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**BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY
FOR UNCONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE: A SYSTEMS
APPROACH FOR ASYMMETRIC DEFENSE IN TAIWAN**

by

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December 2021

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A SYSTEMS APPROACH FOR ASYMMETRIC DEFENSE IN TAIWAN**

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ABSTRACT

Building partner capacity (BPC) is a vital strategic tool for the U.S. to compete with great power adversaries and deter aggression against partners and allies. But security partnerships and alliances are unique and complex adaptive systems; they display certain characteristics at the local level that lead to non-linear, system-wide emergent properties over time. Currently, the Joint Force and SOF enterprise lack a systems-based approach to develop and implement effective BPC strategies for great power competition (GPC).

This thesis presents a systems approach to trilateral relationship between Taiwan, China, and the U.S. in order to develop a common framework for BPC in the context of deterrence and GPC. Conventional “deterrence by punishment” strategies for Taiwan focus primarily on high-end arms sales, but an unconventional “deterrence by denial” strategy focused on civil resilience, and threats of organized resistance could deter China by rendering its relative military superiority irrelevant and protracting a *fait accompli* indefinitely.

The Asymmetric Warfare Group’s (AWG) advisory support in Taiwan as well as the Resistance Operating Concept (ROC) and NATO-SOF’s *Comprehensive Defence Handbook* provide ready-made frameworks to build Taiwan’s capacity for resilience, resistance, and asymmetric defense. Additionally, strategic communication and deception through a continued policy of “strategic ambiguity” are essential elements to achieve this strategy.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A2/AD	anti-access/area denial
ADC	asymmetric defense component
ADIZ	air defense identification zone
AIT	American Institute of Taiwan
AOWG	asymmetric operations working group
ASD	Assistant Secretary of Defense
ATGM	anti-tank guided missile
AWG	Asymmetric Warfare Group
AWS	Asymmetric Warfare Symposium
BPC	building partner capacity
CA	civil affairs
CC	critical capability
CCMD	combatant command
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDH	<i>Comprehensive Defence Handbook</i>
CFA	critical factors analysis
CLD	causal loop diagram
CMSE	civil military support element
COG	center of gravity
COIN	counterinsurgency
CR	critical requirement
CSG	carrier strike group
CT	counterterrorism
CV	critical vulnerability
DASD	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
DIMEFIL	diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, law enforcement
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
DOTMLPF-P	doctrine organization training, material, leadership and education, personnel, facilities – policy
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
ECS	East China Sea
FAO	foreign area officer
FCC	functional combatant command
FDO	flexible deterrent option
FID	foreign internal defense

FMF	foreign military financing
FMS	foreign military sales
FSF	foreign security forces
GCC	geographic combatant command
GPC	great power competition
IDAD	internal defense and development
INDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command
INSSG	Interim National Security Strategic Guidance
IR	international relations
IW	irregular warfare
JCET	joint combined exercise training
JCISFA	Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance
JCS	Joint Chief of Staff
JOC	joint operating concept
JP	joint publication
JPEC	joint planning execution community
JRSOI	joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration
JSCP	joint strategic campaign plan
JSPS	joint strategic planning system
LSCO	large scale combat operations
MANPAD	man portable air defense system
MILDEP	military department
MILGRP	military group
MND	Ministry of National Defense
MPC	Military Police Command
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NMS	National Military Strategy
NSHQ	NATO Special Operations Headquarters
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
ODA/B	operational detachment alpha/bravo
ODC	overall defense concept
OE	operational environment
PDI	Pacific Deterrence Initiative
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force

PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PN	partner nation
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSYOP	psychological operations
PW	political warfare
ROC	Republic of China
ROC	resistance operating concept
SATMO	Security Assistance Training Management Organization
SCO	security cooperation office
SCP	security cooperation and policy
SCC	service component command
SCS	South China Sea
SF	special forces
SFA	security force assistance
SFAB	Security Force Assistance Brigade
SFC	Special Forces Command
SFG	Special Forces Group
SLOC	sea lines of communication
SMART	specificity, measurability, achievability, relevance and results-oriented, and time-bound
SMEE	subject matter expert exchange
SOC PAC	Special Operations Command Pacific
SOF	special operations forces
SOFLE	special operations forces liaison element
SPP	State Partnership Program
SSA	security sector assistance
SSC	special service company
TA	Taiwan Army
TAFT	technical assistance fielding team
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command
TSOC	theater special operations command
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USARPAC	United States Army Pacific Command
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
USCT	United States country team
USD	Undersecretary of Defense
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
UW	unconventional warfare

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study is an examination of building partner capacity (BPC) in the current and future context of U.S. global strategic competition with great power rivals—namely: China. Each U.S. security partnership is a unique and complex adaptive system, meaning it displays certain characteristics at the local level that lead to system-wide emergent properties over time. Reductionist methods of analysis cannot explain such systems because their components interact in dynamical and non-linear ways that display aggregate behavior. Therefore, policy and strategy formulation should begin with a systems-minded approach in order to understand the specific dynamics and relationships of a particular partnership ecosystem.

From this research perspective, this study bounds the research problem to a single security partnership and a single strategic rival: the Republic of China (ROC) Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) respectively.¹ Consequently, the particular security dilemma that the United States faces in this trilateral relationship is what drives the study’s research topic: deterrence of a PRC invasion across the Taiwan Strait to reunify the island.² The reason for selecting a single security partnership system is to demonstrate the utility of employing a systems methodology to identify both the unique attributes of the system as well as its potential commonalities with other systems. It is then possible to extrapolate relevant conclusions and implications that may apply to the greater context of partnerships in global strategic competition writ large. The reason for selecting Taiwan as the systems

¹ U.S. policy for government employees is to use “Taiwan” rather than “ROC.” The most common appellation for Taiwan internationally is “Chinese Taipei,” while the PRC uses “Taiwan, Province of China.” Henceforward, this study uses “Taiwan” in place of “ROC” unless otherwise delineated. Additionally, this study uses “PRC” and “China” interchangeably except when making a clear distinction between the current political identity of the PRC and the greater civilizational or cultural identity of China. “Taipei” and “Beijing” refer to their respective seats of government.

² While China uses the word “tong yi” translated as “reunification,” it can also be translated as “unification,” a term preferred by pro-Taiwan supporters given the fact that the CCP/PRC has never governed Taiwan previously and therefore cannot “reunify” it. This study uses both terms to describe the respective political positions of China vs. Taiwan. Ben Blanchard, “China’s Defence Minister Says Resolving ‘Taiwan Question’ Is National Priority,” Reuters, last modified October 8, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-defence-taiwan/chinas-defence-minister-says-resolving-taiwan-question-is-national-priority-idUSKBN1X003H>.

“case study” is principally because the “cross-strait” security dilemma is one of the most pertinent and challenging issues facing the United States and its allies today. The “question” of Taiwan’s existence is one of the greatest geopolitical phenomena in history and also one of the most dangerous flashpoints for armed conflict in the world today. There is a sense in which—if it is possible to understand the problem accurately and create an effective deterrence strategy for such a complex situation as Taiwan—it is possible to do so with other partnerships and problem-sets that do not possess some of the singular characteristics as Taiwan does. No other state is as politically sensitive for military engagement and security assistance than Taiwan. Moreover, selecting Taiwan is germane because of its central importance in the grand strategy and foreign policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³ The United States and Taiwan can exploit this susceptibility—as this study proposes—to successfully compete with and counter the CCP’s long-term, grand strategic goals. The reason for selecting the PRC is its relevance and timeliness as the United States’ “most significant competitor” and “pacing threat,” as U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin declared during his Senate confirmation hearing in January 2021.⁴ This introduction provides the reader with context and direction in order to apprehend the overall trajectory of the study. Although each chapter builds upon the introduction and preceding chapters, each is also semi-autonomous from the whole and provides a singular lens from which the reader may view the strategic problem.

A. THE STRATEGIC PROBLEM

In the immediate aftermath of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and rapid takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in mid-August 2021, many around the world began to call into question the credibility of American security commitments and

³ This study uses the more common appellation “CCP” instead of the official “Communist Party of China” (CPC), which connotes a linkage between the party and the people of China. Using CCP more precisely attributes the actions and policies of the PRC to the party rather than the Chinese people themselves.

⁴ *To Conduct a Confirmation Hearing on the Expected Nomination of: Lloyd J. Austin III to Be Secretary of Defense*, Senate, 117th Cong., 1st sess. (2021) (statement of Lloyd J. Austin, Secretary of Defense), January 19, 2021, 138, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/21-02_01-19-20211.pdf.

partnerships. Opportunistic foreign adversaries and major news media outlets echoed the same sentiment: that allies and partners could no longer trust the United States after witnessing its frenzied departure from Afghanistan. A *New York Times* columnist forewarned that “every ally—Taiwan, Ukraine, the Baltic states, Israel, Japan—will draw the lesson that it is on its own.”⁵ A day later, before the fateful ISIS-K suicide bomber attack and before evacuations from Hamid Karzai International Airport had yet concluded, a chorus of Chinese state-run media agencies seized on the opportunity to herald the “death knell for the decline of U.S. hegemony.” State news agency *Xinhua* added that “the fall of Kabul marks the collapse of the international image and credibility of the US.”⁶ Meanwhile, the CCP nationalist mouthpiece, the *Global Times*, set its sights on Taiwan and wasted no time in drawing comparisons between the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the “omen of Taiwan’s future fate,” exclaiming that, “once a cross-Straits war breaks out while the mainland seizes the island with forces, the U.S. would have to have a much greater determination than it had for Afghanistan, Syria, and Vietnam if it wants to interfere.”⁷ The comparison continued: “from what happened in Afghanistan, [Taiwan authorities] should perceive that once a war breaks out in the Taiwan Straits, the island’s defense will collapse in hours and the U.S. military won’t come to help.”⁸ The purpose of CCP propaganda like this is to undermine the credibility of the U.S. security commitment and partnership with Taiwan and to influence the cost-benefit analysis of Taiwan’s continued reliance on the United States.

In contrast, some argue that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is unlikely to have any significant negative consequences on existing or future American security

⁵ Bret Stephens, “Disaster in Afghanistan Will Follow Us Home,” *New York Times*, August 16, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/15/opinion/afghanistan-taliban-biden.html>.

⁶ Wu Liming, “‘The Fall of Kabul’ Sounds the Death Knell for the Decline of U.S. Hegemony,” Xinhua News Agency, last modified August 16, 2021, http://xinhuanet.com/world/2021-08/16/c_1127765152.htm.

⁷ “Afghan Abandonment a Lesson for Taiwan’s DPP,” *Global Times*, August 16, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1231636.shtml>.

⁸ “Afghan Abandonment a Lesson for Taiwan’s DPP.”

commitments.⁹ As one commentator summarized, “the specter of crises, conflicts, and strategic realignments is guaranteed to grab attention, but an emphasis on rare events almost certainly inflates the potential consequences of credibility damage.”¹⁰ In fact, by ending the so-called “drain” of what many came to call the “forever war” in Afghanistan, the United States can arguably shift greater resources and attention to more pressing national security threats, such as an ascendant China. This shift has the potential to *increase* the credibility of existing American security commitments, rather than *decrease* it.¹¹ Freed from the strategic distraction of Afghanistan, Washington can finally make the strategic adjustment to complete its long-proclaimed “pivot to Asia.” The United States is better positioned now to aid Taiwan with its defense posture and to pursue new security commitments such as the nascent AUKUS trilateral security pact with Australia and the United Kingdom. On a larger scale, the termination of the war in Afghanistan represents a final transition for American grand strategy from two decades focused on a global war on terror (GWOT) to a renewed era of great power competition (GPC). But it is not entirely clear yet how the Department of Defense (DOD) and Joint Force—to include Special Operations Forces (SOF)—should now understand existing partnership strategies and the role of BPC in the context of GPC.¹²

The question of whether the withdrawal from Afghanistan was a net positive or negative gain for the credibility of American security commitments is not the focus of this study. But the events surrounding the withdrawal serve as a timely and illustrative

⁹ Joshua D. Kertzer, “American Credibility After Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2021-09-02/american-credibility-after-afghanistan>.

¹⁰ Evan Montgomery, “Credibility Controversies: The Implications of Afghanistan for the Indo-Pacific,” *War on the Rocks*, last modified September 7, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/09/credibility-controversies-the-implications-of-afghanistan-for-the-indo-pacific/>.

¹¹ Stephen M. Walt, “Afghanistan Hasn’t Damaged U.S. Credibility,” *Foreign Policy*, August 21, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/21/afghanistan-hasnt-damaged-u-s-credibility/>.

¹² The Joint Force signifies all of the services (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard) as well as the six geographic combatant commands and five functional combatant commands: Special Operations Command (SOCOM), Strategic Command (STRATCOM), Space Command (SPACECOM), Cyber Command (CYBERCOM), and Transportation Command (TRANSCOM).

microcosm of the greater strategic problem which the United States faces in global strategic competition with China, namely: the *capability*, *commitment*, and *communication* of deterrence. These three “Cs” are the pillars of deterrence theory—with capability and commitment often encompassed together as *credibility*. With regard to *capability*, Beijing has historically had no impetus to doubt the capability of U.S. power projection and deterrence in the region, but China’s drastic growth and rise to power—as well as recent events such as the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan—have increasingly emboldened it to contest U.S. capability. One conspicuous example is China’s recent program to expand its strategic nuclear arsenal to include the construction of at least 250 new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) silos and two successful test launches of a nuclear-capable hypersonic glide delivery vehicle.¹³ Beijing cites the “abandonment” of Afghanistan as evidence that the United States’ military power is waning and that the United States would lose a war against China.

Secondly, the pillar of *commitment* or *resolve* has always been central to the deterrent value of the United States’ relationship with Taiwan. Repeatedly since 1949—when the ROC government under Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan—Beijing has attempted to discredit the U.S. commitment to Taiwan and sow seeds of doubt in the minds of Taiwanese citizens. Predictably, the controversial element of commitment continues to rear its ugly head today, and not without cause. It is unclear and purposefully ambiguous whether or not the United States would come to Taiwan’s defense if China attacked, and it is far from certain whether the general American public would endorse such a costly war with China. But there is political pressure on both sides of the aisle in Washington to shore up American resolve—particularly after Afghanistan and particularly with the thriving democracy of Taiwan—which makes it difficult to formulate clearheaded and dispassionate assessments of the security environment. For example, if one of the primary reasons for the withdrawal from Afghanistan was to stop further U.S. casualties, how could

¹³ Shannon Bugos and Julia Masterson, “New Chinese Missile Silo Fields Discovered,” Arms Control Association, last modified September 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-09/news/new-chinese-missile-silo-fields-discovered>; Demetri Sevastopulo, “China Conducted Two Hypersonic Weapons Tests This Summer,” *Financial Times*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/c7139a23-1271-43ae-975b-9b632330130b>.

the current administration then advocate for an intervention on behalf of Taiwan where thousands or possibly tens of thousands of U.S. service members would lose their lives? It is not without reason that the “question” of Taiwan can interchangeably refer to the “question” of whether Taiwan is self-sovereign or a part of China *or* the “question” of whether the United States would (or should) defend or disavow Taiwan. The “question” looms large, regardless of which meaning one intends.

Lastly, U.S. *communication* and deterrence signaling are also under siege. Even though Beijing’s targeted messaging is what one commentator deemed, “cheap psychological warfare,” it is nonetheless effective in complicating and obfuscating Washington’s ability to present a coherent foreign policy—both to domestic and foreign audiences.¹⁴ China is exceptionally adept in pointing out the United States’ inconsistencies and where it has disregarded the very norms and laws which it uses to discredit China. Typically, when a state’s reputation and credibility are cast in doubt, leaders turn to a “standard playbook”—making public statements to refute false accusations and to reassure existing partners and allies.¹⁵ When questioned about the Chinese commentaries comparing Taiwan with Afghanistan, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki reiterated the United States’ commitment to its “enduring” partnership with Taiwan: “Our message is very clear. We stand by, as is outlined in the Taiwan relations agreement [*sic*], by individuals in Taiwan. We stand by partners around the world who are subject to this kind of propaganda that Russia and China are projecting. And we’re going to continue to deliver on those words with actions.”¹⁶ Several days later during an interview with ABC News, President Biden himself reaffirmed America’s commitment to Taiwan in a somewhat more explicit yet oblique manner: “We made a sacred commitment to Article Five that if in fact anyone were to invade or take action against our NATO allies, we would respond. Same

¹⁴ Nectar Gan and Steve George, “Chinese State Media Sets Sights on Taiwan as U.S. Afghan Retreat Stokes Nationalism,” CNN, last modified August 18, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/18/china/china-afghanistan-taiwan-mic-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹⁵ Montgomery, “Credibility Controversies.”

¹⁶ Tyler Olson, “White House Pushes Back on China Amid Propaganda in Wake of Afghanistan’s Collapse,” Fox News, last modified August 17, 2021, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/china-taiwan-afghanistan-biden-united-states-white-house>.

with Japan, same with South Korea, same with Taiwan.”¹⁷ It is now routine for U.S. officials to describe the United States’ commitment to Taiwan as “rock solid,” following the impromptu remarks of a State Department spokesman in April 2020.¹⁸ The United States has remained fairly consistent in its choice of wording on Taiwan since 1979, when it officially adopted the “One China” policy and switched diplomatic recognition of China from Taipei to Beijing. But there is a growing body from the public, media, and government which argues it is high-time to communicate a clear commitment to the defense of Taiwan—a message which they believe will have a greater deterrent effect against China. The strategic problem which the Joint Force and SOF now face in the wake of Afghanistan and the emergence of global strategic competition with China is how to increase its *capability*, *commitment*, and *communication* in order to deter China from its strategic objectives and place the United States in a position of relative advantage. Taiwan is rapidly becoming “ground-zero” for this competition.

B. TOPIC AND RELEVANCE

The realm of U.S. security sector assistance (SSA) is a vast and complex system of joint, interagency, and multinational actors interacting at all levels from the policy to the tactical levels. Within this system, building partner capacity (BPC) is a broad concept that means many different things to different people within the U.S. security sector establishment. The term originated in the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)* and has since become a “catchall” phrase to encompass a large cross-section of various security cooperation, security assistance, and security force assistance missions, programs,

¹⁷ “Full Transcript of ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos’ Interview with President Joe Biden,” ABC News, last modified August 19, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/full-transcript-abc-news-george-stephanopoulos-interview-president/story?id=79535643>.

¹⁸ Trevor Hunnicutt, “Taiwan Says U.S. Commitment Is ‘Rock Solid’ after Biden Remark on China’s Xi,” Reuters, last modified October 6, 2021, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-says-us-commitment-is-rock-solid-after-biden-remark-chinas-xi-2021-10-06/>; Chris Reese, “White House Says U.S. Commitment to Taiwan Is ‘Rock Solid,’” Reuters, October 14, 2021, sec. China, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/white-house-says-us-commitment-taiwan-is-rock-solid-2021-10-14/>.

activities, and authorities.¹⁹ Security cooperation is the activity undertaken by the DOD to build relationships with international partner nations (PN) and develop their security capabilities in order to achieve U.S. or collective security sector objectives. In concert with security assistance programs led by the Department of State (DOS), security cooperation is one of the U.S. government’s greatest foreign policy and statecraft tools because it can shape and assure alliances, generate interoperability, assist weak or fragile states, and deter state and non-state adversaries. Within this construct, the Joint Force and SOF conduct security cooperation and other related activities such as security force assistance (SFA) to train, educate, advise, and equip foreign security forces (FSF).²⁰ In so doing, BPC can be one of the most important ways—if not the most important way—for the United States to compete with adversaries, deter aggression, and set conditions for the transition to armed conflict if needed. But the DOD lacks a systems-based approach to BPC that will enable the Joint and SOF enterprise—from policy-maker to practitioner—to develop and implement BPC strategies that effectively compete with and deter great power adversaries.

There is general consensus that BPC can play a significant role in deterrence, specifically *extended* deterrence—the concept of deterring adversarial aggression toward a third party such as a partner or ally.²¹ But there are countless stakeholders and corresponding concepts, policies, and strategies that make BPC a haphazard rather than unified enterprise when it comes to extended deterrence. There is also a wide range of explanatory deterrence theories through which one may interpret and apply BPC. There is no universal consensus on which theory to adopt. Furthermore, it may be relatively straightforward how BPC may achieve extended deterrence through *conventional* deterrence practices, but it is less understood how it may play a role in *unconventional*

¹⁹ See Figure 17 in Chapter VI for a visual depiction of BPC cross-section examples. Kathleen J. McInnis and Nathan J. Lucas, *What Is “Building Partner Capacity?” Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. R44313 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 1, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R44313.pdf>.

²⁰ Because of the geopolitical environment of global counterterrorism in which BPC originated, the majority of people view BPC as assistance to weak and fragile states and specifically assistance to FSFs in Iraq (2003-2011), Afghanistan (2001-2021), and Iraq/Syria (2014-present). McInnis and Lucas, 1.

²¹ *Extended* deterrence is in contrast with *direct* deterrence, which deters aggression toward a state’s own territory or interests.

deterrence—the concept of dissuading an adversary from aggression via threats of unconventional warfare (UW) such as guerilla resistance, sabotage, and terrorism.²² This irregular form of BPC may be precisely the approach needed to offset the hybrid and “gray zone” activities of great power rivals such as China and Russia. Just as they have adapted their strategies to compete with the United States while remaining below the threshold of armed conflict, so the Joint Force and SOF must also adapt their BPC strategies to be able to maneuver within this “gray zone” and deter escalation toward conflict.

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, security cooperation and especially SFA have largely focused on BPC in order to counter global terrorism. However, under the 2017 *National Security Strategy (NSS)*, the 2018 *National Defense Strategy (NDS)*, and the *National Military Strategy (NMS)*, the DOD has now shifted focus to GPC and the potential for large scale combat operations (LSCO) against peer or near-peer threats such as China or Russia. President Biden reinforced these themes shortly after his inauguration in the *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG)*—emphasizing collective action and the reinvigoration and modernization of alliances and partnerships: “we will strengthen and stand behind our allies, work with like-minded partners, and pool our collective strength to advance shared interests and deter common threats.”²³ There have been some positive steps to refocus security cooperation and SFA for GPC and LSCO, such as the Irregular Warfare Annex to the 2018 *NDS* and the U.S. Army’s creation of five permanent Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB). But overall, the security cooperation enterprise is lagging behind when it arguably should be leading the way. GPC is predominantly occurring on the frontiers between PNs and revisionist adversaries such as China and Russia, who are exploiting this space to their advantage—often using proxies and hybrid tactics to avoid attribution. BPC policy, strategy, and doctrine must adapt and align with the current GPC construct, which expands the view of the operating environment from an obsolete peace/war binary model to an alternate “competition continuum” of cooperation,

²² Mindaugas Rekasius, “Unconventional Deterrence Strategy” (Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005), v, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/1863>.

²³ Joseph R. Biden Jr., *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2021), 6.

competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. The Joint Force and SOF need a BPC model that is flexible enough to compete in this operational environment and effectively deter not only the outbreak of conventional conflict, but also the escalation of “gray zone” irregular and unconventional threats below the threshold of armed conflict.

C. RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the optimal deterrence strategy for the Joint Force and SOF—in the context of global strategic competition with China—to deter an invasion and annexation of Taiwan, and in what ways does the Joint Force and SOF need to adapt and innovate in order to develop and implement this strategy effectively? Supporting research questions include the following. How does China perceive and react to U.S. global strategic competition and deterrence efforts? What is the optimal role for BPC in deterrence and competition?

D. HYPOTHESES AND OBJECTIVES

The central hypothesis of this study is that a strategy of unconventional deterrence—focused on BPC activities and programs to build Taiwan’s resilience, resistance, and asymmetric defense capacities—will increase the probability of deterring a Chinese invasion by decreasing China’s probability of achieving a *fait accompli* and rapidly securing the Taiwanese populace. The independent variable is BPC for resilience and resistance and the dependent variable is unconventional deterrence.

This hypothesis resides at the strategic level of warfare, but it extends to the level of policy and grand strategy as well. For example, it requires no change to current U.S. policy regarding Taiwan from a policy of “strategic ambiguity” to “strategic clarity,” as many argue today. In fact, a continued policy of “strategic ambiguity” would *facilitate* and *enhance* an unconventional approach whereas a policy of “strategic clarity” would *preclude* it by committing the United States to an overt and conventional military strategy for defending Taiwan. Furthermore, an unconventional deterrence strategy which deters China from achieving a *fait accompli* indefinitely would simultaneously be a “gray zone” form of strategic sabotage of the CCP’s grand strategy, which ties the reunification of Taiwan to its “national rejuvenation.” As it approaches the end of its 100 year plan with no

sure way to reunify Taiwan, the CCP will face increasing challenges to maintain its legitimacy and regime stability.

There is one supporting hypothesis which corresponds at the strategic and operational levels of implementation. Superimposing and “baking-in” strategic communication and deception at every layer of BPC and deterrence activities will confuse, disrupt, and delay Chinese decision-making by introducing doubt, misinformation, and multiple possible interpretations into their information collection and processing systems. This requires the synchronization of multiple information related capabilities (IRC) including diplomatic, cyber, media, and military means such as psychological operations, civil affairs, and military deception. Strategic communication is essential for a strategy of unconventional deterrence in order to signal to the aggressor the PN’s level of resolve and resilience as well as its resistance and asymmetric defense capabilities. A partner’s perceived capability and commitment will fail to influence an aggressor’s cost-benefit calculation without the incorporation of the third pillar of deterrence: communication.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, this study aims to develop an updated mental framework for BPC in the context of global strategic competition, with Taiwan as a case study. This mental model will serve as a conceptual foundation from which planners and practitioners can conceive of and conduct security assistance, security cooperation, and SFA activities. To accomplish this goal, this study begins with a comprehensive treatment of the cross-strait strategic environment and a system dynamics analysis. Second, this study aims to demonstrate how a strategy of unconventional deterrence in Taiwan is the most feasible and effective strategy for the United States and Taiwan in order to deter a Chinese attack and invasion of the island. A corollary goal is to demonstrate how strategic communication can amplify its effects. Third, the expanded purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the greater strategic role that unconventional deterrence and strategic communication can play with other partners and allies. Finally, the thesis end state is to provide recommendations at the strategic, operational, tactical, and institutional levels, as well as recommendations for future research.

This study neither *proposes* nor *proves* a universal theory for BPC, deterrence, or GPC. In fact, it demonstrates how *no* single theory or approach can make sense of a

complex and systemic issue like Taiwan nor develop perfect solutions for it. Instead, this study presents a variety of analytical methods and perspectives to serve as a tool and guide for U.S. military planners and practitioners at the policy, strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Although this study is most relevant for the United States and its regional partners within the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR), the methodology, conclusions, and implications of the study can inform policy and strategy formulation for other GPC problem sets, partnerships, and AORs.

