some have the impression—rightly or wrongly—that Taiwan is unserious about its security; the odds of achieving a fait accompli have therefore risen from Beijing's perspective.[8] Would the Taiwanese military and citizenry fight hard enough, quickly enough, and with enough firepower to prevent an invasion from succeeding? Observers in China might answer, "No." In turn, doubts about Taiwanese resolve have implications for how China views the likelihood of a US intervention on Taiwan's behalf. Would the United States really send its troops to fight and die for a society that has not adequately prepared for its defense, especially after the example of Afghanistan?[9] Could the United States be kept out of a war over Taiwan if the island were overrun in short order, as opposed to mounting an effective defense on par with Ukraine's resistance against Russian aggression in February and March 2022? We have no dispositive answers to these questions, but concluding the potency of military deterrence has weakened over time in line with these questions about Taiwanese and US resolve seems reasonable.[10]

Other deterrents have withered because China has undergone changes. For instance, Beijing used to view incorporating Taiwan as a province of the People's Republic of China as a severe problem that would be difficult to overcome. Today, China's leaders might be much more confident about

8. David C. Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

9. Chung-li Wu and Alex Min-Wei Lin, "Will the United States Come to Taiwan's Defense? Analysis of Public Opinion in Taiwan and the United States," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (website), November 4, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcac013.

10. "Frontline Formosa," *Economist* (website), March 11, 2023, https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023-03-11.

their ability to absorb Taiwan into their party-state—not because Taiwan has changed to become easier to swallow (on the contrary, Taiwan is becoming more different from Mainland China with every passing year) nor because China's leadership has changed to become more risk acceptant and more willing to bear the costs of forced unification (though as 2049 approaches, the leadership's attitude may change), but because Beijing now has decades of experience with population control.[11] It is important not to overestimate the utility of surveillance and artificial intelligence in controlling restive populations, as seen in the recent success of the so-called A4 Revolution protests in China. In addition, the crackdown in Hong Kong and mass incarceration in Xinjiang likely provide a false equivalency for how easy an occupation of Taiwan might be.[12] Even so, it is reasonable to assume that China has become more confident in its ability to carry out the political, economic, and social integration of Taiwan into the People's Republic of China. In such an attempt, Beijing may revive plans to govern Taiwan under the "one country, two systems" formula, an idea that was badly discredited after the crackdowns on Hong Kong's democratic system but that has recently received new interest among top officials.[13] At the same time, leaders in Beijing likely view themselves as facing fewer reputational costs than they once did, given the relatively high level of animosity toward China now evident in the United States and other Western capitals.

As recently as 2022, Taiwan and the United States could still take solace in elements of the economic strand of deterrence holding strong. To be sure, President Trump's trade war with China did much to decrease the country's positive expectations of future trade with the United States and the West. And President Biden maintaining—and even deepening—the effort to decouple from China showed this trend was not a passing, idiosyncratic one that could be waited out but a new consensus among the American political class. Even so, significant interdependence remained, and the volume of trade between the United States and China increased during 2022.[14] This interdependence, especially in the global semiconductor trade, could

11. Josh Chin and Liza Lin, *Surveillance State: Inside China's Quest to Launch a New Era of Social Control*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2022).

12. Wang Zhian 王志安, *Wang Sir's News Talk: The Power of a Blank Sheet of Paper* (Tokyo: Wang Zhian, 2022), YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEj--vceJIo.

13. Jianli Yang, "Will Xi Jinping Make Taiwan a New Offer?," *Diplomat* (website), February 7, 2023, https://thediplomat.com/2023/02/will-xi-jinping-make-taiwan-a-new-offer/.

14. Emily Washburn, "US Trade with China Actually Increased Last Year: Here Are the 10 Top Imported Items," *Forbes* (website), February 10, 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilywashburn/2023/02/10/us-trade-with-china-actually-increased-last-year-here-are-the-10-top-imported-items/?sh=25c330885f85.

have been weaponized in the short term (this decade) as a deterrent. Unfortunately for Taiwan, the threat of withholding access to semiconductors and the global industry no longer holds as much deterrent value. As discussed previously, this loss of deterrent value did not occur because China had successfully circumvented the deterrent (although Beijing was certainly laying plans to do so) nor did it occur because China had become more resilient to threats of economic punishment (as Russia did after 2014).[15] Rather, the potency of economic deterrence against China has decayed because of missteps made by Washington and others: Instead of waiting for the deterrent to decay organically, the United States has chosen in recent years to hasten the demise of the deterrent through deliberate choice (that is, preemptively reducing China's access to semiconductors and other technologies instead of threatening isolation from the global industry as a punishment to be meted out in response to an invasion).[16] In the next chapter, we explain in more detail why this move by the United States was a strategic error.

At the same time, the Russia-Ukraine War has shown the willingness of Western states to bear economic hardship is limited. In the immediate aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Western response seemed comprehensive and unified. At least, few observers anticipated the United States and its European allies would be able to organize such speedy and punishing sanctions against Moscow. Yet, over time, cracks in the Western alliance began to emerge. The Netherlands, for instance, refused to extend gas extraction in the province of Groningen, and the German government stands resolutely opposed to nuclear power as an alternative to oil and gas.[17] Such decisions, which seemed to fly in the face of geopolitical imperatives, slowed Europe's move away from Russian oil and gas. Even after 18 months of war in Ukraine, EU countries are still purchasing Russian energy in large quantities, with countries such as Hungary and Slovakia remaining mostly dependent on Russian energy. In France, Italy, and Czechia, opposition parties and popular movements have voiced disapproval of continued support for Ukraine, drawing attention to the

---

15. Xi Jinping, "Remarks by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 14th BRICS Summit" (speech, 14th Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa Summit, Beijing, June 23, 2022), https://english.news.cn/20220623/d001e1a37c0f40a8acf0e77070b8c256/c.html.

16. Aidan Powers-Riggs, "Taipei Fears Washington Is Weakening Its Silicon Shield," *Foreign Policy* (website), February 17, 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/17/united-states-taiwan-china-semiconductors-silicon-shield-chips-act-biden/.

17. "Europe's Next Energy Crunch," *Economist* (website), September 29, 2022, https://www.economist.com/europe/2022/09/29/europes-next-energy-crunch.

exorbitant cost of living increases that have resulted from sanctioning Russia.[18] Hungary's Viktor Orbán served as a brake on sanctions at various points throughout 2022. These difficulties in maintaining sanctions against Russia held despite the geographic closeness of the war in Ukraine. Even purported longer-term costs, such as Bundeswehr modernization, remain—at the time of this writing—susceptible to failure.[19] The lessons of the Russia-Ukraine War, in other words, will not become clear for quite some time: Perhaps China will learn that the West stands ready to impose crippling economic sanctions in response to an invasion of Taiwan, but perhaps China might also perceive that the West would be severely limited in its ability to threaten economic punishments as a mean of deterrence—a conclusion US-based analysts have already reached.[20]

One clear lesson of the Russia-Ukraine War seems to be that economic warfare against China would be far more devastating to Western economies than the collective efforts to sanction and isolate Russia. Moreover, sanctions against China would have to be waged in response to a faraway war in support of a polity that no major Western power recognizes as a sovereign government. On the other hand, Ukraine, which borders several NATO members, is recognized as unambiguously sovereign. Thus, even less allied unity can reasonably be expected on sanctions against China than was achieved in 2022 against Russia, a conclusion Chinese leaders have no doubt reached. Tang Yonghong, deputy director of the Taiwan Research Institute of Xiamen University, writes, for instance:

> Today, when mainland China has risen, Taiwan is not the core interest of these countries, but just a card and a pawn. Therefore, these [Western] countries will certainly not sacrifice the interests of maintaining diplomatic relations with mainland China and sacrifice the lives of their own people to send troops to protect Taiwan. At most, they will publicly condemn, economically sanction, diplomatically oppose, and support with weapons. Once the Taiwan issue is resolved, it will not be long before these realistic

18. "Czechs Rally to Demand Resignation of Pro-Western Government," Associated Press (website), October 28, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-donald-trump-prague-europe-4bafb860e117e735651d06cd346af273.

19. "The State of the Bundeswehr Is More Dismal Than Ever," *Economist* (website), January 26, 2023, https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/01/26/the-state-of-the-bundeswehr-is-more-dismal-than-ever.

20. DiPippo and Blanchette, "Sunk Costs."

> countries, based on their own interests, will inevitably face up to and recognize reality and seek to re-handle diplomatic relations with China. Therefore, Taiwan will inevitably change from a chess piece to an abandoned child.[21]

In the event of such a war—which would involve what Beijing has come to call the "core of China's core interests"—how many countries would reason like Kissinger did in 1976?[22] "For us to go to war with a recognized country where we have an ambassador over a part of what we would recognize as their country would be preposterous," Kissinger exhorted back then.[23] In short, despite the significant potential power of a perfectly executed campaign of economic punishment against China, Beijing could plausibly dismiss the viability of such deterrents, even—perhaps, especially—after the example of the Russia-Ukraine War. Once again, we can offer no dispositive answer to the question of what lessons China has learned and will learn from the war in Ukraine; perhaps the crisis in Eastern Europe will embolden Chinese leaders, or perhaps the crisis will dampen their enthusiasm for a military solution. We can only emphasize the great uncertainty that now exists over whether China is being adequately deterred from invading Taiwan by virtue of latent Western threats to inflict economic punishments on Beijing.[24]

Our conclusion is grim. Most of the deterrents that were once thought to stay the hand of would-be Chinese aggressors against Taiwan have now arguably decayed to the point of being highly dubious. In the contemporary context, the only remaining deterrents are (1) a questionable threat of economic warfare, which would require Western consensus and a willingness to accept high costs in defense of a far-off polity, (2) Taiwan's wobbly willingness to punish invading forces at great cost to Taiwanese society, and (3) an ambiguous American security commitment to Taiwan that is no longer backed

---

21. Yonghong Tang 唐永红, "台湾从俄乌局势演变中能学到什么?," trans. Micah Sun, Aisixiang (website), June 4, 2022, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/134418.html; and Gang Ding 丁刚, "为什么说俄乌冲突改变了欧洲人的中国观," Aisixiang (website), January 31, 2023, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/140389.html.

22. Beijing Newsroom, "Taiwan Is at the Core of China's Core Interests – Chinese Defence Minister," Reuters (website), November 22, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/china-says-reason-us-china-situation-is-because-us-made-wrong-strategic-move-2022-11-22/.

23. Alan D. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy toward Taiwan and US-PRC Relations* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), 73.

24. DiPippo and Blanchette, "Sunk Costs."

by overwhelming force.[25] Table 2-1 summarizes how deterrence has decayed along all three key inputs (severity, certainty, and celerity).

Table 2-1. Depiction of deterrent decay

Deterrent Input	Severity	Certainty	Celerity
Deterrent decay	Circumvention	Changing interests	Neglect, misinterpretation, and faltering consensus
Example	PRC nuclear development, A2/AD program	Decreasing Taiwan military spending and national service commitment	Inability of Western sanctions to cripple Russian economy rapidly after its invasion of Ukraine

If this conclusion is correct, then the implications for Taiwanese security are as obvious as they are severe. Even if we are wrong, charitable critics must allow that, to be secure, the authorities in Taipei must be confident at least one logic of deterrence is working to persuade the Chinese leadership an attempted invasion would be counterproductive. Preferably, given the possibility for rapid change in world politics, Taiwan would be confident multiple logics of deterrence are operating simultaneously. Even better, Taipei ought to have a plan for how future strands of deterrence will look once the current deterrents have eroded. In the past, all these conditions applied. Today, we argue Taiwan cannot have high confidence Beijing views an invasion as cost prohibitive, and Taiwan certainly cannot boast of several, interlocking deterrents working in unison. In addition, few signs have indicated a plan to bolster deterrence for the future. This situation is dangerous for Taiwan and is made even more fraught by changes taking place in China and to the Sino-American relationship, as we next discuss.

25. Dennis Van Vranken Hickey, "The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996: Implications for US Security Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 7, no. 19 (1998): 418.

— 3 —

Why China Might No Longer Defer an Invasion of Taiwan: Four Key Variables

In the previous chapter, we argued that China is no longer being adequately constrained from invading Taiwan because the various deterrents designed by external powers in the past—Taiwan and the United States, especially—have decayed over time and have not been refurbished or replaced. By itself, this argument (even if correct) does not imply an invasion is inevitable. This is because China might be restrained from pursuing an invasion even if it is not constrained, the difference being that an impetus toward restraint is derived from internal calculations about what the national polity can practicably achieve, whereas constraints are external locks designed by others to thwart the national ambitions of an adversary. So, the question arises: If China is not being constrained from invading Taiwan, can China at least be expected to exercise restraint?

The Chinese policy of restraint that has held from 1949 until present has been driven in large part by anxieties about achieving military victory and integrating Taiwan as a functional province of the People's Republic of China, among other factors. Today, we assess that the attractiveness of restraint as a policy option is fast dwindling in the eyes of China's helmsmen. On the contrary, the perceived costs of restraint—that is, the cost to China's leaders and its national interests of simply maintaining the status quo—have grown and continue to grow.[1] For Taiwan, this situation is grave because it means political developments that militate in favor of an invasion are exacerbating the (very serious) problem of deterrent decay. China's leaders have become less constrained by deterrence at exactly the same time multiple shifting trends

1. Kayse Jansen, "How Competition Undermines Deterrence" (master's thesis, Missouri State University, 2021), https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/3666.

may be reducing Chinese restraint. The fear is that China's leaders may—as early as this decade—assess that the People's Republic of China faces a "better now than later" situation.[2]

In this chapter, we identify four key variables causing China's costs of restraint to increase over time. First, we discuss the erosion of the One China framework as a viable diplomatic peace tool. In the past, the language of One China—which has been used differently and deftly by actors in China, Taiwan, the United States, and elsewhere—was flexible enough to accommodate the competing needs of Beijing, Taipei, and Washington; the language represented a constellation of understandings about the status quo that allowed China to imagine that peaceful unification was possible, while reassuring Taiwan that forced unification was not inevitable and advancing the US interest in a peaceful settlement of the dispute. Yet, the One China framework has now been so badly damaged that it might no longer serve this role. Second, we discuss political and economic developments inside China—namely, the Chinese Communist Party's increased reliance on economic performance as a source of domestic legitimacy. We suggest that some severe economic challenges will increasingly imperil the Chinese Communist Party's political standing and push China's leadership to look for new, desperate ways to shore up the regime's survival. Because the Party has rhetorically bound itself to a 2049 date for unification, China's top leaders may come to switch logics of legitimation: from economic growth to "national unification." Third, we point to the decoupling of China from the global semiconductor trade as a troubling development that we expect to encourage Chinese strategists to view an attack on Taiwan as a less costly endeavor than it once appeared. And finally, we discuss the familiar topic of the changing balance of power across the Taiwan Strait. We concur with others that China has grown increasingly capable of mounting a potentially successful assault against Taiwan but join this observation with another: that China's advantages over Taiwan and the United States are set to expire in the early to mid-2030s, meaning the next decade constitutes a closing window of opportunity for China to press its military advantages across the Strait.

To be clear, we are not arguing that conclusive, objective evidence—the purported "smoking gun"—exists to reveal China's plans for Taiwan this decade. We doubt any such evidence exists, most basically because the People's Republic of China's future actions are contingent upon emerging trends that may not yet be fully appreciated in China as well as on contingent

2. Jack Snyder, "Better Now Than Later: The Paradox of 1914 as Everyone's Favored Year for War," *International Security* 39, no. 1 (July 2014): 71–94.

developments that are merely probabilistic. Neither do we resort to providing a subjective assessment of Chinese thinking, which is difficult given the opacity of China's elite politics and unfalsifiable to boot. Instead, we focus on elucidating a set of shifting material variables upon which most can agree. If readers can be persuaded we are coding these variables correctly, then they should be confident in our conclusion that China's incentives to invade Taiwan sooner rather than later have increased relative to past eras. In addition to the phenomenon of deterrent decay outlined above, we posit the material realities described in this chapter as an underlying substrate upon which Taiwan's present insecurity rests.

An important caveat is in order: For the purposes of answering our research questions of interest, we have chosen to abstract from any psychological factors that might influence leaders in Beijing. We recognize that individual and collective psychology can be of critical importance in international politics; leaders matter, and a wealth of scholarship now purports to measure and analyze leaders' traits with a view to predicting their likely actions while in office.[3] For the most part, however, leadership trait analysis is applied to explain leaders' broad (general) approaches to foreign policy rather than their narrow (particular) policy decisions. We are aware of no rigorous application of leadership trait analysis that claims to pinpoint when and why a given leader might choose to declare war, for example, which is our focus here. A corollary is that we have also deliberately abstracted from the fuzzy notion of "risk acceptance," as it pertains to China's leaders. Again, we acknowledge that leaders vary in terms of risk acceptance (and, indeed, the same leader might vary over time in terms of how much he or she is willing to tolerate risk). Because we are unable to measure leaders' levels of risk acceptance with any degree of certainty, we have opted instead to draw readers' attention to variables we can code in ways that might enjoy broad, intersubjective agreement. As a result, our conclusions will necessarily be incomplete and somewhat contingent.

The One China Formula(s)

We begin with the assumption that, in the context of Taiwanese security, deterring China can be understood as an exercise in persuading Chinese

3. Margaret G. Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: Trait Analysis," in *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, ed. Jerrold M. Post (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005): 178–212; Juliet Kaarbo, "Personality and International Politics: Insights from Existing Research and Directions for the Future," *European Review of International Studies* 4, no. 2-3 (2017): 20–38; and Juliet Kaarbo, "New Directions for Leader Personality Research: Breaking Bad in Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 97, no. 2 (2021): 423–41.

leaders to defer acting upon their commitment to achieving unification. This is because convincing Beijing to abandon its goal of unification altogether is not likely. Even if the People's Republic of China were to lose a war over Taiwan, we are skeptical such a conflict would end with leaders in Beijing agreeing to endorse the existence of a fully sovereign Taiwanese state. Instead, China would likely remain committed to absorbing the island of Taiwan into the People's Republic of China. The only realistic objective is to encourage China's top decisionmakers to view deferring unification as preferable to attempting unification by force in the immediate term. Over time, the nature of the Chinese regime might evolve in a manner that is more compatible with Taiwan's democratic identity.[4]

China's leaders can only be expected to defer unification if they are convinced that peaceful unification is possible and choosing against invasion is not tantamount to losing Taiwan forever. In the past, these two conditions were met—at least in large part—because Beijing, Taipei, and Washington subscribed to a version of the One China principle, policy, or framework. To be sure, many versions of the One China framework exist; leaders and ordinary people in China, Taiwan, and the United States use the language of One China in ways that differ in important respects. The People's Republic of China speaks of a One China principle, whereas the United States describes a One China policy, for instance.[5] Moreover, the precise meanings and implications of One China have evolved over time for most of the actors under analysis.[6] At their core, however, the various meanings attached to the One China idea used to converge on a basic understanding that there were not two sovereign states on either side of the Taiwan Strait. On the contrary, both the Chinese Communist Party government in Beijing and the Nationalist Party government in Taipei held that they were the legitimate government of the whole of China—Mainland China and Taiwan included. This basic understanding was important to leaders in Beijing because it implied that the only issue to be resolved with Taipei was the question of how to settle the political disputes outstanding from the Chinese Civil War. In other words, unification was possible because the two sides already agreed in principle that they had never been de jure separated from one another.

4. Jude Blanchette and Ryan Hass, "The Taiwan Long Game," *Foreign Affairs* (website), December 20, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-long-game-best-solution-jude-blanchette-ryan-hass.

5. Richard C. Bush, *A One-China Policy Primer*, East Asia Policy Paper no. 10 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, March 2017).

6. Chong Ja Ian, "The Many 'One Chinas': Multiple Approaches to Taiwan and China," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (website), February 9, 2023, https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/02/09/many-one-chinas-multiple-approaches-to-taiwan-and-china-pub-89003.

This reality is reflected in the way the One China framework has increasingly been critiqued: as "a leftover from the colonial past."[7]

For their part, US diplomats have enunciated their own version of a One China policy for more than 50 years. Importantly, the Shanghai Communique of 1972 included a statement by the United States that it "acknowledged" that "all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China" but it did not commit Washington to sharing this view. The subsequent Joint Communique of the United States and the People's Republic of China to establish normalized diplomatic relations similarly noted (but did not endorse) the Chinese position that "there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China." Needless to say, this statement differs majorly from the Beijing-preferred One China principle. As far as the US government is concerned, the political status of Taiwan is "undetermined" because the island of Taiwan was never transferred to Chinese sovereignty after being relinquished by Japan after World War II. Nevertheless, the United States is not opposed to China and Taiwan reaching a future agreement that Taiwan is part of China, as long as such a resolution is reached via peaceful means. Other elements of the US One China policy similarly focus on the process by which a resolution of Taiwan's political status must be reached. For example, the United States has renounced any role as mediator of the dispute and has further committed not to pressure Taiwan to enter negotiations with Beijing. Washington has also committed (per the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances) to supply Taiwan with defensive weapons. These facets of the US One China policy—important ones, especially from the perspective of Taipei—help to balance Washington's undertakings not to support Taiwanese independence or Taipei's membership of international organizations "for which statehood is a requirement."[8]

To reiterate, there are major disagreements between (and within) Beijing, Taipei, and Washington over the precise meaning of the One China idea. As noted previously, the language of One China can best be conceptualized as an umbrella under which can be found a constellation of different understandings of the political status quo across the Taiwan Strait. For instance, some in Taiwan, especially inside the Democratic Progressive Party, insist that the island's governing authority

7. J. Bruce Jacobs, "Whither Taiwanization? The Colonization, Democratization and Taiwanization of Taiwan," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14, no. 4 (December 2013): 583.

