

Restoring a Peaceful Status Quo Across the Taiwan Strait with Pacific Partnership



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*Photo by Sergeant Brittney Vella, U.S. Marine Corps, depicts the USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) and the JS Shimokita (LST-4002) transiting the South China Sea to the third mission stop of Pacific Partnership 2016 in Da Nang, Vietnam.

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13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the curriculum. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT To restore and maintain a peaceful status quo across the Taiwan Strait, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command ("USINDOPACOM") should invite Taiwan to join the Pacific Partnership mission as soon as practicable. Pacific Partnership is "the largest annual multinational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparedness mission conducted in the Indo-Pacific." With each iteration, "the mission team works collectively with host and partner nations to enhance regional interoperability and disaster response capabilities, increase security and stability in the region, and foster new and enduring friendships in the Indo-Pacific." Taiwan joining Pacific Partnership now makes sense for three primary reasons. First, Congress recently encouraged the Department of Defense ("DoD") to expand cooperation with Taiwan and other regional partners in disaster response planning and preparedness. Second, the New Southbound Policy provides Taiwan with the ideal framework to participate in the Pacific Partnership mission. And third, countering China's increasing reliance on media warfare, Taiwan can positively influence the information environment by publishing Pacific Partnership's successes in multiple languages across the Indo-Pacific. Although China may object to Taiwan joining Pacific Partnership, it will not likely start a war over a mission that provides humanitarian assistance and disaster response collaboration across the region. Instead, by inviting Taiwan to join Pacific Partnership, USINDOPACOM will help "ensure that Taiwan remains secure, confident, free from coercion, and able to peacefully and productively engage the mainland on its own terms." Such action, if tactfully executed, will help restore a more peaceful relationship between the PRC and the ROC across the Taiwan Strait.					
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“The United States has a vital interest in upholding the rules-based international order, which includes a strong, prosperous, and democratic Taiwan.”

– The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (1 June 2019)

I. Introduction: Taiwan Strait Tensions and Pacific Partnership

Below the level of armed conflict, the People’s Republic of China (“PRC” or “China”) uses diplomatic, economic, and non-kinetic measures against the Republic of China (“ROC” or “Taiwan”) to advance the One China Principle.¹ The PRC defines this principle to mean that “there is only one China in the world, Taiwan is a part of China, and China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is not to be separated.”² In contrast, the United States maintains the nuanced One China Policy, which acknowledges the PRC’s position but does not take a stance on whether the PRC or the ROC has sovereignty over Taiwan.³ Under this policy, the United States “opposes any unilateral change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait” but supports “the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues in a manner, scope, and pace acceptable to both sides.”⁴ According to the Department of State (“DoS”), however, China has unilaterally altered the status quo “through flipping of diplomatic partners, pushing Taiwan out of international organizations, stepped up military maneuvers, and other activities.”⁵ In response, David Stilwell, the previous administration’s Assistant Secretary Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, DoS, proclaimed in

¹ David R. Stilwell, Assistant Secretary Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “The United States, Taiwan, and the World: Partners for Peace and Prosperity” (remarks, The Heritage Foundation, virtual presentation, 31 August 2020), <https://www.state.gov/The-United-States-Taiwan-and-the-World-Partners-for-Peace-and-Prosperity/>.

² Susan Lawrence, and Wayne Morrison, *Taiwan: Issues for Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 30 October 2017), 38.

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Stilwell, “The United States, Taiwan, and the World: Partners for Peace and Prosperity.”

August 2020 that the United States “must act to restore balance. Other peace-loving countries should do the same.”⁶

To restore and maintain a peaceful status quo across the Taiwan Strait, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (“USINDOPACOM”) should invite Taiwan to join the Pacific Partnership mission as soon as practicable. Pacific Partnership is “the largest annual multinational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparedness mission conducted in the Indo-Pacific.”⁷ With each iteration, “the mission team works collectively with host and partner nations to enhance regional interoperability and disaster response capabilities, increase security and stability in the region, and foster new and enduring friendships in the Indo-Pacific.”⁸ Taiwan joining Pacific Partnership now makes sense for three primary reasons. First, Congress recently encouraged the Department of Defense (“DoD”) to expand cooperation with Taiwan and other regional partners in disaster response planning and preparedness. Second, the New Southbound Policy provides Taiwan with the ideal framework to participate in the Pacific Partnership mission. And third, countering China’s increasing reliance on media warfare, Taiwan can positively influence the information environment by publishing Pacific Partnership’s successes in multiple languages across the Indo-Pacific. Although China may object to Taiwan joining Pacific Partnership, it will not likely start a war over a mission that provides humanitarian assistance and disaster response collaboration across the region. Instead, by inviting Taiwan to join Pacific Partnership, USINDOPACOM will help “ensure that Taiwan remains secure, confident, free from coercion, and able to peacefully and productively engage the mainland on its own terms.”⁹ Such action, if tactfully executed, will help