The target audience of this study is primarily the Joint Planning and Execution Community (JPEC): policy-makers at the national and military departmental level as well as strategic planners and commanders at the geographic (GCC) and functional (FCC) combatant command (CCMD) level—including the respective service component commands (SCC) and theater special operations commands (TSOC). The primary goal is to inform Globally Integrated Campaigning (GIC) within the Joint Strategic Planning System (JSPS) and provide recommendations for joint capability development, joint force development, and the Joint Strategic Campaign Plan (JSCP). But the study is also relevant and informative for practitioners and advisors who plan or carry-out security cooperation and SFA activities with partners at the operational and tactical levels. Lastly, the study has bearing for analysts and scholars in the foreign policy and security community as well, who can utilize the methodologies and tools in this study for further research or to pursue new research questions. At a minimum, if this thesis provides the reader with a greater awareness and appreciation of the complexity of the problem or prompts further discussion or research, it will have accomplished its core objectives.

E. THESIS APPROACH

This study employs a multilayered approach drawing from various theoretical frameworks, qualitative and quantitative analysis, case studies and analogies, wargames, and practical experience. This study primarily employs a *systems-thinking* approach, which focuses on one particular sub-system rather than the whole. It also draws on a wide range of explanatory disciplines to make specific points—from ancient Greek history to modern psychology and communication theory. Although this study primarily analyzes the system

at the *strategic* level of warfare and statecraft, it also considers elements at the *operational* and *tactical* levels, with some considerations at the higher levels of *policy* and *grand strategy* as well. The three universally accepted levels of warfare are *strategy*, *operations*, and *tactics*, although some have postulated different or additional levels. For example, the famous Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz saw believed the three levels were *policy*, *strategy*, and *tactics*, whereas the acclaimed military strategist Edward N. Luttwak postulated five levels of war: *grand strategy*, *theater strategy*, *operations*, *tactics*, and *technology*—arguing that that changes in tactics can negate innovative technologies and vice versa with each of the levels.²⁴ This study does not seek to propose a novel framework. Instead, it employs an amalgamated framework consisting of six interrelated levels (*grand strategic*, *policy*, *strategic*, *operational*, *tactical*, and *institutional*) in order to make corresponding claims and recommendations at the appropriate levels wherein “the logic at each level is supposed to govern the one below and serve the one above.”²⁵

- **Grand Strategic** – the level of aligning national interests and resources with a long-term vision of a nation and its theory about how it can best achieve that vision. Grand strategy lies above policy and bureaucracy but influences both domestic and foreign policy. It may be explicit or implicit or it may be a deliberate plan or simply an organizing principle.
- **Policy** – the level of codifying and communicating domestic and foreign national interests in order to guide national or multinational strategic planning. Policies provide legal, moral, and fiscal authorities and constraints in order to direct national or multinational resources to achieve grand strategic objectives.
- **Strategic** – the level of determining national or multinational security objectives, then developing national or multinational guidance, resources,

²⁴ Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), 69–71.

²⁵ Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 6, <https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/016228800560444>.

and capabilities to achieve policy objectives through operations and campaigns.²⁶ The strategic level is often sub-divided into *theater* strategic levels for each of the GCC and FCC combatant commands (CCMD).

- **Operational** – the level of planning, conducting, and sustaining campaigns and major operations to achieve strategic objectives by assigning missions, tasks, and resources to tactical units and forces.²⁷
- **Tactical** – the level of planning and executing missions, engagements, and activities to achieve operational or campaign level objectives.²⁸ It involves tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), as well as technical aspects and the employment of technologies.
- **Institutional** – the level of identifying capability gaps and developing material and non-material solutions for implementation in the other, parallel levels of warfare.²⁹ This study outlines various institutional recommendations utilizing a DOTMLPF-PI framework: doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, policy, and interoperability.³⁰

This study also references the results and findings from two Taiwan-focused wargames conducted at NPS in 2021. First, the department of Defense Analysis (DA) collaborated with 1st Special Forces Group (1SFG) to design and run a series of wargames in order to inform the planning and execution of 1SFG's participation in exercise FORAGER 21. The wargames also served to propose the requisite capabilities, force posture, and organizational mission command structure that Joint SOF should employ

²⁶ Daniel Sukman, "The Institutional Level of War," The Strategy Bridge, last modified May 5, 2016, <https://thestategybridge.org/the-bridge/2016/5/5/the-institutional-level-of-war>.

²⁷ Sukman.

²⁸ Sukman.

²⁹ Sukman.

³⁰ The NATO framework (DOTMLPFI) replaces policy with interoperability. Because of this study's focus on strategy and solution development with partner and allied forces, this study combines the interoperability category from NATO with the DOD framework.

during the phase of persistent competition transition to conflict against a peer adversary in INDOPACOM. The wargame scenario centered around a riverine border dispute between China and Thailand along the Mekong River followed by a 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Taiwan.

Secondly, the department of National Security Affairs (NSA) conducted a geostrategic wargame in conjunction with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Political Science department and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. The intent was to use a non-military crisis to explore international implications of Taiwan's unique status facing Chinese coercive pressure—with teams representing military and diplomatic representatives from Taiwan, China, Japan, and the United States. Similar to the 1SFG wargame, the NPS-MIT scenario began with a 7.9 earthquake leading to a “Fukushima-like” nuclear meltdown of one of Taiwan's ageing nuclear powerplants.

1. Methodology and Structure

The underlying methodology of this study is *design thinking*, itself an offshoot of *systems thinking*. Design thinking is a cognitive approach for devising innovative and divergent conceptual frameworks in order to develop and implement an ensuing and integrated solution or strategy. It facilitates strategic *thinking* vice strategic *programming*, wherein planners assemble a strategy from previous ones instead of designing a new one. Design thinking is a form of conceptual backwards planning; it begins with a focused understanding of the end-user or recipient of the solution or strategy. This involves what design literature calls *empathizing* or fully probing and appreciating the end user's problems, needs, and desired outcomes.³¹ This allows the designer or user to ‘understand what's in the box before thinking outside of it.’ The end users of this study are U.S. policymakers, strategic thinkers, and security cooperation practitioners—and their foreign counterparts. It also includes what NPS professor of history Zachary Shore describes as

³¹ Rikke Friis Dam and Teo Yu Siang, “What Is Design Thinking and Why Is It So Popular?,” The Interaction Design Foundation, accessed November 18, 2021, <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/what-is-design-thinking-and-why-is-it-so-popular>.

“strategic empathy” or the ability to think like one’s opponent.³² Design thinking then models or prototypes potential solutions through a process of envisioning more desirable end states—encompassed in the system dynamics modeling of this study. The process is iterative i.e., it arrives at a desired solution by repeating rounds of analysis with the objective of bringing the desired solution closer to discovery with each iteration. The inherent value of the iterative modeling or ideation is that it not only helps to develop a solution but also helps the user re-imagine and redefine the original problem by challenging previously held assumptions and biases and updating paradigmatic mental models—a process called double-loop learning. In the process, the user discovers novel implications or areas for further analysis and innovation—as captured in the conclusion of this study.

The structure of this study consists of three parts. The first part is a qualitative analysis of the problem-set beginning with a literature review in Chapter II and an analysis of the cross-strait strategic environment in Chapter III. The second part utilizes Art Lykke’s “strategy stool” paradigm to outline the various “ends, ways, and means” of an unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan with the “ends” in Chapter IV, the “ways” in Chapters V, and the “means” in Chapter VI. The third part in Chapter VII consists of the conclusion and recommendations.

a. Part One – Literature Review & Cross-Strait Strategic Environment

Chapter II presents the findings from a preliminary literature review of the study’s primary topics and themes. The purpose of the literature review is twofold. First, the review outlines the necessary context, background, and basic definitions of terms and concepts to provide an introductory understanding of the logic and approach used for the remainder of the study. Secondly, the review identifies current gaps and inconsistencies in the existing literature which this study strives to redress and resolve. The focus of the literature review is on partnerships, building partner capacity, and their respective roles in deterrence. However, the review does not explicitly cover the topics of Taiwan, system dynamics,

³² Zachary Shore, *A Sense of the Enemy: The High Stakes History of Reading Your Rival’s Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

unconventional deterrence, or strategic communication because the subsequent chapters will cover each of those subjects in detail.

Chapter III examines the “question” of Taiwan and the complex, triangular relationship between Taiwan, China, and the United States. This qualitative analysis utilizes a myriad of analytical lenses to shed light on the problem-set including a contemporary, historical, policy, strategic, and future lens. The chapter draws on international relations (IR) theory, applied history, and also introduces important conceptual constructs that will appear throughout the study such as the Thucydides Trap, the “One China” principle, and the policy of “strategic ambiguity.” The purpose of this comprehensive analysis is to provide a detailed understanding of the cross-strait strategic environment. It will demonstrate not only the immense complexity of the problem-set but also the extraordinary divergence of public and expert opinions, explanatory theories, and policy decisions that further complicate the issue.

b. Part Two – Unconventional Deterrence Strategy for Taiwan

Chapter IV presents the policy & strategic “ends” for an unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan. First, the chapter utilizes Ivan Arreguín-Toft’s “strategic interaction theory” to frame the purpose and rationale for an indirect, unconventional strategy rather than a direct, conventional one. Then it reviews relevant deterrence theory and how China interprets and reacts to deterrence. It examines both the Chinese strategic psyche and the grand strategic processing of the CCP to identify how an unconventional deterrence strategy would influence CCP decision-making.

Chapter V outlines the primary strategic & operational “ways” to operationalize the strategy. It presents the model of advisory support to Taiwan by the U.S. Army’s Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG), then discusses the concepts of resilience and resistance, comprehensive defense, and asymmetric defense—as presented in the Swedish Defence University’s *Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)* and NATO Special Operations Headquarters’ (NSHQ) *Comprehensive Defence Handbook (CDH)*. The chapter concludes by examining the value of superimposing strategic communication and strategic deception on BPC and deterrence activities throughout the operational approach.

Chapter VI outlines the tactical & institutional “means” with which to implement the “ways” to achieve “ends.” It outlines the multiple organizations and capabilities from SOF, the Joint Force, and relevant institutional and multinational organizations that are best suited to implement the strategy.

c. Part Three – Conclusion

Chapter VII presents the strategic risks and implications of the strategy, ranging from Taiwan to broader circumstances of global strategic competition. The chapter then offers a series of policy, strategic, operational, and institutional recommendations and concludes with suggested areas for future research.

Appendix A examines the systemic nature of BPC in Taiwan. The appendix includes a causal loop diagram (CLD) of the specific BPC interactions and feedbacks between the United States, Taiwan, and China in order to facilitate the visualization of the complex interactions and feedback loops between various elements in the system, thus reevaluating previously held notions of cause and effect. Appendix B presents the findings and outcomes of the Asymmetric Warfare Group’s (AWG) Asymmetric Warfare Symposium (AWS) conducted with the Taiwan Army (TA) from 2015–2020.

2. Limitations, Assumptions, and Bounds

There are several limitations and assumptions within this study that may negatively eschew the results. Some are deliberately self-imposed within the bounds of the research while some are extrinsically imposed.

a. Measuring Deterrence

The most significant limitation of this study is one which is endemic to nearly all deterrence studies: how to determine when deterrence is successful and how to measure it. Successful deterrence is inherently elusive to detect because—by definition—it entails looking for something that did not occur. In a complex interconnected system like the security dilemma of Taiwan—where the variables interact in dynamical and non-linear ways leading to system-wide emergent properties over time—it is difficult to prove

definitively that change in the independent variable (BPC) was the cause of change in the dependent variable (deterrence).

In his landmark publication *The Logic of Warfighting Experimentation*, Chief of Analysis for the Joint Experimentation Directorate Dr. Rick Kass put forward a methodology for defense concept and technology experimentation consisting of four requirements for valid experiments (see Figure 1). This simple framework provides a clear set of criteria for evaluating the validity of this study’s approach. First, there must be the ability to detect change in the dependent variable (B) when the independent variable (A) changes. Next, there must be the ability to identify the cause of change (A was a factor in changing B) as well as the ability to isolate the cause of change (A alone caused B). These three criteria together determine the *internal validity* of a study: whether there is causal relationship between the two variables. The fourth criterion determines the *external validity* of the study or the ability to transpose the relationship to the actual operational environment (change in B due to A is expected in actual operations).³³

Hypothesis: If A, then B.

Requirement		Evidence for Validity	Threat to Validity
1	Ability to use the new capability.	A occurred.	The asset did not work or was not used.
2	Ability to detect change.	B changed as A changed.	Too much noise, cannot detect any change.
3	Ability to isolate the reason for the change.	A alone caused B.	Alternate explanations for the change are available.
4	Ability to relate results to actual operations.	Change in B due to A is expected in actual operations.	The observed change may not be applicable.

Figure 1. Dr. Rick Kass’s Four Requirements for Good (Valid) Experiments.³⁴

³³ Richard A. Kass, *The Logic of Warfighting Experiments*, The Future of Command and Control (Washington, DC: CCRP Publications, 2006), 37–39.

³⁴ Source: Kass, 38.

By utilizing a systems approach, it is feasible to determine the *internal validity* of this study (requirements one through three). By bounding the problem-set to a predetermined set of endogenous variables—those influenced only by other variables *inside* the boundaries of the system—this study is able to isolate the independent and dependent variables from the various exogenous control variables *outside* the boundaries, such as changes in policy, arms sales, troop presence, force posture in the region, and other factors that could influence deterrence success or failure within the instruments of national power (DIMEFIL).³⁵ Absent these exogenous control variables, it would be impossible to determine the *external validity* of the hypotheses or the ability to generalize results to the actual operating environment. It is impossible because the model would need to include *every* conceivable variable within a now unbounded system that could possibly influence the independent variable—everything from the weather to fiscal operating budgets. It would also need to simulate the relationships and values of these variables with complete accuracy, which is virtually impossible given current technology and information limitations. But more importantly, doing so would be of little to no research value. Even if the architecture of the model were to perfectly map onto the real world, the moment that a model simulation begins, the real world will have changed and will have done so in a non-linear, unpredictable way, thus invalidating the simulation. Consequently, the only ability to conclusively demonstrate or prove the study’s hypotheses is to conduct a real-world experiment. But the limitation of the model—whether bounded or unbounded—still transposes onto the real world experiment: how to determine when deterrence succeeds and which variables cause it to succeed. It is feasible to evaluate deterrence *measures of performance* (MOP), such as number of persons trained or exchanges completed, but there are no adequate *measures of effectiveness* (MOE). A potential MOE could be an increase in resistance and resilience capacity, but it is beyond the scope and objectives of this study to determine a set of criteria for establishing MOEs.

³⁵ Diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement

b. *Multicollinearity of Independent Variables*

A second limitation is the fact that the independent variable of the model is correlated and codependent with other variables within the system. This phenomenon is known as *multicollinearity*—when more than two explanatory variables are related linearly.³⁶ Multicollinearity is a hindrance to the *internal* validity of a study because the independent variable is not truly *independent*. In this study, the codependent variables to building Taiwan’s capacity for resistance and resilience are the Taiwanese government, military, and populace. BPC programs and activities are *bilateral* agreements, meaning Taiwan must first agree with and approve any U.S. proposal or initiative for BPC. Even if it were possible to design a BPC strategy which would absolutely *guarantee* deterrence of China in Taiwan, unless the Taiwanese government *authorizes* it, the military *implements* it, and the populace *accepts* it, the strategy will die on the vine. For this reason, this study operates under the assumption of bilateral concurrence and consensus between the United States and Taiwan, negating the collinearity between them. However, multicollinearity still significantly influences the *external* validity of the study, as any implementation of the proposed strategy would inevitably change in a non-linear manner as the Taiwanese choose to adopt or adapt the strategy according to their distinct mental model of the problem.

There are several other noteworthy assumptions which may or may not correspond to reality outside the model. This study assumes that the United States, China, and Taiwan do not make any significant changes in their current policies and strategies during the time horizon considered. For example, Taiwan does not declare independence and the United States does not rescind its “One China” policy and move from a position of “strategic ambiguity” to “strategic clarity” regarding its security commitment to Taiwan. In fact, this study makes the case at various points that the United States should *maintain* its current policy and that the proposed strategy of unconventional deterrence would be more effectual under such politically ambiguous conditions. Furthermore, this study assumes that the operational security environment—regionally and globally—does not undergo any

³⁶ Peter Kennedy, *A Guide to Econometrics*, 6th ed (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 192–95.

significant change. For example, the United States does not decide to garrison troops in Taiwan in an overt attempt to deter an invasion or create a “tripwire force” which would commit the United States to war if it were attacked. Likewise, a major conflict or crisis does not erupt elsewhere in the world which would divert the attention and resources of the United States or China in such a way that the proposed strategy becomes no longer feasible or applicable. In other words, the outcome does not become one of *de facto* deterrence simply because both parties no longer actively pursue their previous policy objectives concerning Taiwan—rendering the proposed strategy temporarily extraneous.

c. Focused Lens on Deterrence and Military Solutions

This study focuses on various deterrence options to *dissuade* adversaries from taking aggressive actions, but it does not adequately explore potential compellence strategies that provide offramps for escalation or inducements to *persuade* aggressors to take alternative actions that are favorable to the deterrer. Deterrence strategies inherently have a “negative aim” which seek to deny the aggressor his objectives. They do not typically have “positive aims” which seek to achieve political or military objectives. Clausewitz claims in his treatise *On War* that it is easier for defenders to attain “negative aims” and that “positive aims” are not even necessary for defenders to be successful.³⁷ But if a defender such as Taiwan were to achieve its “negative aim” of denying China its “positive aim” of reunification while China still retains that aim and the ability to prosecute toward it in the future, then Taiwan and the United States will have only temporarily achieved their objectives. Without any corresponding compellence options to provide inducements for China to ultimately relinquish its “positive aim” or exchange it for alternative aims, Taiwan and the United States will only succeed in *deferring* conflict, not *detering* it. Compellence must shore-up and support deterrence for either to be successful. This study, however, does not fully explore potential “positive aims” of compellence. This study also does not explore the topics of strategic *nuclear* deterrence or *cyber* deterrence.

³⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Eliot Howard, and Peter Paret, *On War*, First paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 83–84.

Lastly, this study focuses predominantly on the military instrument of national power with corollary emphasis on the diplomatic and information domains. However, it does not examine in detail the economic, financial, intelligence, or law-enforcement aspects of DIMEFIL. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze, for example, the role of economic sanctions or foreign espionage in deterring aggression. Because of the emphasis on BPC “means” and “ways,” this study narrows the study primarily to the military domain. The other domains remain areas for future research.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent of this literature review is to demonstrate how previous research has touched on the topics and questions of this study and to identify any relevant gaps or inconsistencies in the research which this study may help to address. This review is not meant to be exhaustive but instead to be a launching-point for further research. This preliminary literature review reveals that while there is a great amount of literature on the topics of BPC and deterrence respectively, there is surprisingly little on how they relate to one another, or how BPC activities may play a deterrent role against adversarial aggression. At first this is counterintuitive, but closer examination reveals there is abundant scholarship on the role of alliance-making and partnering, but little on the specific role of BPC programs and activities to accomplish these methods of deterrence. Additionally, while there exists a wide range of explanatory deterrence theories, this review examines only the scholarship focused on how BPC manifests in deterrence theory. In particular this review focuses on the role of BPC in *extended* and *unconventional* deterrence concepts, which deter aggression in a third-party state through threats of UW, guerilla resistance, and sabotage and terrorism.³⁸ This is in contrast to *direct* and *conventional* deterrence, which deter aggression toward a state's own territory through conventional means.³⁹

A. PARTNERSHIPS AND DETERRENCE STRATEGY

U.S. strategy documents—both past and present—consistently herald the reemergence of GPC and emphasize the corresponding importance and role of partnerships and alliances. The 2018 *NMS* states that it “acknowledges the unique contributions of allies and partners, a strategic source of strength for the Joint Force. Building a strong, agile, and resilient force requires better interoperability and enhancing the combat lethality and

³⁸ Rekasius, “Unconventional Deterrence Strategy,” v.

³⁹ Michael J. Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, PE-295-RC (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), 3, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html>.

survivability of our allies and partners.”⁴⁰ In the 2018 *NDS*, the second of three lines of effort is, “Strengthen Alliances and Attract New Partners,” in which “mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to our strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match.”⁴¹ This asymmetric advantage underpins the strategic utility of security cooperation and BPC activities, serving to maintain “favorable balances of power that deter aggression” and “expand our options.”⁴² With reference to partner nations in the Indo-Pacific specifically, the *NDS* stated, “A free and open Indo-Pacific region provides prosperity and security for all. We will strengthen our alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific to a networked security architecture capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains.”⁴³

1. America’s Greatest Strategic Asset

President Biden’s 2021 *INSSG* also elevates the importance of allies and partners—a theme that the administration is anticipated to echo and reinforce in the forthcoming *NSS*. In a statement undoubtedly intended to signal a break from the policies of the previous administration, President Biden’s vision is for America to return to the world stage: “America is back. Diplomacy is back. Alliances are back.”⁴⁴ To accomplish this strategic vision, the interim strategic guidance acknowledges that, “we can do none of this work alone. For that reason, we will reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships around the world.” America’s partners and allies are a “unique American advantage” and “America’s greatest strategic asset.”⁴⁵ The Biden administration and DOD quickly began

⁴⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), 3–4.

⁴¹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 8, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

⁴² Office of the Secretary of Defense, 8.

⁴³ Office of the Secretary of Defense, 9.

⁴⁴ Biden, *INSSG*, 4.

⁴⁵ Biden, 10.

putting these words into action. In July 2021, during his first visit to Southeast Asia, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin gave a speech in Singapore entitled “The Imperative of Partnership.” Speaking to defense representatives from the region, Secretary Austin stressed the value of allies and partners in a network that is an “unparalleled strategic asset.”⁴⁶ One of the central components he proposed during the speech in order to deepen bonds, meet common security challenges, and “forge a more resilient regional order” was to join together in a new conception of deterrence called “integrated deterrence.”

2. Integrated Deterrence

Secretary Austin first introduced his new vision for deterrence in May at the INDOPACOM headquarters in Hawaii during his first major speech after taking office. He described the need for “the right mix of technology, operational concepts and capabilities—all woven together in a networked way that is so credible, flexible and formidable that it will give any adversary pause. We need to create advantages for us and dilemmas for them.”⁴⁷ Soon after, the DOD formally synthesized this vision into an official concept of integrated deterrence, which Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (USD-P) Colin Kahl stated in a policy meeting at the Pentagon in June would be a “cornerstone” in the upcoming 2022 *NDS*. Speaking of allies and partners, USD-P Kahl stated that the United States would “need to *integrate* them into our understanding of what deterrence means [emphasis added].”⁴⁸ The DOD has yet to fully detail this understanding of deterrence, but several key components can be synthesized from the statements thus far.

⁴⁶ “Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Participates in Fullerton Lecture Series in Singapore,” U.S. Department of Defense, last modified July 27, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2711025/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-participates-in-fullerton-lecture-serie/>.

⁴⁷ Todd Lopez, “Defense Secretary Says ‘Integrated Deterrence’ Is Cornerstone of U.S. Defense,” United States Navy, May 3, 2021, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2592817/defense-secretary-says-integrated-deterrence-is-cornerstone-of-us-defense/>.

⁴⁸ Jim Garamone, “Official Talks DOD Policy Role in Chinese Pacing Threat, Integrated Deterrence,” U.S. Department of Defense, June 2, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2641068/official-talks-dod-policy-role-in-chinese-pacing-threat-integrated-deterrence/>.

Secretary Austin described integrated deterrence in his Singapore speech as first, “using every military and non-military tool in our toolbox in lockstep with our allies and partners. Secondly, Integrated deterrence is about using existing capabilities, and building new ones, and deploying them all in new and networked ways—all tailored to a region’s security landscape, and growing in partnership with our friends.”⁴⁹ From this representation, integrated deterrence can first be understood as a whole-of-government approach—involving not just the use of military means—in coordination with allies and partners. Secondly, integrated deterrence involves greater innovation and investment that is “interwoven.” Austin explained how “innovation requires the resources to develop new ideas and scale them appropriately.”⁵⁰ Third, integrated deterrence will employ these capabilities in new and networked ways, tailored to specific regions, and in multi-domains: “It means investing in cutting-edge capabilities for the future, in all domains of potential conflict.”⁵¹ But this innovation and investment will not be unilateral. It will extend to allies and partners to increase their capacity for deterrence and resilience:

Together we’re aiming to coordinate better, to network tighter and to innovate faster. And we’re working to ensure that our allies and partners have the capabilities, the capacities and the information that they need. With our friends, we are stepping up our deterrence, resilience and teamwork, including in the cyber and space domains.⁵²

Integrated deterrence is also not limited to high-end conflict, but to extended deterrence of “gray zone” activities as well,

working with partners to deter coercion and aggression across the spectrum of conflict—including in the so-called “grey zone” where the rights and livelihoods of the people in Southeast Asia are coming under stress. That’s

⁴⁹ “Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Participates in Fullerton Lecture Series in Singapore.”

⁵⁰ Kris Osborn, “Secretary Austin’s New ‘Integrated Deterrence’ Strategy Is Turning Heads,” *The National Interest*, September 30, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/secretary-austins-new-integrated-deterrence-strategy-turning-heads-194550>.

⁵¹ Osborn.

⁵² “Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Participates in Fullerton Lecture Series in Singapore.”

why we're working to strengthen local capacity and to bolster maritime-domain awareness, so that nations can better protect their sovereignty.⁵³

Lastly, integrated deterrence entails increasing interoperability with allies and partners through exercises and training, and by increasing combined presence in the region. Secretary Austin cited recent exercises with Japan, Australia, and South Korea, as well as Britain's carrier deployment of the HMS Queen Elizabeth in conjunction with U.S. Naval forces.

Integrated deterrence, therefore, is a *coordinated and tailorable multinational and whole-of-government deterrence concept that employs more innovative, networked, and dispersed capabilities and technologies to increase local capacity for deterrence, resilience, and interoperability across all domains including the "gray zone."* It is evident that partnerships, capacity-building, and innovation are central to the new integrated deterrence concept—all themes explored in this study. However, it is not yet clear how BPC programs and activities of security cooperation and security force assistance will adapt to meet the demands of this new concept. The forthcoming *NSS* and subsequent *NDS* will likely expound on these questions and clarify to some degree the components of integrated deterrence, but until then it is crucial to understand what the role of BPC is in deterrence now and how it is currently understood in order to design and implement integrated BPC deterrence strategies effectively.

B. BPC AND DETERRENCE

Nearly every study on deterrence that broaches the subject of BPC presents the two themes as contrasting alternatives between rival states, i.e., rival states can either deter one another or cooperate with each other in order to prevent aggression. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 *Joint Operations* places deterrence along the same spectrum as military engagement and security cooperation, which “develop local and regional situational awareness, build networks and relationships with partners, shape the OE [operational environment], keep day-to-day tensions between nations or groups below the threshold of armed conflict, and

⁵³ “Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Participates in Fullerton Lecture Series in Singapore.”

maintain U.S. global influence.”⁵⁴ But there is little to no scholarship on how BPC nests or aligns under deterrence theory as opposed to beside or co-equal with deterrence as an alternative. Furthermore, there is virtually no scholarship on the role of BPC in unconventional deterrence, apart from its deterrent value in special operations UW-themed exercises with partners.⁵⁵

1. Direct versus Enabling Means

The DOD’s 2006 *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept* (JOC) is the most robust document to detail how BPC can play a role in deterrence. It divides the “military means” of deterrence into two categories: direct and enabling.