8. Michael Y. M. Kau, "Clinton's 'Three No's' Policy: A Critical Assessment," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 6, no. 2 (1999): 15–22.

is already the legitimate government of an independent sovereign state (the Republic of China), and, thus, no declaration of independence from Beijing is required. It is also possible to construe President Bill Clinton's insistence in 1998 that the United States did not support "two Chinas, or one Taiwan-one China" as a tacit acceptance of the People's Republic of China's One China principle, though Clinton's aides were quick to dismiss this interpretation of his remarks at the time (insisting instead that Washington's long-standing One China policy was still intact).[9] What matters most is that, for decades, a shared willingness by all sides to tolerate ambiguity has been essential to Beijing's belief that a peaceful political integration might possibly occur at some point in the future; most invocations of the One China framework clustered around a broad understanding of the status quo that, on a fundamental level, was tolerable to Beijing. Without American and Taiwanese nominal adherence to some version of the One China idea—even if not the People's Republic of China's own One China principle—Beijing would have concluded long ago that peaceful reunification was impossible. In turn, China might well have reasoned that war was the only option left for settling the dispute on favorable terms.

Unfortunately, we assess the One China idea is at dire risk of collapse as a broad and inclusive discursive framework that can indefinitely structure peaceful relations among China, Taiwan, and the United States. As noted, the One China framework's loose strictures—which, among other things, require the United States and most other world governments to recognize Beijing officially as the capital of the sovereign state of China but permit them to maintain limited, unofficial relations with the polity of Taiwan—have always been "amorphous, often unspoken and politically contingent."[10] The space between recognizing the People's Republic of China as the "sole legal government of China" and the operationalization of informal relations with Taiwan is an unavoidably contested gray area; by design, One China can be applied in many different ways in practice, not all of which are acceptable to the parties involved. How much contestation occurs in this space, however, is critically important to peace across the Strait. Some disagreement is to be expected, given the nature of the dispute between China and Taiwan. As argued previously, however, too much disagreement over the meaning of One China risks pushing Beijing toward the conclusion that an armed attack is the only pathway to cross-Strait unification.

9. Kau, "Clinton's 'Three No's' Policy."

10. Adam P. Liff and Dalton Lin, "The 'One China' Framework at 50 (1972–2022): The Myth of 'Consensus' and Its Evolving Policy Significance," *China Quarterly* 252 (December 2022): 11.

Historically, the level of discord over the precise meaning of One China has depended on Taiwan's politics, China's power, and the overall stability of Sino-American relations. Alas, along all of these dimensions, the contemporary trendlines are toward conflict and not coexistence: Taiwan's politics have hardened against the People's Republic of China (spurring Chinese nationalists to fret about the prospects of peaceful unification); China's power has increased (emboldening Beijing and causing trepidation in Taipei and Washington); and Sino-American relations have destabilized and become increasingly conflictual, raising the question of whether any parties to the conflict remain truly committed to the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. The result is that all sides have begun to contest One China's gray zone, thereby reducing the prospects of the One China formula remaining as the de facto basis for a negotiated peace.

Once, China and Taiwan seemed to be moving in the direction of an intersubjective understanding over the One China idea. For example, some scholars point to the existence of an agreement reached in 1992 that established the notion of "one China, different interpretations" (the so-called "1992 consensus") as the basis for a long-term agreement on the political status of Taiwan.[11] Today, such a consensus is hotly disputed—with some in Taiwan arguing the consensus never existed in 1992—or if the consensus did exist, its meaning was misunderstood.[12] In 1999, Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui proposed basing cross-Strait relations upon "special state-to-state relations" (the "two-states theory"), a rival vision of Sino-Taiwanese relations that enjoys some traction in Taiwan.[13] His successor, Chen Shui-bian, went further by suggesting the existence of "one country on each side" of the Taiwan Strait.[14] Under President Ma Ying-jeou, relations with China warmed. In 2016, however, Tsai Ing-wen's election as president of Taiwan—the island's second Democratic Progressive Party president, after Chen—served in retrospect as a critical juncture that redirected cross-strait relations from moderate trust to complete antagonism.

Whereas the Nationalist Party had, as recently as Ma's administration, traditionally preferred to use ambiguity that draws on "relationality, emotion,

11. Chi-hung Wei, "China-Taiwan Relations and the 1992 Consensus, 2000–2008," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 16, no. 1 (2016): 67–95.

12. Austin Horng-En Wang et al., "The Non-Consensus 1992 Consensus," *Asian Politics & Policy* 13, no. 2 (2021): 212–27.

13. Dean P. Chen, *US-China Rivalry and Taiwan's Mainland Policy: Security, Nationalism, and the 1992 Consensus* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 52, 77.

14. Chen, *US-China Rivalry*, 52, 77, 82.

non-solution, and adaptation" to maintain de facto independence without totally alienating China, the Democratic Progressive Party has governed with less of a sense of needing to mollify Beijing.[15] Ma drew on Xi's objective of forming a "community of common destiny" and insisted, that "The two sides of the Taiwan Strait are one intimate family."[16] This approach allowed the 1992 consensus to stand as the foundation of cross-Strait relations—at least implicitly, with the tag "one China, respective interpretations"—which preserved the legacy of the Republic of China for the side of Taiwan and the harder "one country, two systems" interpretation for the People's Republic of China. That the "consensus" was "fictional" and intended "to conceal a deep dissensus" was the point; it allowed the vexing issues of legitimacy, statehood, and state succession to be set aside.[17] Consequently, when President Tsai acknowledged the "historical fact" of the 1992 meeting but would not embrace its legacy, intense opposition from Beijing followed.[18]

Yet, blame for diverging interpretations of the One China idea can hardly be laid at the feet of Taiwan alone. Through its words and deeds, Beijing has weakened the viability of the One China formula, too. In response to deteriorated relations with the Democratic Progressive Party, the People's Republic of China has undertaken gray-zone actions intended to signal its intense displeasure at Taiwanese autonomy. Beijing has generally followed a "kill the chicken to scare the monkey" approach to deterrence; whether this approach has accomplished anything is unclear.[19] Examples include forcing major airlines to remove "Taiwan" from countries passengers can fly to; forcing the cancellation of the 2019 East Asian Youth Games, which were to be held in Taiwan; repeatedly reducing the number of the few remaining states that recognize Taiwan; and undermining even "observer" status for Taiwan in the World Health Organization, a particularly reckless move in the era of COVID-19. These coercive moves have, if anything, hardened

15. Chih-Yu Shih, "Strategizing Femininity between the Global and the Taiwanese Local: Implications for International Relations," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 23, no. 1 (December 2022): 1–31.

16. Chih-Yu Shih, "Strategizing Femininity."

17. Yu-Jie Chen, "'One China' Contention in China–Taiwan Relations: Law, Politics and Identity," *China Quarterly* 252 (December 2022): 11.

18. Derek Grossman, "Is the '1992 Consensus' Fading Away in the Taiwan Strait?," *RAND Blog* (blog), June 3, 2020, https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/06/is-the-1992-consensus-fading-away-in-the-taiwan-strait.html.

19. Ketian Zhang, "Cautious Bully: Reputation, Resolve, and Beijing's Use of Coercion in the South China Sea," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (July 2019): 117–59.

independence positions in Taiwan, not loosened them.[20] As such, Beijing can be held responsible for rendering the status quo unstable for all concerned. After all, why would the Taiwanese choose to believe in the existence of One China if it meant subjugation by a hostile Mainland? Given Beijing's policies, the attraction of many Taiwanese to an interpretation of Sino-Taiwanese relations that emphasizes Taiwan's distinctiveness from the Mainland is not surprising.

The most important way China has alienated ordinary Taiwanese and their leaders is with regard to Hong Kong, where Beijing's repression of the student movement has ruined the possibility of "one country, two systems," an approach that was originally supposed to apply to Taiwan. Beijing's assertion that Taiwan's peaceful incorporation into the People's Republic of China could be done in such a way that guarantees special treatment for the island borders on the defiance of credulity. These same promises were made to Hong Kong, both in a treaty (the Sino-British Joint Declaration, ratified in 1985) and Chinese statutory law (the Basic Law, adopted by the National People's Congress in 1990), yet the promises have since been disregarded by the Chinese Communist Party and its intermediaries in Hong Kong. From the Taiwanese perspective, the destruction of "one country, two systems" is intimately related to the weakening of One China: In the past, none of the various interpretations of the One China framework were necessarily at odds with the island of Taiwan maintaining its democratic and capitalist institutions, depending on what a final agreement between Beijing and Taipei looked like. Today, it is difficult to see how Beijing's vision of One China is not an existential threat to Taiwan as a distinct society; the fate of Hong Kong would seem to be proof positive the Chinese Communist Party is bent on homogenization, assimilation, and hegemonic control.

Finally, consider how One China has suffered as a result of worsening Sino-American relations. Ominously, the Taiwan issue has become a totemic issue in the United States, helping to shape narratives about Sino-American rivalry (for example, the framing of Sino-American competition as a struggle between democracy versus authoritarianism), norms (the role of force in the contemporary international order), technological rivalry (access to semiconductors), credibility (the dependability of US security assurances in the Indo-Pacific), geopolitics (especially, the effort to contain the

20. Wei-chin Lee, "Multiple Shades of China's Taiwan Policy after the 19th Party Congress," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 55, no. 2 (March 2020): 201–20.

People's Republic of China within the first island chain), domestic politics (which incentivize symbolic actions that demonstrate "toughness"), and military modernization (with the US military using a potential Taiwan conflict as a "pacing scenario" intended to force rapid transformation of military systems and budgets). In this context, the ambiguity that once allowed Taiwan to be an "agree to disagree" issue is being eroded. In its place, there has been a push for greater clarity over Taiwan's political status, its relationship to China, and the former's importance to US national interests.

In part, the growing salience of Taiwan might reflect the Chinese Communist Party's apparent timeline for reunification and the party's perception that struggle is essential to achieving national goals, especially in a period no longer characterized by the relative calmness of "strategic opportunity," which held from 2002–22. Instead, Xi now instructs party cadres to "prepare for the storm."[21] The Chinese Communist Party has given itself until 2049 to achieve the objective of reunification, and although only 44 percent of China experts surveyed recently see 2049 as a hard deadline, to us, the evidence indicates this date has a high level of significance for Chinese government officials.[22] The symbolism of 2049 functions as a unifying principle for Chinese society. It also has a whiff of Marxist teleology, wherein different stages of history are unlocked by the wise (the Chinese Communist Party), who understand the laws of development. Taiwan has not been the most prominent part of the China Dream rhetoric so far, which remains focused on economic themes.[23] Nevertheless, Taiwan has consistently been articulated as part of the dream, with an explicit connection made with the "unity is strength" theme found in past Chinese epochs.[24] From this view, the United States (and Taiwan) are only reacting

21. Academy of Military Science Military Strategy Department, *The Science of Military Strategy*, trans. China Aerospace Studies Institute (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2013), 13, 98; and Richard McGregor, "Xi's Clean Sweep: China Marks New Era with Loyalist Lineup," *Nikkei Asia* (website), October 26, 2022, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Big-Story/Xi-s-clean-sweep-China-marks-new-era-with-loyalist-lineup.

22. Bonny Lin et al., *Surveying the Experts: China's Approach to Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2022).

23. Adam Osborne-Smith, "The Dream of the Dragon: A Content Analysis of Xi Jinping's 'China Dream'" (master's thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2019), 63–66.

24. Liu Jieyi 刘结一, "在新时代新征程上奋力推进祖国统一进程" [Striving to advance the process of reunification of the motherland in the new era and new journey], *People's Daily* (website), July 7, 2022, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-07/07/nw.D110000renmrb_20220707_1-09.htm; and Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

to Chinese impatience; it is entirely reasonable for Washington and Taipei to rethink the viability of One China if American and Taiwanese leaders have already concluded that Beijing is set on imminent unpeaceful "unification."

Yet, the heightened salience of the Taiwan issue to Sino-American relations also, in part, reflects the reality that a large segment of the US elite was never comfortable with severing formal diplomatic relations (and, along with it, a treaty-based mutual defense pact) with Taiwan and tacitly aligning with a communist power. Even today, many in the United States view it as a form of unnecessary, ignoble, and unwise appeasement for Washington to cooperate closely with Beijing while relegating Taiwan to the sidelines of international relations, especially absent a compelling great-power or Middle East threat as an excuse (the Russia-Ukraine War, for many, does not count).[25] At the same time, the island of Taiwan—a beleaguered democratic outpost just 100 miles from the shores of Mainland China—has sometimes been viewed in US circles as a valuable asset in the wider strategic competition against China, a "cork" in the proverbial "bottle" of communist expansion.[26] From this view, Taiwan is a "beacon of democracy" that keeps despotism in check or perhaps even a potential "unsinkable aircraft carrier" that might be garrisoned by US forces in the future. Neither narrative easily permits US leaders to maintain a modus vivendi with Beijing over Taiwan; on the contrary, both narratives cut against a fundamental premise of the One China principle and Washington's One China policy, which is that, at some point, Taiwan may very well unite with Mainland China and the United States is open to acquiescence in this union. Meanwhile, the persistent geopolitical framing of the Taiwan issue in the United States seems certain to encourage China's communist leaders to view the dispute in similarly securitized and alarmist terms—if, of course, they did not do so already—playing on their long-standing fears and intense focus on the importance of "buffer states" and the need to avoid hostile encirclement.[27]

25. Jared M. McKinney, "Deterring Potential Chinese Aggression against Taiwan," *Journal of Strategy and Policy* 2, no. 1 (2022): 72–77; and Ken Moriyasu, "5 Keys for US Deterrence to Work in Ukraine—and Taiwan," *Nikkei Asia* (website), February 2, 2022, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/5-keys-for-U.S.-deterrence-to-work-in-Ukraine-and-Taiwan.

26. Shelley Rigger, "How Does Taiwan Affect US–PRC Relations?," in *The China Questions 2: Critical Insights into US-China Relations*, ed. Maria Adele Carrai, Jennifer M. Rudolph, and Michael Szonyi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 204–210.

27. Yu-Hua Chen, "Bringing Geography Back In: Buffer Thinking in Chinese Foreign Policy" (PhD diss., Australian National University, Canberra, AU, 2019); and John W. Garver and Fei-Ling Wang, "China's Anti-Encirclement Struggle," *Asian Security* 6, no. 3 (September 2010): 238–61.

The perception that Taiwan is increasingly threatened by China and that the United States needs to exploit the gray space of One China vigorously has resulted in a rapid erosion of the way One China has been operationalized by Washington, which has been pursuing "incremental moves that viewed discretely do not raise the specter of war but push the issue in a favorable direction," according to an assessment by a Joint Forces Staff College professor.[28] Collectively, these discrete changes may change the status quo such that a de facto defense arrangement evolves.[29]

Perceptive international observers—such as Nigel Inkster, a former assistant director of MI6—have noted this shift. When asked about the prospects of China invading Taiwan, Inkster replied:

> So for the moment China is prepared to wait and see, and to carry on with its current so-called gray zone tactics, that are a mixture of carrot and stick—at the moment much more stick than carrot. The key variable now has become US behavior. In recent years, China has perceived that the United States has delivered a succession of punches to its gut, which, as they put it, collectively amounts to a hollowing out of the One China Policy. Now, there is inevitably a certain disingenuousness about how China presents this, but the fact is that a lot of things have changed. We've seen a lot more political engagement between the US and Taiwan, now with a seemingly endless succession of congressional delegations visiting. The US [has been] reinvigorating a network of partnerships and alliances in the Indo-Pacific which are clearly focused on the Taiwan issue.[30]

---

28. Luke Bellocchi, "The US One China Policy: A Primer for Professional Military Education Faculty," *Campaigning: The Journal of the Joint Forces Staff College* (website), May 11, 2022.

29. Bellocchi, "One China Policy."

30. Shannon Van Sant, "Nigel Inkster on Tech, Taiwan and Intelligence," *Wire China* (website), April 30, 2023, https://www.thewirechina.com/2023/04/30/nigel-inkster-on-tech-taiwan-and-intelligence/.

Unsurprisingly, Chinese analysts have also noted this overall trend with alarm.[31] Indeed, since just 2016, around 25 firsts since 1979 (when the United States officially recognized the People's Republic of China diplomatically and agreed to have only unofficial relations with Taiwan) have occurred that push back against the agree-to-disagree formula that previously permitted the ambiguous status quo to continue. Political and military leaders and analysts have noticed the effect of the status quo breaking down—for instance, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has pointed to Beijing seeking "to pursue reunification on a much faster timeline" instead of sticking with the status quo—but these leaders and analysts do not always evince comprehension of the causal context that has made the status quo less acceptable or even unacceptable to Beijing.[32] If the Democratic Progressive Party's victory in 2016 was the first critical juncture that made the status quo less tenable from Beijing's perspective, Donald Trump's election later that year, in retrospect, can be seen as the second. The firsts that have occurred since 1979 include the following.

1. President-elect Trump and Tsai Ing-wen participate in a planned phone call (December 2, 2016).[33]

2. President Trump threatens to abandon the One China policy if the People's Republic of China does not make a trade deal.[34]

3. The Taiwan Travel Act upgrades relations (2018), and the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act follows (2020).[35]

---

31. Zuo Xiying, "Unbalanced Deterrence: Coercive Threat, Reassurance and the US-China Rivalry in Taiwan Strait," *Pacific Review* 34, no. 4 (December 2019): 1–30; and Xiaodi Ye, "From Strategic Ambiguity to Maximum Pressure? Explaining the Logic of the US Taiwan Policy in the Post–Cold War Era," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 57, no. 8 (2021): 1511–43.

32. Ellen Francis, "China Plans to Seize Taiwan on a 'Much Faster Timeline,' Blinken Says," *Washington Post* (website), October 18, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/18/china-seize-taiwan-plan-blinken/#.

33. Anne Gearan, Phillip Rucker, and Simon Denyer, "Trump's Taiwan Phone Call Was Long Planned, Say People Who Were Involved," *Washington Post* (website), December 4, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trumps-taiwan-phone-call-was-weeks-in-the-planning-say-people-who-were-involved/2016/12/04/f8be4b0c-ba4e-11e6-94ac-3d324840106c_story.html.

34. Caren Bohan and David Brunnstrom, "Trump Says US Not Necessarily Bound by 'One China' Policy," Reuters (website), December 11, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-china/trump-says-u-s-not-necessarily-bound-by-one-china-policy-idUSKBN1400TY.

35. Julian Ku, "Ignore the Hype: The Taiwan Travel Act Is Legally Binding," *Lawfare* (blog), March 20, 2018, https://www.lawfareblog.com/ignore-hype-taiwan-travel-act-legally-binding.

4. Tsai visits a US federal government facility (NASA in Houston, August 2018).36

5. Taiwan's national security lead, David Lee Ta-wei, travels to Washington, DC, and meets with National Security Advisor John Bolton (May 2019).[37] A similar meeting occurred in February 2023 and included Taiwan's foreign minister in the "first publicized visit to the US capital area" since 1979.[38]

6. Lee Hsi-ming, chief of Taiwan's general staff, visits the White House (2019).[39]

7. A special operations MC-130J Commando II aircraft of the US Air Force conducts operations in the Taiwan Strait (2019).[40]

8. Heino Klinck, deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia, visits Taiwan (November 2019). (Whether Klinck was the senior-most Department of Defense official to visit Taiwan since 1979 or merely in the last decade is unclear; reports conflict on this point.)[41] Another deputy assistant

---

36. Jesse Johnson, "In First for a Taiwan Leader, Tsai Ing-Wen Tours Federal Facilities during US Stopover," *Japan Times* (website), August 20, 2018, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/08/20/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/tsai-ing-wen-becomes-first-sitting-taiwanese-leader-set-foot-inside-u-s-federal-building-move-expected-enrage-china/.

37. "China Bridles at Rare Meeting between Taiwan and US Security Officials," Reuters (website), May 26, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-taiwan/china-bridles-at-rare-meeting-between-taiwan-and-u-s-security-officials-idUSKCN1SX077.

38. Thompson Chao, "Taiwan Displays Growing Clout with Top Diplomat's US Visit," *Nikkei Asia* (website), February 23, 2023, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Taiwan-displays-growing-clout-with-top-diplomat-s-U.S.-visit.