⁶ Id.

⁷ Pacific Partnership, Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, accessed 18 October 2020, <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/PacificPartnership>.

⁸ Id.

⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1 June 2019), 31.

restore a more peaceful relationship between the PRC and the ROC across the Taiwan Strait.

II. Following Congress’s Call for Disaster Response Cooperation with Taiwan

Congress recently encouraged the DoD to consider options to expand cooperation with Taiwan and other regional partners in disaster response planning and preparedness. USINDOPACOM should leverage this legislative mandate to integrate Taiwan into the Pacific Participation mission as soon as practicable.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (“NDAA 2020”), Congress expressed its intent to enhance “the United States-Taiwan Defense Relationship” and issued several sentiments in support of this objective.¹⁰ At the start, Congress proclaimed that “Taiwan is a vital partner of the United States and is critical to a free and open Indo-Pacific region[.]”¹¹ Next, Congress reiterated that the Taiwan Relations Act (“TWA”) is one of the cornerstones of that nation’s relationship with Taiwan.¹² As background, after the United States established diplomatic relations with the PRC in place of the ROC, Congress passed the TWA in 1979 to authorize “the continuation of commercial, cultural, and other relations between the people of the United States and the people on Taiwan[.]”¹³ Following these foundational sentiments in the NDAA 2020, Congress declared that “the United States and Taiwan should expand cooperation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief[.]”¹⁴ Particularly relevant for USINDOPACOM, Congress wrote that “the Secretary of Defense should consider options, including exercises and ship visits, as appropriate, to expand the scale and scope of humanitarian assistance and disaster

¹⁰ National Defense Authorization Act of 2020 (“NDAA 2020”), Public Law 92, 116th Congress, 20 December 2019, § 1260D.

¹¹ *Id.*, § 1260D(1).

¹² *Id.*, § 1260D(2).

¹³ Taiwan Relations Act, Public Law 8, 96th Congress, 1 January 1979, § (2)(a)(2.).

¹⁴ NDAA 2020, § 1260D(8).

response cooperation with Taiwan and other regional partners to improve disaster response planning and preparedness[.]”¹⁵ In sum, Congress set the conditions for USINDOPACOM to invite Taiwan to participate in Pacific Partnership.

The two most recent missions demonstrate that Pacific Partnership is the best option for USINDOPACOM to satisfy Congress’s intent as expressed in the NDAA 2020. For Pacific Partnership 2019 (“PP 19”), teams aboard the USNS Fall River (T-EPF 4) and the USNS Brunswick (T-EPF 6) visited Thailand, Vietnam, Timor-Leste, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Malaysia, the Philippines, and the Federated States of Micronesia.¹⁶ Along with personnel from each host nation, PP 19 participants from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Peru, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea, and Japan “came together to increase disaster preparedness and capacity in the Indo-Pacific region.”¹⁷ For Pacific Partnership 2018 (“PP 18”), the USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) visited Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. Additionally, the USNS Fall River made separate mission stops in Palau, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Federated States of Micronesia to support “public diplomacy, community outreach, and theater security cooperation initiatives.”¹⁸ During PP 18, over 800 civilian and military personnel from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Peru, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Singapore worked with personnel from the host nations to improve the region’s capacity for responding to natural disasters.¹⁹ In the host nations, dental, medical, veterinary, and civil

¹⁵ Id., § 1260D(9).

¹⁶ Nathan Carpenter, “*Pacific Partnership 2019 Concludes*,” U.S Indo-Pacific Command, 29 May 2019, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1860579/pacific-partnership-2019-mission-concludes/>.