Direct means include:

- Force Projection
- Active and Passive Defenses
- Global Strike (nuclear, conventional, and non-kinetic)
- Strategic Communication

Enabling means include:

- Global Situational Awareness
- Command and Control
- Forward Presence
- Security Cooperation, Military Integration, and Interoperability
- Deterrence Assessment, Metrics, and Experimentation⁵⁶

The *Deterrence Operations JOC* further outlines BPC’s contributions to denying benefits, imposing costs, and encouraging adversary restraint, which correspond with the three fundamental approaches of modern deterrence theory: “deterrence by denial,” “deterrence

⁵⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, JP 3-0 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2017), xvii, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0ch1.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-160457-910.

⁵⁵ Bryan Groves and Steve Ferenzi, “Unconventional Deterrence in Europe: The Role of Army Special Operations in Competition Today,” Real Clear Defense, last modified April 16, 2020, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/04/16/unconventional_deterrence_in_europe_the_role_of_army_special_operations_in_competition_today_115207.html.

⁵⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2006), 6, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joc_deterrence.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162015-337.

by punishment,” and “deterrence through assurances or inducements.”⁵⁷ In 2014, the Atlantic Council published a report on the future of U.S. extended deterrence in Asia to 2025 which adapted the “military means” of the *Deterrence Operations* JOC into the “21st Century Deterrence Toolkit,” adding new direct means such as cyber and space and retaining security cooperation as an enabling means.⁵⁸

2. Security Cooperation versus Security Assistance

BPC literature does a marginally better job at describing the relationship between BPC and deterrence. JP 3-20 *Security Cooperation* places security cooperation and military engagement alongside deterrence on the low end of the range of military operations (ROMO), with LSCO on the high end.⁵⁹ One of the greatest challenges to reviewing the role of BPC in deterrence—and foreign policy in general—is both the broad definition of the term and vast network and “acronym soup” of interrelated terms and concepts.⁶⁰ For example, there are three official definitions for security cooperation, corresponding with the respective legal, policy, and doctrinal levels for the term (Title 10 of U.S. Code Chapter 16, DOD Directive 5132.03, and Joint Publication 3-20).⁶¹ The definitions are too extensive to list separately in this review, but each generally agrees on the primary purposes of security cooperation: “(A) To build and develop allied and friendly security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations. (B) To provide the armed forces with access to the foreign country during peacetime or a contingency operation. (C) To build

⁵⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, 35–36; Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 2–5.

⁵⁸ Robert A. Manning, *The Future of Us Extended Deterrence in Asia to 2025* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2014), 3, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/184441/Future_US_Ext_Det_in_Asia.pdf.

⁵⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Security Cooperation*, JP 3-20 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2017), II–8, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_20_20172305.pdf.

⁶⁰ See Figure 17 in Chapter VI for a visual depiction of BPC in relation to security sector assistance, security assistance, and security cooperation.

⁶¹ Armed Forces, 10 U.S.C. § 167 (1956); Office of the Under Secretary for Defense for Policy, *DOD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security Cooperation*, DOD Directive 5132.03 (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary for Defense for Policy, 2016), 17, https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodd/513203_dodd_2016.pdf; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Security Cooperation*, v.

relationships that promote specific United States security interests.”⁶² While these purposes make no explicit mention of deterrence, promoting U.S. security interests and developing partner capability for self-defense often entail deterrence of an adversary. Unfortunately, most of the literature leaves the reader to make this mental connection himself.

Further complicating the issue is the close association of security cooperation with security assistance and security sector assistance. Security assistance is widely understood as the greater governmental effort under DOS headship, whereas security cooperation is specific and exclusive to the DOD. But in fact, many of the DOD’s security cooperation activities and programs are actually in support of security assistance programs under DOS supervision, either through Title 10 or Title 22 authorities and funding. Thus, it is possible to refer to a specific activity or program as security cooperation when it is in reality DOD-administered security assistance. Another way to understand security cooperation is simply as security assistance under the auspices of Title 10 or the delegated authorities of the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).⁶³ For this reason, it is impossible to isolate security cooperation for discussion and analysis without understanding how it also supports and nests under security assistance.

With regard to security sector assistance (SSA), the only official description comes from Presidential Policy Directive 23 (PPD 23), where it appears to serve as an umbrella term for any and all U.S. government (USG) interactions with foreign security sectors, to include partner nations and international organizations.⁶⁴ The term does not appear in U.S. code as does security assistance and security cooperation, but government officials nevertheless utilize it when describing the combined activities or whole-of-government

⁶² Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, 41st ed. (Arlington, VA: Defense Security Cooperation University, 2021), 1–2, <https://www.dscu.mil/pages/resources/greenbook.aspx>.

⁶³ Nina M Serafino, *Security Assistance and Cooperation: Shared Responsibility of the Departments of State and Defense*, CRS Report No. R44444 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45091.pdf>.

⁶⁴ “Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy” (White House, 2013), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/05/fact-sheet-us-security-sector-assistance-policy>.

approach of the United States, and not necessarily any particular department or doctrine. Generally speaking, security assistance and security cooperation are the two sides that comprise the whole of SSA. Thus, it is more common to utilize one label or the other and reserve SSA for only the broadest possible terms. Officials also sometimes refer to SSA as security sector *reform*, but this term can carry negative connotations with foreign partners as they may not feel their security sectors are in need of reform.

3. BPC versus Train and Equip

Lastly, BPC can become muddled because it consists of multiple sub-sections of programs and activities, both official and unofficial, each with its own list of programs and funding sources. For example, there are three broad categories for “Train and Equip” programs, officially known as “Building Partner Capacity,” each corresponding to DOS-administered Title 22, DOD-administered Title 22, or DOD Title 10 BPC programs. However, the DOD tends to view BPC in much broader terms: “While Congress and the State Department tend to think of BPC as a relatively narrow foreign assistance tool, the DOD is *de facto* conceptualizing BPC as a strategy to address a broad range of challenges.”⁶⁵ There are other, less ambiguous categories such as operational support, defense institution building (DIB), international armaments cooperation (IAC), humanitarian assistance, education, exercises, contacts or military-to-military engagements, and exchanges.⁶⁶ But it is not immediately clear how to make sense of all these activities or how best to orchestrate them toward effective deterrence. As a RAND report noted, BPC is more a “term of art” than a specific program or activity.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ McInnis and Lucas, *What Is “Building Partner Capacity?”*, 15.

⁶⁶ Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, 41st ed. (Arlington, VA: Defense Security Cooperation University, 2021), 1–7–1–12, <https://www.dscu.mil/pages/resources/greenbook.aspx>.

⁶⁷ Christopher Paul et al., *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity and Under What Circumstances?*, MG-1253/1-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2013), 8, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1253z1.html>.

4. Security Force Assistance

Lastly, there is one noteworthy element of BPC that is typically under-valued when it comes to great power competition and deterrence strategies: SFA. SFA is not a security cooperation program or activity, but rather a method or approach to accomplishing many components of security cooperation. SFA is the set of activities that develop the “capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions.”⁶⁸ SFA activities often cut across the seams of security cooperation (Title 10) and security assistance (Title 22) programs and authorities.⁶⁹ In some respects, SFA can be a broader activity than security cooperation or BPC in that it functions throughout the range of military operations, from competition to conflict to stability operations. Therefore, SFA may be the more appropriate convergence point within the realm of SSA for the DOD to conduct unconventional deterrence—utilizing the SFA expertise and doctrine of SOF and other elements such as the Army’s new SFABs or the National Guard’s State Partnership Program (SPP). Like security cooperation, there is virtually no literature on the role of SFA in deterrence—either conventional or unconventional.

C. SUMMARY

In summary, the existing literature primarily treats BPC as an “enabling” or force-multiplying means of deterrence rather than having a prominent, “direct” role. BPC can entail any number or cross-section of security assistance, security cooperation, or SFA activities and programs and it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other. A 2015 Congressional Research Service (CRS) report defined BPC as simply “a term that refers to a broad set of missions, programs, activities, and authorities intended to improve the ability of other nations to achieve those security-oriented goals they share with the United States.”⁷⁰ Therefore, for the purposes of this study, BPC will signify *any program or activity under the umbrella of SSA that is conducted by the DOD or supporting agencies* unless otherwise delineated. One of the reasons there is scant literature on the role of BPC

⁶⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Security Cooperation*, GL-6.

⁶⁹ Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, 1–13.

⁷⁰ McInnis and Lucas, *What Is “Building Partner Capacity?”*

in deterrence may be because it is a counterintuitive conception. BPC is primarily about *improving partnerships* and *building relationships*, not *denying benefits* or *imposing costs*. Additionally, there is likely no literature because of the sensitive, diplomatic, and legal ramifications of this kind of strategy. BPC is most effective when it is transparent, mutual, and unclassified, not directed toward raising a guerrilla force or inciting insurgency or sabotage. This study will seek to inform this gap and provide an optimal model for the Joint Force and SOF to implement security cooperation and SFA in order to achieve unconventional deterrence in competition with adversarial great powers.

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III. ANALYSIS OF THE CROSS-STRAIT PROBLEM ENVIRONMENT

The cross-strait geopolitical and strategic environment is a living, dynamic system like all others. It constantly adapts and evolves as new events unfold. As Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen noted in a recent article for *Foreign Policy*, there are “new tensions and systemic contradictions.”⁷¹ Moreover, there is an extraordinary divergence of expert and public opinions, explanatory theories, and policy decisions that complicate the trajectory of its evolution, but there are also multiple themes and trends which continue to influence it in somewhat predictable ways. While it is beyond the scope of this study to identify *every* potential variable within the triangular security ecosystem of Taiwan, China, and the United States, this chapter provides the most essential and relevant contextual information in order for the reader to understand the system dynamics and deterrence strategies presented in the remainder of the study. In an attempt to provide a detailed and comprehensive understanding of this evolving environment and its potential trajectory, this chapter examines the “question” of Taiwan from five intersecting lenses: contemporary, historical, policy, strategic, and future prospects.

A. CONTEMPORARY LENS: CRISIS ON THE HORIZON?

Before looking at the historical background for how the cross-strait situation arrived at its current state, it is important to first frame and describe the current state as of December 2021 and identify some of the pressing implications moving into 2022 and beyond. The year 2021 will unquestionably be remembered as the year when tensions between China and Taiwan increased to their highest level in decades. Whether these tensions will continue to escalate or will deescalate in the coming years is yet to be seen. The situation is continually in flux.

Many commentators believe the approaching 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing are generating a dampening effect on Chinese foreign policy and that recent signs of aggression

⁷¹ Tsai Ing-wen, “Taiwan and the Fight for Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/taiwan/2021-10-05/taiwan-and-fight-democracy>.

toward Taiwan are largely symbolic of nationalist rhetoric. But after the Olympics—unfettered by the economic and political risks that greater aggression against Taiwan would engender—the rhetoric may intensify or it may dissipate naturally. Nationalism spiked in China after the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and there is little reason to suggest it will not do so again after the 2022 Olympics.⁷² And because China has prohibited foreign spectators from attending the 2022 Olympics, effectively circumventing any potential boycott, the games are set to become a “domestic—and domesticated—affair.”⁷³ Whatever the future holds, what is most remarkable about 2021 and the current period leading into 2022 is the *nature* of the nationalist rhetoric as well as the myriad assessments and warnings from high-profile experts including U.S. Congressmen, former and current U.S. flag and general officers, and senior Taiwan defense officials. Even smaller nations such as Lithuania have begun to push back against Chinese pressure, followed by delegations sent to Taiwan from France and the EU and the first British warship sailing through the Taiwan Strait in over a decade.⁷⁴

1. The Davidson Window

During a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on March 2, 2021, former National Security Advisor and retired Lieutenant General (LTG) H.R. McMaster addressed the panel regarding current global security challenges and strategy. As the discussion turned to China, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) questioned LTG (Ret.) McMaster concerning

⁷² Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing,” *International Security* 41, no. 3 (Winter 2016): 20, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/648306>.

⁷³ Gady Epstein, “China Avoids Olympic Protests by Banning Foreign Spectators,” *The Economist*, November 8, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2021/11/08/china-avoids-olympic-protests-by-banning-foreign-spectators>.

⁷⁴ Franklin D. Kramer and Hans Binnendijk, “The China-Lithuania Rift Is a Wake-Up Call for Europe,” *Foreign Policy*, last modified September 22, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/22/china-lithuania-taiwan-eu-nato/>; Erin Hale, “French Lawmakers Reach Out to Taiwan Despite Risk of Angering Beijing,” *VOA*, last modified October 22, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/french-lawmakers-reach-out-to-taiwan-despite-risk-of-angering-beijing/6281387.html>; Sarah Wu, “‘You Are Not Alone’: EU Parliament Delegation Tells Taiwan on First Official Visit,” *Reuters*, last modified November 4, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/you-are-not-alone-eu-parliament-delegation-tells-taiwan-first-official-visit-2021-11-04/>; Alex Wilson, “‘Insidious Intentions’: China Condemns UK Warship’s Trip Through Taiwan Strait,” *Stars and Stripes*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.stripes.com/branches/navy/2021-09-28/taiwan-strait-uk-royal-navy-hms-richmond-beijing-3048987.html>.

the threat of a cross-strait invasion of Taiwan: “How bad would it be for America’s security and our national interests if China went for the jugular in Taiwan, if China invaded and annexed Taiwan to the mainland?”⁷⁵ LTG (Ret.) McMaster replied that it would be “extremely costly for both sides” and that it is “the most significant flashpoint now that could lead to large-scale war.”⁷⁶ He went on to explain that president Xi Jinping believes China has a closing window of opportunity to annex the island, and after repressive actions in places such as Hong Kong and Xinjiang, “Taiwan is the next big prize.”⁷⁷ In his testimony, LTG (Ret.) McMaster alluded to a period of time for this closing window of opportunity—possibly after the conclusion of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing—but he gave no specific timeline.⁷⁸

Less than a week later in front of the same committee, the INDOPACOM commander Admiral (Adm.) Philip Davidson *did* provide a timeline for a potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait—which some commentators have since labeled the “Davidson Window.”⁷⁹ In his testimony, Adm. Davidson stated, “Taiwan is clearly one of [China’s] ambitions, and I think the threat is manifest during this decade, in fact, in the next six years.”⁸⁰ Like LTG (Ret.) McMaster, Adm. Davidson also believed that China’s actions in the region such as Hong Kong are “indicative that China’s pace is quickening, and we need to be postured to prevent that quickening from happening.”⁸¹

⁷⁵ *Global Security Challenges and Strategy: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, Senate, 117th Cong, 1st sess. (2021) (statement of H.R. McMaster).

⁷⁶ McMaster, testimony on *Global Security Challenges and Strategy*.

⁷⁷ McMaster, testimony on *Global Security Challenges and Strategy*.

⁷⁸ McMaster, testimony on *Global Security Challenges and Strategy*.

⁷⁹ Jerry Hendrix, “Closing the Davidson Window,” RealClearDefense, July 3, 2021, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/07/03/closing_the_davidson_window_784100.html.

⁸⁰ Davidson, *Hearing to Receive Testimony on United States Indo-Pacific Command in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2022 and the Future Years Defense Program: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, Senate, 117th Cong., 1st sess. (2021) (statement of Adm. Philip S. Davidson, INDOPACOM commander).

⁸¹ Davidson, testimony on *Hearing to Receive Testimony on United States Indo-Pacific Command*.

Two weeks later, the incoming INDOPACOM commander Adm. John Aquilino appeared before the same committee and Sen. Cotton questioned him if he agreed with Adm. Davidson’s assessment. Adm. Aquilino replied, “there are many numbers out there . . . there are spans from today to 2045. My opinion is this problem is much closer to us than most think,” adding that Taiwan is Beijing’s “number one priority.”⁸² He echoed LTG (Ret.) McMaster and Adm. Davidson’s concerns regarding the signs and indicators of a possible cross-strait conflict: “we have seen aggressive actions earlier than we anticipated, whether it be on the Indian border or whether it be in Hong Kong or whether it be against the Uyghurs. We have seen things that I do not think we expected, and that is why I continue to talk about a sense of urgency. We ought to be prepared today.”⁸³

From these three separate testimonies in the span of just one month, we gain a picture of the growing concern within the U.S. government (USG) and DOD regarding the prospect of a Chinese military action against Taiwan in the near future—a conflict which could embroil the United States and other regional actors such as Japan or the Philippines in a large-scale war with China. After seven decades of relative stability and coexistence between China and Taiwan, the risk of war has never been starker. From military incursions into the South and East China Seas (SCS & ECS) and Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ) to political repression in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and even Hollywood, the threshold for a Chinese attempt at forceful reunification of Taiwan is no longer as high as it once seemed. Beijing’s escalatory actions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and growing anti-Chinese sentiment or Sinophobia has now turned the world’s attention to see what China’s next move will be. And with the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing around the corner—recalling memories of Russia’s annexation of Crimea shortly after the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi—Taiwan is quickly coming off the back-burner of international consciousness and into the spotlight of geopolitics. The reality and gravity of a possible invasion scenario is leading many to describe Taiwan as one of the most precarious

⁸² *To Consider the Nomination of Admiral John C. Aquilino, USN, for Reappointment to the Grade of Admiral and to Be Commander, United States Indo-Pacific Command: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senate, 117th Cong., 1st sess. (2021)* (statement of Adm. John C. Aquilino, incoming INDOPACOM commander).

⁸³ Aquilino, testimony on *To Consider the Nomination of Admiral John C. Aquilino*.

flashpoints in the world today or—as the *Economist* magazine headlined in May 2021—“the most dangerous place on Earth.”⁸⁴

2. The Most Dangerous Place on Earth

Many security experts believe the Taiwan Strait is likely to become “ground zero” for competition or conflict between the United States and China.⁸⁵ A flashpoint over Taiwan could swiftly descend the region into high-end—potentially nuclear—conflict and could precipitate conflict in other regions. But Taiwan is not just the most dangerous place on earth, militarily speaking. War would also disrupt global trade, international institutions and norms, and even domains that we have come to take for granted such as space and cyberspace.⁸⁶ In other words, war in the Taiwan Strait could fundamentally alter the current international world order. As the *Economist* article framed the problem, “If the [U.S.] Seventh Fleet failed to turn up, China would overnight become the dominant power in Asia. America’s allies around the world would know that they could not count on it. Pax Americana would collapse.”⁸⁷

Moreover, because of Taiwan’s unique geopolitical status, there is no readily identifiable mechanism in the international space to mitigate the risk. Taiwan is not a member within multinational organizations specifically designed to deconflict or liaise between nations regarding international norms and standards, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) or World Health Organization (WHO). Taiwan is not even recognized by the organization specifically created to prevent another world war: the

⁸⁴ “The Most Dangerous Place on Earth,” *The Economist*, May 1, 2021, 7, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/05/01/the-most-dangerous-place-on-earth>.

⁸⁵ Jiachen Shi, “Will US-China Tensions Trigger the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis?,” *Modern Diplomacy*, last modified July 29, 2021, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/07/29/will-us-china-tensions-trigger-the-fourth-taiwan-strait-crisis/>.

⁸⁶ For example, the *Economist* highlights how Taiwan is home to the semiconductor industry’s leading chipmaker, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC), which produces 84% of the world’s most advanced microchips on the island. If an invasion were to interrupt or destroy TSMC production in Taiwan, it would bring the global electronics industry to a halt, “at incalculable cost. The firm’s technology and know-how are perhaps a decade ahead of its rivals.”

⁸⁷ *The Economist*, “The Most Dangerous Place on Earth,” 7.

United Nations (UN).⁸⁸ Taiwan has not held a seat at the UN since 1971, when member states voted it out to accommodate for the entry of the PRC. Perhaps the United States and other nations have recently acknowledged this glaring deficiency. In October 2021, Washington and Taipei discussed how Taiwan may “meaningfully” participate in the UN, with Secretary of State Anthony Blinken proclaiming in a press release that it is “not a political issue, but a pragmatic issue.” Predictably, this suggestion drew the ire of Beijing; a spokesperson for the PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office reminded the world that Taiwan “has no right to join the United Nations.”⁸⁹ Secretary Blinken appealed to the value of including Taiwan as a “stakeholder” to help address global challenges—such as COVID-19—but he made no allusion to the reality that Taiwan could be the spark of another world war, one which could draw a large swathe of UN member states into conflict against one of the UN’s permanent security council members: the PRC.⁹⁰ If such a conflict were to ignite, how would the UN continue to function in any meaningful way?

3. Strait of Emergency?

In recent months, tensions across the Strait have escalated significantly. In a four-day stretch in early October 2021, 149 People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) aircraft entered Taiwan’s ADIZ to the southwest, including a record number of 56 in one day alone. The aircraft included 34 J-16 fighters and 12 nuclear-capable H-6 bombers.⁹¹ In the past, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) have conducted missile tests and flown aircraft into Taiwan’s airspace multiple times over the years as an overt means of political

⁸⁸ Samuel Teixeira, “If America Wants to Prioritize Peace, It Must Formally Recognize Taiwan,” *The National Interest*, October 17, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/if-america-wants-prioritize-peace-it-must-formally-recognize-taiwan-195135>.

⁸⁹ Agence France-Presse, “Taiwan Has No Right to Join United Nations: China,” VOA, last modified October 27, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taiwan-has-no-right-to-join-united-nations-china/6287358.html>.

⁹⁰ United States Department of State, “Supporting Taiwan’s Participation in the UN System,” press release, October 26, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/supporting-taiwans-participation-in-the-un-system/>.

⁹¹ Jiachen Shi, “Record Number of China Planes Enter Taiwan Air Defence Zone,” BBC News, last modified October 5, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58794094>.

signaling to the people and authorities of Taiwan.⁹² Beijing typically coincides these incursions with meaningful dates, such as the anniversary of the PRC or Taiwan’s National Day, or just prior to Taiwan elections, as it did prior to national elections in 1996 leading to the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. China also conducts these flights to signal opposition when U.S. officials meet with Taiwan counterparts either in Taipei or Washington. But there has been a noticeable uptick in missile tests and overflights since early 2020, at least since the reelection of Taiwan’s incumbent president, Tsai Ing-wen. Aggressive signaling from Beijing increased even more after President Trump sent a high-level delegation to Taiwan in September 2020, including Undersecretary of State Keith Krach—the highest-level State visit since 1979.⁹³ Since that trip, China has flown into Taiwan’s zone approximately twenty days out of every month, a percentage much higher than in the past.⁹⁴ But the overflights in October eclipsed all previous signals from Beijing (667 incursions thus far in 2021 as opposed to 380 in all of 2020) leading some to suggest the situation is on the verge of becoming a *Fourth* Taiwan Strait Crisis (after the First in 1954–55, Second in 1958, and Third in 1996).⁹⁵ In the aftermath of the incident, there was a substantial flurry of reports and op-eds attempting to explain the increased aggression of the PLA and predict Beijing’s intentions. As of the writing of this thesis, online opinions are still proliferating. The international attention became so intense that for period of time

⁹² PLA aircraft typically used to conduct the majority of their exercises in the ECS. But since 2018 they have gradually shifted to the southwest airspace of Taiwan. Taiwan’s *CommonWealth* magazine published an interactive website graphically depicting the PLA’s incursions and multiple statistics from October 2020 to October 2021—including the type and number of aircraft per day, day versus night exercises, and an analysis of the geostrategic value of the southwestern airspace of Taiwan versus the airspace in the ECS. Silva Shih et al., “Why the Chinese Military Has Increased Activity Near Taiwan,” *CommonWealth Magazine*, last modified November 2, 2021, <https://web.cw.com.tw/taiwan-strait-2021-en/index.html>.

⁹³ Michael Mink, “The Catalyst for Stronger US-Taiwan Ties: How Frm. Under Secretary of State Krach Became ‘Taiwan’s Number One Friend,’” *Keith Krach* (blog), last modified January 2, 2021, <https://keithkrach.com/the-catalyst-for-stronger-us-taiwan-ties/>.

⁹⁴ Fred Kaplan, “How Close Did Chinese Warplanes Really Get to Taiwan?,” *Slate*, October 6, 2021, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2021/10/chinese-military-taiwan-airspace.html>.

⁹⁵ Lara Seligman and Paul McLeary, “Mounting Tensions Between U.S., China Raise New Fears of Threat to Taiwan,” *POLITICO*, last modified October 5, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/10/05/tensions-us-china-taiwan-515142>.

it spurred a kind of “invasion panic” in Washington, as a *Foreign Affairs* article entitled “Strait of Emergency?” suggested.⁹⁶

Over the past few years, there have been disturbing signs that Beijing is losing confidence in the viability of a peaceful solution to the “question” of Taiwan. Crackdowns on pro-democratic protests in Hong Kong and heavy-handed restrictions of speech and movements during the COVID-19 outbreak all point to a growing wariness of internal instability for the CCP and impatience with domestic threats to sovereignty—Taiwan being chief among them. Nationalism is also a rising concern. M. Taylor Fravel notes that states are more likely to resort to force when the issue involves territory they value greatly.⁹⁷ For Xi Jinping, China may be “less able or willing to compromise in public, especially on territorial issues or other matters that are rooted in national sentiment, for fear that it would harm his political position.”⁹⁸ Chinese citizens expect the government to respond to bullying abroad, which is commensurate to the CCP’s desire to be able to use its military in support of foreign policy and security issues—something which it has not been able to do in the past. According to leading China affairs expert, David Lampton, “Beijing was incapable of doing much to assist and generally had to stand by as disasters unfolded. Today’s Chinese leaders will have decreasing ability to stand idly by, and they are acquiring logistical and strike capabilities that increasingly will give them options.”⁹⁹ There is also a convergence between China’s growing military capability and its growing assertiveness and pressure to show a strong hand on the issue of Taiwan. “Whereas Chinese leaders used to view a military campaign to take the island as a fantasy, now they consider

⁹⁶ Rachel Esplin Odell et al., “Strait of Emergency?,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-08-09/strait-emergency>.

⁹⁷ M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 14–16.

⁹⁸ Robert D. Blackwell and Kurt M. Campbell, *Xi Jinping on the Global Stage: Chinese Foreign Policy Under a Powerful but Exposed Leader*, Special Report No. 74 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2016), 4.