39. Joseph Yeh, "Former Top Taiwan Military Official Discloses White House Meeting," *Focus Taiwan* (website), January 12, 2023, https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202301120016.

40. Joseph Trevithick, "USAF MC-130J Spec Ops Transport Flies through Taiwan Strait with US Spy Plane Nearby," War Zone (website), August 29, 2019, https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/29624/usaf-mc-130j-spec-ops-transport-flies-through-taiwan-strait-with-u-s-spy-plane-near-by.

41. Heino Klinck, *Taiwan's Turn – Deterring and Derailing an Existential Threat*, Information Series no. 508, ed. David J. Trachtenberg, Michael A. Dodge, and Amy Joseph (Fairfax, VA: National Institute for Public Policy, November 2021).

secretary of defense visit occurred in February 2023, the second in over 40 years.[42]

9. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo offers official congratulations to "Taiwan's president" upon her reelection (May 2020).[43]

10. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar becomes the highest-ranked cabinet member to travel to Taiwan (August 2020).[44]

11. A US Navy EP-3E Aries II aircraft is alleged to have landed in Taipei (August 2020).[45]

12. Under Secretary of State Keith Krach becomes the highest-ranking Department of State official to travel to Taiwan (September 2020).[46]

13. Ambassador to the UN Kelly Craft meets with the director of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (September 2020).[47]

14. The Department of State terminates restrictions on US government contacts with Taiwanese officials, calling

---

42. Demetri Sevastopulo, "Pentagon's Top China Official Visits Taiwan," *Financial Times* (website), February 17, 2023, https://www.ft.com/content/b6b4a624-212b-408b-8cdf-82118ed1da26?desktop=true&segmentId=0e5502c2-a654-17b7-29eb-3bb1c22ff1ba.

43. Sophia Yang, "Mike Pompeo Congratulates 'Taiwan's President' Tsai Ing-Wen on Inauguration," *Taiwan News* (website), May 20, 2020, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3937139.

44. Derek Grossman, "Secretary Azar's Taiwan Visit Should Be Celebrated—for the Right Reasons," *RAND Blog* (blog), August 21, 2020, https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/08/secretary-azars-taiwan-visit-should-be-celebrated-for.html.

45. Keoni Everington, "Aircraft Spotters Allege US Spy Plane Landed in Taipei," *Taiwan News* (website), August 19, 2020, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3990289; and Kevin Rudd, *The Avoidable War: The Dangers of a Catastrophic Conflict between the US and Xi Jinping's China* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2022), 300.

46. Keoni Everington, "Visit of Highest-Ranking US State Department Official to Taiwan in 41 Years Confirmed," *Taiwan News* (website), September 17, 2020, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4010766.

47. "US Envoy to United Nations Meets with Taiwan Official in NY," Associated Press (website), April 20, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-new-york-united-states-china-united-nations-general-assembly-334b2df3add3c732b6930bae9f12efc5.

policies enforced by six previous administrations "appeasement" (January 2021).[48]

15. President Joe Biden says Taiwan is like NATO (August 2021) and the United States would defend Taiwan if attacked (October 2021).[49]

16. The White House invites a Taiwanese envoy to President Biden's inauguration ceremony (January 2021).[50]

17. An American envoy to Palau conducts an official visit to Taiwan (March 2021).[51]

18. Active-duty US military forces are acknowledged to be present in Taiwan (October 2021).[52]

19. Taiwan is said to be a "critical node" and "critical to the defense of vital US interests in the Indo-Pacific," implying not even peaceful unification is acceptable (December 2021).[53]

---

48. Michael R. Pompeo, "Press Statement: Lifting Self-Imposed Restrictions on the US-Taiwan Relationship," U.S. Department of State (website), January 9, 2021, https://2017-2021.state.gov/lifting-self-imposed-restrictions-on-the-u-s-taiwan-relationship/.

49. David Brunnstrom, "US Position on Taiwan Unchanged despite Biden Comment – Official," Reuters (website), August 20, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-position-taiwan-unchanged-despite-biden-comment-official-2021-08-19/; and John Ruwitch, "Would the US Defend Taiwan If China Invades? Biden Said Yes. But It's Complicated," National Public Radio (website), October 28, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/10/28/1048513474/biden-us-taiwan-china.

50. Chao Deng and Chun Han Wong, "Biden Sends Important Foreign-Policy Signal with Taiwan Inauguration Invite," *Wall Street Journal* (website), January 21, 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-sends-important-foreign-policy-signal-with-taiwan-inauguration-invite-11611230623.

51. "US Ambassador Makes First Visit to Taiwan in More Than 40 Years," *Diplomat* (website), April 1, 2021, https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/us-ambassador-makes-first-visit-to-taiwan-in-more-than-40-years/.

52. Will Ripley, Eric Cheung, and Ben Westcott, "Taiwan's President Says the Threat from China Is Increasing 'Every Day' and Confirms Presence of US Military Trainers on the Island," *CNN* (website), October 28, 2021, https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/27/asia/tsai-ingwen-taiwan-china-interview-intl-hnk/index.html.

53. Michael D. Swaine, "US Official Signals Stunning Shift in the Way We Interpret 'One China' Policy," *Responsible Statecraft* (blog), December 10, 2021, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/12/10/us-official-signals-stunning-shift-in-the-way-we-interpret-one-china-policy/.

20. Former Secretary of State Pompeo calls for diplomatic recognition of the Republic of China (March 2022).[54]

21. Bolton calls for recognizing Taiwan diplomatically and stationing US soldiers in Taiwan (April 2022).[55]

22. The Department of State website removes references to One China and opposing Taiwanese independence (May 4, 2022).[56] On May 28, the language is added back.[57]

23. President Biden says the United States has made a "commitment" to "get involved militarily" if the People's Republic of China were to invade Taiwan (May 2022).[58] A few months later, he says this defense would include sending US forces, which the United States has not even done in Ukraine (September 2022).[59]

24. Mark T. Esper, secretary of defense from 2019–20, says, "[T]he one-China policy has outlived its usefulness" (July 2022).[60]

---

54. Ben Blanchard, "US Should Recognise Taiwan, Former Top Diplomat Pompeo Says," Reuters (website), March 4, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-should-recognise-taiwan-former-top-diplomat-pompeo-says-2022-03-04/.

55. Keoni Everington, "Bolton Says US Troops Should Be Stationed in Taiwan," *Taiwan News* (website), April 18, 2022, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4511003.

56 "China Rebukes US for Changing Taiwan Wording on State Department Website," Reuters (website), May 10, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/china-slams-us-changing-taiwan-wording-state-department-website-2022-05-10/; and Jake Chung, "US' New Fact Sheet Reflects 'Warming' Ties," *Taipei Times* (website), May 11, 2022, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2022/05/11/2003778037.

57. "US Updates Taiwan Fact Sheet Again to Say It Does Not Support Independence," Reuters (website), June 3, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/us-updates-fact-sheet-again-says-does-not-support-taiwan-independence-2022-06-03/.

58. Kevin Liptak, Donald Judd, and Nectar Gan, "Biden Says US Would Respond 'Militarily' If China Attacked Taiwan, but White House Insists There's No Policy Change," *CNN* (website), May 23, 2022, https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/23/politics/biden-taiwan-china-japan-intl-hnk/index.html.

59. Rob Garver, "Biden's Taiwan Comments Raise Questions about US Stance," Voice of America (website), September 19, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/biden-s-taiwan-comments-raise-questions-about-us-stance-/6754684.html.

60. Lawrence Chung, "Former US Defence Chief Says One-China Policy Has 'Outlived Its Usefulness,'" *South China Morning Post* (website), July 19, 2022, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3185818/former-us-defence-chief-says-one-china-policy-has-outlived-its.

25. William Lai Ching-te, Taiwan's vice president, becomes the highest-level official to visit Japan since 1972 (July 2022).[61]

26. The Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act, passed as part of the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, authorizes $10 billion in security assistance funds and encourages joint military exercises (December 2022).[62]

27. The number of US soldiers active in Taiwan is said to be increasing from around 30 to as many as 200.[63]

Notably absent from this list is Speaker Nancy Pelosi's August 2022 trip to Taiwan since it was not a first but a second (Speaker Newt Gingrich having visited Taiwan in 1997). Even so, the differences between these two trips are as important as the similarities. In 1997, Gingrich visited mainland China first, where he had high-level meetings. Pelosi, in contrast, did not visit China. Whereas Gingrich visited Taiwan for three hours, Pelosi stayed overnight. And whereas the Chinese Communist Party had very strong control of popular messaging in 1997, in 2022, the online nationalist reaction in China was much different, imposing additional audience costs on Chinese leaders.[64] In 1997, China's top officials harbored expectations of better relations with the West and eyed joining the globalized world economy, an incentive structure that led them to minimize the political harm of Gingrich's visit. In any case, Taiwan still had military superiority over its airspace, which limited Beijing's capacity to react in overly aggressive terms.[65] In 2022, the leaders had no more positive expectations of ever-improving relations with the United States, and the balance of power had decisively shifted in China's favor. For all these reasons, the People's

61. Cindy Wang and Samson Ellis, "Taiwan's Vice President Makes Historic Trip to Japan to Mourn Abe," Bloomberg (website), July 11, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-11/taiwan-vice-president-makes-historic-trip-to-japan-to-mourn-abe.

62. "Bill with Provisions for Taiwan Clears Congress," Taipei Times (website), December 25, 2022, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/12/25/2003791370.

63. Nancy A. Youssef and Gordon Lubold, "US to Expand Troop Presence in Taiwan for Training against China Threat – WSJ," *Wall Street Journal* (website), February 23, 2023, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-expand-troop-presence-in-taiwan-for-training-against-china-threat-62198a83.

64. Ric Neo and Chen Xiang, "State Rhetoric, Nationalism, and Public Opinion in China," *International Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July 2022): 1327–46.

65. Chong-Pin Lin, "The Military Balance in the Taiwan Straits," *China Quarterly* 146 (June 1996): 577–95.

Republic of China perceived the visit as a continuation of the campaign (featured above) of "'hollowing out' the One China policy."[66] The Chinese response was therefore much more aggressive than it had been in 1997.

The point of the list of firsts is not to assign blame for the erosion of the One China framework or the wider worsening of Sino-American and Sino-Taiwanese relations. Assertive or provocative Chinese actions preceded some of the actions contained in the list, and so every seemingly provocative US action could conceivably be construed as reasonable diplomatic responses (tit for tat) to behavior emanating from Beijing. More generally, we do not dispute that "overreach" has defined Chinese foreign policy since 2012.[67] On the contrary, we are clear eyed that Chinese leaders have played an instrumental role in the demise of One China as an inclusive discourse and the related weakening of Washington's One China policy. Beijing has derailed its "peaceful rise" narrative with its quest for "strategic space" in the South China Sea; reactivated Indian enmity with assertiveness (and the use of lethal force) along the disputed Sino-Indian frontier; spoiled Chinese relations with South Korea and Australia with economic coercion; taken the Chinese relationship with Europe to the brink with informational and diplomatic support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine; embraced hard-line nationalism that has resulted in a war against the People's Republic of China's ethnic minorities, who have now been altercast as an alien other; and failed to understand, moderate, or reverse the objectionable practices that have led Washington to seek a divorce from,

66. Jin Canrong 金灿荣, "50年前中美关系在冷战中缓和，这次的窗口在哪里?," *Guancha* (website), February 28, 2022, https://www.guancha.cn/JinCanRong/2022_02_28_628058_1.shtml.

67. Susan L. Shirk, *Overreach: How China Derailed Its Peaceful Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

instead of mere revisions to, the bilateral relationship.[68] Given such anti-strategic and reckless foreign policy, it is certainly the case that the People's Republic of China has played its part in undermining the viability of the One China status quo.

Indeed, perceived changes in US policy toward Taiwan are concerning because they are proceeding in tandem with more assertive behavior on Beijing's part. For example, the People's Republic of China has exerted its instruments of power to reduce the number of states that recognize Taiwan diplomatically, changing the status quo from 22 in 2016 to 13 today. As another example, since March 2019, People's Liberation Army aircraft have regularly crossed the "median line" in the Taiwan Strait, something only done three times from 1954–2019. The People's Republic of China now openly disregards the median line.[69] Like the American or Taiwanese actions mentioned previously, crossing the line is not illegal, but it undermines the modus vivendi the respective powers have implicitly negotiated over the decades. Actions on both the American and Chinese sides have transgressed into the other's "red zone," an area "with blurred borders and a certain elasticity," as a Chinese analyst has insightfully observed.[70]

Two causal mechanisms are at play, each contributing to a worsening of security and a narrowing of opportunities to restore cordial relations. First, Chinese assertiveness toward Taiwan creates a perceived need

68. Lim Kheng Swe, Ju Hailong, and Li Mingjiang, "China's Revisionist Aspirations in Southeast Asia and the Curse of the South China Sea Disputes," *China: An International Journal 15*, no. 1 (February 2017): 187–213; Manoj Joshi, *Understanding the India-China Border: The Enduring Threat of War in High Himalaya* (London: Hurst & Company, 2022); Bee Yun Jo, "Loosening or Tightening the Linchpin? The Effects of China's Approach to US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense Deployment in South Korea," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 29, no. 1 (June 2022): 1–20; Charles Miller, "Explaining China's Strategy of Implicit Economic Coercion. Best Left Unsaid?," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September 2022): 507–21; Laura Silver, Christine Huang, and Laura Clancy, "How Global Public Opinion of China Has Shifted in the Xi Era," *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project* (blog), September 28, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/09/28/how-global-public-opinion-of-china-has-shifted-in-the-xi-era/; Roberto Stefan Foa et al., *A World Divided: Russia, China and the West* (Cambridge, UK: Centre for the Future of Democracy, October 2022); Sean R. Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); "China Cuts Uighur Births with Intrauterine Devices, Abortion, Sterilization," Associated Press (website), June 29, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c; and Xiangfeng Yang, "The Great Chinese Surprise: The Rupture with the United States Is Real and Is Happening," *International Affairs* 96, no. 2 (March 2020): 419–37.

69. Suisheng Zhao, "Is Beijing's Long Game on Taiwan About to End? Peaceful Unification, Brinkmanship, and Military Takeover," *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 143 (September 2022): 11.

70. Da Wei 达巍, "如何实现台湾问题的新稳定," Aisixiang (website), August 26, 2022, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/136179.html.

for the United States to offer more security assurances vis-à-vis Taiwan and for Taiwan to assert a desire to preserve its political and societal distinctiveness from Beijing. Second, these assurances from the United States coupled with perceived Taiwanese challenges to the status quo provoke more Chinese aggression. The United States responds with more forward posturing and presence, which may increase support for formal independence in Taiwan, generating further military signaling from Beijing.[71] In other words, classic security dilemma dynamics have come to define the issue.[72] Both sides perceive themselves as responding to the other's injuries, which could be specific actions prompting immediate deterrent actions (the People's Republic of China's pressure after 2016, for example, was taken in response to Tsai's refusal to recognize the "1992 consensus") or merely latent intentions and a perceived need for deeper general deterrence (Pelosi's trip to Taiwan in August 2022 appears to be such an example). Taken on its own, each development may be defensible and even contribute to deterrence (from the views of at least one of the respective parties). Taken together, however, the developments are producing a noticeable shift from the status quo ante. Our assessment is that Chinese strategic planners can no longer be expected to operate on the assumption that Sino-Taiwanese relations can carry on as they have been.[73] One China-based analyst has gone so far as to assess the current period as being analogous to the lead-up to the Sino-Indian War, when Indian patrols exploited the gray zone of the two states' territorial dispute, provoking a decisive Chinese military response.[74] Understandings of how the sides of the Taiwan Strait relate to one another are fluid and diverging rapidly; without the language of One China to bridge the gap, no discursive framework can reconcile (or paper over) the vast differences separating the various parties to the Taiwan dispute.

This coding of the One China framework (from "viable" to "unviable") should be cause enough for concern over the future of Taiwanese security. Consider, though, the 27 firsts in US policy that have occurred in the past seven years are likely a beginning, not an end. At the least, viewing Sino-American and Sino-Taiwanese relations in these terms

71. Wen-Chin Wu et al., "Taiwanese Public Opinion on the Chinese and US Military Presence in the Taiwan Strait," *China Quarterly* (April 2023): 1–14.

72. Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

73. Zhang Wenzong 张文宗, "美国遏压背景下再论统筹发展和安全," 国家安全研究 [*National Security Research*] 3 (July 2022).

74. Chen Feng 晨枫, "这次'围台'军演，看点在东侧," *Guancha* (website), April 18, 2023, https://www.guancha.cn/ChenFeng3/2023_04_18_688834_s.shtml.

would be reasonable for China. Perceptive Chinese observers, such as the popular blogger Chairman Rabbit, have started calling the Taiwan question a "gray rhino event" (that is, a high-probability and high-consequence event one sees but ignores). Chairman Rabbit argues a future US president (starting in 2024 if Biden is not reelected or 2028 if he is) will seek to outdo all previous firsts, which would require the president to send a higher-level cabinet official (such as the secretary of state) to Taiwan, meet in person with Taiwan's leaders (likely at some third-party location), or even openly abolish or abandon the three joint communiqués.[75] A similar precedent-shattering action would be for US Navy ships to stop by Taiwan's ports, which Chinese analysts consider eminently possible.[76]

Is Chairman Rabbit wrong in his assessment that the United States will continue to push against the traditional understanding of the One China policy?[77] Perhaps. Influential analysts, however, have called for such a strategy, with "overt government-to-government relations" as the "ultimate goal."[78] The original version of the 2022 Taiwan Policy Act, since revised as part of larger legislative compromises, went a long way toward elevating the government of Taiwan to the same level as the governments of sovereign states, including the establishment of joint military exercises between American and Taiwanese forces. Even if successive White Houses continue to profess adherence to traditional understandings of the One China policy dating to the 1970s, the sorts of statements and visits listed above are highly symbolic and, therefore, consequential; they provoke without actually changing the objective balance of power.[79] As such, the United States and Taiwan have significant incentives to match actions to symbols, lest provocative symbolism dangerously outstrip material commitments. Chinese scholars

---

75. Chairman Rabbit, "台海问题可能正在变成一个'灰犀牛,'" Weixin (website), July 30, 2022, http://mp.weixin.qq.com.

76 Ji You and Yufan Hao, "The Political and Military Nexus of Beijing-Washington-Taipei: Military Interactions in the Taiwan Strait," *China Review* 18, no. 3 (August 2018): 110.

77. Jiang Jiang and Ji Xiaodong, "Blinken's China Speech: Views from Beijing," Ginger River Review (website), May 30, 2022, https://www.gingerriver.com/p/blinkens-china-speech-views-from; and Dong Chunling, "Centennial Evolution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s National Security Thought," *Contemporary International Relations* 31, no. 3 (June 2021): 28.

78. Ian Easton, "Ian Easton on Taiwan: Revisiting America's Security Strategy for Taiwan," *Taipei Times* (website), September 26, 2022, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2022/09/26/2003785922.

79. Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Biden Says We've Got Taiwan's Back. But Do We?," *New York Times* (website), May 27, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/27/opinion/biden-taiwan-defense-china.html.

already assess the United States is intent on using Taiwan as a "bridgehead" "to control China" and perceive that the trajectory of One China is toward "One China, One Taiwan," as a former China country director at the Department of Defense recently noted with approval.[80] From the People's Republic of China's perspective, then, imagining the United States recreating a de facto mutual defense relationship with Taiwan as a means of catching up with existing, observable symbolism and rhetoric, all the while professing no formal policy change has been made, is not very difficult.

One way of backing words with actions would be to dispatch Marine Littoral Regiments to Taiwan. Given the likelihood of the continued degradation of bilateral relations and the recently reported sixfold increase in US troops operating in Taiwan, could a Chinese intelligence analyst assess with confidence that US combat forces will not be stationed in Taiwan by 2030?[81] Retired People's Liberation Army Senior Colonel Shi Xiaoqin, for instance, suggests "efforts to integrate Taiwan" into the United States' "'integrated deterrence' network may accelerate" due to the action-reaction cycle associated with Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.[82] These expectations are not outlandish. The cumulative effect for the People's Republic of China is to paint a gloomier future than was once the case: Not only are the Taiwanese not going to welcome People's Liberation Army conquerors and administrators with open arms, but American garrisons and weapons may come to stand in the way. Taken together, the decline of One China and increasingly plausible future policy decisions that threaten to upend hopes of reunification altogether are enough to present Chinese leaders with considerable doubt that a policy of peaceful unification is sustainable in the current context. The upshot is that the People's Republic of China arguably has significant incentives to take action against Taiwan before deployed soldiers and a defense policy

80. Xia Liping 夏立平, Ma Yanhong 马艳红, and Ge Yixing 葛倚杏, "拜登政府对美台军事关系的延续与调整," Aisixiang (website), November 12, 2022, https://www.aisixiang.com/data/137964.html; and Joseph Bosco, "America Now Has a 'One China, One Taiwan' Policy: Trade and Investment Framework Agreement and Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act Will Strengthen It," *Hill* (website), July 6, 2021, https://thehill.com/opinion/international/561591-america-now-has-a-one-china-one-taiwan-p.