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ DoD News, Defense Media Activity, “*USNS Mercy Deploys in Support of Pacific Partnership 2018*,” 26 February 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1450292/usns-mercy-deploys-in-support-of-pacific-partnership-2018/>.

¹⁹ Id.

engineering teams conducted community health exchanges, medical symposiums, disaster response training activities, and civic-action projects.²⁰

As shown above, USINDOPACOM can use the Pacific Partnership mission to expand cooperation with Taiwan and other regional partners in disaster response planning and preparedness. Therefore, given the mission's scope and Congress's expressed intent in the NDAA 2020, USINDOPACOM should seize the initiative by inviting Taiwan to participate in Pacific Partnership. Doing so will allow Taiwan to work closely with host and partner nations to improve the region's capacity for responding to natural disasters. Moreover, with both the executive and legislative branches aligned, the United States will send a powerful and unified message that China should not isolate Taiwan from the international community.

III. Linking the New Southbound Policy with the Pacific Partnership Mission

Taiwan's New Southbound Policy ("NSP"), an initiative to improve relations in the Indo-Pacific, presents the perfect opportunity for the ROC to participate in the Pacific Partnership mission. Under the auspices of the NSP and Pacific Partnership, Taiwan can share its expertise throughout the Indo-Pacific region on disaster response planning and preparedness.

The NSP shares Pacific Partnership's goal to strengthen relationships in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2016, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-Wen launched the NSP to improve Taipei's relationship with Australia, New Zealand, the ten nations comprising the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the countries of South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka).²¹ The NSP "seeks to leverage Taiwan's cultural, educational, technological, agricultural, and

²⁰ Id.

²¹ Bonnie Glaser, Scott Kennedy, Derek Mitchell, Matthew Funaiole, *The New Southbound Policy, Deepening Taiwan's Regional Integration*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, A Report of the CSIS China Power Project (Washington, DC, January 2018), 1.

economic assets while maintaining stable cross-Strait relations.”²² The NSP’s promotion plan focuses on four lines of effort: regional connectivity, talent exchange, economic and trade collaboration, and resource sharing.²³ With these four focus areas, Taiwan shares “resources, talent, and markets with those countries while creating a new and mutually beneficial model of cooperation.”²⁴ For Pacific Partnership, the NSP’s most relevant focus area is regional connectivity, which seeks to enhance “official and private exchanges, sign and renew trade agreements, institutionalize multilateral and bilateral cooperation with partner countries, and step up negotiations and dialogue.”²⁵ Recognizing the value of NSP, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (“CSIS”), a leading think tank focused on national security, called upon the United States and Taiwan to increase cooperation. In a 2018 report addressing the TSP’s next steps, CSIS recommended that Taiwan partner with the United States to “hold joint training programs in the NSP target countries.”²⁶ CSIS concluded that doing so would enhance Taiwan’s ability to collaborate in the fields of “humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, democratization, energy security, women’s rights, and global health.”²⁷ Thus, the NSP and Pacific Partnership represent a potential synergistic relationship that can benefit Taiwan, the United States, and the broader international community.

Inviting Taiwan to participate in Pacific Partnership will greatly reinvigorate the mission to strengthen partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. In a 2019 report, CSIS specifically recommended that

²² Id., 1.

²³ Executive Yuan, New Southbound Policy, Department of Information Services (4 July 2019), accessed 18 October 2020, <https://english.ey.gov.tw/News3/9E5540D592A5FECD/2ec7ef98-ec74-47af-85f2-9624486adf49>.

²⁴ Id.

²⁵ Id.

²⁶ Glasser et al., *The New Southbound Policy, Deepening Taiwan’s Regional Integration*, 64.