⁹⁹ David M. Lampton, *Following the Leader: Ruling China, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 162–63.

it a real possibility.”¹⁰⁰ Sooner or later, China’s military superiority may tempt it to change the status quo. In July 2021, during a speech in Tiananmen Square on the 100th anniversary of the CCP, Xi Jinping rearticulated all of these themes and delivered a pointed warning: “we will never allow any foreign force to bully, oppress, or subjugate us. Anyone who would attempt to do so will find their *heads bashed bloody* against a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people. [emphasis added]”¹⁰¹

From Taipei’s lens, the situation grows progressively starker. Immediately following China’s incursions into its ADIZ in October 2021, Taiwan’s Minister of Defense Chiu Kuo-cheng warned that China will have the capability to invade Taiwan by 2025 and that the situation “is really the most dangerous I have seen in my more than 40 years in the military.”¹⁰² Perhaps the “Kuo-cheng Window” will prove to be a more prescient time horizon than the slightly longer “Davidson Window.” Regardless, the United States, Taiwan, and international partners must quickly surmount the steep learning curve of Taiwan’s peculiar predicament in order to develop and implement effective deterrence strategies in time.

B. HISTORICAL LENS: CIVIL WAR INTERRUPTED

1. A Geopolitical Anomaly

The “question” of Taiwan is one of the most challenging geopolitical phenomena in modern history. Since the cessation of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 and founding of the PRC under Mao Zedong, leaders in Beijing have invariably placed reunification of

¹⁰⁰ Oriana Skylar Mastro, “The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-03/china-taiwan-war-temptation>.

¹⁰¹ The official English translation released by the CCP altered the translation to “Anyone who would attempt to do so will *find themselves on a collision course with...*” Ben Westcott and Steven Jiang, “Foreign Countries That ‘Bully’ China Will Meet a ‘Great Wall of Steel,’ Says Xi,” CNN, last modified July 1, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/01/china/ccp-100-beijing-china-xi-celebration-intl-hnk/index.html>; Annabelle Timsit, “Read Xi Jinping’s Full Speech from the 100th Anniversary of the Communist Party,” Quartz, last modified July 1, 2021, <https://qz.com/2028306/xi-jinping-speech-transcript-for-the-ccps-100th-anniversary/>.

¹⁰² Jordyn Haime, “Mainland China Invasion? Taiwan Residents Aren’t Worried,” SupChina, last modified October 7, 2021, <https://supchina.com/2021/10/07/mainland-china-invasion-most-taiwan-residents-arent-worried/>.

Taiwan as one of their top policy objectives. But for more than 70 years, China and Taiwan have avoided war. Both governments “agree” that the mainland and island are inalienable parts of one sovereign state—an agreement known as the “1992 Consensus”—but they disagree on which of them is the legitimate ruling authority of that sovereign state. This is known as the “One-China policy.” Since its inception, China has employed “wolf warrior diplomacy” to compel other nations to adopt the “One-China policy” and officially recognize either Beijing or Taipei as the sovereign authority, but not both. In 1979, during negotiations to incorporate Hong Kong into the mainland, Chinese Leader Deng Xiaoping introduced the “one country, two systems” principle to allow Hong Kong to retain its economic, legal, and administrative systems while stipulating that Beijing exercise all diplomatic and military authority. China also extended the principle as an olive branch to Macau and Taiwan as a model for “peaceful coexistence.”¹⁰³ Hong Kong and Macau officially adopted the principle in 1997 and 1999, respectively, and became Special Administrative Regions (SAR) of China. But Taiwan has consistently refused the proposal, irrespective of the political party in office or special provisions extended by Beijing such as the preservation of Taiwan’s military. In light of recent escalation and legal vitiation in Hong Kong, the “one country, two systems” principle has increasingly become a siren’s song for Taiwan just as it becomes increasingly null and void for Hong Kong.

2. The Chinese Civil War

It is important to note that at the heart of cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan is a civil war that has never officially concluded.¹⁰⁴ Officially, the Chinese Civil War lasted from 1927 to 1949—with a break during WWII to fight the Japanese—after which the ROC’s Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government, led by generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, fled to Taiwan. In the ensuing years, the PRC and PLA under Mao Zedong prepared an invasion plan for the island and began amassing troops on the

¹⁰³ “A Policy of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ on Taiwan” (Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China), accessed August 8, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18027.shtml.

¹⁰⁴ Wes O’Donnell, “Would the U.S. Get Involved in a War Between China and Taiwan?,” In Homeland Security, last modified July 16, 2020, <https://inlandsecurity.com/would-the-us-get-involved-in-a-war-between-china-and-taiwan/>.

mainland coast. But they were interrupted by the UN Command's attack across the 38th parallel into North Korea in 1950—led by the United States. Mao redirected the PLA forces that were earmarked for Taiwan and mobilized them to the North Korean border in order to counterattack and repel the combined UN-US force. Although Chinese and North Korean forces were successful in pushing back the allied forces, many historians argue that the Korean War—together with President Truman's order to sail the Navy's 7th Fleet into the Taiwan Strait in 1950 as a containment strategy—forced China to lose the initiative and momentum in reunifying Taiwan, resulting in a stalemate between the two and the creation of a geopolitical quagmire. In many ways, the seven-decade stalemate between China and Taiwan is entwined with the other seven-decade stalemate on the Korean peninsula, with the United States at the center of both and the fate of the region held in the balance. Neither party signed an armistice and the resultant status quo between China and Taiwan is technically still one of civil war. The means and time horizon for the war have just shifted. Thus, the goal of deterring China is not to prevent the *onset* of war, but rather to prevent the *conclusion* of it. This realization is at the heart of the CCP's goal of "national rejuvenation." Taiwan is unfinished business. Therefore, the United States must come to appreciate this dynamic and understand that Chinese containment and deterrence strategies are ultimately only stop-gap solutions. True resolution can only be achieved through compellence toward peace. Traditionally, states employ compellence to shore-up and reinforce deterrence, but in the Taiwan Strait, deterrence must set the conditions for effective compellence of both sides toward peaceful resolution of the civil war.

3. PRC-Taiwan Relations

Beginning in the early 2000s, Beijing began to refine its foreign policy by outlining various "core" interests, of which Taiwan remained a top priority. According to the PRC's landmark 2011 white paper on peaceful development, China's core interests include "state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, and national reunification."¹⁰⁵ The "question" of Taiwan is entwined in each of these interests, as Defense Minister Wei

¹⁰⁵ The People's Republic of China, "China's Peaceful Development" (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, September 7, 2011), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/whitepaper_665742/t856325.shtml.

Fenghe affirmed in October, 2019: “Resolving the Taiwan question” is “China’s greatest national interest.”¹⁰⁶ In addition, when speaking with President Trump in 2017, PRC President Xi Jinping declared Taiwan to be the “most important and sensitive issue” in PRC-U.S. relations.¹⁰⁷ And recently in August 2021, Taiwan was the only topic *directly* addressed by the PRC’s newly appointed ambassador to the United States during his first meeting with the State Department.¹⁰⁸ Taiwan is the single most predominant and longest-lasting point of contention between China and the United States at every bilateral engagement since 1949. Other disputes have arisen over the years, but the “question” of Taiwan has always remained simmering in the background.

In October 2021, during an address in Beijing on the anniversary of the revolution to overthrow the last imperial dynasty in 1911, President Xi Jinping spoke of the “glorious tradition” of opposing separatism and vowed to achieve “peaceful reunification” of Taiwan. Xi asserted that “Taiwan independence separatism is the biggest obstacle to achieving the reunification of the motherland, and the most serious hidden danger to national rejuvenation,” adding that “no one should underestimate the Chinese people’s staunch determination, firm will, and strong ability to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The historical task of the complete reunification of the motherland must be fulfilled, and will definitely be fulfilled.”¹⁰⁹ Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen responded the following day during a ceremony marking Taiwan’s National Day and in the wake of China’s record number of incursions into Taiwan’s airspace: “There should be absolutely no illusions that the Taiwanese people will bow to pressure.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Blanchard, “China’s Defence Minister Says Resolving ‘Taiwan Question’ Is National Priority.”

¹⁰⁷ White House, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America” (Washington, DC: White House, 2015), <http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015.pdf>.

¹⁰⁸ Reuters, “China’s New U.S. Envoy Stresses Importance of Taiwan in First High-Level Meeting,” Reuters, last modified August 13, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-new-us-envoy-stresses-importance-taiwan-first-high-level-meeting-2021-08-13/>.

¹⁰⁹ Adela Suliman, “China’s Xi Vows Peaceful ‘Unification’ with Taiwan, Days After Sending a Surge of Warplanes Near the Island,” *Washington Post*, October 9, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/10/09/china-xi-taiwan-unification-speech/>.

¹¹⁰ Annabelle Timsit, “Taiwanese President Responds to Xi’s Call for Peaceful Reunification: Island Will Not ‘Bow to Pressure,’” *Washington Post*, October 10, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/10/10/taiwan-china-reunification-tsai-ing-wen/>.

4. PRC Levers of Influence

To uphold its core interests with regard to Taiwan, Beijing maintains many levers of influence to constrain Taiwan's international space—typically employed in the “gray zone” below the threshold of armed conflict. China is increasingly employing a strategy of “combination warfare”—itself an asymmetric approach first conceived by Sun Tzu to “mix and match” combinations of warfare such as Colonels Qiao Ling and Wang Xiansui's “unrestricted warfare” or the “three warfares” (psychological, public opinion, and legal warfare or “lawfare”) set forth by the PLA in 2003 as “political work regulations” to undermine opposition without firing a shot.¹¹¹ The central strategy against Taiwan is to combine “ten thousand methods combined as One” from military, non-military, and above-military forms of war to “overwhelm others by assaulting them in as many domains or spheres of activity as possible.”¹¹²

- **Diplomatic:** Beijing wages an aggressive “wolf warrior” diplomatic campaign aimed at dissuading international support for and recognition of Taiwan. Only 13 out of 193 UN member states recognize Taiwan (Nicaragua recently changed diplomatic recognition in December 2021), as well as the Holy See in the Vatican. Beijing also consistently blocks any resolution for Taiwan to be included in any international institution in which China is also a member, such as the UN, World Health Organization (WHO), and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).¹¹³

¹¹¹ Peter Mattis, “China's ‘Three Warfares’ in Perspective,” War on the Rocks, last modified January 30, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>.

¹¹² Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare, Assumptions on War and Tactics in the Age of Globalization* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999), 199; James Callard and Peter Faber, “An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2002): 62–63.

¹¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Diplomatic Allies,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of China (Taiwan), accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.mofa.gov.tw/en/AlliesIndex.aspx?n=DF6F8F246049F8D6&sms=A76B7230ADF29736>.

- **Political:** Beijing regularly attempts to drive a wedge between the various political parties in Taipei, primarily between the pro-independence leaning Democratic People’s Party (DPP) and the anti-independence leaning KMT party. Beijing regularly attempts to interfere in elections and conducts sweeping disinformation campaigns to sway the populace toward or against specific candidates. In 2018, for example, Beijing orchestrated the election of a favorable KMT candidate as the mayor of Kaohsiung, Taiwan’s second largest city, by manipulating social media opinion.¹¹⁴
- **Informational/Psychological:** Beijing seeks to erode Taiwan’s alleged sovereignty and engages in a consistent propaganda campaign to undermine the will of Taiwan, employing “media warfare” or “public opinion warfare” to pressure and influence the populace to oppose independence and accept reunification. Beijing also directs a “united front” network of key influencers to target and pressure Taiwanese businesses and individuals with both carrots and sticks.¹¹⁵ These methods are strategies to “win without fighting” by making forceful means ultimately unnecessary.¹¹⁶
- **Cyber:** Beijing uses Taiwan as a test-bed for intrusive and offensive cyber technologies, including those it later uses against other targets, such as the United States. China also steals electronic and corporate information.
- **Espionage:** Former Taiwanese officials now travel to China for business regularly and in great numbers. China persuades, and in some cases

¹¹⁴ Grant Newsham, “Wake Up: China Is Engaging in Media Warfare Against Taiwan,” *The National Interest*, October 23, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/wake-china-engaging-media-warfare-against-taiwan-195477>.

¹¹⁵ Brendon Hong, “China’s Real Invasion of Taiwan Has Already Started,” *The Daily Beast*, last modified October 28, 2020, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/chinas-real-invasion-of-taiwan-has-already-started-through-the-united-front>.

¹¹⁶ Newsham, “Wake Up.”

coerces, some former officials to collect sensitive information from those still active in Taiwan's government.

- **Economic:** In hopes of persuading Taiwan of the benefits of “peaceful reunification” with the mainland, Beijing has pursued an agenda to increase economic, social, and cultural ties with Taiwan.¹¹⁷ Taiwan now has extensive economic connections with the mainland, so much so that China has become Taiwan's largest trading partner.¹¹⁸ Taiwanese leaders have expressed concerns that Beijing will leverage these linkages to further coerce Taiwan into trading its sovereignty for economic stability. Beijing also offers economic inducements to other countries in exchange for adherence to the “One China” policy.
- **Legal:** Beijing exploits legal inconsistencies and loopholes to wage legal warfare or “lawfare” in order to further isolate and surround Taiwan in the international space. Beijing skillfully exploits the laws and policies of other nations in order to tie their hands against taking any action in support of Taiwan. Beijing regularly appeals to the “Three Communiques” which it signed jointly with the United States in order to condemn Washington's interference with its “domestic” issues with Taiwan and discredit Washington's trustworthiness on the international stage.
- **Military:** Apart from a full-scale invasion, there are a multitude of ways in which the PLA can and does influence Taiwan. Beijing applies creeping normalization to its military coercion operations against Taiwan. The habitual encroachment of the Taiwan's ADIZ and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as well as regular circumnavigation of the island by PLA Navy (PLAN) ships and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) aircraft—including

¹¹⁷ Mastro, “The Taiwan Temptation.”

¹¹⁸ “Taiwan - Market Overview,” International Trade Administration, last modified September 24, 2020, <http://www.trade.gov/knowledge-product/taiwan-market-overview>.

nuclear-capable platforms—provides a poignant reminder of increasing PLA capability and also normalizes the presence of these systems in new areas. These threats menace the Taiwanese population and authorities and erodes the ability to reliably detect indicators of a potential PLA kinetic strike against Taiwan. Beijing also continues to construct bases on disputed islands in the SCS just below Taiwan and regularly deploys its People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) and Chinese People’s Armed Police Force Coast Guard Corps (PAPCGC) into the East China Sea to the north of Taiwan. Moreover, in 2013 Beijing declared an ADIZ over the ECS which overlaps with the zones of other nations, including Taiwan.¹¹⁹

In addition to these strategies of “combination warfare,” “unrestricted warfare,” and “three warfares” below the threshold of armed conflict, China’s economic rise has financed a dramatic military modernization program. As a result, Taiwan has lost its long-held military advantage and power parity with the PLA in a potential conflict.¹²⁰ This power asymmetry grows starker as the PLA continues to grow in size and capability relative to the Taiwan military. A 2019 unclassified report from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessed that,

Beijing’s longstanding interest to eventually compel Taiwan’s reunification with the mainland and deter any attempt by Taiwan to declare independence has served as the primary driver for China’s military modernization. Beijing’s anticipation that foreign forces would intervene in a Taiwan

¹¹⁹ Arthur L. Slusher and John B. Waits, “The SFAB and Near-Peer Competitors,” Concept Paper (Fort Meade, MD: U.S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group, March 2, 2020); Asymmetric Operations Working Group, *Cross-Strait Asymmetric Warfare, Phase 1: Understanding the Threat* (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2015).

¹²⁰ Tanner Greer, “Taiwan’s Defense Strategy Doesn’t Make Military Sense,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 17, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/taiwan/2019-09-17/taiwans-defense-strategy-doesnt-make-military-sense>; William S. Murray, “Revisiting Taiwan’s Defense Strategy,” *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 3 (2008): 13–38, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1814&context=nwc-review>.

scenario led the PLA to develop a range of systems to deter and deny foreign regional force projection.¹²¹

Very rarely in world history has a single nation grown so quickly in so many different areas of national influence. This unparalleled development presents a unique set of questions for the United States, yet Taiwan remains consistently at the center of Sino-U.S. relations and competition.¹²²

5. U.S.-Taiwan Relations

The U.S.-Taiwan relationship has fluctuated and evolved significantly since 1949, but Washington's primary policy objectives regarding Taiwan have remained largely consistent: to ensure the future of Taiwan is resolved peacefully in order to maintain peace and stability in the region, to resist any attempts of force or coercion that would jeopardize the security or survival of Taiwan, and to demonstrate what former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development (DASD(SFD)) Elbridge Colby refers to as America's "differentiated credibility" and resolve to partners and allies in Asia.¹²³ The democratization of Taiwan has further accentuated each of these objectives and led to a delicate balancing act in the trilateral relationship structure with China and Taiwan as the United States seeks to avoid entrapment in a costly cross-strait war.¹²⁴ For this reason, the most sensitive area in Sino-American relations is the "dual-deterrence" of China and Taiwan: deterring China from forcefully annexing Taiwan and simultaneously

¹²¹ Defense Intelligence Agency, *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win*, DIA-02-1706-085 (Washington, DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019), 33, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military_Powers_Publications/China_Military_Power_FIN_AL_5MB_20190103.pdf.

¹²² Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*, Fourth edition (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 5.

¹²³ Steven M. Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 1st ed. (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015), 24; Taiwan Relations Act; Daniel Larison, "Why Colby's Strategy of Denial Is Aggression Packaged as 'Management,'" *Responsible Statecraft*, last modified September 24, 2021, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/09/24/why-colbys-strategy-of-denial-is-aggression-packaged-as-management/>.

¹²⁴ Steven Goldstein suggests the United States is caught in a paradox of attempting to avoid entrapment while not undermining Taiwan's morale to defend itself or providing an impetus for China to attack. Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 25.

detering Taiwan from attempting to retake the mainland or—in more recent times—from declaring “independence” as a sovereign nation.

Washington’s relationship with the ROC government began when it formed in 1912 following the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. Relations remained limited until 1940, when President Roosevelt approved economic aid to China and began to support Chiang Kai-shek against Japanese occupation forces in China and Manchuria—with Mao Zedong’s National Revolutionary Army temporarily joining forces with Chiang’s Chinese National Army. The United States maintained official relations with Chiang’s government after the war and through the remainder of the Chinese Civil War. When the ROC fled to Taiwan, the United States continued to recognize it as the legitimate government of China until 1972, when it then established diplomatic relations with Beijing under President Nixon and entered a period of détente and rapprochement with the PRC. Washington signed a series of three joint statements with Beijing known as the “Three Communiques,” wherein it switched official recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979.

Prior to 1979, Washington maintained an embassy in Taipei and held a mutual defense pact with the ROC—the Sino-American Defense Treaty.¹²⁵ The United States created a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Taipei and established the U.S. Taiwan Defense Command (USTDC) consisting of 30,000 U.S. forces and advisors. In 1954–1955 and 1958 the United States responded militarily to repel Chinese aggression against Taiwan in what are now known as the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises. However, in 1979 the United States ceased to formally recognize Taiwan or maintain official diplomatic relations with Taipei. Washington removed its embassy and withdrew all military forces from the island. President Carter terminated the mutual defense treaty with Taiwan, but in an effort to reassure pro-Taiwan constituencies and preserve relations with Taiwan, Congress signed into law the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979. It carried some of the content from the Sino-American Defense Treaty but used the terminology “governing authorities of Taiwan” instead of “Republic of China.” In place of an embassy,

¹²⁵ Formally known as the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China.

the TRA authorized the establishment of a nonprofit organization in Taipei under the auspices of the U.S. government to manage its interests: the American Institute of Taiwan (AIT). The TRA governs the interactions between the United States and Taiwan, allowing the United States to maintain commercial, cultural, and other non-diplomatic forms of exchange with Taiwan. But most importantly, the TRA does not explicitly articulate whether or not the United States would come to the defense of Taiwan. This has translated into a U.S. policy of deliberate “strategic ambiguity” regarding a potential conflict between China and Taiwan. Washington has made no pledge to defend Taiwan, but the TRA allows for security assistance and cooperation with Taiwan by declaring the United States, “will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capacity” as determined by the President and the Congress.¹²⁶ This provision builds-in ambiguity by leaving much to interpretation. It is deliberately unclear what constitutes “defense articles and defense services” that are “necessary” or “sufficient” for self-defense. Historically, security assistance and cooperation with Taiwan has centered around foreign military sales (FMS) of prestigious, high-value weapons systems, but it has also included bilateral engagements, military observation and advisory support, and shows of force in the region, including frequent U.S. Navy freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS). These actions serve to deter a potential Chinese invasion without obliging the United States to become a combatant if deterrence fails. U.S. engagement strategy, therefore, “largely focuses on improving [Taiwan’s] war fighting functions through improved individual and small unit training and exercises.”¹²⁷

6. Critique of U.S.-Taiwan Relations

Western defense experts and commentators have long criticized Taiwan’s penchant for expensive weapons, given the PLA’s apparent and growing overmatch vis-à-vis Taiwan. Taiwan’s leaders have opted for such purchases in part to show mainland and

¹²⁶ Taiwan Relations Act, Pub. L. No. 96–8, § 3, 93 Stat. 14 (1979), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/2479>. § 3, 93 Stat. 15.

¹²⁷ US Asymmetric Warfare Group, “AWG Phase I Conventional Break-Out Discussion Review: Outcomes and Observations” (US Army Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2018).

international audiences that it maintains a “modern” military and to demonstrate national resolve to its own populace. Instead, some argue Taiwan would benefit from a more decentralized, “porcupine” strategy whereby it makes the prospect of an invasion very costly to the PLA by hardening its defenses “to make itself indigestible,” as LTG (Ret.) McMaster recommended to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2021.¹²⁸ By purchasing a higher volume of less expensive systems, such as anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) and man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS)—similar to those provided by the United States in the 1980s to the Mujahadeen guerillas in Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War—the advantage would be threefold. First, it would produce a more potent deterrent against invasion. Second, should deterrence fail, it would be more difficult for the PLA to destroy a large number of small, portable systems widely dispersed throughout the dense urban terrain of Taiwan’s cities than it would be a smaller number of larger, high-profile items such as tanks or fighter jets.. Third, it might allow Taiwan to resist an invasion longer, perhaps buying time and space for its allies and the larger international community to intervene.¹²⁹ In this way, a “porcupine” strategy could morph into a “poison pill” or “poison frog” strategy, whereby Taiwanese resistance prohibits China from consolidating any gains from the annexation of the island.¹³⁰ Taiwan has shown some shift in this direction. In its last arms purchase from the United States, worth \$2.25 billion, \$250 million was allocated for MANPADS (the remaining \$2 billion was for Abrams tanks.)¹³¹ And in late 2020, the United States approved a potential \$7 billion arms

¹²⁸ McMaster, testimony on *Global Security Challenges and Strategy*.

¹²⁹ Greer, “Taiwan’s Defense Strategy Doesn’t Make Military Sense”; William S. Murray, “Revisiting Taiwan’s Defense Strategy.”

¹³⁰ Chris Dougherty, Jennie Matuschak, and Hunter, Ripley, *The Poison Frog Strategy: Preventing a Chinese Fait Accompli Against Taiwanese Islands* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2021), https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/TaiwanWargameReport_Formatted-1-1.pdf?mtime=20211025143441&focal=none.

¹³¹ Greer, “Taiwan’s Defense Strategy Doesn’t Make Military Sense.”

sale to Taiwan—the largest of its kind to date—including cruise missiles, sea mines, and \$400 million worth of MQ-9B Reaper drones.¹³²

Furthermore, Taiwan’s parliament recently approved a \$17 billion defense budget for 2022—the largest to date. It is a 5% increase from the previous year and accounts for 2.3% of Taiwan’s GDP. The budget will reportedly pay for new air defense missiles for the Taiwan Navy’s six Kang Ding-class frigates, four MQ-9B armed drones, \$1.4 billion will also go towards new fighter jets, likely F-16s.¹³³ Taiwan’s parliament also approved an additional \$9 billion special budget over the next five years. The majority of the funds will reportedly pay for indigenous long-range and anti-ship missiles, as well as the construction of Taiwanese manufactured warships, to include new “carrier killer” missile corvettes, landing ships, and diesel-electric submarines.¹³⁴ But the PLAN fleet has over 170 frigates, cruisers, corvettes, and destroyers against Taiwan’s 28, which are much older than the PLAN’s.¹³⁵ Up-arming six “carrier killers” will likely only make them a larger target for the PLA.

C. THEORETICAL LENS: THUCYDIDES AND REALPOLITIK

Many political science experts and international relations (IR) theorists have drawn anecdotes from history to help elucidate the present situation. Beginning in 2012, political scientist Graham Allison drew insightful parallels from the ancient Greek historian Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War*.¹³⁶ In his subsequent book in 2017:

¹³² Gordon Lubold and Nancy A. Youssef, “U.S. Set to Sell Taiwan \$7 Billion in Arms,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 2020, sec. Politics, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-set-to-sell-taiwan-7-billion-in-arms-11600287102>.

¹³³ Reuters, “Taiwan Plans to Spend \$1.4 Billion on New Fighter Jets,” CNN, last modified August 26, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/26/asia/taiwan-defense-spending-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹³⁴ Ben Blanchard and Yimou Lee, “Taiwan Plans \$9 Bln Boost in Arms Spending, Warns of ‘Severe Threat,’” *Reuters*, last modified September 16, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-proposes-extra-87-bln-defence-spending-over-5-years-2021-09-16/>.

¹³⁵ David Axe, “Taiwan Is Arming Itself to Beat a Chinese Invasion. Some New Weapons Are Better than Others.,” *Forbes*, last modified September 13, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2021/09/13/taiwan-is-arming-itself-to-beat-a-chinese-invasion-some-new-weapons-are-better-than-others/>.

¹³⁶ The Peloponnesian War was an ancient Greek war fought from 431 to 404 BC between two city-state alliances: the Delian League led by Athens and the Peloponnesian League led by Sparta.

Destined for War: Can China and the U.S. Escape Thucydides's Trap?, Allison noted the myriad parallels between the rise of Athens in the midst of Spartan hegemony and the rise of China in the face of long-standing U.S. hegemony today. The eponymous “Thucydides Trap” is now a common political science device used to describe the seeming inevitability of one rising power to go to war with an established great power—e.g., Athens versus Sparta. “When a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power, the resulting structural stress makes a violent clash the rule, not the exception.”¹³⁷ Thucydides’s words from the 5th century B.C. still echo true: “It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable.”¹³⁸ Recognizing this emerging dynamic between China and the United States, the 2018 *NDS* clearly asserts that “the most far-reaching objective of this defense strategy is to set the military relationship between our two countries on a path of transparency and non-aggression.”¹³⁹

1. The Modern Melian Dialogue

One of the most relevant case studies from Thucydides’s ancient account is the famous “Melian Dialogue,” which recounts the failed negotiations between Athens and the small island-nation of Melos—an ally with Sparta. In the account, Athenian envoys attempt to reason with the Melian magistrates that it is in their best interest to cede the island without conflict and renounce their colony alliance with Sparta. The Melians imprudently refuse and consequently suffer annihilation at the hands of the Athenians. This brief account from millennia ago bears striking similarities with modern day cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan and highlights the potential role of Taiwan in the Thucydides Trap theory. While many have come to view international relations between China and the United States through this binary lens, concluding that the two great powers “are currently on a collision course for war,” few have analyzed the role of Taiwan in this

¹³⁷ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), xv.