81. Youssef and Lubold, "US to Expand."

82. Pinran Liu and Yang Liu, "Chinese Experts Reflect on Sino-US Relationship Post Pelosi and Drills," *Beijing Channel* (blog), August 15, 2022, https://beijingchannel.substack.com/p/chinese-experts-reflect-on-sino-us.

that fully integrates counter-modernization against Chinese capabilities substantiates increasing US symbolism.[83]

The One China question may come to the fore sooner than most observers expect. What if the 2024 presidential election in Taiwan does not continue the swinging pendulum between parties in Taiwan every eight years but, rather, comes to signify the disappearance of the Nationalist Party as a major national party? What if hard-line independence activists—or simply those perceived to be such by Beijing—are elevated to elected office in Taipei?[84] In the past, analysts would have expected the United States to exercise a restraining role.[85] In 2003, for instance, President George W. Bush stood alongside the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao and rebuked Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party president for working to change the status quo.[86] In 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice chided the Democratic Progressive Party for its "provocative policy" to apply to join the UN, which she said the United States opposed.[87] Such opposition reflected the largely consistent policies of eight American presidents (from Richard Nixon to Barack Obama).[88] Today, however, ideological and geopolitical approaches have solidified into a consensus in US politics. Even if future American leaders do not publicly discard One China, they are unlikely to enforce alliance restraint with respect to Taiwan. Symbolic and material acts after 2024 in this environment may force an issue through a process of reciprocal escalation. Consequently and paradoxically, deterrence—to the extent it exists at all—will lose its constraining force, for, as Thomas Christensen explained two decades ago, "[T]he target of a deterrent threat must believe that its core interests will be spared if it

83. Walker D. Mills, "Deterring the Dragon: Returning US Forces to Taiwan," *Military Review* (September-October 2020): 55–67; and (Clark) Aoqi Wu, "To Reassure Taiwan and Deter China, the United States Should Learn from History," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 79, no. 2 (March 2023): 72–79.

84. John F. Copper, "Taiwan's Party Politics: Whither the Kuomintang and the Democratic Progressive Party?," *East Asian Policy* 14, no. 2 (2022): 5–21.

85. Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

86. George W. Bush and Wen Jiabao, "Remarks to the Press" (speech, White House, Washington, DC, December 9, 2003).

87. "United States Opposes 'Provocative' Taiwan Referendum Bid: Rice," Reuters (website), December 21, 2007, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-usa-rice-idUSN2160129120071221.

88. Kenneth Lieberthal and Susan Thornton, "Forty-Plus Years of US-China Diplomacy: Realities and Recommendations," in *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*, ed. Anne F. Thurston (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 365–90; and Richard C. Bush, *Difficult Choices: Taiwan's Quest for Security and the Good Life* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2021).

does not commit an act of aggression."[89] Such a belief rests on quicksand today; the principal outstanding question is when Chinese leaders might judge the matter hopeless. Experts who say no reason exists to "panic about Taiwan" are not so different from observers who dismiss a 10-day weather forecast for storms because it is currently sunny.[90]

The Chinese Communist Party's Emerging Legitimacy Problem

A second reason China has restrained itself from attempting an attack on Taiwan in the past has been that Chinese leaders have expected to incur massive economic costs from doing so. The Chinese Communist Party faced this problem not because China is unwilling to pay a high price for Taiwan in the abstract but because the ruling party's legitimacy had become so tightly bound with economic success in practical terms; invading Taiwan was an unattractive proposition so long as it threatened to destroy the economic success upon which the party's claim to legitimacy had been mounted.

Today, a shift has occurred that we argue is likely reducing the Chinese Communist Party's restraint toward Taiwan: Economic problems at home are inducing the party to find legitimacy in new places, with nationalism, jingoism, and militarism standing out as the most prominent potential contenders to replace the competent management of the Chinese economy. To summarize, we argue China's top leaders are becoming less concerned about the economic fallout from a war over Taiwan because they will increasingly face severe and worsening economic woes. Although it would do nothing to solve these economic problems, conquering Taiwan would be consistent with a nationalistic justification for the Chinese Communist Party's continued rule over the Chinese people.

How did China arrive at this place? In the early days of its existence, the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy was rooted in its revolutionary credentials, its wartime record fighting the Japanese, and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. Since the era of Reform and

89. Thomas J. Christensen, "The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 11.

90. Jessica Chen Weiss, "Don't Panic about Taiwan: Alarm over a Chinese Invasion Could Become a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," *Foreign Affairs* (website), March 21, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-chinese-invasion-dont-panic; and Richard Bush, Bonnie Glaser, and Ryan Hass, "Opinion: Don't Help China by Hyping Risk of War over Taiwan," National Public Radio (website), April 8, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/04/08/984524521/opinion-dont-help-china-by-hyping-risk-of-war-over-taiwan.

Opening-up and the suppression of protestors in Tiananmen Square in 1989, the party has shifted to emphasize its economic achievements as a means of securing legitimacy, albeit with a sizable dash of nationalist appeal to justify the party's "right to rule."[91] Economic and nationalist legitimacy, however, depend almost entirely on performance—that is, the Chinese Communist Party's strategy for securing legitimacy requires the party to improve the Chinese standard of living, to strengthen the state at home and abroad, and to achieve visibly China's international objectives. According to the performance-legitimacy equation, "if a great majority of people feel their life as a whole is improving through governmental actions, then the existing government is seen as meritorious and rightful, which can translate to retaining legitimacy."[92]

The danger of a performance-fueled system of legitimacy is that it is rooted in restless energy for progress.[93] Progress may not always be at hand, however, and the government may not always perform. In the Chinese case, this statement is not just hypothetical. As Jiwei Ci, one of China's most insightful contemporary political philosophers, cogently explains:

> [T]here is simply nowhere for the [Chinese Communist Party] to hide when the economy is not doing well or doing less well than before. This means that the Chinese party-state cannot speak of economic crises in the same way Western democratic governments can. In their [the Westerners'] strict sense, economic crises are serious disturbances of a market economy conceived of as an autonomous system and, as such, presuppose a degree of separation between system integration and sociopolitical integration that is simply absent in China. For this reason, every crisis in China that otherwise resembles an economic crisis is directly a political crisis. The [Chinese

91. Dingxin Zhao, "The Mandate of Heaven and Performance Legitimation in Historical and Contemporary China," *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no. 3 (November 2009): 416–33; Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, "Performance Legitimacy, State Autonomy, and China's Economic Miracle," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 91 (January 2015): 64–82; Bruce Gilley, "Legitimacy and Institutional Change: The Case of China," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 3 (March 2008): 259–84; Thomas Heberer, "The Chinese 'Developmental State 3.0' and the Resilience of Authoritarianism," *Journal of Chinese Governance* 1, no. 4 (2016): 611–32; and Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

92. Yuchao Zhu, "'Performance Legitimacy' and China's Political Adaptation Strategy," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16, no. 2 (June 2011): 128.

93 Yang and Zhao, "Performance Legitimacy," 82.

> Communist Party's] role is so defined that it cannot convince anyone that "it no longer rules"— including over the economy.[94]

For a generation, restless economic progress has succeeded, and the Chinese people have become remarkably better off in material terms. As a result (and in combination with Xi's anticorruption campaign and the center's tendency to take credit for successes while pushing failures onto lower levels of government), the Chinese Communist Party has avoided a legitimacy crisis.[95] Yet, structural trends and contingent developments indicate economic performance has now become exponentially more difficult.

Looking at the contingent trends first, China:

1. has endured its worst drought and heat wave in modern history, affecting 900 million people in 2022;

2. is in the midst of recovering from the social, political, and economic crisis caused by almost three years of "Zero COVID" policies, followed by an almost instant reopening of society;

3. continues to grapple with the worst real estate crisis in memory;

4. faces economic headwinds from high energy prices;

5. continues to suffer from the pressures of deglobalization and US trade tariffs;

6. must deal with a developing-world debt repayment crisis; and

94. Jiwei Ci, *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 180.

95. Edward Cunningham, Tony Saich, and Jessie Turiel, *Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion through Time* (Cambridge, MA: Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, 2020); and *Hearing on US-China Relations in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges*, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2020) (statement of Anthony Saich, director, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation and Daewoo Professor of International Affairs at Harvard University).

7. continues to grapple with corruption in the government guidance fund industry.[96]

Whereas in the recent past, China was able to boast of double-digit economic growth on an annual basis, gross domestic product growth in the medium term will likely normalize around 3 percent, even if the People's Republic of China experiences a short-term post–COVID-19 boom.[97] Moreover, much of China's recent growth has been highly inefficient, the result of state subsidies and tax rebates related to COVID-19.[98] Such growth is a far cry from even the "new normal" of economic growth Chinese leaders started talking about in 2014, when growth was seen as falling from around 10 percent to a mere 6 or 7 percent per annum. Then, the talking points were that China was transitioning from high-speed to medium–high-speed economic growth. Beijing is now facing the prospect of moving from medium speed to slow or sluggish speed—hardly a firm foundation upon which to claim economic competence and the right to rule.

To be clear, structural explanations are driving the transition to slower growth. The factors that had enabled rapid Chinese economic growth since the early 1980s (demographics, investment, debt, energy intensity, environmental exploitation, urbanization, migrant labor, and exports) have peaked by most measures.[99] China now faces major demographic, social, and ecological headwinds, and, even apart from contingent disruptions, 3 percent annual growth is increasingly seen as what China can realistically expect in the longer term.[100]

96. Zhang Xue 张雪, "新时代中国参与全球经济治理： 进展、挑战与努力方向," *International Studies* 2 (March 2022): 70–84; T. V. Paul, "Globalization, Deglobalization, and Reglobalization: Adapting Liberal International Order," *International Affairs* 97, no. 5 (September 2021): 1599–620; James Kynge et al., "China Reckons with Its First Overseas Debt Crisis," *Financial Times* (website), July 20, 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/ccbe2b80-0c3e-4d58-a182-8728b443df9a; and Yifan Wei, Yuen Yuen Ang, and Nan Jia, "The Promise and Pitfalls of Government Guidance Funds in China," *China Quarterly* (website), April 19, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741023000280.

97. C. Fred Bergsten, *The United States vs. China* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2022), 231–48.

98. David Cowhig, "2022 Transcript: Li Keqiang at Special Economy Stabilization Conference," *David Cowhig's Translation Blog* (blog), May 28, 2022, https://gaodawei.wordpress.com/2022/05/28/2022-transcript-li-keqiang-at-special-economy-stabilization-conference/.

99. Thomas Fingar and Jean C. Oi, "China's Challenges: Now It Gets Much Harder," *Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (January 2020): 67–84; and Andrea Čajková and Peter Čajka, "Challenges and Sustainability of China's Socio-Economic Stability in the Context of Its Demographic Development," *Societies* 11, no. 1 (March 2021): 22.

100. Daniel H. Rosen, Charlie Vest, and Rogan Quinn, "Now for the Hard Part: China's Growth in 2023 and Beyond," Rhodium Group (website), December 29, 2022, https://rhg.com/research/now-for-the-hard-part/.

Figure 3-1 shows the enormous, long-term economic implications of China prematurely shifting from "high speed" to "medium speed" and then "slow speed" in the 2030s.[101]

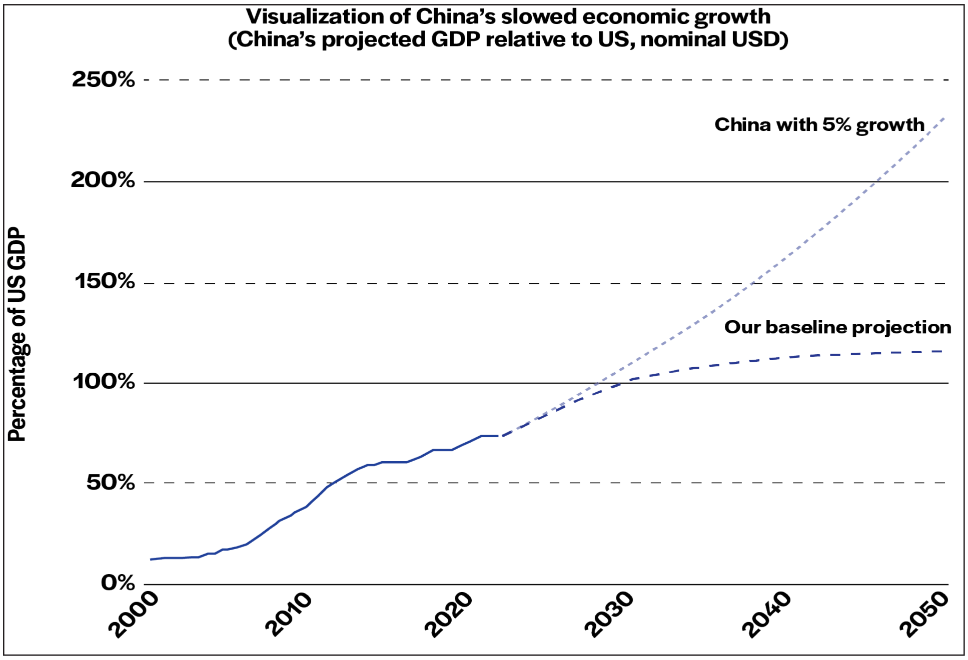

Figure 3-1. Visualization of China's slowed economic growth (Source: Figure courtesy of Lowy Institute and its authors' projections, International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook – October 2021, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Long-term Growth Forecasts – 2018)

The implication of the baseline GDP projection, which assumes a gradual shift to 2 to 3 percent annual growth by the 2030s, is quite literally "plateau China" relative to economic growth in the United States and other developed economies.[102] Current estimations are that by mid-century, China will be an economic peer of, but not superior to, the United States

101. Roland Rajah and Alyssa Leng, "Revising Down the Rise of China," Lowy Institute (website), March 14, 2022, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/revising-down-rise-china; and Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, "The End of China's Rise: Beijing Is Running Out of Time to Remake the World," *Foreign Affairs* (website), October 1, 2021, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-10-01/end-chinas-rise.

102. Ruchir Sharma, "China's Economy Will Not Overtake the United States until 2060, If Ever," *Financial Times* (website), October 24, 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/cff42bc4-f9e3-4f51-985a-86518934afbe; William H. Overholt, "Thinking through the China Hype," *Asia Times* (website), October 27, 2022, https://asiatimes.com/2022/10/thinking-through-the-china-hype/; and Jacob Funk Kirkegaard, *Stresses and Contradictions in the Chinese Economy in the Early 2020s* (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2022).

and the EU.[103] Although by mid-century the People's Republic of China's economy will likely be the largest globally in terms of size, the state will have to dedicate virtually all of its resources to caring for a geriatric and shrinking population. Chinese researchers estimate spending on education, health, and pensions will require 23 to 30 percent of GDP by the 2050s, which is more than China's entire government revenue today.[104] The future, in other words, will impose an increasingly zero-sum guns-or-butter trade-off, a phenomenon the Chinese public has not experienced in this century.[105] Raising taxes to buy both is not in the cards. China across history has kept taxes low to avoid rebellion, a technique the People's Republic of China—the latest in China's line of imperial dynasties—has also embraced.[106] In short, the People's Republic of China will face severe fiscal constraints in the medium term.[107]

Even to maintain "new normal" growth will require China to transition to a new growth model. Made in China 2025, the industrial policy the People's Republic of China published in 2015, shows the Chinese Communist Party has understood (in principle) for many years the need to switch to a new growth model. The document summarizes this transition as "from Made in China to Created in China." The driving goal for Created in China is for the People's Republic of China to "[a]chieve breakthroughs in a number of key general purpose technologies that have an overall impact and strong driving force on the

103. Japan Center for Economic Research, *China's Gross Domestic Product Will Not Surpass That of the United States* (Tokyo: Japan Center for Economic Research, December 15, 2022); Goldman Sachs, *The Path to 2075—Slower Global Growth, but Convergence Remains Intact* (New York: Goldman Sachs, December 6, 2022); and "How Soon and at What Height Will China's Economy Peak?," *Economist* (website), May 11, 2023, https://www.economist.com/briefing/2023/05/11/how-soon-and-at-what-height-will-chinas-economy-peak.

104. Yong Cai, Wang Feng, and Ke Shen, "Fiscal Implications of Population Aging and Social Sector Expenditure in China," *Population and Development Review* 44, no. 4 (December 2018): 811–31.

105. Kai Quek and Alastair Iain Johnston, "Can China Back Down? Crisis De-Escalation in the Shadow of Popular Opposition," *International Security* 42, no. 3 (Winter 2017): 7–36.

106. Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976); William Guanglin Liu, "The Making of a Fiscal State in Song China, 960–1279," *Economic History Review* 68, no. 1 (February 2015): 48–78; Stephen Broadberry, Hanhui Guan, and David Daokui Li, "China, Europe, and the Great Divergence: A Study in Historical National Accounting, 980–1850," *Journal of Economic History* 78, no. 4 (December 2018); and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Revenue Statistics in Asia and the Pacific 2022: Strengthening Tax Revenues in Developing Asia* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022).

107. Weihong Sun, Huating Lai, and Ding Liu, "Tracking China's Fiscal Sustainability: A Time-Frequency Perspective," *Emerging Markets Finance and Trade* 59, no. 9 (May 2023): 1–15.

overall improvement of industrial competitiveness."[108] Since 2006, China has sought such breakthroughs, according to plans drawn up in *The National Medium- and Long-Term Program of Science and Technology Development (2006–2020)*, a 15-year plan for investment in 68 "priority topics" and 16 megaprojects. The People's Republic of China later rebranded this approach "innovation-driven development" and created the government guidance funds system, which has authorized $1.6 trillion US dollars in capital but only raised 60 percent of this amount so far.[109] Barry Naughton calls this approach and system "the greatest single commitment of government resources to an industrial policy objective in history."[110]

The State Council of the People's Republic of China is supposed to release a new medium- and long-term program of science and technology for the period 2022–35, and some have reported a draft has been in the works since 2019.[111] When the new list is publicly issued (assuming it will be), it will likely emphasize the advances called for in the 14th Five-Year Plan (high-end, new materials; smart manufacturing; aerospace engines; new medical equipment; integrated circuits; quantum communication; brain-inspired research; biotechnology; and deep-space, deep-earth, deep-sea, and polar exploration technologies).[112] In short, the Chinese Communist Party's solution to slowing growth is to innovate.[113] (The party has chosen not to follow the path of additional economic reform, given the associated political costs.[114]) Much of this innovation—especially, at a commercial scale—will require access to advances in semiconductor hardware. As a result

108. State Council of the People's Republic of China 国务院, 中国制造2025 [Made in China 2025], trans. Center for Security and Emerging Technology (Washington, DC: Center for Security and Emerging Technology, May 2015), 9.

109. Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *Outline of the National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy*, trans. Center for Security and Emerging Technology (Beijing: Central Committee of the CCP and State Council of the People's Republic of China, May 2016); and Barry Naughton, *The Rise of China's Industrial Policy: 1978 to 2020* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2021), 81.

110. Naughton, *China's Industrial Policy*, 82.

111. Yutao Sun and Cong Cao, "Planning for Science: China's 'Grand Experiment' and Global Implications," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 8, no. 1 (September 2021): 215.

112. *Outline of the People's Republic of China 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives for 2035*, trans. Etcetera Language Group, Inc. (Washington, DC: Center for Security and Emerging Technology, March 2021).

113. Tai Ming Cheung, I*nnovate to Dominate: The Rise of the Chinese Techno-Security State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

114. Nicholas R. Lardy, *The State Strikes Back: The End of Economic Reform in China?* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2019).

of the United States' new export restrictions and most of these technologies being dual use, this access will be circumscribed and progress slowed (about which will be discussed more later in the monograph). This will make breakthrough innovation in China more difficult in the next decade. Low economic growth will become China's new normal, despite likely breakthrough innovation in some sectors. China will miss its 2035 growth targets, which require doubling per-capita gross domestic product from levels circa 2020.[115] This failure will reduce the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy, even as greater authoritarianism generates increasing popular backlash.[116]

As economic growth declines, the Chinese Communist Party will increase domestic coercion, which is already happening.[117] The party will also need to find alternative ways to boost nationalism, with looking tough or resolving the Taiwan question chief among Beijing's options. In the words of Jiwei Ci, "It is almost as if there were a race between China's economic and military advance, on the one hand, and the [Chinese Communist Party's] progressively declining legitimacy, on the other."[118] A war over Taiwan could become more likely in these circumstances. Some evidence suggests slowing economic growth and crises of regime legitimacy are connected to international conflict.[119] As Amy Oakes showed about Argentina's decision to invade the Falkland Islands in 1982, embattled leaders can sometimes choose to wage wars (even wars the leaders' countries are unlikely to win) when facing internal dissent and the lack of economic resources to buy off the population.[120] Some scholars of Russia argue that this same causal logic explains the Putin regime's turn to nationalism and warfare as a way to legitimate his rule after growth slowed (and oil prices declined) due to the 2007–8 financial crisis; foreign operations (such as those

115. "Gross Domestic Product Reaches New Level as Chinese Economy Embarks on New Journey of Hope," *Xinhua* (website), January 17, 2023, https://english.news.cn/20230117/f1dffb2518b640be8d9dde30476cfdac/c.html.