²⁷ Id.

the United States integrate Taiwan into Pacific Partnership based on the shared goals of Taiwan's NSP and the United States' Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. CSIS reasoned that Taiwan joining Pacific Partnership would "boost Taipei's image among NSP partner countries, creating a stronger base of support upon which Taiwan can achieve the NSP's goals."²⁸ In support of this recommendation, CSIS cited a 2018 article by Joseph Bosco, former China Country Director in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2005-2006, who declared that now is the "time to let Taiwan join Pacific Partnership."²⁹ In his article, Bosco wrote that "building on its own experience as a natural disaster victim, Taiwan demonstrated both human compassion and extraordinary skill and competence as an early responder in cooperation with other donors."³⁰ In his assessment, Taiwan is "one of the world's most experienced, innovative, and generous providers of humanitarian assistance."³¹ It has demonstrated "the ability to partner with civilian humanitarian organizations, that Pacific Partnership seeks to foster among countries in the region."³² Additionally, CSIS argued that Taiwan could support Pacific Partnership's efforts to advance the United Nation's initiative for Women, Peace, and Security. As Bosco observed, Taiwan "has encouraged women's empowerment and entrepreneurship at all levels of Taiwanese society" and has emerged as a leader on gender equality issues in the international arena.³³ Thus, Taiwan is a true force multiplier for the Pacific Partnership mission.

As demonstrated above, the NSP neatly dovetails with the Pacific Partnership mission based on

²⁸ Bonnie Glaser, Mathew Funaiole, Hunter Marston, *Charting Convergence, Exploring the Intersection of the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and Taiwan's New Southbound Policy*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, A Report of the CSIS China Power Project (Washington, DC, December 2019), 29-30.

²⁹ Joseph Bosco, "Time to Let Taiwan Join the Pacific Partnership," *The Diplomat*, 27 February 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/time-to-let-taiwan-join-the-pacific-partnership/>.

³⁰ Id.

³¹ Id.

³² Id.

³³ Id.

the mutual goals of enhancing regional connectivity between nations in and around the South China Sea. Therefore, under the auspices of the NSP, Taiwan should join Pacific Partnership.

IV. Influencing the Information Environment Across the Indo-Pacific

Taiwan's participation in the Pacific Partnership mission provides USINDOPACOM with a timely solution to counter China's increasing reliance on media warfare to isolate and intimidate Taiwan. Through the NSP, Taiwan can favorably influence the information environment by publishing Pacific Partnership's successes in multiple languages across several different media platforms in the Indo-Pacific.

As tensions escalate across the Taiwan Strait, China has increased the use of media warfare against Taiwan.³⁴ As background, China ascribes to the "Three Warfares" strategy, which encompasses legal, psychological, and media warfare, to achieve its objectives without resorting to kinetic operations.³⁵ With media warfare, China shapes "domestic and international public opinion to build support for China's military actions and dissuade an adversary from pursuing actions contrary to China's interests."³⁶ As a recent example, China used media warfare in response to President Tsai Ing-wen's 2020 National Day address commemorating the Republic of China's establishment on October 10, 1911.³⁷ President Tsai Ing-wen called upon Beijing to "jointly facilitate cross-strait conciliation and peaceful dialogue" to resolve regional. After her

³⁴ David Brennan, "China Media Says Risk of War With Taiwan Rising, Despite President's Conciliatory Speech," *Newsweek*, 12 October 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-media-risk-war-taiwan-rising-despite-president-tsai-ing-wen-conciliatory-speech-1538220>.

³⁵ Emilio Iasiello, "China's Three Warfares Strategy Mitigates Fallout From Cyber Espionage Activities," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 2016), 51.

³⁶ Id.

³⁷ Gerry Shih, "China threatens invasion of Taiwan in new video showing military might," *The Washington Post*, 12 October 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-taiwan-invasion-military-exercise/2020/10/12/291f5d86-0c58-11eb-b404-8d1e675ec701_story.html.

address, the Washington Post reported that China Central Television released a “video and report of a ‘multidimensional’ drill off China’s southeastern coast featuring amphibious landing craft, attack helicopters, and land-based missiles.”³⁸ The “segment was the most extensive in a recent string of Chinese propaganda videos, featuring stirring music and quick cuts, warning that the military could attack” if Taiwan refused to recognize the One China Principle or “deepened its relationship with ... the United States.”³⁹ China will likely increase the use of such information warfare to intimidate and isolate Taiwan.