¹³⁸ Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 16.

¹³⁹ Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 2, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

political context, akin to the role of Melos during the Peloponnesian conflict.¹⁴⁰ Of all the potential flashpoints that could ignite conflict between China and the United States, none is more salient today than Taiwan. The vision of a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” as well as U.S. assurances to vital allies in the region, all hinge on the “question” of Taiwan. A reexamination of the Thucydides Trap through the lens of the “Melian Dialogue” reveals how differences in IR theory between the United States, China, and Taiwan have critical foreign policy implications for the future of cross-strait relations. Having this awareness and a correct interpretation of these differences and implications is absolutely imperative if the United States and Taiwan are to avoid making the same mistakes as the Melians. An applied history methodology unveils alternative solutions other than war as well as effective policy options for U.S. extended deterrence in Taiwan across the spectrum of instruments of national power (DIMEFIL).

As a primer for analysis, the “Melian Dialogue” functions as a straightforward analogy for trilateral relations between Taiwan, China, and the United States. Melos represents Taiwan, Athens represents China, and Sparta represents the United States (or the post-WWII, U.S.-led liberal international order). The conspicuous similarities between Melos and Taiwan are manifold. Both are island-states which face superior military aggressors: Athens and China. Both align with competitive great powers whose hegemony is now challenged: Sparta and the United States. Both are geographically isolated from their base of support and face difficult calculations regarding the resolve and credibility of military intervention from their allies: Sparta and the United States. And both are regarded by their aggressor states (Athens and China) as politically and militarily strategic in order to shore up domestic support and send coercive signals to surrounding nations. But there is one noteworthy difference between the two island-states: Melos is a *colony* of Sparta whereas Taiwan is merely a *partner* of the United States. This may seem like a minor detractor in the analogy if it were not for the peculiar nature of Taiwan—what some

¹⁴⁰ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); a noteworthy exception is James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, “Taiwan: Melos or Pylos?,” *Naval War College Review* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 43–61, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol58/iss3/22>.

analysts have described as a “geopolitical absurdity” or paradox.¹⁴¹ Ironically, Taiwan’s most significant defense partner and preferred trading partner—the United States—does not even diplomatically recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state, nor is it a treaty defense ally with Taiwan. Conversely, China does not merely claim Taiwan as a foreign colony; it claims territorial *sovereignty* over Taiwan. In the eyes of China, Taiwan is an internal domestic issue—a dissident province separated from the mainland awaiting the right moment for reunification. Athens did not view Melos in this manner. On the contrary, the analogy would be more resemblant if Melos were a rebellious colony of the rising Athens, rather than Sparta. However, this divergence does not invalidate the overall analogy and in fact presents multiple unique opportunities for the United States and Taiwan to exploit that were not available to ancient Sparta and Melos.

The crux of the Melian analogy hinges on the comparison of IR theories. IR pundits herald the “Melian Dialogue” as a classical case study in realist versus idealist political theory, and more specifically coercion theory. Realist theory emphasizes national interests and security above ideology and international cooperation, with politics as the anarchic arena of competition and conflict among actors seeking power. Idealist theory emphasizes philosophical and ethical shared values and cooperation between states, with politics as a collective effort among actors seeking mutual advantage. The Melians’ lack of realism and stubborn adherence to idealist notions that Sparta would come to their defense ultimately led to their downfall and decimation. The Melian magistrates maintained faith in the international system presided by just and honorable alliances rather than the pragmatic pursuits of power. They asserted to the Athenians, “we trust that the gods may grant us fortune as good as yours, since we are just men fighting against unjust, and that what we want in power will be made up by the alliance of the Lacedaemonians [Spartans], who are bound if only for very shame, to come to the aid of their kindred.”¹⁴² The Athenians’ argument, in contrast, is the classic exemplar of realism and Realpolitik: “since you know

¹⁴¹ Chris Horton, “Taiwan’s Status Is a Geopolitical Absurdity,” *The Atlantic*, July 8, 2019, sec. Global, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/07/taiwans-status-geopolitical-absurdity/593371/>.

¹⁴² Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 354.

as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, *while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.* [emphasis added]”¹⁴³ In the analogy with Taiwan, the pivotal question is which IR theory and deterrence strategy do the United States, China, and Taiwan adhere to? The answer holds significant policy implications for the future of cross-strait relations. If Taiwan observes an idealist interpretation of international relations in the face of a Chinese invasion, while the United States does not, then the chances of U.S. intervention are ambiguous at best and nonexistent at worst.

2. U.S. Constructivism and Return to Realism

There is ample evidence and literature to suggest that the United States is returning to a realist view of cross-strait relations after years of idealist-leaning policies—in particular, constructivism: an extension of idealism which sees politics and cooperation as socially constructed dynamics which will lead to a “collective identity that ameliorates a security dilemma.”¹⁴⁴ Following the “Three Communiques” with China from 1979–1982, the United States believed that the opening of China to the world and coupling of its economy with the United States would eventually lead to a free and democratic China. It also believed it could play the “China Card” to balance against the Soviet Union and pressure it on a number of issues. But as China grew more and more powerful while repudiating the western, neoliberal order which had accepted it, it became increasingly clear in Washington that the constructivist approach had failed. Now, China is espousing its “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as an alternative system for the rest of the world to emulate, also known as the “Beijing Consensus” or “China Model.” But today, in the wake of COVID-19, political blundering, and widespread misinformation and fake news regarding the epidemic in China, the United States is beginning to abandon all pretexts of an idealist or constructivist resolution and is hoping it is not too late to stem the tide of China’s rise while avoiding the Thucydides Trap. Many in Washington are now calling to

¹⁴³ Thucydides, 352.

¹⁴⁴ Yu Tsung-chi, “A Constructivist Take on the Strait,” *Taipei Times*, June 16, 2009, sec. Editorials, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2009/06/16/2003446259>.

replace the long-standing policy of “strategic ambiguity” with one of “strategic clarity,” in order to send a hardline message to China and allies regarding war over Taiwan. It appears that the United States is indeed returning to a realist view of the cross-strait dilemma.

3. PRC Idealism versus Realism

Conversely, it appears on the surface that China—unlike Athens—has persistently pursued an idealist policy with regard to Taiwan. It determinedly wages diplomatic and economic warfare against Taiwan to prevent it from being recognized by other nations or included by international organizations. By this standard China is seeking international *consensus* and *compliance* regarding the sovereignty of Taiwan, setting conditions for legal and unopposed reunification of the island by 2049—the 100th year anniversary of the founding of the PRC. However, underlying this guise of idealism on the international stage, China maintains a realist approach within its own borders and with its direct dealings with Taiwan. China is stoking the flames of domestic nationalism and ultimately is prepared to use force to occupy and annex Taiwan in spite of any international objection. In fact, a closer examination of China’s foreign policy reveals a consistent undertone of realism stretching back to 1949. Chinese “foreign” policy towards Taiwan is unapologetically Realpolitik and tremendously patient. Yet China simultaneously seeks increasing involvement in the international, rules-based system of standards and behavior—albeit it believes the current system is orchestrated by the United States and was constructed during an era when China did not have a seat at the table.

In his book *Haunted by Chaos*, author Sulmaan Khan expounds on the consistent realism of China since its founding. His stated purpose for writing the book is to better understand China’s grand strategy and “explore the calculus behind Chinese decision-making, to attempt to see the world the way China’s leaders do.”¹⁴⁵ Beginning with Mao, he demonstrates how China has remained remarkably consistent in its domestic and foreign policy, even through modern times. The operating principle of Mao’s strategy has remained largely unchanged and is pragmatically simple: to maintain a diplomatic balance of power,

¹⁴⁵ Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China’s Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 1–2.

to grow its economy and modernize its military, and to never compromise on its core interests—of which Taiwan is central. Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, its existence has been one of constant caution and insecurity. Its greatest perceived risk was and still is its claim to sovereignty and political recognition by others. To protect itself, Mao’s goal was to reduce threats to national security by maintaining as many relationships as possible. Mao “sought to be closer to other players in the balance of power than they were to one another.”¹⁴⁶ Relations with smaller powers were as important as larger powers, and often partnerships with ideological sister-states such as the Soviet Union, North Vietnam, and North Korea were for mutual convenience rather than ideological reasons.¹⁴⁷ For Mao, socialist ideology was perennially flexible. Instead, he held an ideology of “pragmatic coexistence” and was not averse to depart from communist orthodoxy when needed, while not compromising away sovereignty.¹⁴⁸ “The key organizing principle of Mao’s diplomacy was simple: he would deal with whomever he could to get the state he wanted.”¹⁴⁹ He also sought buffer states from imperialist encroachment. The prospect of American presence and influence in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan has not significantly changed. China remains staunchly realist but is not closed to the idea of diplomatic cooperation when possible, even with its greatest rivals. But China will not and has not compromised on its core interests. The problem is that its core interests often shift and expand. As China grows stronger, its insecurity and ambition expand as well.

4. Taiwan Realism versus Constructivism

Unlike the United States and China, which closely approximate the realism of Sparta and Athens respectively, Taiwan does not ascribe to idealism as Melos did. With a nuclear-powered, existential threat merely 100 miles from its coastline—realism has nearly always dominated Taiwan’s view of international politics. Even when Taiwan has shown idealist leanings in the past and aspired to greater cooperation and inclusion within the

¹⁴⁶ Khan, 38.

¹⁴⁷ Khan, 47.

¹⁴⁸ Khan, 21.

¹⁴⁹ Khan, 51.

international community, the international community has continually excluded and treated it as a political pariah. Taiwan's looming neighbor across the strait will simply not allow it to pursue an idealist agenda on its own terms. Notwithstanding, there have been undertones of constructivism in Taiwan at times. For a period of time following the "1992 Consensus"—when both sides of the strait essentially agreed that the other side existed—it appeared that both China and Taiwan were pursuing a constructivist agenda of rapprochement i.e., the re-establishment of cordial relations. Mutual trade and investment increased, travel restrictions lessened, and the two opened unofficial mechanisms and lines of communication to resolve low-level disagreements. Some argue that the "one country, two systems" proposal was an extension of this constructivist cooperation—an appeal to common identity, compromise, and social consensus. But realism ultimately prevailed through this period. Taiwan rejected the "One-China policy" and fully transitioned into a democratic nation with elected leaders from the pro-independence-leaning DPP after 91 years of continuous KMT rule. It increased military expenditures and reforms and effectively disavowed the controversial "1992 Consensus" by failing to reaffirm it since then. And after the COVID-19 pandemic and several high-profile visits from U.S. officials including a congressional delegation (CODEL) visit in June by three Senators to deliver 750,000 vaccines to Taiwan, realism has emerged stronger than ever. But does this mean that Taiwan would navigate the Thucydides Trap differently than the Melians? In the face of an imminent invasion from the mainland and political annihilation, would the Taiwanese hold-out like the Melians in hope that the United States or other nations would come to their rescue? Or would Taiwan stay true to its realist roots, acknowledging the tens or hundreds of thousands of lives that would be lost and the region embroiled in war? Would it capitulate to China and abandon all idealist or constructivist pretexts? These are the unnerving questions in the minds of millions of ethnic Chinese on both sides of the strait, and they are questions which keep international security analysts awake at night.

In the end, the Melian analogy has immense analytical value for understanding the cross-strait dilemma. Where the analogy and reality differ is in the political ideology of the two island-states. One is idealist to the end while the other is staunchly realist. But where Melos failed, Taiwan can benefit. During the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, President

Tsai Ing-wen reinforced the need for self-determinism on social media: “It’s not an option for us to do nothing on our own and just to rely on other people’s protection.”¹⁵⁰ Without this kind of realist attitude, the “question” of the United States’ security commitment to Taiwan would not matter. The United States cannot care more about Taiwan’s defense than the Taiwanese. What matters most is the realist mindset and resilience of the Taiwanese people. U.S. policy can only supplement and enhance Taiwan’s defense posture. But unlike Taiwan, the United States does not have the luxury of taking a purely realist stance toward China. It cannot do so without risking war or destabilizing the entire region or world. U.S. policy, therefore, is a delicate balancing game between “strategic ambiguity” and “clarity.”

D. POLICY LENS: STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY OR CLARITY?

1. The Need for Strategic Clarity

In the realm of U.S. official and unofficial policy, the “question” of Taiwan quickly turns into a “policy football.”¹⁵¹ Many argue that it is time for the United States to fully emerge from a long period of “strategic atrophy” as repudiated in the *NDS* and replace its policy of “strategic ambiguity” with Taiwan with “strategic clarity” to increase formal relations with Taiwan and intensify anti-invasion rhetoric.¹⁵² In fact, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and U.S.-China relations at a historic low, there is beginning to be exactly that kind of momentum toward support of Taiwan. Some—like Representative Elaine Luria (D-VA)—have gone so far as to recommend amending the War Powers Act to give the White House greater authority to launch a military response to defend Taiwan if needed. “The legal limitations on a president’s ability to respond quickly could all but ensure a Chinese *fait accompli*.”¹⁵³ In July 2020, U.S. Congressmen introduced the Taiwan

¹⁵⁰ The Straits Times, “Taiwan Needs to Be ‘Stronger’ After U.S. Afghanistan Exit, Says President Tsai Ing-Wen,” *The Straits Times*, August 18, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/taiwan-needs-to-be-stronger-after-us-afghanistan-exit-says-president-tsai-ing-wen>.

¹⁵¹ John Bolton and Derik R. Zitelman, “Why Taiwan Matters to the United States,” *The Diplomat*, August 23, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/why-taiwan-matters-to-the-united-states/>.

¹⁵² Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, 1.

¹⁵³ Elaine Luria, “Congress Must Untie Biden’s Hands on Taiwan,” *Washington Post*, October 11, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/11/elaine-luria-congress-biden-taiwan/>.

Invasion Prevention Act (TIPA) in order to “clarify and strengthen the commitment of the United States to defend Taiwan in the event of an armed attack.”¹⁵⁴ This came on the heels of the Taiwan Defense Act (TDA), intended to “draw a clear red line through the Taiwan Strait” and propose forward deployed forces and even the use of nuclear weapons to defeat a Chinese *fait accompli*.¹⁵⁵ Both bills were reintroduced in 2021. Congress has not ratified either of these acts into law, but they represent the latest in a line of legislation intended to maneuver on the political playing field without violating the watershed “Three Communiques” wherein the United States switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing. Other significant legislation that Congress did pass into law includes the Taiwan Travel Act in 2018 to allow high-ranking officials from the United States to visit Taiwan and vice versa, the Taiwan International Participation Act in 2018 to increase support for Taiwan’s membership or observer-status in international organizations, and the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act in 2019 to expand U.S.-Taiwan relations and urge partners in the international community to increase their official and unofficial ties with Taiwan.¹⁵⁶ Lastly, the Senate introduced in April 2021 the most ambitious legislation yet—the Strategic Competition Act—to intensify efforts to counter China.¹⁵⁷ The act references Taiwan over 160 times, including a provision “to deepen, to the fullest extent possible, the extensive, close, and friendly relations of the United States and Taiwan, including cooperation to support the development of capable, ready, and modern forces necessary for the defense of Taiwan.”¹⁵⁸

These bills and resolutions are more than just signs of political grandstanding. They suggest for many that while Washington retains a public-facing policy of “strategic

¹⁵⁴ Chiang Chin-yeh and Ko Lin, “U.S. Lawmaker Introduces Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act,” Focus Taiwan, last modified July 30, 2020, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202007300004>.

¹⁵⁵ Keoni Everington, “Taiwan Defense Act Submitted to House,” *Taiwan News*, July 3, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3957686>.

¹⁵⁶ Taiwan Travel Act, H.R. 535, 115th Cong. (2018); Taiwan International Participation Act of 2018, S. 2962, 115th Cong. (2018); Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019, S. 1678, 116th Cong. (2019).

¹⁵⁷ “Ten Problems with the Strategic Competition Act,” Union of Concerned Scientists, last modified May 20, 2021, <https://www.ucsusa.org/about/news/ten-problems-strategic-competition-act>.

¹⁵⁸ Strategic Competition Act of 2021, S.116, 117th Cong. (2021).

ambiguity,” it is gradually shifting to a *de facto* policy of “strategic clarity.” There is a distinct difference between *declaratory* policy and *actual* policy. Two years after the passing of the 2018 Taiwan Travel Act, Undersecretary of State Keith Krach visited Taiwan in September 2020 as the highest State official to visit Taiwan since 1979. Beijing responded during the visit by flying 40 fighters and bombers across the median line of the strait.¹⁵⁹ Then, in January 2021, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the termination of all restrictions for U.S. government contacts with Taiwan. The CCP’s mouthpiece *The Global Times* denounced the announcement as a “last-ditch madness” that would “push the Taiwan question deeper down the road of no return.”¹⁶⁰ Since the beginning of President Biden’s administration, diplomatic signals have increased rather than decreased. Taiwan’s *de facto* ambassador to the United States was invited to the presidential inauguration for the first time since 1979.¹⁶¹ Then in April, in what the White House called a “personal signal” to Taiwan, President Biden sent an unofficial delegation of two former Secretaries of State and one former senator to Taiwan in honor of the 42nd anniversary of the TRA.¹⁶² In June, President Biden sent an official CODEL of three acting senators to deliver 750,000 COVID-19 vaccines to Taiwan, trumping Undersecretary of State Krach’s visit the previous year as the highest-level visit by a U.S. official since 1979.¹⁶³ Possibly the most significant feature of the visit, however, was the mode of travel. The CODEL arrived in a USAF C-17, the first time a U.S. military aircraft had been used since 1999.

¹⁵⁹ Mink, “The Catalyst for Stronger US-Taiwan Ties.”

¹⁶⁰ “Pompeo May Toll the Knell for Taiwan Authorities,” *Global Times*, January 10, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212378.shtml>.

¹⁶¹ Chao Deng and Chun Han Wong, “Biden Sends Important Foreign-Policy Signal With Taiwan Inauguration Invite,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-sends-important-foreign-policy-signal-with-taiwan-inauguration-invite-11611230623>.

¹⁶² Reuters, David Brunnstrom, and Michael Martina, “Biden Sends Unofficial Delegation to Taiwan in ‘Personal Signal,’” Reuters, last modified April 13, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/biden-sends-unofficial-delegation-taiwan-underscore-commitment-white-house-2021-04-13/>.

¹⁶³ Kathrin Hille, “US Gives Covid Vaccines to Taiwan After China Accused of Interference,” *Financial Times*, June 6, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/815e8224-ac3f-4611-99e0-5e8f6bbf4a9a>.

In April 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken responded in an interview that the United States has “a serious commitment to Taiwan being able to defend itself...and in that context, it would be a serious mistake for anyone to try to change that status quo by force.”¹⁶⁴ In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, National Security Advisor Dan Sullivan stated that U.S. commitments to allies and partners were “sacrosanct and always have been. We believe our commitment to Taiwan and to Israel remains as strong as it’s ever been.”¹⁶⁵ Secretary Blinken reinforced Sullivan’s point in September during a testimony before the House of Representatives, referring to Taiwan as a “country” for the second time in his official tenure.¹⁶⁶ Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin also suggested a commitment to defend America’s interests with Taiwan, claiming “we will not flinch.”¹⁶⁷ But the most clear and vocal statement of support for Taiwan among all those listed here came from the president himself in October 2021. In a CNN town hall interview, when asked whether the United States would defend Taiwan if China attacked, President Biden replied, “Yes, we have a commitment to do that.”¹⁶⁸ The White House immediately rolled back the president’s remarks and reiterated that there had been no change in U.S. policy toward Taiwan. Many commentators dismissed the remarks as a political gaffe by the president, but what confounds the issue is that President Biden is no stranger to the nuances of the language of “strategic ambiguity.” In 2001, Senator Biden (then the senior Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee) wrote an article in *The Washington Post* criticizing then President George W. Bush for his negligent choice of language similarly committing the United States to defending Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack. In response to questions during an interview with ABC News whether the United States had an obligation to Taiwan, President Bush stated, “yes, we do, and the Chinese must understand that.”

¹⁶⁴ NBC News, “Meet the Press–April 11, 2021,” April 11, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-april-11-2021-n1263752>.

¹⁶⁵ Derek Grossman, “Biden Administration Shows Unwavering Support for Taiwan,” *RAND* (blog), October 20, 2021, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/10/biden-administration-shows-unwavering-support-for-taiwan.html>.

¹⁶⁶ Grossman.

¹⁶⁷ “Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Participates in Fullerton Lecture Series in Singapore.”

¹⁶⁸ Kevin Liptak, “Biden Vows to Protect Taiwan in Event of Chinese Attack,” CNN, October 22, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/21/politics/taiwan-china-biden-town-hall/index.html>.

Asked if this commitment would be backed by “the full force of the American military,” Bush replied, “Whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself.”¹⁶⁹ This was the most overt statement of support for Taiwan by a standing U.S. President up to that point, but Sen. Biden was quick to point out the gaffe, stressing in his op-ed critique, “Words matter, in diplomacy and in law.” Aware of the tenuous circumstances and language of the cross-strait policy, Sen. Biden quipped against the Bush administration, “we now appear to have a policy of ambiguous strategic ambiguity.”¹⁷⁰ Moreover, as a Senator in 1979, Sen. Biden voted in favor of the TRA. In other words, it is difficult to imagine someone more capable than President Biden today to correctly understand the United States’ position toward Taiwan and formulate an appropriate response that aligns with that position. The similarities between President Bush and Biden’s interview remarks are remarkable. Both made nearly identical misleading statements regarding the U.S. position toward Taiwan to which both administrations had to immediately backpedal. But President Biden appears to understand the gravitas of his statements and actions. In November 2021, he invited Taiwan to participate in the virtual Summit on Democracy in December—the only participant not formally recognized as a country by nearly any of the other participants.¹⁷¹

Again, there is a difference between *declaratory* policy and *actual* policy. Renewed emphasis on partnerships and alliances has reinvigorated the discussion of a multinational approach to deterrence—what the Biden administration and DOD has termed “integrated deterrence.” It appears that both have taken active steps to convey commitment to this vision, despite outspoken criticism from both domestic and foreign audiences. In a very short span of time between August and October 2021, Washington has carried out a series of highly public and decisive strategic decisions which—when viewed collectively—signal a much clearer rebalance or “pivot” to Asia and the Pacific than previous actions. First, in

¹⁶⁹ “Bush Vows Taiwan Support,” ABC News, January 7, 2006, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=93471&page=1>.

¹⁷⁰ Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Not So Deft on Taiwan,” *Washington Post*, May 2, 2001, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2001/05/02/not-so-deft-on-taiwan/2adf3075-ee98-4e70-9be0-5459ce1edd5d/>.

¹⁷¹ Chris Megerian, “In Struggle Between Autocracy and Democracy, Biden Chooses Taiwan for His Team,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-12-08/biden-democracy-summit-taiwan-china>.

August, Washington withdrew all forces from Afghanistan—ostensibly to shift greater attention and resources to global strategic competition with great power adversaries like China. Then, in September, Washington announced the surprise formation of a new trilateral defense partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom, known as AUKUS.¹⁷² Explicitly, the partnership’s purpose is to advance Australia’s undersea projection capability by sharing critical nuclear technology and helping to develop attack class nuclear-powered submarines for Australia.¹⁷³ Implicitly, however, the purpose is to hedge the balance of power in the Pacific against Chinese expansionism. The trilateral agreement is even more significant because it demonstrates Washington’s willingness to forge new security relationships at the expense of damaging others. The AUKUS deal undermined and replaced an existing deal between Australia and France worth €56 billion for non-nuclear-powered submarines. The United States and Australia did not notify France of their intentions until hours before the public announcement of the deal, which France condemned as a “stab in the back” and responded by removing its ambassadors from Washington and Canberra.¹⁷⁴ Lastly, the following month, two carrier strike groups (CSG) from the United States, one from the United Kingdom, and fifteen ships from Japan, New Zealand, Canada, and the Netherlands conducted naval exercises in the Philippine Sea, followed by exercises in the SCS with Australia. The U.S., Japanese, and some Australian ships then sailed to the Bay of Bengal to conduct QUAD naval exercises together with India, while the UK, Australia, and New Zealand remained in the SCS to conduct exercises with Singapore and Malaysia.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, prior to the exercises, a frigate from the HMS Queen Elizabeth CSG sailed through the Taiwan Strait enroute to

¹⁷² Charles Edel, “China Has Only Itself to Blame for AUKUS,” *Foreign Policy*, September 24, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/24/china-aucus-submarines-defense/>.

¹⁷³ The deal also includes cooperation on cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, long-range and hypersonic missiles, and additional undersea capabilities. Prime Minister of Australia, “Australia to Pursue Nuclear-Powered Submarines Through New Trilateral Enhanced Security Partnership,” Prime Minister of Australia, last modified September 16, 2021, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-pursue-nuclear-powered-submarines-through-new-trilateral-enhanced-security>.

¹⁷⁴ Edel, “China Has Only Itself to Blame for AUKUS.”

¹⁷⁵ Kathrin Hille, “China’s Bellicose Behaviour Is the Driver of Tensions in Asian Waters,” *Financial Times*, October 12, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/fc2d5463-b5bb-4dde-a1ab-f4a4ff04de05>.

Vietnam—the first time the UK had done so since 2008. One commentator noted the enormity of the carrier-based operations involving nine nations and compared it with the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1996, which involved only two carriers instead of three.¹⁷⁶

2. Pro-Independence?

Many experts believe the actions and statements described in the previous section do not go far enough. Many believe the only compelling force powerful enough to coerce China is to recognize Taiwan as an independent nation. But the greatest obstacle to this strategy is that the DPP-led government itself does not seek independence (officially). Despite various pro-independence movements and a record high 83% of the populace identifying themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese or both in February 2020, the DPP-led government does not want to risk escalation with China over the topic of independence.¹⁷⁷ The goal is rather to deter mainland unification efforts and maintain its current thirteen diplomatic allies (Nicaragua was the most recent nation in December 2021 to change diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing). But some analysts inside and outside of Taiwan suggest that Taiwan would be better off if it lost *all* its allies. It would leave Taiwan with a more natural and intrinsic impetus to declare *autonomy* as the “Republic of Taiwan” rather than the more flagrant decision of *independence*, which connotes a breaking away from mainland hegemony. This would allow nations to recognize both Taiwan and China simultaneously as two separate sovereign states. As long as even one country continues to recognize Taipei as the legitimate seat of China’s government, a vote for independence will always be seen as defiance. But by losing the few allies that it has, Taiwan could—ironically—gain far more. There are, however, major risks inherent in this course of action, not least of which is that China would have no better occasion to

¹⁷⁶ Radio Free Asia, “US, UK Aircraft Carriers Lead Show of Naval Might Around South China Sea,” Radio Free Asia, last modified October 7, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/usa-uk-southchinasea-10072021172517.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Keoni Everington, “Record 83% of People in Taiwan Identify as Taiwanese amid Wuhan Virus Outbreak,” *Taiwan News*, last modified February 2, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3880591>; A more recent survey from a different polling source put the number at 67%, but it was also the highest percentage recorded by the source. Huang Tzu-ti, “67% of People in Taiwan Self-Identify as Taiwanese,” *Taiwan News*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3960029>.

attack the island, even though Taiwan independence poses no physical threat to China. Any rhetoric of the nationalist KMT party taking back the mainland or waging a low-intensity campaign against the coastline is long gone.