116. Timothy Cheek, "Xi Jinping's Counter-Reformation: The Reassertion of Ideological Governance in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 132 (November 2021): 875–87; and Minxin Pei, "Xi Jinping's Political Agenda and Leadership: What Do We Know from His Decade in Power," *China Leadership Monitor* 73 (Fall 2022).

117. Xu Xu, "To Repress or to Co-opt? Authoritarian Control in the Age of Digital Surveillance," *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (April 2021): 309–25.

118. Ci, *Democracy in China*, 378.

119. Sung Chul Jung, "Economic Slowdowns and International Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* (website), November 7, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433221116656.

120. Amy Oakes, "Diversionary War and Argentina's Invasion of the Falkland Islands," *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 431–63.

in Syria, Libya, and Ukraine) were intended to distract the population from their problems at home, while Putin embraced "conservative" values and supported right-wing populism worldwide "as a way of solidifying an increasingly disgruntled and shaky domestic order."[121] Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 may also have involved the belief, however deluded, that the risks of war were lower than the risks of peace in a world in which neighboring Ukraine would first join the EU and then NATO.[122]

To be clear, we are skeptical that a war over Taiwan would happen via the logic of diversionary war. First, we see no reason to believe the survival of the Chinese Communist Party regime will be imperiled by an economic slowdown in the same way that, say, the Argentine junta's grip on power was threatened in the run-up to Argentina's ill-fated invasion of the Falklands. For a diversionary war to be the most logical and rational response for an embattled regime, there would have to be no option to "buy off" domestic opponents or engage in repression.[123] We expect the Chinese regime will have the wherewithal to engage in both strategies, and so a war over Taiwan would hardly present itself as the least risky option for maintaining power.

Even so, we still argue that the turn toward a more nationalistic justification for the Chinese Communist Party would help to increase the odds of an invasion taking place—not because of pure diversionary-war logic but because prior impediments to an invasion (the Chinese Communist Party's mantle of economic competence, which was supposed to inevitably draw Taiwan into China's orbit) will have been removed and replaced with one of nationalistic fervor. In the past, in reference to a war with Taiwan, analysts argued, "[L]aunching a war today to achieve unification would put more fundamental development goals at risk."[124] This argument is true. Our pessimistic conclusion is that, if these development goals are already at risk (which they arguably are today and look to be becoming more so), then it is not clear how Beijing's

121. Elias Götz and Camille-Renaud Merlen, "Russia and the Question of World Order," *European Politics and Society* 20, no. 2 (2019): 141.

122. Geoffrey Roberts, "'Now or Never': The Immediate Origins of Putin's Preventative War on Ukraine," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 22, no. 2 (2022): 3–27; and Jonas J. Driedger, "Risk Acceptance and Offensive War: The Case of Russia under the Putin Regime," *Contemporary Security Policy* 44, no. 2 (2023): 1–27.

123. Tzeng Wei-Feng and Wang Hsin-Hsien, "Co-Optation or Coercion: Protest Targeting and Mass Violence in China," *China: An International Journal* 20, no. 4 (November 2022): 86–109.

124. Scott L. Kastner, *War and Peace in the Taiwan Strait* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 151.

preferred strategy of peaceful unification will succeed. This would logically lead to increasing reliance on non-peaceful means, especially as 2049 draws closer.

The most recent polling data from the People's Republic of China suggests that China's population would support such an approach. According to a random cell-phone survey conducted in 2019 in nine major Chinese cities, 53 percent of respondents supported armed unification.[125] A second survey by different researchers conducted online in late 2020 and early 2021 found a similar majority (55 percent) supported armed unification.[126] Over 50 percent in support of armed unification is most remarkable when examined in context. A survey conducted in 2013 in the middle of Ma Ying-jeou's term in office (when Sino-Taiwanese relations were warming) found only 7 percent supported armed unification.[127] In other words, as Sino-Taiwanese relations worsened after Ma left office, unconditional support for armed unification in the People's Republic of China changed from a fringe position to a view the majority supported. Moreover, both recent surveys asked respondents their current preferences for armed unification. Still, a bolt-out-of-the-blue invasion is not likely. Almost certainly, something would happen to precipitate an invasion—most likely, a series of crises. Even if restraint were shown in initial crises, such restraint would provoke nationalist fervor, which leaders would feel pressured to satisfy during subsequent crises. This phenomenon is one of the reasons the third Balkan war ended up becoming World War I.[128] If the surveys summarized previously had postulated various crises or major, proximate precipitating events, we suspect support of armed unification would have been significantly higher. Regardless, it is imperative to understand that not only has a prior restraint been shed (general *opposition* among China's people to armed unification), but that public opinion may now function as an

125. Dongtao Qi, Suixin Zhang, and Shengqiao Lin, "Urban Chinese Support for Armed Unification with Taiwan: Social Status, National Pride, and Understanding of Taiwan," *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 143 (2023): 1–18.

126. Adam Y. Liu and Xiaojun Li, *Assessing Public Support for (Non-)Peaceful Unification with Taiwan: Evidence from a Nationwide Survey in China*, Research Paper no. 2023-1 (La Jolla, CA: 21st Century China Center, May 14, 2023), 1–13.

127. Hsin-Hsin Pan, Wen-Chin Wu, and Yu-Tzung Chang, "Does Cross-Strait Tourism Induce Peace? Evidence from Survey Data on Chinese Tourists and Non-Tourists," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 20, no. 1 (January 2020): 149–81.

128. Joachim Remak, "1914—The Third Balkan War: Origins Reconsidered," *Journal of Modern History* 43, no. 3 (September 1971): 353–66; and Jared M. McKinney, "Nothing Fails Like Success: The London Ambassadors' Conference and the Coming of the First World War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 7 (2018): 947–1000.

incitement, especially as the Chinese Communist Party runs out of other ways to legitimize itself.

Understanding this new reality requires analysts to update their beliefs from those which seemed to be true a few years ago. In a volume published in 2022 but written in 2021, Andrew Scobell, a noted expert on the People's Republic of China, wrote:

> The [Chinese Communist Party] is currently operating in the domain of gains, and hence, [People's Republic of China] leaders are risk averse and reluctant to incur costs associated with the use of armed force against Taiwan. At present, China's economy remains robust because the country seems to have weathered COVID-19 better than any other Great Power in the world, and the [Party] enjoys strong popular support. Therefore, discussion about the increased likelihood of Beijing using force against the island in 2020 constituted stimulating but unsubstantiated speculation.[129]

As China's leaders confront their nation's increasingly imposing demographic, economic, and technological problems (which will be discussed in greater detail later in the monograph) in the era after the post–COVID-19 opening frenzy, we judge it likely they will see themselves operating in an increasingly zero-sum fiscal and geopolitical environment in which rapid economic growth will no longer raise all boats. Time will be the problem, not the solution. Even as a One China gray rhino charges from one direction (as Chairman Rabbit, quoted previously, noted), a second rhino of "extremely low fertility" lumbers from another direction, threatening the Japanization of China's economy.[130] As Liang Jianzhang, a professor of economics at Peking University, writes:

> All in all, although we have long predicted the arrival of negative population growth in China, it is shocking that fertility rates have fallen so rapidly over the past five years and that the crisis of low fertility has come so violently.

129. Andrew Scobell, "China's Calculus on the Use of Force: Futures, Costs, Benefits, Risks, and Goals," in *Crossing the Strait: China Prepares for War with Taiwan*, ed. Joel Wuthnow et al. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2022), 66.

130. Liang Jianzhang 梁建章, "梁建章：灰犀牛来了——极低生育率意味着什么?" [Liang Jianzhang: Here comes the gray rhino—what does the extremely low fertility rate mean?], Sina (website), January 23, 2023, https://finance.sina.com.cn/china/2023-01-17/doc-imyapiii3232900.shtml.

> This negative population growth in Chinese for many years has actually sounded the alarm for the whole society. The various worries that may arise from low fertility rates have become closer and closer to us. It can be said that the gray rhino with extremely low fertility is already clearly visible. It will take almost 20 years for the impact of the five-year fertility collapse on China's economy to be fully felt (we are optimistic about the Chinese economy in the short and medium term), but the long-term negative impact on China is bound to be enormous, and this gray rhino is slowly but surely rushing over.[131]

Despite these rhinos rushing slowly, a third variable challenging Chinese restraint has emerged much more quickly: China's semiconductor conundrum.

The End of the Silicon Shield

According to the final report of the US National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, "If a potential adversary bests the United States in semiconductors over the long term or suddenly cuts off US access to cutting-edge chips entirely, it [the adversary] could gain the upper hand in every domain of warfare."[132] This dire course of events has now actually transpired—but it happened to China, not the United States.

China's semiconductor predicament is the third way in which the country's incentives for restraint have eroded when it comes to weighing the pros and cons of an invasion of Taiwan. The export controls imposed on China's chip industry in October 2022 cut the country off from leading node semiconductors. The controls will undermine major progress in fields that require the latest silicon hardware—especially artificial intelligence research and supercomputing. As a result, Chinese mass production of new, leading-edge systems will stall this decade. Follow-up controls on American outbound investments in Chinese companies in the areas of semiconductors,

131. Liang Jianzhang, "Here comes," trans. Micah Sun.

132. National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, *Final Report* (Arlington, VA: National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, 2021).

quantum computing, and artificial intelligence, long rumored to be in the works, were finally issued in August 2023.[133]

The Biden-Harris administration's export controls are intended to ensure the United States maintains "as large of a lead as possible" for the "twenty percent of the technologies" that will enable "eighty percent of our overall success," according to National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.[134] The controls are intended to prevent the People's Republic of China from making advances in supercomputing, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and cutting-edge military technologies—the exact type of progress on which the country has staked its economic future. The People's Republic of China plans to beat the "middle-income trap," "intelligentize" Chinese military forces, and become a modern and prosperous great power by 2049 by leading in these "new domains" through Xi's so-called "innovation-driven development." According to Xi, "Under a situation of increasingly fierce international military competition, only the innovators win."[135]

The new export controls are intended to prevent such innovation and, as Jon Bateman of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace explains, "effectively bring all of China under the special rule formerly reserved for Huawei." Because Chinese chipmakers depend on Western machinery to produce leading-edge semiconductors, analysts struggled to find hyperbolic language to do justice to the sanctions. In a blunt statement, Szeho Ng said Chinese companies "are basically going back to the Stone Age."[136] Hao Min, a Chinese scientific security researcher, has spoken of "technical terrorism."[137]

Chinese analyses undertaken before the full chip ban was announced noted the extent of China's dependence. As two leading experts wrote, "China's chip industry chain is relatively fragile. If a link in the supply

133. Exec. Order No. 14,105, 88 Fed. Reg. 54867 (Aug. 9, 2023); and Bill Bishop, "Three Red Lines; Sweet Talk for Business; US-Japan-PRC; Protestor Roundup," *Sinocism* (blog), January 12, 2023, https://sinocism.com/p/three-red-lines-sweet-talk-for-business.

134. Jake Sullivan, "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan at the Special Competitive Studies Project Global Emerging Technologies Summit" (speech, Special Competitive Studies Project Global Emerging Technologies Summit, Washington, DC, September 16, 2022).

135. Xi Jinping, "Scientific and Technological Innovation" (speech, National Congress of the CCP, Beijing, September 15, 2017), quoted in Elsa B. Kania, "AI in China's Revolution in Military Affairs," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44, no. 4 (June 2021): 520.

136. "China's Chip Industry Set for Deep Pain from US Export Controls," *Financial Times* (website), October 9, 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/e950f58c-0d8f-4121-b4f2-ece71d2cb267.

137. Hao Min, "技术封锁严重违逆时代潮流," *People's Daily* (website), August 11, 2022, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-08/11/nw.D110000renmrb_20220811_2-17.htm.

chain were to be broken, our industry would be at the mercy of others and our chip industry as a whole would be forced into a passive state. [Such a scenario] might even end up threatening China's economic and social development."[138]

A report from Fudan University published in October 2022 but completed a month earlier (after the CHIPS and Science Act had been signed into law and an early form of the current export controls had been imposed on NVIDIA Corporation and Advanced Micro Devices, Inc., before the major, industry-wide export controls of October 2022) offered a more upbeat assessment. The report contended the Biden-Harris administration's policies were part and parcel of a long-term plan to weaken China's technological progress, and the latest policies would create a window of vulnerability for China:

> Ironically, in the medium to long term, US pressure is set to "force" China's high-tech industry to develop a more solid industrial base as well as [its own] core technologies. Objectively speaking and from the US's perspective, this will lead to [the emergence of] a more challenging, comprehensive, and thus more-difficult-to-contain, powerful adversary.
>
> In the short term, US tech-related policies targeting China will create a window of opportunity. That is to say, a window during which China will be seeking to fix the adverse consequences caused by the US's technology crackdown. *For the US, this window will mean that the US is given more time to develop itself in a number of key and emerging technologies, including advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence, so as to gain the upper hand over China*.[139]

As stressed in this analysis, understanding the element of time in the current situation is important. Semiconductor Manufacturing International

138. Wang Yaonan and Liao Lei, "'中国芯'破局之路如何走," People's Forum (website), September 16, 2022, http://www.rmlt.com.cn/2022/0916/656316.shtml; and Thomas des Garets Geddes, "US National Security Strategy | Semiconductors | GER/UK-China Relations | 20th Party Congress," *Sinification* (blog), October 23, 2022, https://sinification.substack.com/p/us-national-security-strategy-semiconductors.

139. Shen Yi 沈逸 and Mo Fei 莫非, 从"防范"到"遏制": 被安全化的美国半导体产业政策研究报告 [*From "prevention" to "containment": A report on the securitization of the United States' semiconductor industry policy*], Fudan Think Tank Report no. 56 (Shanghai: Fudan Development Institute, 2022), trans. Thomas Des Garets Geddes, *Sinification*, https://www.sinification.com/p/new-fudan-report-us-china-chip-war.

Corporation, China's leading manufacturer of semiconductors, can produce limited numbers of 7-nanometer chips using existing deep ultraviolet lithography machines. The extent to which such chips can be produced at scale with competitive pricing is still an open question, although Huawei's success introducing a 7-nanometer (like) processor in September 2023 showed significant prowess squeezing performance out of China's existing set of production machinery. Using its existing Western deep ultraviolet lithography machines and increasingly demanding techniques, Chinese engineers will likely produce 5 nanometer (like) chips, which could be used for limited military and specialized purposes. 5 nanometer transistors were developed in the West in 2017 and went into mass production in 2020. This is likely where progress will top out for China, however, until Chinese companies recreate the entire extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography supply chain, which could take until the end of this decade or longer. In short, until China is able to establish its own suppliers, production of near-leading node chips will be restricted to limited military and government production and will decline, relatively speaking, as advances are made in the West; Chinese companies will falter in their attempts to innovate their way to developing new technologies and markets; and civil-military fusion, in which commercial technical advances are integrated into military systems, will be slowed. In the long term (2030s onward), the Fudan semiconductor report's conclusion—China will overcome and form its own industry—is a plausible forecast. Once China has rebuilt the industry from the ground up, it will catch up. Given enough time, the industry may advance ahead of Western rivals, but these advances will not happen quickly.

Chinese GDP growth is already trending down for this decade, and the US export controls will reinforce this trend. The short-term effects of the export controls are estimated to reduce annual Chinese GDP growth by at least 0.6 percent of GDP.[140] Additional controls, which remain probable, would further increase this number. A report from *Nikkei Asia*, meanwhile, estimated the slowing growth of the Chinese chip sector in China's domestic market would require hundreds of billions of dollars in additional imports annually.[141]

140. Che Pan, "Tech War: US Chip Restrictions Could Cost 0.6 Percent of China's Gross Domestic Product and Weigh on Yuan, According to Barclays Report," *South China Morning Post* (website), November 16, 2022, https://www.scmp.com/tech/big-tech/article/3199860/tech-war-us-chip-restrictions-could-cost-06-cent-chinas-gdp-and-weigh-yuan-according-barclays-report.

141. Cheng Ting-Fang and Shunsuke Tabeta, "China's Chip Industry Fights to Survive US Tech Crackdown," *Nikkei Asia* (website), November 30, 2022, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Big-Story/China-s-chip-industry-fights-to-survive-U.S.-tech-crackdown.

Even as the controls impose long-term economic costs and undermine Beijing's innovation-driven development strategy, the controls also change the cost-benefit analysis of Chinese leaders when they estimate the net value of attempting to conquer Taiwan. Most significantly, the costs to China of not having access to Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company have gone down (and will continue going down). If Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company were destroyed in a war, for example, China would be able to substitute most lower-end chips with domestic sources (and increasingly so as the decade progressed). Because it is already losing access to Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's advanced chips, the People's Republic of China has much less to lose in this regard. This change is hugely consequential—yet seemingly vastly underappreciated—in the Chinese calculus about whether invading Taiwan will produce more harm than good (see figure 1-1 showing the halving of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's business in China). In the recent past, the prospect of losing access to Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's products was a factor weighing against an invasion, but the prospect is no longer a factor.

Alternatively, in an all-out invasion, China may seek to seize Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company to gain access to the advanced semiconductor machinery and production the country has been denied by US export controls. Since the publication of our "Broken Nest" essay in November 2021, this idea has been summarily dismissed by a variety of actors, including the Chinese government, for the supposed reason the People's Republic of China does not desire unification with Taiwan because of the semiconductor industry.[142] This criticism misunderstands the "Broken Nest" argument, which was intended to look for ways to manipulate the relative costs and benefits of an invasion at a given time to strengthen deterrence, not describe the constant of the Chinese desire for unification (which obviously existed before the semiconductor era). Since the publication of the article, however, two high-profile Chinese commentators have pointed directly to the benefits of seizing Taiwan's semiconductor industry. Chen Wenling, chief economist of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, an organization overseen by China's National Development and Reform Commission, the People's Republic of China's top economic planning agency, declared in a quote censored by the government:

142. Jared M. McKinney and Peter Harris, "Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan," *Parameters* 51, no. 4 (2021): 23–36; and "美前印太司令担忧台海6年内生变 美学者鼓动民进党当局自毁台积电以阻止'武统,'" Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council (website), December 23, 2021, http://www.taiwan.cn/taiwan/jsxw/202112/t20211223_12397866.htm.

> In the conditions that America and the West want, similar to Russia, to destructively sanction China, we definitely must recover Taiwan, especially in restructuring the industrial and supply chains, and seize TSMC, a company originally belonging to China, back into China's hands. They are speeding up the transfer to the United States, they want to construct six factories in the United States, we absolutely cannot allow their transfer goals to be implemented.[143]

This analysis sees a closing window for China to dominate the semiconductor industry before Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company moves many resources to the United States, something it is in the midst of doing. A second key analysis comes from Chen Feng, a leading independent foreign policy analyst, who writes, "On an economic strategy level, Taiwan's chip industry is the springboard for China's economic transformation and overcoming the middle-income trap." Such a seizure, along with the parallel geopolitical and international political effects, would "shake the foundation of America's supremacy.[144] Assuming China could successfully seize Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, this argument is plausible.

Would the fabrication plants survive an invasion? Although much has been written about these facilities being destroyed if an invasion were to occur, it is important to understand that Taiwan's leaders do not share this view. When asked about plans to destroy Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company if China were to invade, Chen Ming-tong, the head of Taiwan's intelligence service, said, "Even if China got a hold of the golden hen, it won't be able to lay golden eggs." Chen assured the lawmakers no plans existed to render the plants inoperable deliberately in the context of a war. In a similar vein, Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs contended that "For the entire world, the stability and security of the Taiwan Strait is the best supply chain investment."[145] Taiwan's minister of national defense has said even if China were to attack, Taiwan would not

143. Xu Ning 许宁, "北京觊觎芯片技术或对台动武？美专家见解不一," Voice of America Chinese (website), June 10, 2022, https://www.voachinese.com/a/will-china-invade-taiwan-for-chips-20220609/6611220.html.

144. Feng Chen 晨枫, "台湾和平统一的曙光实际上在悄悄升起," *Guancha* (website), December 28, 2022, https://www.guancha.cn/ChenFeng3/2022_12_28_673113.shtml.