Countering China’s media warfare, Taiwan can positively influence the information environment by publishing Pacific Partnership’s successes in multiple languages across different media platforms. As background, the DoD describes the information environment as “a heterogeneous global environment where humans and automated systems observe, orient, decide, and act on data, information, and knowledge.”⁴⁰ With Pacific Partnership, the U.S Navy generally does not communicate in the native languages of the host and partner nations. Based on past practice, the mission team works with the local U.S. embassy and the host nation to publish an arrival announcement in the host country’s language or languages as appropriate. The Navy, however, publishes most of the follow-on news articles and social media posts in English. With Taiwan as a partner, USINDOPACOM can work with the NSP Office under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to disseminate news and information about Pacific Partnership across the entire region to Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, and English-speaking audiences. The NSP Portal, which publishes NSP-related news, events, and successes, already hosts the website in those five languages. The NSP Office can also coordinate messaging through Taiwan’s Cultural and

³⁸ Id.

³⁹ Id.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, June 2016), 3.

Economic Offices and embassies in Pacific Partnership host and partner nations. Furthermore, Taiwan has an active presence on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram in the NSP target countries that overlap with the partner and host nations of Pacific Partnership. Through social media, the NSP Office can highlight Taiwan's efforts with host and partner nations to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparedness.

As indicated above, with Taiwan participating in Pacific Partnership, USINDOPACOM can positively and effectively influence the information environment. Instead of China threatening invasion to reign in a breakaway island province, the narrative will be that China seeks to unlawfully invade a peaceful, responsible, and generous member of the South China Sea community. While China broadcasts videos of soldiers launching missiles, the NSP Office will show Taiwanese dentists working side by side with American and Malaysian dental technicians. In response to vignettes of Chinese naval vessels conducting amphibious landing operations, the NSP Office can publish photos of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief experts from Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore, and Australia looking over a topographic map to identify flood zones, evacuation routes, and planned shelter locations. It will prove problematic for China to continue rattling war sabers while Taiwan offers dental care, humanitarian assistance, and disaster response planning throughout the Indo-Pacific.

V. Limiting the Risk of War Over A Humanitarian Assistance Mission

Critics may argue that Taiwan joining the Pacific Partnership mission will trigger a war. However, China will not likely invade Taiwan because it joined an endeavor that expands the Indo-Pacific's capacity for responding to natural disasters. As demonstrated by its reliance on media warfare to shape domestic and international opinion, China cares about perception and legitimacy. If China invaded Taiwan over its participation in the Pacific Partnership mission, a significant portion of the international community would likely view China's actions as belligerent, unlawful,

and illegitimate. Nonetheless, to mitigate the risk of a cross-strait war or China retaliating with other non-kinetic measures, USINDOPACOM should adhere to the following three guidelines when integrating Taiwan into the Pacific Partnership mission.

First, USINDOPACOM should follow the lead of Taiwan, which emphasizes that the NSP focuses on “people to people ties rather than country-to-country engagements ... to avoid the minefields posed by its ambiguous sovereignty.”⁴¹ President Tsai Ing-wen has assured “Beijing that the NSP is not intended to supplant or inhibit cross-Strait economic ties, but rather is designed to diversify Taiwan’s cultural and economic linkages around the region.”⁴² Following this principle, USINDOPACOM should characterize Taiwan’s participation as a member, not a country, of the South China Sea community seeking to expand the region’s capacity for responding to natural disasters. This likely means not including Taiwan’s flag on Pacific Partnership’s PowerPoint briefs, brochures, and other paraphernalia such as pins and ballcaps. If USINDOPACOM included Taiwan’s flag in the mission’s messaging materials, China would undoubtedly object. The U.S. Navy should not place host or partner nations in a position where they are required to choose between the United States, Taiwan, and China.⁴³ At the very least, the host nation should decide whether to display Taiwan’s flag amongst other partner nation flags. For example, Palau, which maintains diplomatic ties with Taiwan, would likely display Taiwan’s flag for its opening and closing ceremonies. Besides, the United States does not officially support Taiwan’s independence, so including Taiwan’s flag among other host and partner nations may undermine that position.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Glasser et al., *The New Southbound Policy, Deepening Taiwan’s Regional Integration*, 3.

⁴² Id.

⁴³ Keegan Elmer, “Beijing angry over Taiwanese flag flown by firm in Vietnam,” *South China Morning Post*, 31 July 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2157673/beijing-angry-over-republic-china-flag-being-flown-firm>.

⁴⁴ Lawrence et al., *Taiwan: Issues for Congress*, 38.