An invasion notwithstanding, opponents argue that the loss of Taiwan's allies would hamper its ability to take part in international activities. The Centre for Foreign Policy Studies at the National Chengchi University in Taiwan made this prescient observation in 2018: "For instance, if the World Health Assembly held an international conference to solicit ideas for dealing with a global virus, Taiwan could be shut out and deprived of first-hand information because no other countries supported its desire to take part."¹⁷⁸ But this is *exactly* the scenario which Taiwan endured in 2020 during its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite its 14 diplomatic allies at the time as well as the United States and others lobbying for Taiwan's inclusion in the World Health Organization (WHO) and its assembly meetings (the WHA), they ultimately failed.¹⁷⁹ If diplomatic ties are no guarantee of inclusion in international affairs, then what difference would it make if Taiwan had no diplomatic allies? This realization is undoubtedly changing the decision calculus for pro-autonomy leanings in the government and populace of Taiwan.

3. The Case of Hong Kong

One of the strongest and most recent arguments for Taiwan independence is the ongoing circumstances or repression in Hong Kong. Anti-government protests in the former British colony erupted in June 2019 against legislation that would allow extradition of criminals to mainland China, violating the "two systems" agreement between China, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom in 1997. China withdrew the extradition bill in September, but protests continued and escalated until China passed a controversial and legally ambiguous security law in June 2020 that gave China broad powers to criminalize

¹⁷⁸ Lawrence Chung, "Should Taiwan Be Worried If It Loses All Its Allies?," *South China Morning Post*, September 1, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2162316/can-defiant-taiwan-hang-its-allies-and-sovereignty-beijing-puts>.

¹⁷⁹ Yu-Jie Chen and Jerome. A. Cohen, "Why Does the WHO Exclude Taiwan?," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified April 9, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/why-does-who-exclude-taiwan>.

any act of secession, subversion, terrorism, or collusion with foreign entities.¹⁸⁰ By all accounts the security law has effectually terminated the special administrative status and “two systems” governance of Hong Kong. Never has there been a stronger case for Taiwan to denounce the “One-China policy” or for the international community to expose it as a deception and infringement of domestic sovereignty. This also provides the United States with a circuitous opportunity for extended deterrence and compellence of China in Taiwan. If the United States were to deter Chinese intervention in Hong Kong while simultaneously broadcasting the inconsistencies and fraudulence of PRC “domestic” policy, it could concurrently bolster anti-unification and pro-independence rhetoric in Taiwan, thus deterring Chinese military action against Taiwan.

A positive step in this direction is the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act (HKHRDA) and related Hong Kong Be Water Act of 2019. But the United States could go further and attempt to compel China in Hong Kong by threatening increased collaboration with Taiwan or even pro-independence. By holding China’s primary “core” interests of state sovereignty and territorial integrity at risk, the United States may be able to coerce China to play by its own rules (the special administrative status of Hong Kong) and adhere to international standards of human rights etc. In other words, extended compellence through Hong Kong could potentially result in augmented extended deterrence in Taiwan. This adaptation of extended coercion theory could be a powerful means to compete with China and escape the Thucydides trap.

In his book *Haunted by Chaos*, Sulmaan Khan demonstrates how there has been a surprising continuity between Mao’s domestic and foreign policies and those of China today. But he then exposes the extent to which modern-day China has deviated from the policies of Mao’s successors: Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao. The overarching grand strategy during this period may have remained the same: to keep China secure through modernization and developing the economy to underwrite that security. But modern China under Xi Jinping has strayed from the adaptive flexibility of this period’s

¹⁸⁰ “China’s New Law: Why Is Hong Kong Worried?,” BBC News, last modified June 30, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>.

“pragmatic coexistence” and has run counter to the very policies that led to rapprochement with the United States and international recognition of sovereignty.

The case of Hong Kong is informative. Sulmaan Khan believed Deng Xiaoping would likely have reacted differently to the Hong Kong protests than Xi Jinping. For Deng, repression would have been *antithetical* to the relative benefits of allowing Hong Kong to remain capitalist and upholding the “one country, two systems” policy until 2047 (when the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1997 expires after 50 years). Actions like these undercut the credibility and political philosophy of Deng’s “two systems” policy: that it could not only apply locally, but also serve as a global model for peaceful transition between contested territories such as Israel and Palestine or North and South Korea.¹⁸¹ Instead, the actions in Hong Kong undermine the intent of espousing “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and weakens the “Beijing Consensus.” The evidence seems to suggest that China itself may be renouncing its own “two systems” approach and idea of “peaceful coexistence.” It is doubling down in Hong Kong while resigning all options for Taiwan save a military solution. The fact that China is not responding to international cries for China to uphold the special administrative status of Hong Kong shows the world that it does not really believe in its own policy and solidifies its untrustworthiness and revisionism in the minds of other nations while only further disillusioning Taiwan and elevating the United States as the pragmatic advocate for peace and diplomacy.

4. Strategic Stability and Coherence

There are generally three broad courses of action proposed by U.S. policy analysts and government officials to address the “question” of Taiwan: (1) an explicit policy commitment of “strategic clarity” to Taiwan (as Richard Haas and David Sacks argue),¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ “A Policy of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ on Taiwan”; Muhammad Cohen, “Try ‘One Country, Two Systems’ Where It Might Work,” *Asia Times*, June 26, 2017, <https://asiatimes.com/2017/06/try-one-country-two-systems-might-work/>; Tom O’Conner, “A Plan to Unite Koreas: ‘One People, Two Countries, Two Systems, One Market,’” *Newsweek*, last modified April 23, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/plan-unite-north-south-korea-one-people-two-countries-two-systems-one-market-1586091>.

¹⁸² Richard Haas and David Sacks, “American Support for Taiwan Must Be Unambiguous,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/american-support-taiwan-must-be-unambiguous>.

(2) an explicit statement that the defense of Taiwan is the sole responsibility of Taiwan (as Charles L. Glaser argues),¹⁸³ and (3) a sustainment of the current policy of “strategic ambiguity” (as Bonnie Glaser and Michael Mazur contend).¹⁸⁴ There is a wide range of differing opinions within the contours of these three policy options, but there are also diverging views which assert that these are not the only available courses of action.

Former AIT director and adjunct lecturer in Chinese studies at Johns Hopkins University, David Keegan, proposes a policy of “strategic stability.”¹⁸⁵ The policy would focus less on the level of clarity regarding the “question” of Taiwan and more on the strengthening of “dual deterrence” wherein the United States deters China from forcefully annexing Taiwan while simultaneously deterring Taiwan from declaring “independence” as a sovereign nation. This would be a better recipe for de-escalation than any of the other options. This also echoes what former ASD for International Security Affairs (ASD(ISA)) Franklin Kramer and former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd have described as “managed strategic competition” with China.¹⁸⁶

Alternatively, former AIT chairman and managing director, Therese Shaheen, proposes a policy of “strategic coherence” based on “transparency about what is at stake” and the reality of Taiwan’s existence.¹⁸⁷ Such a policy would speak truth to Taiwan’s geographic, *de facto* sovereignty apart from the PRC and validate the coherence of U.S.

¹⁸³ Charles L. Glaser, “Washington Is Avoiding the Tough Questions on Taiwan and China,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 28, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2021-04-28/washington-avoiding-tough-questions-taiwan-and-china>.

¹⁸⁴ Bonnie S. Glaser et al., “Dire Straits: Should American Support for Taiwan Be Ambiguous?,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 24, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-09-24/dire-straits>.

¹⁸⁵ David Keegan, “Strengthening Dual Deterrence on Taiwan: The Key to US-China Strategic Stability,” *Stimson*, July 6, 2021, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/strengthening-dual-deterrence-on-taiwan-the-key-to-us-china-strategic-stability/>.

¹⁸⁶ Franklin D. Kramer, *Managed Competition: Meeting China’s Challenge in a Multi-Vector World* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2019), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Meeting-Chinas-Challenges-Report-WEB.pdf>; Kevin Rudd, “Short of War: How to Keep U.S.-Chinese Confrontation From Ending in Calamity,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-05/kevin-rudd-usa-chinese-confrontation-short-of-war>.

¹⁸⁷ Therese Shaheen, “China & Taiwan: U.S. Policy Needs Strategic Coherence,” *National Review*, October 9, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/10/to-counter-china-u-s-policy-toward-taiwan-must-change/#slide-1>.

relations with Taiwan over the past 71 years. This is a similar approach to LTG (Ret.) McMaster’s conception of “transparent competition” as described in the declassified 2018 Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework (IPSF), which seeks to achieve a balance between confrontation and accommodation with China.¹⁸⁸

Lastly, the Lowy Institute published a “third way” for the United States beside ambiguity versus clarity. Authors Patrick Porter and Michael Mazaar do not propose a new policy but rather a drastic expansion of existing law and policy so the United States may act as Taiwan’s “armorers”—rapidly upgrading its “porcupine” defenses and preparing multiple options short of conflict to impose costs on China if it attacks.¹⁸⁹ This would effectually negate the “question” of Taiwan by making invasion so costly for China that the United States would not need to intervene.

E. STRATEGIC LENS: WHY TAIWAN MATTERS

The United States has geostrategic, economic, political, and normative reasons for safeguarding Taiwan and preventing Chinese hegemony in the “first island chain,” which runs from Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula and Japan through the ECS and Taiwan, the Philippines and Borneo, and the contested “nine-dash line” region within the SCS (see Figure 2).

¹⁸⁸ H. R. McMaster, “Biden Would Do the World a Favor by Keeping Trump’s China Policy,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/01/18/mcmaster-biden-trump-china/>.

¹⁸⁹ Patrick Porter and Michael Mazarr, *Countering China’s Adventurism over Taiwan: A Third Way*, Lowy Institute Analysis (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2021), <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/countering-china-s-adventurism-over-taiwan-third-way>.



Figure 2. First and Second Island Chains.¹⁹⁰

Chinese control of Taiwan at the center of this chain would put it in a strategic position relative to regional actors and the United States. As President Tsai Ing-wen surmised in a recent *Foreign Affairs* article,

Should this line be broken by force, the consequences would disrupt international trade and destabilize the entire western Pacific. In other words, a failure to defend Taiwan would not only be catastrophic for the Taiwanese; it would overturn a security architecture that has allowed for

¹⁹⁰ Source: The Economist, “China’s First Aircraft-Carrier Bares Its Teeth,” *The Economist*, January 19, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/china/2017/01/19/chinas-first-aircraft-carrier-bares-its-teeth>.

peace and extraordinary economic development in the region for seven decades.¹⁹¹

1. An Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier

In April 2021, Taiwan’s foreign minister said that Taiwan views itself as a “sea fortress” against Chinese expansion into the Pacific—committed to ensuring freedom of navigations in its surrounding waters.¹⁹² Removed from the policy perspective regarding U.S. security commitments to Taiwan, there are multiple reasons why Taiwan is geopolitically and strategically significant. Answers to the “question” of whether the United States or a multinational coalition should come to Taiwan’s defense range from dismissive views that a loss of Taiwan sovereignty would be inconsequential to alarmist views that it would mark the death knell for democracy and the advent of an irreversible new world order of global authoritarianism—if not the catalyst of a nuclear World War III. In an October 2021 interview on Fox News, Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) likened Taiwan to West Berlin at the height of the Cold War, asserting that “Taiwan is not some peripheral sideshow in great power competition. To me, it is the *frontline of tyranny versus freedom*. [emphasis added]”¹⁹³ Whether true or not, sentiments such as this cloud the ability of policymakers and strategists to make impartial evaluations of the significance of Taiwan’s continued existence. There are generally three lenses from which to evaluate Taiwan. First, what would China gain from taking Taiwan and what would it lose if it failed? Second, what would the United States and allies lose if China took Taiwan and what would they gain if it failed? Lastly, what effects would such outcomes have on the rest of the world?

The strategic value of Taiwan is undeniable. During the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Imperial Japan seized the island of Formosa (Taiwan) from the Qing dynasty and held it until Japan’s surrender to the Allies in 1945. Geographically, Taiwan has always

¹⁹¹ Ing-wen, “Taiwan and the Fight for Democracy.”

¹⁹² Reuters, “Taiwan Is ‘Sea Fortress’ against China, Minister Tells U.S. Audience,” Reuters, last modified September 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-is-sea-fortress-against-china-minister-tells-us-audience-2021-09-15/>.

¹⁹³ Fox News, “Sen. Dan Sullivan Says Taiwan Is ‘Frontline of Tyranny vs. Freedom,’ Calls Biden’s Actions ‘Weak,’” Fox News, last modified October 22, 2021, <https://www.foxnews.com/media/dan-sullivan-taiwan-frontline-tyranny-freedom-biden-weak.amp>.

been “prime real estate” in East Asia. The substantially mountainous island lies at the center of the archipelagic first island chain. If China were to control Taiwan, it would be a “uniformly negative” military effect for the United States and its allies.¹⁹⁴ China would be able to reorient the island’s defense posture outward and could convert the island into a forward operating base. It would extend China’s missile and aircraft range another 150 nautical miles, which would place U.S. forces stationed in the region at greater risk and would likely compel INDOPACOM to reassess its force posture in South Korea, Japan, and Guam etc. It would also eliminate the PLAN’s current freedom of maneuver disadvantages due to the canalization effects of Taiwan’s geography. Taiwan sits on the edge of a continental shelf and would allow China to deploy passive and active underwater sensors from its eastern shore and greatly increase its ocean surveillance and over-the-horizon (OTH) radar capabilities. This would potentially threaten key sea lines of communication (SLOC) for the United States and allies. China would also be able to transition to a power-projection force instead of a near-abroad force. Conversely, it would create even greater stand-off for China and make it more difficult for the United States or allies to reverse or roll-back China’s gains and hold the mainland at risk, similar to the position in which the United States found itself vis-à-vis Japan at the start of the Pacific War in 1941. In the event of war with China, the United States and allies would almost certainly have to seize a heavily defended Taiwan before launching an attack against the mainland, akin to taking Okinawa or Iwo Jima before attacking mainland Japan. It was precisely for this reason that GEN Douglas MacArthur issued a memorandum of warning to Washington in 1950, which remains as accurate today as it was then:

I have been concerned as to the future status of Formosa and I have been convinced that the strategic interests of the United States will be in serious jeopardy if Formosa is allowed to be dominated by a power hostile to the United States.

As a result of its geographic location and base potential, utilization of Formosa by a military power hostile to the United States may either counterbalance or overshadow the strategic importance of the central and

¹⁹⁴ Caitlin Talmadge, *Then What? Assessing the Strategic Implications of Chinese Control of Taiwan*, November 10, 2021, MIT Security Studies Program Wednesday Seminar Series, video, 1:24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qx2szxbBOQk>.

southern flank of the United States front line position. Formosa in the hands of the Communists can be compared to an *unsinkable aircraft carrier and submarine tender* ideally located to accomplish Soviet offensive strategy and at the same time checkmate counteroffensive operations by United States Forces based on Okinawa and the Philippines. [emphasis added]¹⁹⁵

Most importantly, by controlling Taiwan, China would be freed from its 71-year strategic concentration on building the necessary operational requirements to seize the island, such as amphibious and air assault capabilities or a blue-water navy and massive transport fleet to be able to ferry troops across the strait. These capabilities would not disappear or become obsolete, but China would be able to redirect them to new mission sets. Similarly, China would not discontinue its “counter-intervention” or “anti-access/area denial” (A2/AD) strategy; rather it could focus it further afield and begin transitioning operations from the first island chain to the second island chain (see Figure 2). Freed from the strategic distraction of reunifying Taiwan, China could pivot to new strategic priorities such as contested territories in the ECS or the Sino-Indian border.

Economically, China has much to gain by controlling Taiwan and the seas surrounding it. With an extensive mountain range running north-south on the eastern side of the island, the densely populated western side is naturally protected from the devastating typhoons that frequent the region. This also protects sea lanes and free passage through the Taiwan Strait which—if controlled or denied by China—could significantly affect imports and exports to South Korea and Japan. Furthermore, control of the Taiwan Strait would place China in a more advantageous position to seize further disputed islands in the ECS and SCS, creating a consolidated EEZ and ADIZ extending further into the West Pacific. Cargo ships enroute to and from South Korea, Japan, and other nations would be forced to transit more circuitous routes that are more dangerous, time-consuming, and expensive—disrupting global trade. \$5.3 trillion worth of goods transit the SCS and Strait of Malacca, accounting for approximately one-third of global shipping.¹⁹⁶ Controlling Taiwan would

¹⁹⁵ Douglas MacArthur, “Memorandum on Formosa, by General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief, Far East, and Supreme Commander, Allied Powers, Japan” (official memorandum, Tokyo: Far East Command, 1950), 162–63, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v07/d86>.

¹⁹⁶ “How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?,” *ChinaPower Project* (blog), August 2, 2017, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

give China greater economic leverage in the region and world, as well as alleviate the so-called “Malacca Dilemma” or vulnerability of sea-lanes from the Indian Ocean to East Asia through the Malacca Strait. From a budgetary perspective, the PLA currently dedicates a significant portion of its budget to developing and maintaining its capability to invade and seize Taiwan. If China were to reunify Taiwan, those funds could shift to other strategic priorities, such as expanding its A2/AD range to the second island chain and beyond.

Diplomatically, control of Taiwan will have an uncertain effect for China. For decades, China’s diplomatic rhetoric and coercive efforts have centered around ensuring other nations adhere to the “One-China policy.” But if China were to annex Taiwan, the “One-China policy” would become moot and extraneous for many nations in their dealings with China. Absent this issue, it is uncertain whether China would be able to retain the level of diplomatic pressure it previously enjoyed. Freed from the leverage which China held regarding the “One-China policy,” nations may become emboldened to resist Chinese coercion directly. But it may equally induce nations to increase their relations with China or “bandwagon” with China rather than “balance” against it. With the “question” of Taiwan definitively answered and the greatest threat to peace and stability in the region removed from the table, China may or may not be able to exert greater pressure on the world stage.

In the information and cyber domain, all of the resources and time invested into coercing Taiwan could be directed further afield. Furthermore, the loss of a robust democracy like Taiwan would be a feather in the cap for China. Whether Taiwan falls to China because the United States fails to intervene or because it loses in battle, either outcome will fuel and validate China’s narrative of the inevitability of its rejuvenation and America’s decline. The loss of a democratic Taiwan would have a detrimental effect on American credibility and perceived resolve, as well as the legitimacy of a democratic, values-based international order. More than the material gain that Taiwan would provide China, reunification would strike a symbolic and ideological victory at the heart of U.S.-PRC competition and would advance China’s “Beijing Consensus” and grand strategy.

2. First Island Chain Counter Intervention or A2/AD

Following the stunning U.S. victory over Iraq in 1991 and then China's sobering confrontation in 1996 with not one but two U.S. carrier strike groups in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing resolved to never again be in a "position of military weakness" vis-à-vis the United States. "The result was a push for carefully targeted military capabilities that could deny U.S. forces access to the Taiwan area for the period of time necessary to bring Taiwan under PLA control... After 1996, Chinese planning for a Taiwan contingency assumed U.S. entry, with Chinese capabilities designed to defeat that intervention."¹⁹⁷

The strategy which emerged was "counter-intervention" in the first island chain—or what the Chinese commonly refer to this as *shāshǒujiàn*: the "assassin's mace." In his popular book *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, author Michael Pillsbury suggests that the PLA's "counter-intervention" strategy is an "assassin's mace" designed to incapacitate the enemy quickly and suddenly without fighting on his terms.¹⁹⁸ The objective is to deter and deny a Pacific-version of Operation Desert Storm—with Taiwan in the place of Kuwait—and to prevent the humiliation of another U.S. naval intervention like in 1996.

The United States and security community have a different name for China's strategy: "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD). Anti-access refers typically to longer-range, stand-off capabilities designed to prevent an adversary from entering *into* an area of operations (AO). Area denial refers to shorter-range capabilities designed to prevent an adversary from having freedom of maneuver or action *within* the AO.¹⁹⁹ These capabilities include a suite of kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities as well as conventional and hybrid means and methods. The distinction between China and the United States' respective definition of the concept is important. Both China and the United States view the other as the perceived aggressor and view themselves as the perceived defender. China views its

¹⁹⁷ John W. Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 607.

¹⁹⁸ Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2015), 134–35.

¹⁹⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operational Access Concept* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012), i, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joac_2012.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162010-227.

buildup of “counter-intervention” capabilities as defensive in nature while the United States views the “A2/AD” capabilities as offensive and revanchist in nature. In an armed conflict, the difference in perceptions could cause each to see its own actions as internally justifiable, leading to escalation.²⁰⁰

In October 2020, the Pentagon conducted a wargame simulating a fight for Taiwan in which it reportedly “failed miserably.”²⁰¹ The wargame tested the DOD’s new joint warfighting concept at the time in which the United States sought to achieve information dominance and the aggregation of forces in order to concentrate combat power. But the red team playing China targeted and disintegrated this strategy. By disrupting the United States’ information networks immediately and then overwhelming the aggregated and concentrated U.S. forces with salvos of lethal and non-lethal long-range fires in all domains, the U.S. blue team was vulnerable from the start.

Another example of China’s growing military capacity comes from an extensive 2015 RAND study which compared the relative military capabilities between China and the United States in ten categories for two conflict scenarios: Taiwan and the Spratly Islands. The study created ten “scorecards” for each of the categories. Figure 3 summarizes the findings which indicate that China’s capabilities in a Taiwan conflict scenario are steadily improving. The findings note that China would need “to hold advantages in nearly all operational categories simultaneously” to be successful, but the asymmetry of its geographic proximity to Taiwan and the potential protraction of conflict play a disproportionate role in determining the final outcome.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ James Scouras, Edward Smyth, and Thomas Mahnken, *Cross-Domain Deterrence in US-China Strategy: Workshop Proceedings* (Laurel, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, 2017), 20, <https://www.jhuapl.edu/Content/documents/CrossDomainWeb.pdf>.

²⁰¹ Tara Copp, “‘It Failed Miserably’: After Wargaming Loss, Joint Chiefs Are Overhauling How the U.S. Military Will Fight,” *Defense One*, last modified July 26, 2021, <https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2021/07/it-failed-miserably-after-wargaming-loss-joint-chiefs-are-overhauling-how-us-military-will-fight/184050/>.

²⁰² Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power 1996–2017*, RR-392-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 130, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR392.html.

Summary Coding of Scorecard Results								
Scorecard	Taiwan Conflict				Spratly Islands Conflict			
	1996	2003	2010	2017	1996	2003	2010	2017
1. Chinese attacks on air bases	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Orange	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow
2. U.S. vs. Chinese air superiority	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green
3. U.S. airspace penetration	Light Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Green
4. U.S. attacks on air bases	Yellow	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green
5. Chinese anti-surface warfare	Dark Green	Light Green	Yellow	Orange	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Green	Yellow
6. U.S. anti-surface warfare	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green
7. U.S. counterspace	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow
8. Chinese counterspace	Dark Green	Light Green	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Light Green	Yellow	Yellow
9. U.S. vs. China cyberwar	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green
<hr/>								
10. Nuclear stability (confidence in secure second-strike capability)	Country		1996, 2003, and 2010		2017			
	China		Low confidence		Medium confidence			
	U.S.		High confidence					
<hr/>								
NOTES: To prevail in either Taiwan or the Spratly Islands, China's offensive goals would require it to hold advantages in nearly all operational categories simultaneously. U.S. defensive goals could be achieved by holding the advantage in only a few areas. Nevertheless, China's improved performance could raise costs, lengthen the conflict, and increase risks to the United States.								
<hr/>								
Key for Scorecards 1–9								
U.S. Capabilities					Chinese Capabilities			
Major advantage	Dark Green				Major disadvantage			
Advantage	Light Green				Disadvantage			
Approximate parity	Yellow				Approximate parity			
Disadvantage	Orange				Advantage			
Major disadvantage	Red				Major advantage			

Figure 3. RAND Summary of U.S. and China Military Capability Scorecards.²⁰³

²⁰³ Source: Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard*, xxix.

3. The Taiwan Temptation

China's seizure of Taiwan would undeniably be a significant strategic payoff. Taiwan is a tantalizing temptation for China that would add value to it politically, militarily, psychologically, and economically. But seizure of Taiwan could just as easily transform it into an international pariah overnight. For that reason, the *manner* in which China acquires Taiwan is absolutely critical.

There is general consensus among Taiwan security pundits that Beijing has three broad courses of action available to it: invasion, blockade, and seizure of off-shore islands. First is the obvious and worrisome option of a full-scale cross-strait invasion by sea and air. Pundits endlessly debate whether or not the PLA is currently or soon capable of successfully invading Taiwan. Many believe it is Beijing's most decisive option.²⁰⁴ Within this option, however, Beijing has two choices. It can either choose to launch a preemptive strike against U.S. and allied forces in the region (e.g., Okinawa) to prevent their intervention or it can concentrate its attack solely on Taiwan and carefully avoid any confrontation with outside powers. The benefit of the first choice is it effectively denies the United States or other nation from preventing a Chinese *fait accompli* on the island. It does not guarantee it, but coalition forces would not be able to recover from the initial salvo, regain access into the region, and mount a counterattack in sufficient time before Taiwanese defenses capitulate. The cost to China of this choice would be immense in the near and long-term. The attack on U.S. forces on Okinawa would almost certainly bring Japan into the war and give its parliament the impetus to definitively reverse Article 9 of its constitution, which forbids its "defense forces" from fighting in a foreign war or settling international disputes. South Korea could likewise join the war while simultaneously managing newly volatile conditions with North Korea, and other nations such as the Philippines—which has 122,000 workers in Taiwan or 60% of Taiwan's tech industry—could also join to defend their interests in Taiwan.²⁰⁵ This is the *best-case* scenario for

²⁰⁴ Odell et al., "Strait of Emergency?"

²⁰⁵ Keoni Everington, "60% of Foreigners Working Taiwan's Tech Industry Are Filipinos," *Taiwan News*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3692865>.

China. The attack would equate in significance to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and Allied forces throughout the Pacific in 1941. Such an act of aggression could potentially involve a broader alliance architecture, such as the inclusion of NATO. Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty restricts NATO members from invoking Article 5 unless an attack occurs against a member's territory in *Europe, North America, or the Atlantic*. But it is highly unlikely that a coalition of NATO countries would not support the United States in some fashion, if not with outright military support. In contrast, the benefit of the second choice for China is that Beijing would avoid the "tripwire" effect of military alliances described above and would be more capable of maintaining the diplomatic "high ground." China consistently asserts that the resolution of Taiwan's separation from the mainland is purely a "domestic" concern. By carefully sidestepping any military confrontation with surrounding powers, Beijing could justifiably condemn any foreign military attempts to intervene as acts of aggression against China's "domestic" sovereignty. This "no first strike" policy could feasibly entangle foreign domestic and international decision-makers in lengthy and legally problematic debates, wherein Beijing could deploy the full force of its diplomatic, economic, and cyber "united front" to ensure inaction long enough to achieve a *fait accompli* in Taiwan. The risks of this choice, however, is that the United States, Japan, and other regional powers could decide to launch a counteroffensive *despite* the legal and normative ramifications and destroy China's chances of taking Taiwan whole. In the long-term, Taiwan would likely receive full international recognition and support while China would likely never again have the opportunity to reunify Taiwan. The blow to China's legitimacy, economy, and political stability could be catastrophic.