145. Sarah Zheng and Cindy Wang, "No Need to Blow Up Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company in China War, Taiwan Security Chief Says," Bloomberg (website), October 12, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-12/no-need-to-blow-up-tsmc-in-china-war-taiwan-security-chief-says.

allow the United States to destroy Taiwan's silicon industry.[146] Analysts based in the United States have raised concerns about the economic consequences of Taiwan's foundries being taken offline, suggesting some actors in the United States would hope for Taiwan's chip industry to maintain operations under conditions of war—similar, perhaps, to how Russian energy producers have been allowed to keep exporting oil and gas amid the war in Ukraine.[147] The bottom line is that many doubt whether Taiwan's chip industry would be destroyed or disabled in the event of war (indeed, Taipei has given indications to the contrary), meaning Beijing reaching the conclusion that the industry could be captured intact would be perfectly understandable.

As others have noted, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company is deeply integrated into a global supply chain that would be interrupted or destroyed by a Chinese invasion. Yet, the issue is not whether the company exists within a deeply interdependent ecosystem today—obviously, it does. The issue is how the People's Republic of China would create its own ecosystem after an invasion. Assuming China could invade and seize the "golden hen," but the country could not figure out how to use the company's infrastructure to Chinese advantage is deeply naive. Beijing may need the golden hen now more than ever before. The idea China would not have the workforce in this case does not hold water; already, 10 percent of Taiwan's expert semiconductor workforce has moved to China to support its industry.[148] Coercion and bribery could gain the subservience of much of Taiwan's high-tech workforce in the event of a successful invasion. Also, whether the outside world, when faced with having to isolate Taiwan's critical foundries from global supply chains, would follow through on such a threat remains to be seen.

Regardless of whether Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company would survive an invasion or not, the prospect of losing access to Taiwanese chips will not instill fear into Chinese decisionmakers for much longer. Soon, nothing will be left to take away. We believe that this has been a mistake. Sharpening China's fears of losing access to Taiwanese-made semiconductors while defending the viability of the political status quo would have made more sense. Chinese dependence

146. Keoni Everington, "Defense Minister Says Taiwan Will Not Let United States 'Blow Up Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company' during Chinese Attack," *Taiwan News* (website), May 9, 2023, https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4886681.

147. Jared M. McKinney, "Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's Fate Will Indeed Be at Stake If China Attacks Taiwan," *Nikkei Asia* (website), June 2, 2023, https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/TSMC-s-fate-will-indeed-be-at-stake-if-China-attacks-Taiwan.

148. Kensaku Ihara, "Taiwan Loses 3,000 Chip Engineers to 'Made in China 2025,'" *Nikkei Asia* (website), December 3, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/China-tech/Taiwan-loses-3-000-chip-engineers-to-Made-in-China-2025.

on chip imports should have been exploited for as long as possible. Deterrence is more important than competition. Interdependence could have been weaponized to deter a conflict, rather than weaponizing interdependence in a preventative manner to derive advantage in an era in which the United States has plenty of other competition levers it could pull. Instead, US policy is bringing about a scenario in which China no longer fears (as much) the economic consequences of invading Taiwan. This problem would not be as severe if other factors were staying the hand of Chinese leaders. As has been discussed at length in this monograph, however, most other instruments of deterrence have also weakened.

In our view, strict enforcement of the current export controls, to say nothing of their extension, would hobble China's technological development. No matter how hard Beijing tries, no easy economic solution to this problem exists.[149] As far back as 2016, Xi stated, "Our dependence on core technology is the biggest hidden trouble for us. . . . Heavy dependence on imported core technology is like building our house on top of someone else's walls: No matter how big and how beautiful it is, it won't remain standing during a storm."[150] Xi's Made in China 2025 plan, announced in 2015, called for domestically supplying 40 percent of "core basic components" by 2020 and 70 percent by 2025, but, with domestic sourcing of only 16 percent of its semiconductors in 2020, China has not come close to achieving these metrics.[151] Despite huge investments in government guidance funds, seemingly, most of the leaders in the drive for self-sufficiency are being imprisoned or investigated for "corruption."[152] As keen Chinese observers realize, China is not ready for closed technological modernization.[153]

149. Chris Miller, *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology* (New York: Scribner, 2022); and Wu Zihao 吴梓豪, "美国梭哈，日荷跟进，中国芯片奋力一搏还是盖牌走人?," FreeWeChat (website), February 2, 2023, https://freewechat.com//a/Mzg4NTA2NzE0Mg==/2247532207/1.

150. "Core Technology Depends on One's Own Efforts: President Xi," *People's Daily* (website), April 19, 2018, http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0419/c90000-9451186.html.

151. Shunsuke Tabeta, "'Made in China' Chip Drive Falls Far Short of 70% Self-Sufficiency," *Nikkei Asia* (website), October 13, 2021, https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Tech/Semiconductors/Made-in-China-chip-drive-falls-far-short-of-70-self-sufficiency.

152. Brent Crane, "The Semiconductor Madman," *Wire China* (website), January 8, 2023, https://www.thewirechina.com/2023/01/08/zhao-weiguo-the-semiconductor-madman/.

153. Zheng Yongnian 郑永年, "开放、思想市场与科技创新," Weixin (website), December 20, 2022, http://mp.weixin.qq.com; and Zichen Wang, Jinhao Bai, and Zhangxu Kang, "Zheng Yongnian on Openness, Market of Ideas, and Scientific Innovation," *Pekingnology* (blog), January 4, 2023, https://www.pekingnology.com/p/zheng-yongnian-on-openness-market.

Even as Chinese engineers work to eke out every ounce of performance from deep ultraviolet lithography, by the mid-2020s, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Samsung, Intel, and, potentially, the new Japanese group Rapidus Corporation will be using the latest lithography machines to create two-nanometer and smaller chips. The new export controls will disrupt the People's Republic of China's domestic production goals for even more modest chips. Already, ASML Holding and other companies have suspended many of their operations in China (including for some deep ultraviolet lithography technologies). In time, China will compensate for lagging-edge products. Without access to new Western technologies and advanced lithography machinery, in particular, the Chinese economy will be cut off from the emerging fourth industrial revolution. Samsung says it will launch a two-nanometer node in 2025, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company says it will launch two-nanometer mode in 2026 and is working on a 1.4-nanometer node to launch in 2028, and Intel plans to launch its 16A or 14A chips in 2028. By around 2030, even if China had mastered commercially viable 5-nanometer production, the country could be 50 percent behind in terms of the speed and energy efficiency of central processing units (CPUs); for graphics processing units (GPUs), the divergence will be exponential. This is already occurring. For example, NVIDIA Corporation's new H100 chip (fabricated on a Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company four-nanometer node) is three times more powerful than NVIDIA's previous A100 chip (a Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company seven-nanometer node), which is already banned for export to China.[154]

Taiwan's "golden hen" in this context becomes more important than ever before. The People's Republic of China's incentives to invade the island increase in a manner that is directly proportionate to China's inability to create or access the advanced semiconductors it believes—with good reason—to be essential to Chinese centennial modernization objectives. Historically, "making" has been an alternative to "taking."[155] If the People's Republic of China judges it will not be able to make or purchase, it may decide to take. Although Taiwanese leaders may assert their golden hen will not operate on its own, it is not difficult to imagine

154. Eliot Chen, "The AI Lockout," *Wire China* (website), March 12, 2023, https://www.thewirechina.com/2023/03/12/the-ai-lockout-nvidia-china/.

155. Jared M. McKinney, "Making, Taking, and Breaking in World History," *International Studies Review* 22, no. 3 (September 2020): 714–15.

Chinese leaders assessing that they would be more likely to achieve modernization with advanced lithography machinery and the most sophisticated fabrication plants in the world as opposed to without either. The best way to remove this incentive is to demonstrate the capacity to, and will for, breaking in the face of an adversary's attempt at taking. Since Taiwan has indicated it is unwilling to do so, the Silicon Shield has become a Silicon Magnet.[156]

China's Closing Window of Opportunity

The fourth and final variable trending in favor of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is the balance of military power among China, Taiwan, and the United States. By drawing attention to this factor, we join with others who have similarly argued that China's military modernization and asymmetric prioritization have given the country an increasingly decisive advantage in the 2020s.[157] The conventional wisdom is China is on a relentless upward trend vis-à-vis the United States and may attempt an invasion once the balance is definitively in its favor.[158] Our argument is different: The balance of power is not inexorably shifting in China's favor, and, given sufficient time, the United States and partner nations in the region will counter many of the asymmetric advantages China has carefully developed over the past two decades.[159] This situation, though painting China in a less formidable light, is actually more dangerous: If Beijing perceives the window of opportunity to reunify with Taiwan is closing, then the odds of war increase. As Thomas Christensen explained in 2006, speaking of possible military trends, "including increased coordination between the US military and its Taiwanese counterpart" and the "strengthening of the US-Japan alliance": "If, at a time when China had developed more robust military options against Taiwan than

156. Jared M. McKinney and Mark Rosenblatt, "Revive Taiwan's 'Silicon Shield,'" Real Clear Policy (website), July 28, 2022, https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2022/07/28/revive_taiwans_silicon_shield_844814.html.

157. Gabriel Collins and Andrew S. Erickson, *US-China Competition Enters the Decade of Maximum Danger: Policy Ideas to Avoid Losing the 2020s* (Houston: Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, December 2021).

158. "China v America: How Xi Jinping Plans to Narrow the Military Gap," *Economist* (website), May 8, 2023, https://www.economist.com/china/2023/05/08/china-v-america-how-xi-jinping-plans-to-narrow-the-military-gap.

159. Tai Ming Cheung, "Racing from Behind: China and the Dynamics of Arms Chases and Races in East Asia in the Twenty-First Century," in *Arms Races in International Politics: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo, and David Stevenson (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 247–69.

it currently has, [People's Republic of China] elites were to become very concerned about these trend lines (as they were in early 2000) and frustrated that factors like Taiwan's economic dependence were not producing Taipei's accommodation, then Chinese use of force for largely political purposes seems quite possible."[160]

After the time of Christensen's writing, Ma Ying-jeou's presidency (2008–16), which coincided with Beijing's period of strategic opportunity, suspended many alarming trends from Beijing's perspective. Since then, as explained in the previous chapters, the political trends have reversed, even as the period of strategic opportunity has ended, and the military trends appear to be in transition as well.

The reason for China's relative advantage today is that the country has developed a counterintervention strategy for US carrier–based power projection that is likely to be successful. The US Air Force is not much help in this regard because its main combat aircraft are too limited by range and current basing options to overcome the effectiveness of Chinese anti-access/area denial without prohibitively high losses or a reduction in mission effectiveness. Agile Combat Employment, a doctrine that emphasizes decentralized and dispersed locations over centralized physical infrastructure (bases), does not fundamentally change these limitations; the doctrine only makes the reality marginally less bad. As two scholars at China's National University of Defense Technology explain, even with dispersal, "there are not many air and naval bases and they can be easily targeted."[161] The number of vertical launch cells—one key metric of maritime power—the United States could bring to a fight in East Asia is actually dropping this decade, as are available nuclear attack subs.[162] By 2028, all four of the US Navy's *Ohio*-class cruise missile submarines will be retired; their incredible conventional launch capability (up to 154 Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles each) will not

160. Thomas J. Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 77.

161. Chen Xi 陈曦 and Ge Tengfei 葛腾飞, "美国对华拒止性威慑战略论析" [An analysis of the United States' deterrence by denial strategy against China], 国际安全研究 [*International Security Studies*] 5 (2022): 81–106, trans. *Interpret: China*, https://interpret.csis.org/translations/an-analysis-of-the-united-states-deterrence-by-denial-strategy-against-china/.

162. *Trends, Timelines, and Uncertainty: An Assessment of the Military Balance in the Indo-Pacific: Hearing on Advancing Effective US Policy for Strategic Competition with China in the Twenty-First Century, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 117th Cong. (2021) (statement of Thomas H. Shugart, adjunct senior fellow, Defense Program, Center for a New American Security).

be replaced until 2044.[163] More broadly, the United States does not have the magazine depth the country would need to fight a major combat operation effectively, and if the United States lost access to Taiwan's semiconductors during a conflict, US companies could not easily build this capacity.[164] Japan has not adequately invested in its military in the recent past, so it cannot change the balance of power today. Taiwan has radically underinvested on the assumption the United States can give Taiwan a free ride, leaving itself particularly vulnerable.

Remarkably, most of these major handicaps on US and allied and partner military power will change by 2030 or thereabouts—a fact overlooked in the alarmist literature that talks about China eventually dominating Asia. To be sure, the US Navy is not moving away from its carrier-centric force. In a relative competition for advantage, a navy outpacing an antinavy in China's littorals and near seas is not likely. The US Air Force, however, is procuring a new long-range bomber, the B-21 Raider, and aiming for around 100 such aircraft to be in service by the beginning of the next decade. Given their long flying range, carrying capacity that is likely to be large, and stealthy characteristics, these bombers will be ideal for sinking invading ships in the Taiwan Strait, providing the Air Force with the "capacity to sink 300" People's Liberation Army Navy ships "in 72 hours," which would "provide convincing conventional military deterrence."[165] The United States is also massively increasing its semiconductor manufacturing capability, with $200 billion already on the table.[166] By around 2030, in an emergency, the United States could manufacture domestically the majority of semiconductors the country would need for military purposes—especially advanced, precision-guided munitions. At the same time, Taiwan and US allies and partners are now investing seriously in their military capabilities as a response to the Russia-Ukraine War.

163 Joseph Trevithick, "Prized Ohio Guided Missile Submarines Will Be Gone from Navy by 2028," War Zone (website), April 19, 2023, https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/prized-ohio-guided-missile-submarine-will-be-gone-from-navy-by-2028.

164. Mark A. Gunzinger, *Affordable Mass: The Need for a Cost-Effective Precision-Guided Munitions Mix for Great Power Conflict*, Policy Paper no. 31 (Arlington, VA: Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, November 2021).

165. Robert Haddick, *Fire on the Water: China, America, and the Future of the Pacific*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2022), 181.

166. Robert Casanova, "The Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors Act Has Already Sparked $200 Billion in Private Investments for US Semiconductor Production," *Semiconductor Industry Association* (blog), December 14, 2022, https://www.semiconductors.org/the-chips-act-has-already-sparked-200-billion-in-private-investments-for-u-s-semiconductor-production/.

Many of these investments will take practical effect toward the end of the 2020s.[167] Japan's increasing defense budgets, in particular, will help balance Chinese advances—but in the 2030s, not today. Obviously, China is also modernizing this decade, and, by around the 2030s, will be operating a significant number of J-20s and other more advanced systems.

What should be clear as cognitive blinders are dropped is that the period of China's rapid rise is over.[168] The United States is now countermodernizing against China's modernization, which itself was directed against the US revolution in military affairs that started with the Persian Gulf War.[169] Later is no longer better for China. As recently as 2022, rigorous analyses suggested Chinese national power would surpass American national power by the early 2040s.[170] These estimates were computed using the Chinese GDP growth of 5.7 percent in the 2020s and 4.4 percent in the 2030s.[171] These numbers should no longer be seen as plausible. Even if by some metrics, Chinese power surpasses US power in the future, such a transition is not the same thing as a "power transition."[172] The global system of US alliances and partners gives the nation superordinate reach, and, in the context of a Taiwan conflict, the United States would draw upon these alliances and partners. Although the People's Republic of China is scoring highly on some new metrics of power and innovation, these benchmarks tend to be deceptive because innovation ability is not the same thing as technological diffusion, which Chinese state-owned enterprises make

167. National Bureau of Asian Research, *Meeting China's Emerging Capabilities*, National Bureau of Asian Research Special Report no. 103 (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, December 2022).

168. Daniel C. Lynch, "Is China's Rise Now Stalling?," *Pacific Review* 32, no. 3 (May 2019): 446–74; and Martin K. Whyte, "China's Economic Development History and Xi Jinping's 'China Dream': An Overview with Personal Reflections," *Chinese Sociological Review* 53, no. 2 (March 2021): 115–34.

169. Chas W. Freeman, "US-China Military Relations: From Enmity to Entente and Maybe Back Again," in *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*, ed. Anne F. Thurston (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 326; and Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Origins of Victory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023).

170. Jonathan D. Moyer, Collin J. Meisel, and Austin S. Matthews, "Measuring and Forecasting the Rise of China: Reality over Image," *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 140 (2023): 191–206.

171. Moyer, Meisel, and Matthews, "Measuring and Forecasting," 201.

172. Steve Chan, *Rumbles of Thunder: Power Shifts and the Danger of Sino-American War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022).

difficult.[173] The future world will not see a superpower China facing off against a great-power United States. At best, the world will contain multiple great powers.[174] The upshot is that China cannot be optimistic about the global distribution of power in the 2040s, merely assuming the "East wind" will "prevail" over the "West wind" in any definitive sense.[175] If Beijing wants to fight for Taiwan and have the best chance of winning, the People's Republic of China must do so sooner rather than later.

173. Jamie Gaida et al., *Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Critical Technology Tracker*, Policy Brief Report no. 69 (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2023); and Jeffrey Ding, "The Diffusion Deficit in Scientific and Technological Power: Re-Assessing China's Rise," *Review of International Political Economy* (website), March 13, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2023.2173633.

174. Feng Zhang and Barry Buzan, "The Relevance of Deep Pluralism for China's Foreign Policy," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 2022): 246–71.

175. Odd Arne Westad, "What Does the West Really Know about Xi's China?," *Foreign Affairs* (website), June 13, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/what-does-west-really-know-about-xis-china.

— 4 —

What Can Be Done?: The Gravity of the Situation and the Next Deterrents

The argument of this monograph so far has been that, in the past, China could be persuaded that deferring its ambitions to recapture Taiwan was better than acting on the country's formal commitment to unification. This was because the costs of an invasion were high (effective deterrents were in place), as were the benefits of deferral (stability and economic growth were assured and highly valued). As we have shown, however, the costs of an invasion today have fallen as individual deterrents have decayed and not been replaced. The attractiveness of deferral has also weakened, given China can no longer be assured that postponing unification will pay social, political, and economic dividends. The result is a perfect storm for instability and, more to the point, an invasion within the next decade.

Are We Right?

There are reasons to be skeptical about the imminence of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. For instance, some argue that analysts have misunderstood Chinese Communist Party centennials before, incorrectly predicting the centennial of the party's formation as a date for invasion. Xi does not appear to have prepared relevant agencies for occupying Taiwan or explained to Chinese society—or even party cadres—the necessity of a military invasion. Instead, Xi's People's Republic of China is occupied with other priorities (such as economic growth, anticorruption, and managing the Belt and Road Initiative).[1]

1. Timothy R. Heath, "Is China Planning to Attack Taiwan? A Careful Consideration of Available Evidence Says No," War on the Rocks (website), December 14, 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/12/is-china-planning-to-attack-taiwan-a-careful-consideration-of-available-evidence-says-no/.

An invasion, even if successful in the short term, would come with tremendous long-term costs. Xi's rhetoric has not changed from that of previous Chinese leaders.[2] And Russia's failure to achieve a fait accompli in Ukraine has been widely discussed as a cautious lesson in China.[3]

All these points are accurate, but they demonstrate an effort to invade is not imminent—not that such an invasion would be unlikely within the next decade.[4] A Chinese decision to invade would most likely be triggered due to the interaction of proximate and underlying variables. We have already argued that the underlying variables (the erosion of the One China framework, slowing economic growth and rising nationalism in China, the severance of China from the global semiconductor supply chain, and the shifting balance of military power) are creating structural incentives to move away from a position of strategic patience. All that is left is for some proximate event—for example, a provocative statement or action in the Taiwanese or American presidential elections in 2024, 2028, or 2032—to trigger a crisis that pits Beijing's long-held strategic patience against the psychological and strategic requirements of the People's Republic of China's anti-secession law. Most likely, the triggering crisis would be the second or third in a quick succession, if past norms hold.[5]

The role of crises can be considered an extension of our temporal theory of deterrent decay outlined in chapter 2. Deterrent decay does not have to be a secular trend; the passage of time can erode deterrents slowly, but it can also upend deterrents all of a sudden. As Vladimir Lenin famously said, "There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen." This quote makes sense when international crises are essentially considered as situations in which two or more actors must bargain over "high-priority values" while facing "a restricted amount of time in which

2. Lyle Morris, "Listen to Xi Jinping about Taiwan," War on the Rocks (website), November 18, 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/11/listen-to-xi-jingping-about-taiwan/.

3. Ding Gang 丁刚, "为什么说俄乌冲突改变了欧洲人的中国观," Aisixiang (website), January 31, 2023, http://www.aisixiang.com/data/140389.html.

4. John Culver, "How We Would Know When China Is Preparing to Invade Taiwan," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (website), October 3, 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/10/03/how-we-would-know-when-china-is-preparing-to-invade-taiwan-pub-88053.

5. Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez, eds., *The Outbreak of the First World War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014); John A. Vasquez, "The First World War and International Relations Theory: A Review of Books on the 100th Anniversary," *International Studies Review* 16, no. 4 (December 2014): 623–44; and John A. Vasquez, "Whether and How Global Leadership Transitions Will Result in War: Some Long-Term Predictions from the Steps-to-War Explanation," in *Systemic Transitions: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. William R. Thompson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 131–60.

a response can be made."[6] In such situations, deterrents can be put to the test: Information about intentions, credibility, resolve, and capabilities is (or can be) revealed; new commitments are (or can be) assumed, and old ones cast aside; and decisionmakers must always arrive at rushed conclusions, dealing with incomplete information and laboring under the uncertain shadow of the future.[7]

A future crisis over Taiwan could precipitate a Chinese invasion if during the crisis, China's leaders perceive the costs of acting with restraint as dramatically higher than ever before and the costs of action lower relative to the likely costs in the mid-2030s and beyond. It is even possible that an international crisis that does not directly involve Taiwan could result in Beijing making this determination. A third-party conflict such as a US-Israeli war with Iran or a conflict over North Korea, for example, would require Chinese strategists to make snap decisions over whether to make a move against Taiwan (that is, whether to take advantage of the United States being preoccupied elsewhere). At these future critical junctures, the story remains unwritten, and the Chinese Communist Party may double down on strategic patience and the struggle for national resilience rather than coming down in favor of a hasty invasion gambit. Plausibly, Beijing's top leaders may throw the dice of war, gambling on a local conflict that resets the status quo. Game theory analysis has long suggested that entering into conflict will become progressively more likely when China sees itself as increasingly "desperate" and otherwise unable to achieve its national objectives.[8]

A decision to throw the dice would include a reordering of Beijing's central task. In peacetime, the party-state's central task is development. In the context of a test that undermined domestic stability, the central task would be reordered. Development would become a secondary goal until the negative trends posed by the overall situation were reversed. National defense mobilization, explained as a defensive measure to potentially very real provocation, would serve the cause of national unity, even

6. Charles F. Hermann, "Some Consequences of Crisis Which Limit the Viability of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (June 1963): 63.

7. Xiao Tianliang, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy*, trans. China Aerospace Studies Institute (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: China Aerospace Studies Institute, January 2022), 114.

8. Raymond Franck and Francois Melese, "A Game Theory View of Military Conflict in the Taiwan Strait," *Defense & Security Analysis* 19, no. 4 (December 2003): 327–48; and Andrew Scobell, "China's Calculus on the Use of Force: Futures, Costs, Benefits, Risks, and Goals," in *Crossing the Strait: China Prepares for War with Taiwan*, ed. Joel Wuthnow et al. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2022), 73.

as mobilization signaled China's seriousness.[9] Careful calculation of the costs to development would no longer be the priority—just as careful calculation of casualties was not the priority in the Korean War, the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, or the Sino-Vietnamese War.[10] Deterrence by punishment efforts, at this point, would fail.[11]

This picture is grim, implying that the Sino-Taiwanese-American relationship is a powder keg waiting for a spark.[12] It is essential, therefore, for us to consider whether we are wrong in our conclusions—and how we and others would know. Given the importance of underlying and proximate variables to our argument, we are aware of the need to be transparent about elements that might falsify our reading of the trends involving both sets of factors. In what follows, we present a non-exhaustive list of nine empirical indicators that can be considered future tests of our theory—essentially, evidence and counterevidence of our theory's observable implications. The emergence in the mid-2020s of some (three or more) of the following empirical indicators would decrease confidence in our argument, suggesting that war is not becoming much more likely. The emergence of most (five or more) of the indicators would falsify our claims and render our analysis of questionable use in the case of Taiwan.

1. Stable or optimistic Chinese views on unification (on either side of the Taiwan Strait but, especially on the Chinese Mainland) would suggest that we are wrong about the growing likelihood of war. In this scenario, the One China framework will turn out to be more robust than we expect at the present time and may yet continue to serve as a central pillar of peace across the Strait. In this case, China reembraces its optimistic vision for peaceful unification. For a past example of this scenario, the rhetoric and views of the "optimists"

9. Ron Christman, "How Beijing Evaluates Military Campaigns: An Initial Assessment," in *The Lessons of History: The Chinese People's Liberation Army at 75*, ed. Laurie Burkitt, Andrew Scobell, and Larry M. Wortzel (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College Press, 2003), 253–92.

10. Christopher M. Gin, *How China Wins: A Case Study of the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Studies Institute Press, 2016).

11. Howard Wang, "'Security Is a Prerequisite for Development': Consensus-Building toward a New Top Priority in the Chinese Communist Party," *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 142 (2023): 525–39; and *Deterring PRC Aggression toward Taiwan*, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2021) (statement of Lonnie Henley, professional lecturer).

12. William R. Thompson, "A Streetcar Named Sarajevo: Catalysts, Multiple Causation Chains, and Rivalry Structures," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (September 2003): 453–74.

as opposed to the "pessimists" as outlined in 2005 (and republished in 2022) by Jiang Shigong is instructive.[13]

2. Chinese military spending remains directly connected to GDP growth (that is, the growth of the spending slows considerably going forward) and emphasizes military capabilities not particularly useful in a local war in China's near seas (for instance, aircraft carriers and army personnel and mechanization). Because military investments are costly signals of intent, not clearly prioritizing the Taiwan mission relative to other possible missions would indicate that the People's Republic of China is not planning or expecting an imminent invasion of the island. Roll-on, roll-off amphibious lift is one key metric to watch in this regard.[14]

3. China fails to develop the societal and military capabilities to launch a surprise invasion of Taiwan. Given Putin's failure to achieve surprise in Ukraine and China's long-term cultural, historical, and doctrinal attachment to surprise in military operations, China would probably need to expand its ability to achieve surprise in a Taiwan invasion, particularly in an era of persistent and wide-ranging surveillance capabilities. The main way this expansion could be achieved is through conditioning Taiwan and the rest of the world to allow significant People's Liberation Army troop buildups and military exercises along China's coast and in the Taiwan Strait. Air defense identification zone (ADIZ) and median-line operations of the People's Liberation Army currently do not meet the mark because they are not coordinated with the massive logistical requirements an amphibious invasion would impose. As Chinese leaders perceive the likelihood of choosing or being forced into nonpeaceful unification, this variable should change.

13. David Ownby, "Jiang Shigong on the Taiwan Issue," *Reading the China Dream* (blog), August 6, 2022, https://www.readingthechinadream.com/jiang-shigong-on-the-taiwan-problem.html.

14. J. Michael Dahm, *More Chinese Ferry Tales: China's Use of Civilian Shipping in Military Activities, 2021–2022*, China Maritime Report no. 25 (Newport, RI: China Maritime Studies Institute, January 2023), 1–70.

4. Favorable medium- to long-term Chinese assessments of economic and military power relative to Taiwan, the United States, and the wider region would imply that we are wrong about China's closing window of opportunity to attack Taiwan. If Chinese leaders turn out to perceive themselves as having the option of a successful armed attack long into the future, then these conditions will decrease their incentives to attack the island sooner rather than later. In such an event, our argument would seem misguided to future readers. So far, Chinese commentators tend to hold that "time is on their side."[15] Will this view persist?

5. Chinese leadership might openly endorse strategic patience in a reality-based assessment that acknowledges Taiwan's people are not interested in "one country, two systems" in the short to medium term and call for Confucian, as opposed to Legalist, ways and means of achieving unification.[16] We regard this eventuality as highly unlikely because it would constitute an admission of weakness and failure by Chinese Communist Party leadership. Nevertheless, the eventuality is possible. If this development were to transpire, our argument would be significantly weakened because we will have been proven wrong about the Chinese government's willingness to abandon plans to capture Taiwan with or without Taiwanese consent. Such a rhetorical shift would be especially significant in response to pro-independence rhetoric from Taiwan.

6. Chinese success in developing a leading-node semiconductor supply chain that is not dependent on the United States would call our analysis into question because the success would upend many of our assumptions about how future access to semiconductors will shape the Chinese calculus. For instance, in the next few years, China could establish sufficient trailing-edge chip production capability to meet the country's needs while the United States remains primarily dependent on Taiwan without having yet reaped the medium-term

15. Chen Xingzhi 陈行之，"对当下和未来世界的十个臆想，" Aisixiang (website), January 26, 2023, https://www.aisixiang.com/data/140306.html; and Rush Doshi, *The Long Game* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

16. Daniel A. Bell, "Mencius on Just War: A Comparison with Political Thought in Ancient India," in *Bridging Two Worlds: Comparing Classical Political Thought and Statecraft in India and China*, ed. Amitav Acharya et al. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023), 208–20.

rewards of being a decade ahead in chip technology. In such circumstances, a Chinese threat to destroy Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company and other Taiwan-based chip manufacturers could instill fear into US decisionmakers, offering China the ability to "grab hold of the other side by the throat."[17] Perhaps China could use the threat of destroying Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company as a coercive lever to deescalate a conflict over Taiwan and secure a political settlement. Even if the People's Republic of China could not use an indigenous chip ecosystem coercively, the country might feel more optimistic about long-term innovation and competition.

7. The Democratic Progressive Party could be significantly defeated in both 2024 and 2028. Some read the Nationalist Party's local victories in 2022 as a harbinger of this outcome. Such a defeat would weaken our argument because the defeat would presumably reduce fears in Mainland China that Taiwan was inexorably drifting out of China's orbit. The logic here is that if the Nationalist Party or the Taiwan People's Party rose to exercise a firm grip over Taiwanese politics, Beijing would have far less reason to suspect Taiwan would pursue pro-independence policies. The 1992 consensus could be restored as a bedrock foundation of cross-Strait relations, and good faith moves toward warming economic and social ties might be possible. Our fears of a desperate Chinese invasion would seem to be unwarranted and, indeed, alarmist in such circumstances. If these events occurred, 2032 would become the final, potential critical juncture within the short term.

8. Our argument and predictions would be weakened if the United States were to halt or reverse the erosion of the One China policy. Especially if US leaders moved to strengthen the One China policy (through concrete actions as well as words), Beijing would presumably have greater confidence in the sustainability of the status quo: Taiwan would be dissuaded from pursuing pro-independence policies, and the prospect of the United States moving to foreclose peaceful unification

17. Thomas des Garets Geddes and Laura van Megen, "US-China Chip War—Policy Recommendations by Peking University Scholar Lu Feng," *Sinification* (blog), February 1, 2023, https://sinification.substack.com/p/us-china-chip-war-policy-recommendations.

would be greatly diminished from Beijing's perspective. Again, our pessimistic view of cross-Strait relations would seem anachronistic under such circumstances.

9. If a wildcard event were to occur toward the end of this decade (such as a US war with Iran or North Korea or an escalation of the Russia-Ukraine War) that presented Beijing with an opportunity to act while the United States was committed elsewhere, passivity on China's part would indicate the country was, after all, not simply waiting for the right moment. (Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 should not be seen as such a moment because the People's Liberation Army was still not ready to invade Taiwan or fight the United States).[18] If, in such a case, the United States were to move preemptively to improve ties with China and reassure Beijing American intentions toward Taiwan were entirely compatible with core Chinese interests, such a crisis could also more deeply reorient the trajectory of Sino-American relations. A wildcard eventuality that might produce various effects is Taiwan's efforts to move its semiconductor industry offshore. For example, the United States and its allies could come to view Taiwan as less important once the global supply of semiconductors has become more diversified. Taiwan's leaders seem to fear this scenario today. Such a scenario might encourage China to attempt an attack, knowing that help for Taiwan would be less likely to materialize than was previously the case. Alternatively, technological security for the United States might embolden Washington in its dealings with China. Much depends on how—and where—technological advances take place and, especially, whether Beijing is successful at developing its indigenous semiconductor manufacturers.

In the end, a theory is only as good as the observable data—past, present, and future—the theory can interpret. No public policy should be advanced, let alone implemented, unless it is grounded in good theory. With this in mind, we have sought to be clear about empirical tests of our theory, the hope being real-world events will suggest one way or the other whether our related policy prescriptions can be considered reasonable.

18. Mark Cozad et al., *Gaining Victory in Systems Warfare: China's Perspective on the US-China Military Balance* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023).

In the meantime, we are confident in our overall analysis that Taiwan finds itself in a dangerous situation in the 2020s—more dangerous than even some of the most pessimistic commentary has suggested. Moreover, we are confident that current trends support the situation getting worse before it gets better. Most of the factors that once stayed the hand of Chinese leaders have eroded to the point they are no longer exerting much of a deterrent effect. Meanwhile, Beijing faces nontrivial incentives to abandon the status quo. This decade is dangerous because both constraints on the People's Republic of China and restraint within Beijing country have weakened simultaneously.

If We Are Right: Implications for Deterrence

All is not lost. The theoretical substance of our argument implies solutions to the predicament facing Taiwan. First, it is an urgent task—although not an impossible one—for Taiwan to invest in deterrents that will come online quickly. We have suggested the threat to "break" in response to a Chinese attempt to "take" is one way of dissuading China from attacking now—namely, the Taiwanese could threaten China with "scorched tech" and a painful, bloody insurgency in the event of an invasion.[19] Port and airport infrastructure, in particular, would also need to be scuttled before they could become useful to the People's Liberation Army. War games have validated the military effectiveness of such an approach.[20] While these threats are not perfect, they might be enough to serve as a bridge to a future when new and more robust deterrents can be put in place.

In the short term, Taiwan could also radically pivot to embracing defensive weapons, such as sea mines, that would raise the costs of an invasion and occupation.[21] Although Taiwan is already making this pivot to a slight extent, it should do so more fully and quickly. Seemingly, bureaucracy and other resistance will not be overcome unless American leaders forcefully insist on Taiwan doing more and refuse to enable the complacency of the status quo. Such insistence would be in line with the Taiwan Relations Act, which obligates the United States to "make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient

19. Jared M. McKinney and Peter Harris, "Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan," *Parameters* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 23–36, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol51/iss4/4/.

20. Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, *The First Battle of the Next War* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023), 110.

21. Scott Savitz, "Defend Taiwan with Naval Mines," *Proceedings* 149, no. 2 (February 2023).

self-defense capability."[22] Such articles and services, per the Act, will be determined by the president and the Congress "based solely upon their judgment of the needs of Taiwan."[23] A determination that the United States will only make available warfighting materials that could realistically be used with effect in an asymmetric conflict, as opposed to vanity equipment useful in gray-zone confrontations, would go a long way to focus US strategy. Licensed production of Stinger and Javelin missiles, as well as other portable systems, could occur in Taiwan, ensuring faster, dedicated production.[24] Taiwan should embrace what is referred to as the "anti-navy" strategy by Congressman Mike Gallagher.[25] This calls for getting on the "right side of the cost equation" by investing in long-range anti-ship missiles and enabling platforms instead of exquisite acquisitions.[26] Making this strategy Taiwan-centric instead of US-centric (as Congressman Gallagher originally proposed) would have greater impact because direct deterrence is more credible than extended deterrence—especially, ambiguous extended deterrence. Admiral Lee Hsi-ming, a former heavyweight in the Taiwanese armed forces, has outlined such a strategy for Taiwan, but it has yet to result in significant change, and Taiwan has backtracked in some ways (such as canceling its mini missile assault boat program).[27]

Second, it is also important—and possible—for Taiwan to invest in separate deterrents that will enjoy a long shelf life. In the medium to long term, the most decisive way to deter an invasion would be for Taiwan's reserve force to demonstrate the capacity and will to impose significant costs on an invading force and then resist indefinitely, offering China only

22. Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, Pub. L. No. 96-8, 93 Stat. 14 (1979); and Implementation of United States Policy with Regard to Taiwan, 22 U.S.C. § 3302 (1979).

23. Taiwan Relations Act; and Implementation.

24. Carl Ford, "Asking Whether the United States Will Come to the Aid of Taiwan in the Event of an Attack Is Asking the Wrong Question," *Footnote* (blog), January 31, 2023, https://carlford.substack.com/p/asking-whether-the-us-will-come-to.

25. Mike Gallagher, "The 'Anti-Navy' the United States Needs against the Chinese Military," *Wall Street Journal* (website), October 25, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/anti-navy-us-needs-against-china-taiwan-invasion-xi-jinping-military-war-readiness-air-force-army-investments-pla-ccp-defense-spending-11666712660.

26. Gallagher, "'Anti-Navy.'"

27. Gabriel Dominguez, "'We Need a More Effective Way to Defend Ourselves,' Says Taiwan's Former Military Chief," *Japan Times* (website), March 30, 2023, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/03/30/asia-pacific/taiwan-lee-hsi-min-interview/; and Thompson Chau, "Taiwan's Ex-Defense Chief Calls for Sweeping Military Reforms," *Nikkei Asia* (website), July 20, 2022, https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Taiwan-s-ex-defense-chief-calls-for-sweeping-military-reforms.

protracted "people's war"—particularly in cities—upon arrival in Taiwan.[28] This strategy is the ultimate form of deterrence, as Mao understood, and it is strong enough to give pause to all but the most reckless of leaders. War games demonstrate that naval and air forces are likely to perform poorly against an invading Chinese force. Ground forces, on the other hand, have a much stronger chance of inflicting hefty losses upon the People's Liberation Army.[29] This area is one in which Taipei could focus its deterrent efforts, especially as more conscripts come online from 2024 onward.

Third, the United States should develop credible deterrents to dissuade China from invading Taiwan if US leaders are of the mindset that preserving Taiwan's de facto political independence is a national interest. By 2030 or so, the deployment of hundreds of B-21 bombers, alongside a robust *Virginia*-class nuclear-powered attack submarine force, which should be further augmented by a fuller embrace of conventional attack submarines in recognition of their ability to operate effectively in China's littorals with less relative risk to force than other US assets, will restore some of the potency to US threats of conventional war against China.[30] If the United States were to pursue this goal as a priority, the implementation could involve constructing warships in Korean and Japanese shipyards, which would expand the US ability to bring new platforms online quickly (but would require changes to US export laws). By tonnage, Korea and Japan produce as many ships as the rest of the world combined. These countries have also demonstrated expertise in military construction, with first-rate destroyers produced for approximately half the cost of production in American shipyards. According to current estimates, expanding the United States' shipyards for higher capacity will take a decade.[31] Embracing the value proposition offered by US allies and leveraging their abilities are consistent with American values and imperative if the United States is going to "accelerate change" in a quest to close the deterrence gap.[32]

28. Sale Lilly, "'Killing Rats in a Porcelain Shop': People's Liberation Army Urban Warfare in a Taiwan Campaign," in *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*, ed. Joel Wuthnow et al. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2022), 139–57.

29. Cancian, Cancian, and Heginbotham, *First Battle*.

30. Mike Sweeney, "Submarines Will Reign in a War with China," *Proceedings* 149, no. 3 (March 2023).

31. Brad Lendon, "These May Be the World's Best Warships. And They're Not American," *CNN* (website), June 3, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/02/asia/japan-south-korea-naval-shipbuilding-intl-hnk-ml-dst/index.html; and Michael Hirsh, "The Pentagon Is Freaking Out about a Potential War with China," *Politico* (website), June 9, 2023, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/06/09/america-weapons-china-00100373.

32. Charles Q. Brown Jr., *Accelerate Change or Lose* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, August 2020).

Unless Taiwan acts with foresight, anticipated upgrades in US offensive capabilities may create a perceived window of necessity for the People's Republic of China, encouraging Beijing to act now (before 2032) or miss its chance of a successful conquest. Taiwan cannot assume Beijing will sit idly by as the United States bolsters its capabilities in the western Pacific; unless China is being deterred by some other strand of deterrence, the Mainland may have powerful incentives to strike against Taiwan before the US presence in East Asia becomes indomitable. At this point, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the credibility problems that plague US threats (even ambiguous ones) to wage a conventional war against China in defense of Taiwan. As noted in the introduction, just because a country possesses the capability to wage an armed conflict does not mean that it has the interests and the willingness to put the capability to use. Would the United States join a war to defend Taiwan today or in the future? Nobody knows the answer to this question—not in Beijing, Taipei, or even Washington.[33] Perhaps a sitting president would judge the survival of Taiwan as a de facto independent entity to be essential to US interests and thus an issue over which to risk nuclear war. Imagining a nuclear-armed China could succeed at deterring a US intervention in a war over Taiwan, just as Russia has deterred a direct US intervention in the Russia-Ukraine War, is also realistic. Simply put, there is no commitment device that would put beyond doubt America's resolve to fight for Taiwan that is also compatible with America's One China policy (as it is traditionally understood). As a result, basing Taiwan's strategy for deterring China upon an assumption the United States will rush to its defense would be inadvisable. Although this outcome is plausible, it is not an outcome that can be expected to hold decisive deterrent value over Beijing.

Fourth, Taiwan's friends in the region can also help manage the window of risk. Japan, for instance, could choose not to retire existing *Sōryū*-class submarines as it brings new *Taigei*-class submarines online, which it plans to do annually throughout the 2020s. By simply extending the life of existing *Sōryū*-class subs from 20 to 30 years, Japan could increase its submarine fleet's size from 22 to 30 this decade without drastic new expenditures.[34] This larger fleet could help to mitigate the decreasing size of the US fleet as *Los Angeles*-class vessels, which are much older, are retired and enable Japan to increase the robustness of its deterrent to a Chinese first strike

33. Mark Cozad et al., *Gaining Victory in Systems Warfare: China's Perspective on the US-China Military Balance* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023), 190.