Second, USINDOPACOM should leverage China's use of legal warfare by framing Taiwan's participation in the Pacific Partnership mission in a way that does not cross China's redlines. With legal warfare, China exploits "international and domestic law to claim the legal high ground or assert Chinese interests" so that it can "build international support and manage possible political repercussions of China's military actions."⁴⁵ Relevant here, in 2005, China passed the Anti-Secession law that outlined the redlines that would trigger China using "non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity[.]"⁴⁶ China indicated that it would employ these non-peaceful measures if there were any "major incidents entailing Taiwan's succession from China[.]" if the "possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted," or if Taiwan effectively declared independence.⁴⁷ To avoid crossing these redlines, USINDOPACOM and the NSP Office should consistently communicate to the international community that Taiwan is committed to peacefully resolving regional tensions with China. This messaging should explicitly leave open the possibility of a peaceful reunification between China and Taiwan.

Third, USINDOPACOM should focus on integrating Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific community while deliberately avoiding any related actions that would antagonize China. In practice, this means Taiwan should not send its military to participate in Pacific Partnership after first joining the mission. Instead, Taiwan should initially rely on civilians from the government and the non-profit sector. As one possible solution, Taiwan's Department of NGO International Affairs could identify a Taiwanese non-governmental organization to take the lead in representing Taiwan.

⁴⁵ Emilio Iasiello, "China's Three Warfares Strategy Mitigates Fallout From Cyber Espionage Activities," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 2016), 51.

⁴⁶ Embassy of the People Republic of China in the United States of America, Anti-Secession Law, accessed 18 October 2020, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/999999999/t187406.htm>.

⁴⁷ Id.

Eventually, after several years of civilian participation, Taiwan's military can participate in Pacific Partnership. However, USINDOPACOM should avoid antagonistic actions such as publishing a joint-steaming photo of the USNS Mercy, Japan's JS Shimokita (LST-4002), and Taiwan's naval ship Panshih (AOE 532), which is "well-equipped for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations."⁴⁸ It would be better for the NSP to disseminate such joint-steaming photos framed within the context of improving the Indo-Pacific's capacity to respond to natural disasters. In sum, USINDOPACOM should allow China to save face by starting with small steps towards Taiwan's integration with the Pacific Partnership mission while not flying the Taiwanese flag in a convoy of ships crossing the South China Sea.

As discussed above, Taiwan can join the Pacific Partnership mission in a way that reduces the risk of war and effectively limits China's response to non-kinetic responses. And again, the purpose of Taiwan joining the Pacific Partnership mission is to help prevent a war. As Taiwan further integrates into the Indo-Pacific's international community, China will be less likely to start a cross-strait war and risk international condemnation and a broader regional war.

VI. Conclusion

China may describe the U.S. military conducting transits through the Taiwan Strait or flying military aircraft over Taiwan as "provocative" actions.⁴⁹ However, China cannot easily apply that same description when the U.S. military facilitates Taiwan's outreach to help other countries prepare for natural disasters in one of the world's most disaster-prone regions. As described above,

⁴⁸ Michael Thim, "New Ship Boost Taiwan's HADR Capabilities," Center for International Maritime Security, 25 July 2015, <http://cimsec.org/new-ship-boosts-taiwans-hadr-capabilities/17609>.

⁴⁹ Ben Werner, "China Calls USS McCampbell Taiwan Strait Transit Provocative," *USNI News*, 27 March 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/03/27/china-calls-uss-mccampbell-taiwan-strait-transit-provocative>; John Bowden, "China condemns US military for 'provocative' flight over Taiwan," *The Hill*, 11 June 2020, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/502229-china-condemns-us-military-fo-provocative-flight-over-taiwan>.

several significant factors have aligned, thereby making this the ideal time for UNSINDOPACOM to invite Taiwan to join Pacific Partnership. Congress has called upon the DoD to expand the scale and scope of humanitarian assistance and disaster response cooperation with Taiwan and other regional partners. Taiwan's New Southbound Policy provides an ideal framework for Taiwan to join the Pacific Partnership mission. And lastly, China's increasing reliance on media warfare to isolate and intimidate Taiwan requires a response that does not elevate tensions with "provocative" actions. Through Pacific Partnership, USINDOPACOM can help restore a more peaceful status quo between China and Taiwan so that they can "peacefully and productively" resolve their differences without resorting to war.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ DoD, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*, 31.

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