The second, alternative course of action for Beijing other than invasion is to form a naval or air blockade around the island in hopes of starving Taiwan of precious trade and resources until it submits to Beijing's demands. The blockade could be in full or in part; China could prevent all foreign imports yet continue to provide essential goods and services from the mainland, making Taiwan dependent on China for survival. But the costs and benefits of this course of action are nearly identical to the first, with the added difficulty that a complete blockade of an island the size of Taiwan would be extremely time- and resource-intensive. It is a less attractive option for Beijing because it leaves too much open

in the hands of Taiwan and international actors such as the United States or Japan. To encircle the island, China would need to occupy and control maritime zones contested by Japan in the ECS and would disrupt trading sea lanes to Japan through the strait. The chances of success would diminish over time as the level and volume of international opposition would grow proportionally. The most likely international response to a blockade of Taiwan would be a *counter-blockade* of China.²⁰⁶ Even though China would control the majority of the waters in the surrounding SCS and ECS, it would not be overly difficult for the United States and nations along the contested “nine-dash line” to make the “Malacca Dilemma” a reality for China by blockading its SLOCs from the Strait of Malacca or for Japan to counter-blockade from the ECS. China would have to eventually abandon the blockade of Taiwan or turn its forces outward to penetrate and disaggregate the coalition counter-blockade.

The third course of action is a much more plausible one. Beijing could seize one of Taiwan’s offshore islands, such as Kinmen island—which lies only five miles of China’s coast—in order to hold it as ransom for political concessions from Taiwan or to draw Taiwan across the strait into a fight of attrition which it cannot win. China could also seize Taiwan’s Dongsha Atoll (Pratas Islands) at the northern edge of the SCS or Taiping Island in the Spratly Islands in order to transform either into an artificial island and military installation.²⁰⁷ This is often considered the most likely course of action if Beijing’s goal is to signal resolve domestically and internationally but not instigate a full-blown war. But China has had the capability of taking Taiwan’s off-shore islands for decades and has refrained from doing so. The problem with this course of action is it would all but guarantee that China would never have the opportunity to take Taiwan proper in the future. The alarm and backlash against such a hostile act would likely be the tipping point for large-scale international support for Taiwan and more conclusive measures to ensure Taiwan is heavily

²⁰⁶ Odell et al., “Strait of Emergency?”

²⁰⁷ A senior Taiwanese security official revealed in November 2021 that China had considered seizing the Pratas Islands, but would not do so before 2024, when President Tsai Ing-wen’s term concludes. Sarah Wu, “China Has Debated Attacking Taiwan-Controlled Islands, Taiwan Official Says,” Reuters, last modified November 4, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-has-debated-attacking-taiwan-controlled-islands-taiwan-official-says-2021-11-04/>.

defended. It could even precipitate Taiwanese independence. If China were to decide to seize an offshore island, it would need to do so in a way that does not preclude the option of taking Taiwan itself in the future. Once again, it matters very much the *manner* in which China acquires an offshore island.

The Taiwanese military, in contrast, has identified five scenarios that could lead to invasion from the mainland: (1) if an internal upheaval occurs on the island, (2) if Taiwan’s armed forces become comparatively weak; (3) if any foreign power interferes in Taiwan’s internal affairs, (4) if Taipei refuses to talk to Beijing about unification for a protracted period; and/or (5) the island acquires nuclear weapons.²⁰⁸

Other variations abound. In November 2021, *Reuters* published an interactive “wargame” report to visually depict six potential scenarios for conflict between China and Taiwan—each preceded by extensive “gray zone” operations: (1) Blockade of the Matsu Islands, (2) Invasion of Kinmen Island, (3) Customs Quarantine, (4) Full Blockade, (5) Air and Missile Campaign, and (6) All-out Invasion (See Figure 4).²⁰⁹ Reuters constructed each of the scenarios based on the opinions of multiple experts and fifteen current and former military officers from Taiwan, the United States, Australia, and Japan.

The three broad courses of action and other conflict scenarios like those depicted by *Reuters* provide a useful conceptual framework to assess Beijing’s actions, but they are not predictive. The question that analysts largely ignore in these scenarios and which cannot be answered at present is: if Beijing succeeds in any of its courses of action and “wins,” can it “win the peace?” This is a challenge for Beijing that is as difficult as—if not *more* difficult than—the challenge of seizing the island and preventing foreign intervention.

²⁰⁸ (UNCLASSIFIED) “Taiwan Deep Dive” (presentation, U.S. Army Pacific, Fort Shafter, HI, September 11, 2018).

²⁰⁹ David Lague and Maryanne Murray, “T-Day: The Battle for Taiwan,” Reuters, last modified November 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/taiwan-china-wargames/>.

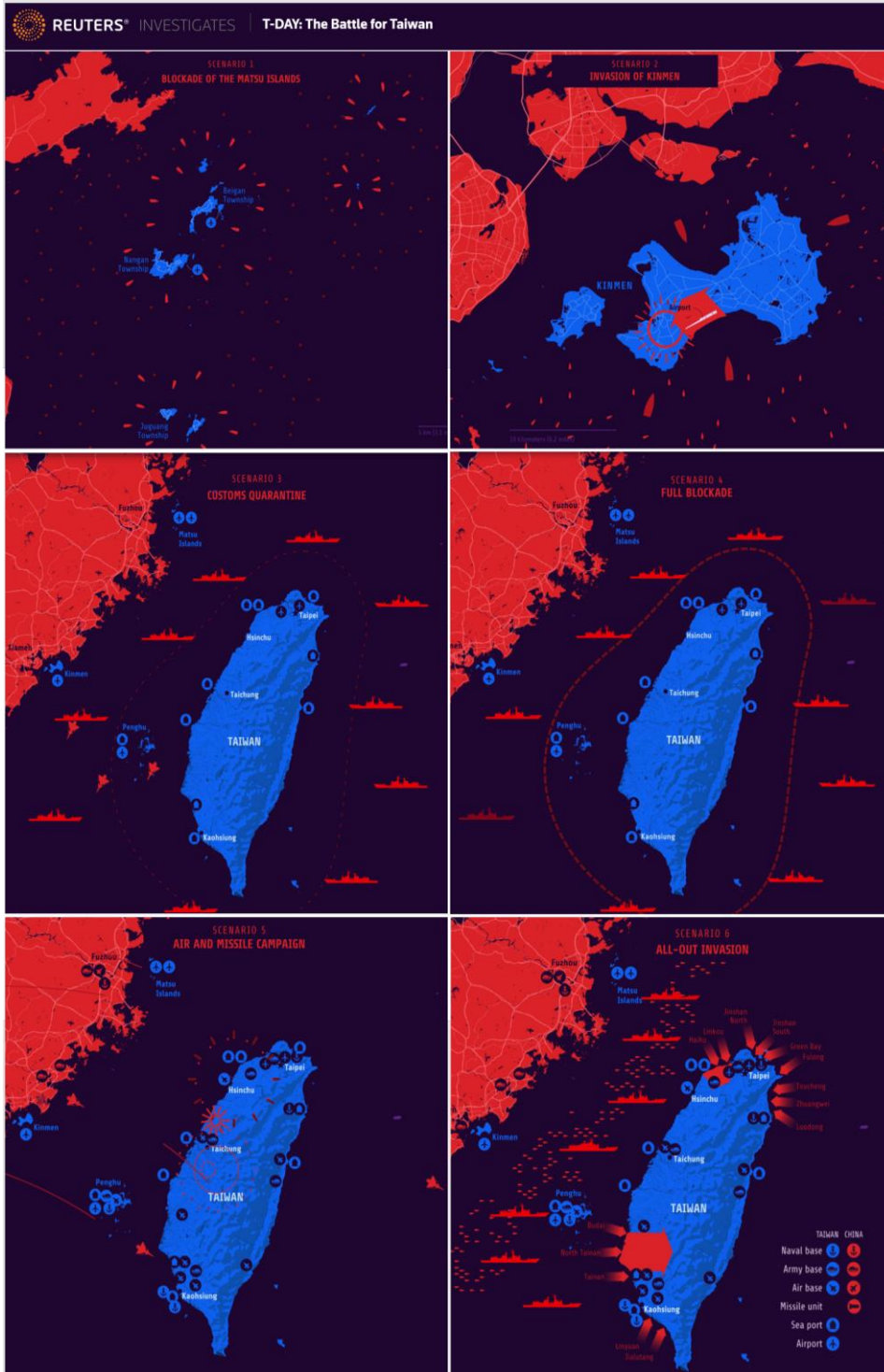


Figure 4. Reuters' Six Scenarios for the Battle for Taiwan.²¹⁰

It is important to note that the “Taiwan temptation” for China is not solely about taking Taiwan. It is also about taking on the United States. Taiwan is deeply symbolic of China’s incomplete attainment of “national rejuvenation” and territorial integrity, as well as regional hegemony. It is also deeply symbolic of the interference and prevention of China from achieving those goals by the United States and other “imperialists.” U.S. hegemony in the region and the perceived containment of China is an obstacle to China’s grand strategic goals and Taiwan is at the centerpiece of this impediment. In Beijing’s estimation, a “rational” incentive to seize Taiwan would be one in which it can feasibly do so *and* make it so the United States never interferes again—i.e., to have its cake and eat it too. In other words, China’s offensive strategy to seize Taiwan is simultaneously a “deterrence by denial” strategy toward the United States, which is why it desires a *fait accompli* above all else. If China believes the only alternative to break U.S. hegemony in the region is through a narrowly focused conflict, then choosing to fight that conflict over Taiwan is the rational choice. Seizing Taiwan is the logical course of action because it achieves two grand strategic objectives with one stone. If China believes it can seize and hold Taiwan successfully, that is temptation enough. But if China believes it can break U.S. hegemony in the process, the temptation doubles in size.

F. FUTURE PROSPECTS: DESTINED FOR WAR?

1. The Thucydides Trap

In his 2017 book *Destined for War*, Graham Allison imagines multiple possible scenarios that could lead to war between China and the United States. His scenario for Taiwan is eerily prescient of events that have unfolded in recent years. In the fictional scenario he portrays, political unrest ignites in Hong Kong, with residents protesting the increase of Chinese repression and legal vitiation of the “one country, two systems” agreement of 1997. The ensuing violence alarms the Taiwanese people, which bolsters pro-independence sentiment and emboldens the U.S. president to applaud and increase support for Taiwan. Taiwan proceeds to apply for full membership to the UN, to which China responds with escalatory missile “tests” in Taiwanese waters, to which the United States

²¹⁰ Source: Lague and Murray. “T-Day: The Battle for Taiwan.”

counteracts with congressional policy and military aid to Taiwan.²¹¹ At the time of Allison's writing of *Destined for War* in 2017, he could not have foreseen the violent and protracted protests that would erupt in Hong Kong less than two years later, but he astutely recognized the far-reaching impact that such an event would have on the Taiwanese people. Referring to the Taiwanese president as "she," he may have predicted the re-election of the pro-independence-leaning DPP incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen in January 2020. The following month, Taiwan revealed a record high 83% of the populace identifying themselves as Taiwanese (rather than Chinese or both).²¹² U.S. vocal support of Taiwan has equally soared, particularly following Taiwan's remarkably effective response to COVID-19, leading former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to congratulate President Tsai Ing-wen and laud Taiwan as an "inspiration" and "model" for the region and world.²¹³ In addition to the U.S. congressional proposals to support Taiwan and the multiple high-profile arms sales and official visits to the island mentioned above, the administration recently discussed how Taiwan may "meaningfully" participate in the UN, just as Allison envisaged.²¹⁴ And China has predictably launched multiple missile tests into Taiwan waters as well as PLAAF incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ.²¹⁵ Allison's analysis of potential scenarios leading to war has never been more relevant or timely today. His vision of the events linking these events to war with China is harrowing, yet no longer inconceivable.

Is the underlying structural stress of China's "rise" versus the United States' "rule" such that the outbreak of war is inevitable, as Thucydides's prescribed? The Harvard

²¹¹ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, 173–75.

²¹² Keoni Everington, "Record 83% of People in Taiwan Identify as Taiwanese amid Wuhan Virus Outbreak," *Taiwan News*, February 2, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3880591>.

²¹³ Jonathan Landay, "U.S. Applauds Tsai's Re-Election as Taiwan President: Pompeo," Reuters, last modified January 11, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-election-usa/u-s-applauds-tsais-re-election-as-taiwan-president-pompeo-idUSKBN1ZA0M3>.

²¹⁴ Reuters, "Taiwan, U.S. Discuss UN Participation Ahead of Key Anniversary," Reuters, last modified October 24, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/taiwan-us-discuss-un-participation-ahead-key-anniversary-2021-10-24/>.

²¹⁵ Lawrence Chung, "Tensions Rise Across the Taiwan Strait as Taipei Test-Fires Missiles," *South China Morning Post*, September 25, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3102990/tensions-rise-across-taiwan-strait-taipei-test-fires-missiles>.

Thucydides's Trap Project analyzed the past 500 years and identified 16 cases where a rising power challenged a ruling one. Of the 16 cases, war broke out twelve times while peaceful transition occurred only four times. In the concluding chapters of *Destined for War*, Allison, before offering strategic options to avoid Thucydides's trap with China, Allison is correct when he summarizes, "There is no 'solution' for the dramatic resurgence of a 5,000-year-old civilization with 1.4 billion people. It is a condition, a chronic condition that must be managed over a generation."²¹⁶ Years after his presidency, as he reflected on the Chinese-American period of rapprochement and détente beginning in 1972, Richard Nixon himself remarked, "We may have created a Frankenstein."²¹⁷ In the same year, in a now widely familiar response to a question about the impact of the French Revolution of 1789, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai replied, "Too early to say."²¹⁸ His response encapsulates the Chinese long view of history and is instructive for U.S. decision-makers regarding the so-called precedent of U.S.-Chinese relations. Several examples are worthy of note.

First, in 1948, when the Chinese Civil war was approaching its conclusion and the Communists under Mao Zedong were closing-in on victory against the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek, then U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall sought courses of action to counter Mao and support Chiang. Ultimately Marshall decided against U.S. intervention due to fears regarding Chinese resentment of foreign interference and the potential for American entrenchment in yet another large-scale war so soon after WWII.²¹⁹ Similarly, only two years later in North Korea, when Chinese Communist soldiers repelled U.S. and UN soldiers to the 38th parallel, President Truman denied GEN McArthur's request to counter-attack into China and use nuclear weapons—once again avoiding the prospect of

²¹⁶ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, 215.

²¹⁷ Graham Allison, 216.

²¹⁸ "Not Letting the Facts Ruin a Good Story," South China Morning Post, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/article/970657/not-letting-facts-ruin-good-story>. Henry Kissinger's translator, Chas Freeman, later revealed that Zhou misunderstood the question, and his response was actually related to the French student' revolts in 1968. The original interpretation, however, has remained a classic example the Chinese long view of history.

²¹⁹ Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers*, Nachdr. (New York: Free Press, 1988), 248–49.

a protracted land war in Asia. Several other decisions since then have brought the United States and China back from the brink of war. In 1955, President Eisenhower unofficially threatened the use of nukes to halt Chinese attacks against Taiwan during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis.²²⁰ Again in 1958 and 1996, during the Second and Third Taiwan Strait Crises, Presidents Eisenhower and Clinton, respectively, displayed military brinksmanship once again to deter Chinese aggression. While all of these incidents resolved tensions temporarily, none of them succeeded in altering China's trajectory or resolve in any meaningful way and have likely only reinforced anti-U.S. resentment for what China views as American interference in domestic issues. It can be argued that not much has changed since Marshall's decision in 1948. It is important to not lose sight of the reality that at the heart of cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan is a civil war that has never truly ended.²²¹ When evaluating U.S. actions and reactions to China during their dramatic 71-year rise, we—like Zhou Enlai—can only remark “too early to say.”

2. New Developments: Xi and the Cult of Personality

In the final chapter and conclusion of *Haunted by Chaos*, Sulmaan Khan demonstrates how Xi Jinping has carried on the grand strategy of his predecessors but has added several distinct features. For one, he has added a cult of personality. Recently, the CCP designated Xi as a “historic figure” on equal footing with Mao.²²² The announcement came as no surprise, as the PRC has widely propagated the collection of Xi's policies and statements known as “Xi Jinping Thought” and incorporated it into the CCP's constitution—akin to Mao's “Mao Zedong Thought” or Maoism.²²³ The coupling of Xi's persona with the communist party brings as many challenges as it does benefits for China. Any threat to or disparagement of Xi is taken as an affront to the party and a challenge to authority. But this provides a trove of potential “Trojan horses” for the United States and

²²⁰ Steven M. Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 1st ed. (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015), 25.

²²¹ O'Donnell, “Would the U.S. Get Involved in a War Between China and Taiwan?”

²²² Keith Zhai, “China's Xi Gains Power as Communist Party Designates Him a Historic Figure,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-xi-gains-power-as-communist-party-designates-him-historical-figure-11636635312>.

²²³ The full title is: “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”

its allies. If the CCP is so concerned about Xi's image that it will even censor and prohibit images of Winnie the Pooh, what else could be co-opted to drive up tensions and draw the world's attention to the increasingly Orwellian nature of the CCP's censorship and (in)security measures? The outside world ridicules China's actions such as these, but they could be turned into an inundation of political and information warfare—striking at the heart of China's greatest insecurities.

Additionally, the fact that Xi has invested so much toward the goal of reunification indicates, as Khan stated, that he cares so deeply about the issue that he no longer understands it.²²⁴ This is a dangerous temperament for a Chinese paramount leader to have, particularly when China's military capacity to successfully invade Taiwan is so close at hand. The predicament is that China is now more powerful than at any time in its history, but its insecurity has not commensurately diminished. In many ways its insecurity has increased, creating a volatile and unpredictable situation for Taiwan and the region.

G. SUMMARY

Today there may be opportunities to take advantage of China's pragmatic operating principle. Competition does not need to be at the expense of ostracization, which would trigger China's greatest insecurity of threats to its sovereignty. Or perhaps the goal of competition should be to prevent and deny China from dealing with "whomever it wants in order to get the state it wants." Nevertheless, great power competition must be able to temper China's growing ambition and expanding core interests without stepping on its central nerve. As David Keegan asserts, "The challenge is how to avoid a crisis over Taiwan and enable strategic stability so that the U.S. and China have time to make the fundamental policy accommodations necessary for a more stable world order."²²⁵

Furthermore, it is difficult to overestimate the salience of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. Any current indicator of effective deterrence will be inevitably eschewed by the

²²⁴ Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 224.

²²⁵ David Keegan, "Strengthening Dual Deterrence on Taiwan: The Key to US-China Strategic Stability," Stimson, last modified July 6, 2021, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/strengthening-dual-deterrence-on-taiwan-the-key-to-us-china-strategic-stability/>.

measure of *self-deterrence* on the part of China prior to the games. The prestige, money, and soft-power influence that an Olympic Games typically affords the host nation are restraining forces on China's "wolf warrior" rhetoric. Nonetheless, as defense analyst and naval historian Jerry Hendrix affirms, "once the Olympic torch is extinguished in late February, the Davidson Window will fly fully open and Xi Jinping, suddenly freed from diplomatic goals, will be able to pursue political and military ambitions once again, much like his ally Vladimir Putin did following the 2014 Sochi games."²²⁶ In a world where the sub-structure of these complex, often wicked problems has not yet cemented, now is the time to "bake-in" solutions that alleviate or prevent the structural stress of great power competition that makes war the rule, not the exception. Let history recall how China and the United States became the fifth exception to Thucydides's Trap in the years to come.

²²⁶ Hendrix, "Closing the Davidson Window."

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IV. POLICY AND STRATEGIC ENDS

While speaking of China as America’s “pacing threat” in June 2021, USD(P) Colin Kahl declared the importance of “getting China right,” adding that with any strategy, “resources must be matched to strategy, strategy matched to policy and policy matched to the will of the American people.”²²⁷ Following this wisdom, chapters IV through VI outline the various military “ends, ways, and means” for an asymmetric defense and unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan in order to achieve national policy objectives in great power competition with China.

A. BALANCING THE STRATEGY STOOL

The outline follows the “strategy stool” framework conceived by acclaimed Army War College professor and retired Army colonel, Art Lykke. Lykke frames military strategy as a stool which balances national security on three legs: objectives, concepts, and resources.²²⁸ Objectives represent “ends,” resources represent the “means,” and concepts represent the “ways” by which the “means” are linked to “ends.” The greater the imbalance between the three legs, the greater degree of risk to national security. “Strategy fails when the chosen means prove insufficient to the ends. This can happen because the wrong means are chosen or because the ends are too ambitious or slippery.”²²⁹ Currently, the U.S. strategy stool for Taiwan is imbalanced and is growing more imbalanced—increasing the degree of risk (see Figure 5). As the United States trends towards “strategic clarity” and more active, direct support of Taiwan, the list of strategic “ends” increases while the “ways” and “means” remain limited. It is possible to balance the strategy stool without recourse to an indirect, unconventional deterrence approach, but doing so would require drastic increases in operational “ways” and “means” which are likely to cause an escalation spiral with China and increase the odds of miscalculation and miscommunication. The

²²⁷ Garamone, “Official Talks DOD Policy Role in Chinese Pacing Threat, Integrated Deterrence.”

²²⁸ Arthur F. Lykke, “Defining Military Strategy,” *Military Review* 64, no. 5 (May 1989): 2–8, <https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p124201coll1/id/504/>.

²²⁹ Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” 50.

value of an unconventional deterrence strategy to build Taiwan’s resilience and resistance capacities for asymmetric defense is that it circumvents this security dilemma by limiting the “ends” while increasing the indirect “ways” and allocating specific yet limited “means” to support achieve those “ends”—therefore reducing the degree of risk.

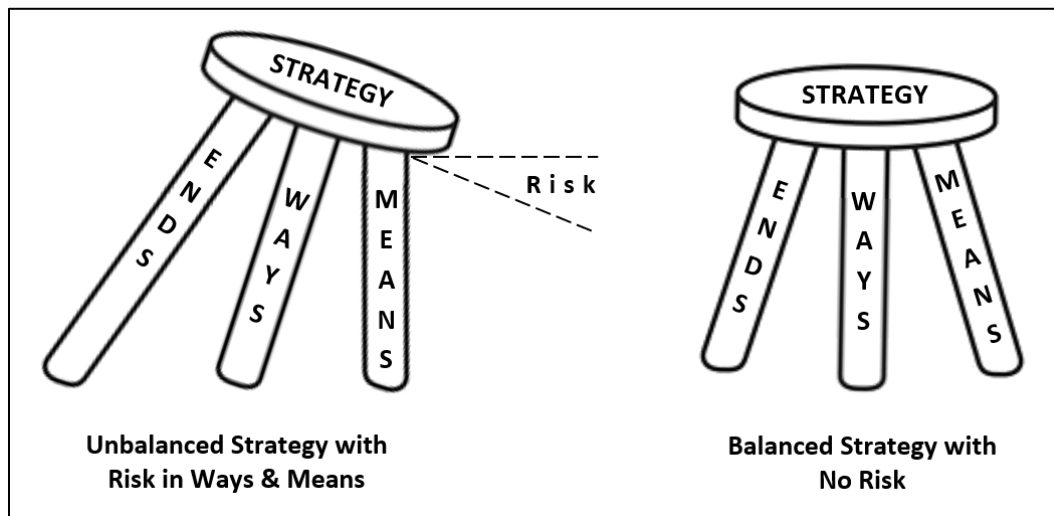


Figure 5. Art Lykke’s Strategy Stool.²³⁰

Lykke also posits two levels of strategy: “operational” and “force development.” Strategies formulated with existing capabilities under existing policies are “operational” strategies. They are typically short-term strategies conducive to five-year plans. Longer-term strategies based on estimates of the future environment and which may require changes to existing policies or capabilities are “force development” strategies.²³¹ The unconventional deterrence strategy outlined in this study contains elements of both these levels of Lykke’s conception of strategy. Some of the “ends, ways, and means” apply to an immediate “operational” strategy while others apply more to a “force development” strategy. In this case, the “operational” objectives are roughly equivalent to Taiwan’s asymmetric defense objectives while the “force development” objectives are the U.S. BPC

²³⁰ Adapted from Lykke, “Defining Military Strategy,” 6.

²³¹ Lykke, 4.

objectives for Taiwan. The reason for identifying the relevant “ends, ways, and means” in this manner is to inform Globally Integrated Campaigning (GIC) within the Joint Strategic Planning System (JSPS). The *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* defines integrated campaigning as “Joint Force and interorganizational partner efforts to enable the achievement and maintenance of policy aims by integrating military activities and aligning non-military activities of sufficient scope, scale, simultaneity, and duration across multiple domains.”²³²

1. Policy versus Strategic Objectives

It is important to distinguish *policy* objectives from *military* objectives, according to Lykke.²³³ The overall *policy* objective for an asymmetric defense strategy is to deter China from invading and annexing Taiwan by denying its ability to accomplish its primary policy and grand strategic objectives: the reunification of Taiwan. In other words, the policy objective is to attack China’s strategy. The objective for Taiwan from the declassified 2018 Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework (IPSF) is to, “Enable Taiwan to develop an effective asymmetric defense strategy and capabilities that will help ensure its security, freedom from coercion, resilience, and ability to engage China on its own terms.”²³⁴ The *strategic* objective for this counterstrategy is to increase Taiwan’s capacity for resilience and resistance should an invasion occur. The strategic objective focuses less on the ability to deny China from invading but rather from controlling the populace. The overall strategic end-state for this unconventional deterrence is successful deterrence of China from attacking or invading Taiwan. But mere deterrence simply prevents Beijing from attacking, not from maintaining the possibility that it could attack someday down the road. In other words, while the status quo does not change, neither do Beijing’s objectives.

²³² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), v, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf?ver=2018-03-28-102833-257.

²³³ Lykke, “Defining Military Strategy,” 5.

²³⁴ National Security Council, *U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific* (Washington, DC: White House, 2018), 5, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>.

For this reason, a deeper, more long-term sustainable end-state which aligns with the overall policy objective must generate conditions that compel Beijing to pursue non-military means to reunification or coexistence. The U.S. BPC “force development” objective is to develop and support this collective military objective, but also to foster Taiwanese defense transformation and innovation.