34. Ken Moriyasu, "From Subs to Missiles, United States Pushes Japan to Get Real about China Threat," *Nikkei Asia* (website), June 23, 2021, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/From-subs-to-missiles-US-pushes-Japan-to-get-real-about-China-threat.

on forward-deployed US forces on Japanese territory as part of an overall Taiwan invasion.

The deterrents outlined above are not mutually exclusive; they can be pursued in some combination—by Taiwan, the United States, regional partners, or by all of these actors working in concert. As a stopgap as the B-21 is developed, for example, the US Air Force could mass produce, distribute, and operate palletized munitions in transport aircraft across the United States Indo-Pacific Command area of operations.[35] The capability would have to be extended from special operations aircraft to general aircraft and crews. This option is particularly attractive because it is cheap; it can be acted upon quickly (especially by integrating training for such missions into normal US Air National Guard and US Air Force Reserve operations); the option further necessitates the acquisition of many more precision-guided munitions (especially long-range anti-ship missiles), which are needed anyway; and it would massively complicate a full-on amphibious invasion of Taiwan. Transport aircraft armed with palletized munitions could launch standoff munitions from around Okinawa against targets in the Taiwan Strait while Japanese integrated air and missile defense systems and US F-35s and F-22s protect the transport aircraft. Given the versatility of the C-130, this option would complement and extend existing bomber capabilities and launch points. Building this kill chain and integrating US and Japanese navy, army, and air force protection and targeting systems would involve some technical difficulty. Confronting and overcoming these obstacles should be a top priority.

Even as the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and other allies invest in more and smarter military capabilities, proponents of the peaceful status quo must not make the mistake of assuming the solution to the present window of risk should only involve the military.[36] Politically, the United States would be well advised to unilaterally end all gray zoning of its One China policy. The United States should enforce real distinctions between official and unofficial relations; emphasize economic and cultural relations with Taiwan, per the Taiwan Relations Act; and avoid new legislative language that undermines the status quo. Also, administration officials should continue to give speeches explaining the context of the US One China policy

35. Christopher Woody, "A US Plan to Drop Bombs from Cargo Planes Hit Another Milestone, but the Air Force Is Still Figuring Out How It Would Use It in a War," *Business Insider* (website), November 30, 2022, https://www.businessinsider.com/us-air-force-palletized-munitions-program-faces-logistics-questions-2022-11.

36. Ryan Hass, Bonnie S. Glaser, and Richard Bush, *US-Taiwan Relations: Will China's Challenge Lead to a Crisis?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2023), 5.

and, especially, how it has created and maintained a status quo of peace and prosperity. If this language sounds too "soft," analysts could frankly communicate—in secret—that, if Beijing fails to exercise restraint in its Taiwan policy, such peaceful overtures from Washington would double as a means of buying time until the United States has fully counter modernized against China's military.

American officials should cease suggesting that ADIZ violations or even median-line overflights change the reality of the present peace.[37] Given Taiwan's ADIZ extends over China's mainland territory and territory claimed by Japan and no country's ADIZ is protected by international law, counting violations as an indication of the failure of the status quo is deceptive. In addition, the Strait's median line has no foundation in international law, and in any case the People's Republic of China could proclaim a position similar to that of the United States: that China will sail, fly, and operate wherever international law allows. The real boundary to be concerned with is 12 nautical miles. For now, it seems likely that Beijing will only violate this boundary in response to perceived provocative acts, as China did in a limited way (via missile tests) after Pelosi's visit. This contingency is the next big one for which the United States must plan. The president should express a clear determination to keep the normalization agreements made with China—in particular, by declaring US forces will not be deployed en masse during peacetime or permanently stationed in Taiwan. Far from being a concession, the United States already agreed to these conditions as part of normalization of relations with China.[38] Finally, the US government should stop trying to one-up previous changes to the status quo, as leaders sometimes have since 2016. Such actions, in the aggregate, undermine deterrence by making the status quo less acceptable to the People's Republic of China. Because the United States wants to maintain the status quo and such actions do nothing to neutralize corresponding Chinese actions, for the United States to attempt to play a tit-for-tat game in this area is nonsensical.[39] Indeed, Beijing uses American-Taiwanese gray-zone actions as excuses to tighten the "rope

37. Editorial Committee, *ROC National Defense Report 2021* (Taipei: Ministry of National Defense, October 2021), 42; and US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2022 Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, November 2022), 599.

38. Alan D. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy toward Taiwan and US-PRC Relations* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003).

39. Peter Harris, "Deterring a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan: Upholding the Status Quo," Defense Priorities (website), May 16, 2022, https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/deterring-a-chinese-invasion-of-taiwan.

sleeve on the neck of 'Taiwan independence,'" as a leading Chinese commentator has said.[40] Ceasing such actions does not mean Beijing will unilaterally stop tightening the noose. Instead, China will decrease the frequency with which such actions are taken by eliminating the "audience costs" Beijing would otherwise face through nonaction. Substance—not symbolism—should be the watchword of US strategy.

Figure 4-1 illustrates how this collection of constraints and restraints could be developed over the next few decades.

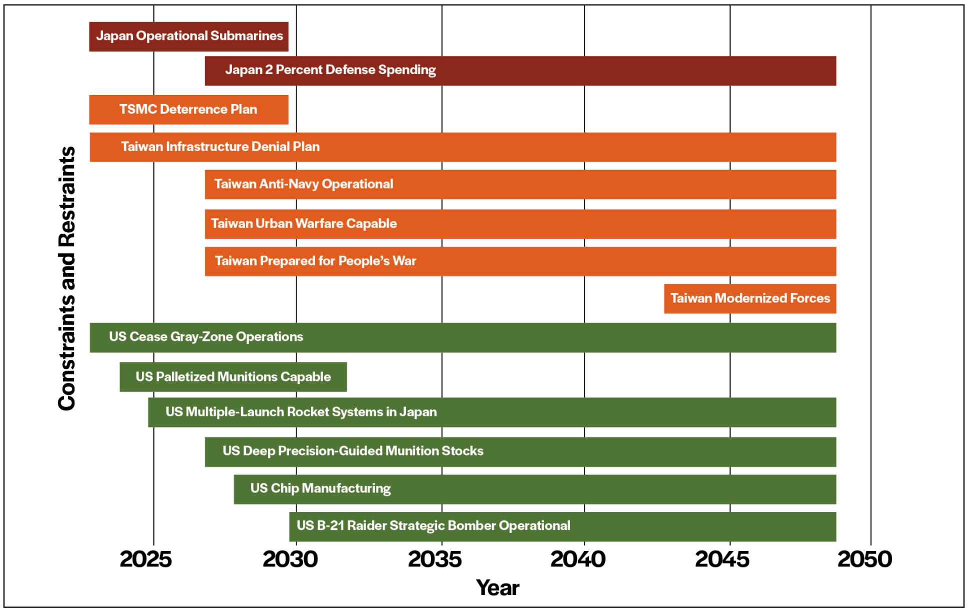

Figure 4-1. Illustration of future recommended constraints and restraints

The point of this monograph has been that Taiwan is now in a critical and uncharted phase. Simply put, Taiwan and the United States have a dearth of credible deterrent options available to dissuade China from invading Taiwan. Efforts to restore deterrence must pay attention to the need for multiple, overlapping, concurrent deterrents to be established. Speed and farsightedness should be combined. To be sure, we have no dispositive evidence that proves the People's Republic of China has short-term plans to invade Taiwan. To the contrary, we have suggested such a decision would likely be made during or following a critical juncture or series of crises, such as a US presidential or vice-presidential meeting with Taiwanese leaders, absolute dominance of Taiwan's politics by the Democratic Progressive Party, or some other game-changing

40. Chen Feng 晨枫, "佩洛西窜访台湾，台海进入新常态," *Guancha* (website), August 5, 2022, https://www.guancha.cn/ChenFeng3/2022_08_05_652410_1.shtml.

development. Even if the precise proximate cause of future invasion cannot be identified in advance, what can be said for sure is that, in the absence of an effective deterrent, any adversary is liable to carry out an unwanted action as long as they are committed to engaging in the action. Undoubtedly, the People's Republic of China is intent on reunifying with Taiwan. Our argument has been that the existing deterrents have decayed; thus, we conclude a deterrence gap currently exists—much to Taiwan's detriment. Understanding the nature of this gap is a prerequisite to filling it. Those who dismiss such fears as "hype" have not, in our view, fully reckoned with the reality of deterrent decay.[41]

Those who have recognized the growing danger of the moment and the importance of this decade often default to poorly thought-out responses that do not acknowledge the complexity of deterrence calculations. Sending troops to Taiwan, for instance, would increase military constraints but decrease China's willingness to act with restraint while, according to one experimental study, boosting support for independence among the Taiwanese, thereby further provoking Beijing.[42] If the United States moved to garrison Taiwan, Beijing would regard the act as a unilateral repudiation of the edifice upon which Sino-American relations have been predicated for the past half a century. The risk that war would follow would be high. Permanently interposing the US fleet between Mainland China and Taiwan, as some have suggested (Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, for example, have argued in favor of "prepositioning [US] military assets in the Taiwan Strait"), would carry similar risks.[43]

Nevertheless, the United States should not abandon Taiwan or accept the ultra-pessimistic conclusion that deterrence has become impossible.[44] This view is also mistaken.

41. Jessica Chen Weiss, "Don't Panic about Taiwan: Alarm over a Chinese Invasion Could Become a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," *Foreign Affairs* (website), March 21, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-chinese-invasion-dont-panic; and Richard Bush, Bonnie Glaser, and Ryan Hass, "Opinion: Don't Help China by Hyping Risk of War over Taiwan," National Public Radio (website), April 8, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/04/08/984524521/opinion-dont-help-china-by-hyping-risk-of-war-over-taiwan.

42. Wen-Chin Wu et al., "Taiwanese Public Opinion on the Chinese and US Military Presence in the Taiwan Strait," *China Quarterly* (website), April 17, 2023, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/china-quarterly/article/taiwanese-public-opinion-on-the-chinese-and-us-military-presence-in-the-taiwan-strait/B247FA56913E3D10D6512F931815FE8F.

43. Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, "What Will Drive China to War?," *Atlantic* (website), November 1, 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/us-china-war/620571/.

44. Lyle Goldstein, "The Trouble with Taiwan," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 79, no. 2 (March 2023): 103–7.

Stability across the Taiwan Strait is possible and can be strengthened through a deterrence strategy that embraces both constraints and restraints. Current trends are unsustainable and entail enormous risks for Taiwan and the United States; deterrent decay is real, and the vulnerability of Taiwan to Chinese predation cannot be ignored; the threats to Taiwanese security must, instead, be managed and overcome; and any attempts to restore deterrence across the Strait must be rooted in policy options derived from a rigorous and objective analysis of the structural and strategic factors facing all sides.

— 5 —

Conclusion

Deterrents decay over time, across the Taiwan Strait as much as anywhere else. As a result, to maintain deterrence over the long term, deterrers—in this case, Taiwan, the United States, and their regional allies and partners—must engage in the processes of upgrade, calibration, and replacement. Many of Taiwan's means of deterring China decayed because of Chinese circumvention. Such actions require commensurate actions and reactions from Taipei. Yet, Taiwan has allowed its relative defensive deterrent to decay through two decades of neglect. More recently, we have argued, the United States unwisely junked one of the strongest remaining instruments of deterrence—an instrument that could have been a critical bridge to a future when new and stronger deterrents might be established. The result? Some pessimistic conclusions about the current and future state of Taiwanese security.

In particular, we have identified the remainder of this decade as a critical juncture in which leaders in Beijing will be strongly pressured to consider an invasion. We have shown, in the immediate term, that Chinese decisionmakers are boxed into a corner. They will have to decide whether to make an attempt on Taiwan in the 2020s—when victory still seems conceivable—or wait until the 2040s. Postponing ambitions of recapturing Taiwan makes the most sense for China if doing so will bolster the likelihood of maintaining a prosperous future for the Mainland and securing the island with the fewest costs. Above all else, this core insight should inspire efforts to deter China.

How do our recommendations fit within the existing literature on deterrence? First, our proposed policies bear a close resemblance to "integrated deterrence"—a concept referenced by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin II that was foregrounded in the *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. Like Austin, we call for the United States and its partners—in this case, Taiwan and other East Asian powers—to muster multiple deterrents from across the various dimensions of national power. We urge Taipei, Washington, and others to pool their respective power assets and forge a tightly networked, layered approach to deterrence that will leverage all available means of shaping the decision-making calculus of leaders in Beijing. Second, our prescriptions can be considered as a call for robust "general deterrence" and as a caution against believing that immediate deterrence would be possible if ever the Chinese government were to set itself on the path toward invasion.[1] Our argument is that the United States and Taiwan should create a permanent relationship across the Taiwan Strait that will render an invasion too costly, and peace too attractive, for Beijing to contemplate overturning the status quo.

The following quote from the *2022 National Defense Strategy* demonstrates how the Department of Defense clearly recognizes the need for such an approach in theory:

> Deterrence is strengthened by actions that reduce a competitor's perception of the benefits of aggression relative to restraint. Effective deterrence requires the Department to consider how competitors perceive US, Ally, and partner stakes, commitment, and combat credibility; their perception of their own ability to control escalation risks; *and their view of how the status quo will evolve—in part as a result of US, Ally, and partner actions—if they do not use force* (italics added).[2]

Only a stable combination of constraints and incentives for restraint will sustain the status quo across the inevitable crises that will plague cross-Strait relations in the coming years. Chinese restraint is as important as external constraints. Thus, working to increase the value of the status quo is an imperative—one unfortunately recognized more in principle than in practice in an era of trade wars and tech wars.

Is the situation facing Taiwan dire? Yes. Is the situation hopeless? No. Taiwan must take the lead in erecting short-term deterrents that will radically increase the costs of an invasion from China's perspective. Such moves may be costly domestically in Taiwan, but they would reflect the reality that "the will of Taiwan's people to resist Beijing's pressure and

1. Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977); and Michael J. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018).

2. Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2022), 8.

preserve their political autonomy . . . is the center of gravity" in efforts to resist Chinese efforts at coercion.[3] The United States, meanwhile, can take several political, diplomatic, and military steps to bolster the status quo, even as longer-term US countermodernization programs develop. Buying time matters, not the least because post-Xi China may become less aggressive or may be forced to focus inward due to political crises or because of the country's emerging demographic burden.[4] Whether a nonpeaceful attempt at unification will be made in such an environment before 2049 is not certain. On the contrary, Taiwan may continue to exist untouched in its current form. The key is to ensure a conveyor belt of deterrents between now and then. If the deterrence gap can be bridged, Taiwan may yet avoid the fate of Ukraine.

3. Ryan Hass, Bonnie S. Glaser, and Richard Bush, *US-Taiwan Relations: Will China's Challenge Lead to a Crisis?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2023), 6.

4. Mark L. Haas, "A Geriatric Peace? The Future of US Power in a World of Aging Populations," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 112–47; and Weiyue Yang, "Bereaved Single-Child Parents as the Focus of Family Planning Officials: State Support, Social Stability, and the Unresolved Consequences of China's One-Child Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 143 (September 2022): 1–14.

Selected Bibliography

Christensen, Thomas J. “The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict.” *Washington Quarterl*y 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2002).

Haass, Richard, and David Sacks. “American Support for Taiwan Must Be Unambiguous.” *Foreign Affairs* (website), September 2, 2020, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/american-support-taiwan-must-be-unambiguous.

Hass, Ryan, Bonnie S. Glaser, and Richard Bush. *US-Taiwan Relations: Will China’s Challenge Lead to a Crisis?*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2023.

Kastner, Scott L. *War and Peace in the Taiwan Strait*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

McKinney, Jared M., and Peter Harris. “Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan.” *Parameters* 51, no. 4 (2021): 23–36. https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol51/iss4/4/.

Thurston, Anne F., ed. *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021.

Weiss, Jessica Chen. “Don’t Panic about Taiwan: Alarm over a Chinese Invasion Could Become a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.” Foreign Affairs (website), March 21, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-chinese-invasion-dont-panic.

Wuthnow, Joel et al., eds. *Crossing the Strait: China’s Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2022.

About the Authors

Dr. Jared M. McKinney is an assistant professor of international security at the Air War College at Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. He directs the Taiwan Deterrence Research Task Force at the university and holds a PhD from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and master's degrees from Missouri State University, Peking University, and the London School of Economics.

Dr. Peter Harris is an associate professor of political science at Colorado State University. He is a nonresident fellow with Defense Priorities and the author of more than 25 peer-reviewed articles and more than 250 additional features, blogs, op-eds, and reviews. Harris is the author of scholarly articles published in *Asian Perspective*, *Asian Security*, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, *International Affairs*, *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, *Marine Policy*, *Parameters*, *Political Science Quarterly*, and *Third World Quarterly*.

The United States Army War College educates and develops leaders for service at the strategic level while advancing knowledge in the global application of Landpower.

The purpose of the United States Army War College is to produce graduates who are skilled critical thinkers and complex problem solvers in the global application of Landpower. Concurrently, it is our duty to the Army to also act as a "think factory" for commanders and civilian leaders at the strategic level worldwide and routinely engage in discourse and debate on the role of ground forces in achieving national security objectives.

The Strategic Studies Institute publishes national security and strategic research and analysis to influence policy debate and bridge the gap between military and academia.

The SSI Live Podcast Series provides access to SSI analyses and scholars on issues related to national security and military strategy with an emphasis on geostrategic analysis. https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/SSI-Media/Podcasts-Lectures-and-Panels/SSI-Live-Podcast/

The Center for Strategic Leadership provides strategic education, ideas, doctrine, and capabilities to the Army, the Joint Force, and the nation. The Army, Joint Force, and national partners recognize the Center for Strategic Leadership as a strategic laboratory that generates and cultivates strategic thought, tests strategic theories, sustains strategic doctrine, educates strategic leaders, and supports strategic decision making. https://csl.armywarcollege.edu/

The School of Strategic Landpower provides support to the US Army War College purpose, mission, vision, and the academic teaching departments through the initiation, coordination, and management of academic-related policy, plans, programs, and procedures, with emphasis on curriculum development, execution, and evaluation; planning and execution of independent and/or interdepartmental academic programs; student and faculty development; and performance of academic-related functions as may be directed by the commandant. https://ssl.armywarcollege.edu/

The US Army Heritage and Education Center engages, inspires, and informs the Army, the American people, and global partners with a unique and enduring source of knowledge and thought. https://ahec.armywarcollege.edu/

The Army Strategic Education Program executes general officer professional military education for the entire population of Army general officers across the total force and provides assessments to keep senior leaders informed and to support programmatic change through evidence-based decision making. https://asep.armywarcollege.edu/

US ARMY WAR COLLEGE PRESS

The US Army War College Press supports the US Army War College by publishing monographs and a quarterly academic journal, *Parameters*, focused on geostrategic issues, national security, and Landpower. Press materials are distributed to key strategic leaders in the Army and Department of Defense, the military educational system, Congress, the media, other think tanks and defense institutes, and major colleges and universities. The US Army War College Press serves as a bridge to the wider strategic community.

All US Army Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press publications and podcasts may be downloaded free of charge from the US Army War College website. Hard copies of certain publications may also be obtained through the US Government Bookstore website at https://bookstore.gpo.gov. US Army Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College publications may be quoted or reprinted in part or in full with permission and appropriate credit given to the US Army Strategic Studies Institute and the US Army War College Press, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA. Contact the US Army Strategic Studies Institute or the US Army War College Press by visiting the websites at: https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu and https://press.armywarcollege.edu.

The US Army War College Press produces two podcast series. Decisive Point, the podcast companion series to the US Army War College Press, features authors discussing the research presented in their articles and publications. Visit the website at: https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/SSI-Media/Podcasts-Lectures-and-Panels/Decisive-Point-Podcast/.

Conversations on Strategy, a Decisive Point podcast subseries. features distinguished authors and contributors who explore timely issues in national security affairs. Visit the website at: https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/SSI-Media/Podcasts-Lectures-and-Panels/Conversations-on-Strategy-Podcast/.

US ARMY WAR COLLEGE

Major General David C. Hill
Commandant

STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

Director
Dr. Carol V. Evans

Director of China Landpower Studies Center
Colonel Richard D. Butler

Director of Strategic Research
Colonel Eric Hartunian

US ARMY WAR COLLEGE PRESS

Editor in Chief
Dr. Antulio J. Echevarria II

Digital Media Manager
Mr. Richard K. Leach

Managing Editor
Ms. Lori K. Janning

Developmental Editor
Dr. Erin M. Forest

Copy Editors
Ms. Stephanie Crider
Ms. Elizabeth Foster

Visual Information Specialists
Ms. Kaitlyn Guettler
Ms. Kristen G. Taylor

Composition
Mrs. Jennifer E. Nevil

U.S. ARMY

ISBN 1-58487-851-7
90000
9 781584 878513

THE UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE
STRENGTH and WISDOM

https://press.armywarcollege.edu