2. Multiple Dilemmas versus Multiple Options

The 2014 Army Operating Concept *Win in a Complex World* introduced the concept of a “Strategic Win” by being able to present multiple dilemmas for the enemy and multiple options for oneself—through multiple domains, multiple partners, and the development of the future force. “The key to a Strategic Win is to present the enemy with multiple dilemmas. To compel enemy action or inaction requires putting something of value to them at risk. To dissuade aggressive force projection, you must deny their confidence in operational success by gaining and maintaining relative positions of advantage.”²³⁵

Within this construct, the strategic goal for a Taiwanese defensive posture is to create as many dilemmas for Beijing and as many options for Taipei and its allies as possible. The challenges that Beijing would face during a large-scale amphibious assault across the strait against a conventional Taiwanese defense are enormous. But Beijing is rapidly closing the capability gap in order to achieve this feat and it may not even be dissuaded by the potential costs of such an assault. Therefore, the *strategic* goal is to create a “defense-in-depth” on the island and in the surrounding waters consisting of integrated and dispersed conventional and unconventional capabilities. The objective of a *conventional* operational approach is to attrit PLA amphibious forces as they cross the strait and prevent them from gaining a decisive foothold on the island. The objective of an *unconventional* operational approach is to build resilient and redundant systems in order to absorb the costs of the assault and to have a robust resistance capability in order to prevent

²³⁵ Training and Doctrine Command, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014), iii, <https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/Army%20Operating%20Concept%202014%20%28TP525-3-1%29.pdf>.

PLA forces from achieving full control of the island. In other words, the goal of a conventional approach is to *prevent* PLA forces from landing on the island whereas the goal of an unconventional operational approach is to compel the PLA to *commit* as many forces as possible until the ensuing counterinsurgency campaign is no longer politically tenable. As Andrew Mack stated, “In order to *win*, [the insurgents] must be able to impose a steady accumulation of ‘costs’ on their opponent... Strategically, the insurgents’ aim must be to provoke the external power into escalating its forces on the ground.”²³⁶

The combination of conventional and unconventional defense and deterrence approaches, regular and irregular forces, civil-military fusion, and resilience and resistance concepts is known as “total defense” or “comprehensive defense.” Comprehensive defense measures are an effective deterrent because they force the aggressor to have to prepare and develop capabilities for not only a conventional attack but also for an ensuing, protracted resistance campaign—i.e., invasion and counterinsurgency. Tami Biddle explains the logic of this dynamic in her article, *Coercion Theory*:

An army’s presence on the ground is at once its greatest strength and its greatest weakness... A determined weaker enemy may be willing to enter an escalatory contest, upping the ante by turning to irregular methods and relying on time (and a high pain threshold) to hold out against a stronger force. Or it may turn to irregular methods once a conventional war has been fought, in order to shift the terms of surrender or alter the postwar political situation.²³⁷

The *Comprehensive Defence Handbook (CDH)* published by NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) refers to the unconventional resistance component of comprehensive defense as “asymmetric defense.” The strategic “end” of an asymmetric defense strategy for Taiwan is to deny China from achieving political and populace control by building Taiwan’s capacities for resilience and resistance. There are multiple benefits of this strategy for the United States.

²³⁶ Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (January 1975): 185, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009880>.

²³⁷ Tami Davis Biddle, “Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners,” *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 107, <https://tnsr.org/2020/02/coercion-theory-a-basic-introduction-for-practitioners/>.

First, the more resilience Taiwan has in peacetime—i.e., the ability to absorb costs or recover from those effects rapidly—the less salient the argument that Washington should signal a clear commitment to Taiwan’s defense. In other words, Taiwanese resilience enables “strategic ambiguity” to persist—providing Washington with flexible response options and unofficial channels for de-escalation and dual deterrence. But a lack of resilience pressures Washington to adopt greater “strategic clarity”—constraining it to a narrow menu of options and binary, zero-sum solutions. Similarly, the more resistance capacity Taiwan has—i.e., the ability to protract a conflict and prevent full political annexation—the less credibility (capability & commitment) that Washington will have to carefully manage. In other words, Taiwan’s resistance capacity reduces both the power projection capabilities (e.g., strategic lift, forward basing, naval presence etc.) and the level of resolve needed by Washington to commit those capabilities and the lives of U.S. service members in response to a potential crisis. If Taiwan lacks resilience and the capacity to resist an occupation then it will likely capitulate quickly and American resolve would need to be clear and unified in order to intervene in time—if at all. But if Taiwan possesses robust resilience and resistance capacities then a Chinese occupation will be more likely to drag on indefinitely, which would provide Washington and the international community with sufficient time and space to mount a counteroffensive and isolate China diplomatically, economically, and psychologically. In this scenario, even if Taiwan were to ultimately exhaust its resilience and resistance capacities and succumb to PRC control, it would still have denied China from achieving its grand strategic objective in the manner of its choosing. In the end, if all else fails, China may regain its territorial sovereignty, but the enormously consequential costs will likely destroy its chances for achieving “national rejuvenation” and becoming a “strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and modern socialist country” by 2049. This would place the United States in position of considerable advantage in global strategic competition with China.

The alternative is for Washington to increase its security commitments and “strategic clarity” with Taiwan and begin to commit more and more resources and assets to defend Taiwan. But there is no reason for Washington to believe it will be at an advantage in a situation of mutual imposition of costs with China. In a brinkmanship style

of competition, the side that typically wins is the side with greater *asymmetry of interest* or *resolve*, as opposed to *asymmetry of power*. Direct, conventional approaches to deterrence are less likely to succeed in these cases than indirect, unconventional approaches.

B. THEORY OF ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

While speaking of global strategic competition with China in June 2021, USD(P) Colin Kahl stated: “My own view is that we win this competition by emphasizing our strengths... which is an unrivaled network of partners and allies around the world.”²³⁸ Similarly, the 2018 *NDS* refers to partners and allies as America’s “asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match.”²³⁹ While these remarks certainly resonate as true, they emphasize America’s *asymmetry of power* without differentiating its *asymmetry of interest* or *resolve vis-à-vis* China. Despite the United States’ military supremacy, it is not a guarantee of deterrence. Some adversaries like China may have a disproportionate level of interest and resolve to pursue aggressive action, regardless of the United States’ power asymmetry. “If an adversary perceives that his stake in the confrontation is extremely high, while the U.S. stake in the crisis is not commensurate... the adversary may find the threat of U.S. military action non-credible.”²⁴⁰ Moreover, it is important to note the difference between U.S. and Chinese perspectives of deterrence. For example, the United States typically focuses on the role of deterrent capabilities, while the Chinese focus more on resolve.²⁴¹ Given this distinction, it is even more important for policymakers and practitioners alike to understand the concept of asymmetry and its role in strategy formulation.

1. Power versus Interest Asymmetry

The distinction of asymmetry is relevant to this study because the “question” of Taiwan represents one of the most significant asymmetries of interest in modern

²³⁸ Garamone, “Official Talks DOD Policy Role in Chinese Pacing Threat, Integrated Deterrence.”

²³⁹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 8.

²⁴⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept*, 17.

²⁴¹ Scouras, Smyth, and Mahnken, *Cross-Domain Deterrence*, 19.

geostrategic history. For more than 70 years Beijing has remained resolute and unified in its desire to reunify Taiwan—at least to a greater extent than the United States is prepared to commit significant lives and treasure to counter. For example, in 2012 the PRC’s Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun declared, “the Chinese government has unshakable resolve and will to uphold China’s territorial sovereignty... No amount of foreign threats or pressure will shake, in the slightest, the resolve of the Chinese government and people.”²⁴²

Both the United States and Taiwan must internalize the differentials between power asymmetry and interest asymmetry with China and seek ways to mitigate them when developing and implementing an effective deterrence strategy. If U.S. policymakers and strategic planners conceive of armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait strictly as a *conventional* fight to defend or retake the island, they will likely overestimate America’s military strengths. But not only does China possess a higher asymmetry of interest and resolve when it comes to Taiwan, it also has a *proximal* and *temporal* asymmetric advantage in relation to the United States; it is positioned only one hundred miles from Taiwan and possesses advanced “counter-intervention” capabilities to preempt or counter any initial U.S. attempts to intervene—a formidable “assassin’s mace.” While China enjoys the “benefit of proximity,” the United States faces the “tyranny of distance.” But if U.S. policymakers and strategic planners conceive of armed conflict in Taiwan as an *unconventional* fight to turn Taiwan into a “porcupine” or “poison pill” for China, they will be more likely to succeed in mitigating the relative power asymmetries by protracting the time horizon long-enough for a U.S.-led coalition to balance the asymmetry of resolve as well.

It is important to understand that *all* conflict—in effect—is asymmetric; there always exists some measure of disparity or overmatch between belligerents because no two belligerents are equally powerful. As Conrad Crane proclaimed and LTG (Ret.) H.R. McMaster was known to frequently quote, “there are two approaches to waging war, asymmetric and stupid.”²⁴³ All belligerents engage in asymmetric conflict in some fashion

²⁴² Michael J. Mazarr et al., *What Deters and Why: Applying a Framework to Assess Deterrence of Gray Zone Aggression*, RR3142 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2021), 20, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3142.html.

²⁴³ Conrad C. Crane, “The Lure of Strike,” *Parameters* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2013).

in order to circumvent the other's strengths, gain a position of advantage, and exploit the other's weaknesses. In 1994, political scientist T.V. Paul described asymmetric conflict as, "conflict involving two states with unequal overall military and economic power resources."²⁴⁴ But this definition fails to account for the *positive* versus *negative* forms of asymmetry as well as the difference between power asymmetry and interest asymmetry. Most often, people tend to view asymmetric warfare in its negative form—as a threat which achieves disproportionate effects by circumventing or undermining one's strengths and advantages.²⁴⁵ But asymmetry—in all its various forms—is not necessarily a negative condition. Interest asymmetry, information asymmetry, power asymmetry, and resource asymmetry are not threats *per se* but opportunities for weak and strong powers alike to exploit. Clausewitz noted this dynamic when he cautioned against the assumption of "polarity" between opponents, "which does not lie in attack or defense, but in the object both seek to achieve: the decision."²⁴⁶ Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson II from the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute provided the most comprehensive definition of asymmetry in their 2001 report, "Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy:"

Asymmetry is acting, organizing, and thinking *differently* than opponents in order to maximize one's own advantages, exploit an opponent's weakness, attain the initiative, or gain greater freedom of action. It can be *political-strategic, military-strategic, operational*, or a *combination* of these. It can entail different *methods, technologies, values, organizations, time perspectives*, or some *combination* of these. It can be *short-term* or *long-term*. It can be *deliberate* or by *default*. It can be *discrete* or pursued in *conjunction with* symmetric approaches. It can have both *psychological* and *physical* dimensions.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ T. V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 33 (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20.

²⁴⁵ Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., *The Revenge of the Melians: Asymmetric Threats and the Next QDR*: (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, 2000), 2, <https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA421982>.

²⁴⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Eliot Howard, and Peter Paret, *On War*, First paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 84.

²⁴⁷ Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson, "Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts:" (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, January 1, 2001), 14, <https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA392257>.

These dyadic, either-or qualifications highlight the vast spectrum of differences and variations that belligerents can detect and leverage. The United States and Taiwan must pursue a *combination* of asymmetric approaches in order to achieve strategic effects and present multiple dilemmas for Beijing. While speaking of the tendency to employ previously successful templates against adversaries, retired USAF colonel Mike Pietrucha suggested that, “faced with the current A2/AD challenge, we should spend our time finding strategies that will enable us to avoid the challenge rather than seeking silver bullets that enable us to ‘win’ it.”²⁴⁸

2. Strategic Interaction Theory

In his seminal 1975 article, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” Andrew Mack was one of the first to use the concept of asymmetry to describe certain conflicts like the Vietnam War—which at the time was fresh in the minds of the American public and which had confounded military experts as to how the inferior North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were able to overcome the superior U.S. military. Mack postulated that small powers succeed against larger powers not through military capability, but by attriting the political capability or will of the larger power. This dynamic is a function of what he calls the “asymmetric relationship” and “asymmetric structure” between the two powers.²⁴⁹

“Asymmetric relationship” refers to how each belligerent views the other, the level of perceived threat which each poses to the other, and the relative stakes at hand. For example, Washington views potential conflict over Taiwan as essentially a *limited* war because—although China has the capability to physically threaten U.S. interests or attack U.S. territory—it would still be *regional* in nature with no desire for all-out warfare with China. Beijing, however, views potential conflict over Taiwan as a *total*—albeit, “domestic”—war with the potential *unlimited* aim of reunification. Taiwan also views

²⁴⁸ Mike Pietrucha, “Avoiding the Charge of the Light Brigade Against China,” War on the Rocks, last modified November 22, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/11/avoiding-the-charge-of-the-light-brigade-against-china-2/>.

²⁴⁹ Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars,” 181–82.

conflict as *total* because war would threaten its continued existence. As the current CENTCOM commander GEN McKenzie observed, “a rich man’s small-scale contingency may be a poor man’s major theater war.”²⁵⁰ For Mack, these relationships are a consequence of power asymmetry versus interest asymmetry.

The United States and China also exist within an “asymmetric structure,” which refers to their respective ability to bear a protracted war of attrition against each other (politically, psychologically, etc.). As the U.S. Air War College professor of strategy Dr. Jeffrey Record surmised in 2005, “disparities in strength of interest and willingness to sacrifice, the dynamics of strategic interaction, and the relative vulnerability of democratic states to coercion via properly conducted irregular warfare go a long way in explaining the outcome of many ‘unequal’ wars.”²⁵¹

The “dynamics of strategic interaction” which Dr. Record cites refer to the highly influential work of Army veteran and IR scholar Ivan Arreguín-Toft. In 2001, Arreguín-Toft expanded on Mack’s theory that power asymmetry explains interest asymmetry in his influential article entitled “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict.” He contends that asymmetric conflict depends on the “strategic interaction” or manner in which strong powers adopt strategies vis-à-vis their weaker opponents. He posits a straightforward predictive model of “direct” versus “indirect” strategies (see Figure 6). The theory predicts that if strong and weak powers employ same-approach strategies against each other, the outcome should favor the stronger power. But if the strategies are mismatched—i.e., direct versus indirect—the outcome should favor the weaker power. The implication is that—whether direct or indirect, symmetric or asymmetric—“every strategy has an ideal counterstrategy. Actors able to predict their adversary’s strategy can therefore

²⁵⁰ McKenzie Jr., *The Revenge of the Melians*, 3.

²⁵¹ Jeffrey Record, “Why the Strong Lose,” *Parameters* 35, no. 4 (2005): 22, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol35/iss4/8>.

dramatically improve their chances of victory by choosing and implementing that counterstrategy.”²⁵²

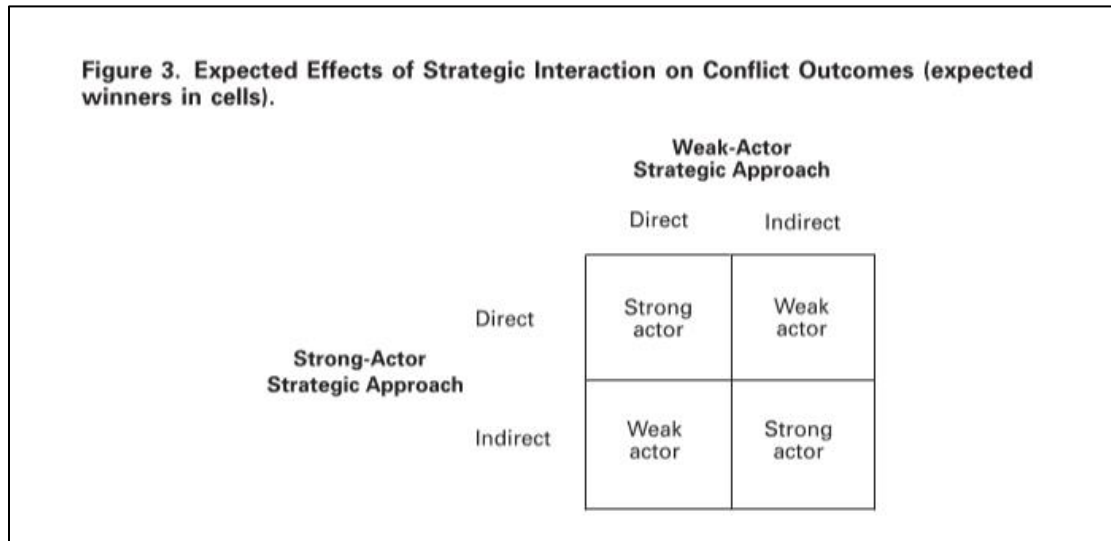


Figure 6. Ivan Arreguín-Toft’s Strategic Interaction Framework.²⁵³

The concept of direct versus indirect counterstrategies is an important consideration for Washington when calculating strategic responses to Beijing’s indirect, combination warfare approach with Taiwan. According to Arreguín-Toft’s theory, if the United States (as the strong-actor) adopts a direct counterstrategy against China (as the weak-actor) and its indirect strategy, China will prevail. Therefore, the United States will have a greater chance of deterrence and success in war if it adopts an indirect, asymmetric approach to China over Taiwan. In *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz notes that “competition produces a tendency toward the sameness of the competitors.”²⁵⁴ Beijing has

²⁵² Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 104, <https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/10.1162/016228801753212868>.

²⁵³ Source: Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 108.

²⁵⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 127.

largely eschewed this tendency in order to avoid direct military confrontation with the United States, but Washington must also resist this tendency in GPC with China.

The logic of Arreguín-Toft's theory applies even if the conditions of strategic interaction were to change in the future. For example, Beijing is pursuing the capabilities to surpass and defeat the United States in direct combat. If China becomes the strong-actor and begins implementing a direct approach while the United States— now the weak-actor—continues to pursue a direct counterstrategy, then China should prevail. In either scenario, whether the United States is the weak-actor or strong-actor, it should adopt an indirect strategic approach.

Arreguín-Toft's framework is useful for Taiwan as well. If Taiwan (as the weak-actor) continues to pursue a direct, conventional defense strategy against China's stronger direct approach, it will likely fail. But if it defends using an indirect approach—all other things being equal—it will likely prevail. According to Dr. Record, "Indirect defense via irregular warfare is in most cases the only sensible strategy for the weaker side, because a direct defense is an invitation to swift defeat."²⁵⁵ Therefore, according to the theory of strategic interaction, the United States and Taiwan should both adopt a combined, indirect, and asymmetric strategic approach to counter China's direct strategy to invade and forcefully annex Taiwan. For Arreguín-Toft, the "key causal mechanism of the strategic interaction thesis is time."²⁵⁶ In other words, the actor with greater resilience can outlast the relative power of the aggressor. An indirect strategy of unconventional deterrence which threatens protracted resistance against China is the most likely strategy to succeed. In this way, as Arreguín-Toft asserts, the "weak actor's strategy can make a strong actor's power irrelevant."²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Record, "Why the Strong Lose," 20.

²⁵⁶ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," 111.

²⁵⁷ Arreguín-Toft, 93.

C. DETERRENCE THEORY

Deterrence is fundamentally a strategy to “shape another’s perception of costs and benefits to dissuade threatening behavior.”²⁵⁸ Acclaimed political scientist and deterrence scholar Glenn Snyder calls this the aggressor’s “risk calculus,” which consists of four basic considerations: (1) assessment of one’s objectives and the expected benefits of action; (2) assessment of the expected costs of action; (3) probability of response actions from the deterring actor; and (4) probability of defeating these responses and attaining one’s objectives.²⁵⁹ Deterrence is a form of coercion, of which there are two main brands: compellence and deterrence.

1. Deterrence versus Compellence

The purpose of compellence is most often to *change* a status quo by pressuring and persuading the target actor to take an action which it would not normally take and which is favorable to the compeller. The purpose of deterrence, however, is most often to *maintain* a status quo between actors by affecting the target actor’s cost-benefit calculus and dissuading it from taking a belligerent action to change the status quo. For example, while Beijing seeks to compel Taiwan and change the status quo—whether forcibly or via “gray zone,” encroachment tactics—Washington seeks to maintain the status quo by deterring Beijing from taking steps in that direction unilaterally. Washington also seeks to deter Taipei from unilaterally changing the status quo in the opposite direction—by declaring *de facto* independence. This is the concept of “dual deterrence.” There is also an element of “triple deterrence;” Washington seeks to deter third party states from unbalancing the status quo by either bandwagoning with Beijing or encouraging Taipei to declare independence.

Furthermore, there is a distinction between *direct* and *extended* deterrence. *Direct* or basic deterrence is any action taken by a deterrer to discourage and prevent belligerent action against the deterrer directly. *Extended* deterrence is the concept of deterring

²⁵⁸ Scott Jasper, ed., *Conflict and Cooperation in the Global Commons: A Comprehensive Approach for International Security* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 56.

²⁵⁹ Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 12.

belligerent actions against a *third-party*, such as an ally or protégé. This is undoubtedly the case with Taiwan, and arguably the main reason for the passage of the TRA in 1979. Extended compellence logically follows as any attempts by a compeller to pressure or persuade a target to take action *in favor of* a third-party. However, there are more nuanced forms of extended deterrence and compellence that exist in special circumstances, such as in Taiwan. If Beijing views Taiwan as vital or decisive to its greater policy and strategic objectives, then Washington can take action not only to deter belligerent acts against Taiwan but also—by doing so—to consolidate gains against Beijing by converting the deterred status of Taiwan into a means to further deter or compel Beijing. In other words, Washington can exploit a critical vulnerability by deterring two birds with one stone. In the case of Taiwan, this would be: (1) Beijing’s goal to reunify Taiwan and (2) Beijing’s goal to achieve “national rejuvenation” by the year 2049. By denying the first goal, Washington could deny the second goal, causing immeasurable repercussions for Beijing and placing the United States at a comparative advantage.

From this understanding of coercion theory, Washington’s main policy objective to deter or counter Beijing should be to prevent it from achieving its foremost policy objective: the reunification of Taiwan. This assessment results from a basic center of gravity (COG) analysis of the CCP. The CCP’s COG is the grand “Chinese Dream” and the critical vulnerabilities to its legitimacy include the repression of Hong Kong, the persecution of Muslim Uyghurs, and the uncertainty of Taiwan. Countering Beijing would include various and synchronized forms of direct and extended coercion efforts across each of the levers of national power (DIMEFIL). In many ways Washington is already pursuing this course of action but has yet to coalesce its actions into a coherent foreign policy for both its allies and partners to comprehend and support—as well as for the American public. The latter audience is the nucleus of the dilemma.

Effective deterrence relies on the *threat credibility* of the deterrer, which itself relies on the *retaliatory capability* of the deterrer to intervene against the aggressor and inflict sufficient costs that outweigh the benefits of aggression. This includes more than just military capabilities. But credibility also relies on the *perceived resolve* of the deterrer. “Making the hostile actor believe that the deterring actor has the political will to deny

benefits and impose costs, even if it comes at a price to oneself, is an important element to impact its cost-benefit calculus.”²⁶⁰ The most significant finding from the system dynamics analysis summarized in Appendix A is that the *actual* capability of the United States and Taiwan matters less than China’s *perception* of their capability. While the White House and Pentagon have effectually communicated credible resolve to Beijing over the decades (President Eisenhower went so far as to threaten the use of nuclear weapons during the Taiwan Crisis of 1954–55),²⁶¹ it is far from certain whether the general public’s endorsement of a costly war against China is concordant, and this civil-military divide could continue to widen while the credibility of U.S. resolve wanes. This would be an unacceptable geopolitical impasse for Washington as it would also signal a lack of resolve to other U.S. partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific region such as South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. But that dynamic could be changing for the first time in decades. A survey of American public opinion and U.S. foreign policy conducted in 2021 by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs revealed that a record 52% of Americans would support U.S. military intervention if China invaded Taiwan—up from 41% in 2019.²⁶² To exacerbate the issue, both Taiwan and the United States are gradually losing the capability advantage to deter and counterattack China militarily. Beijing is increasingly pursuing advanced amphibious, airborne, and cross-domain precision strike capabilities as well as sophisticated “counter-intervention,” A2/AD systems to enable both a fait-accompli invasion of Taiwan as well as a fortified defense of the island that would deny timely U.S. intervention. Former Taiwan Defense Minister Lee Tien-yu famously assessed in 2007 that Taiwan would only be able to resist a Chinese invasion for *two weeks* before capitulating,

²⁶⁰ Vytautas Kersankas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach to Countering Hybrid Threats* (Helsinki: Hybrid CoE, 2020), 19, https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Deterrence_public.pdf.

²⁶¹ Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 25.

²⁶² Dina Smeltz et al., *A Foreign Policy for the Middle Class - What Americans Think* (Chicago: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2021), https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ccs2021_fpmc_0.pdf.

and the ability of the United States to respond or reverse the invasion within that timeframe is becoming increasingly bleak.²⁶³

2. The Psychological Dimension of Deterrence

While an actor may use military as well as diplomatic, economic, or other instruments of national power (DIMEFIL) to deter an aggressor, the “act” of deterrence itself occurs in the mind of the adversarial decision-maker, or in the information domain. Deterrence, then, is a psychological mechanism; it is essentially *self-restraint* on the part of the would-be aggressor. Deterrence is never an end-state, but an intermediate means to cause a change in the mind of the adversarial decision-maker. People often speak of deterrence as the prevention of an aggressor from action, but no measure of deterrence or amount of deterrent force can prevent an aggressor from *choosing* to commit an aggressive act regardless. The *Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military* defines deterrence as “a state of mind brought about by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction.”²⁶⁴ There are three factors to this threat, according to Joint Publication (JP) 5-0 *Joint Planning*: “the likelihood of being denied the expected benefits of action, the likelihood of having excessive costs imposed for taking the action, and the acceptability of restraint as an alternative.”²⁶⁵

The psychological dimension of deterrence is paramount. JP 5-0 describes deterrence activities as any “actions or operations executed specifically to alter adversaries’ decision calculus. These actions or operations may demonstrate U.S. commitment to a region, ally, partner, or principle. They may also demonstrate a U.S. capability to deny an adversary the benefit of an undesired action.”²⁶⁶ In this sense, deterrence is a form of

²⁶³ Keoni Everington, “China Finalizes Plan to Invade Taiwan in 2020: Researcher,” *Taiwan News*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3268316>.

²⁶⁴ *Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military*, s.v. “deterrence,” accessed November 7, 2021, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199891580.001.0001/acref-9780199891580-e-2344?rskey=UtA6tK&result=2244>.

²⁶⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, JP 5-0 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2020), E-2, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp5_0.pdf?ver=us_fQ_pGS_u65ateysmAng%3d%3d.

²⁶⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, V-3.

strategic psychological operations (PSYOP): “Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.”²⁶⁷

The DOD’s 2006 *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept* (JOC) defines deterrence operations as those operations which dissuade an adversary from taking certain actions by means of “decisive influence over their decision-making.” Decisive influence is defined as “credibly threatening to deny benefits and/or impose costs, while encouraging restraint by convincing the actor that restraint will result in an acceptable outcome.”²⁶⁸ In other words, decisive influence is achieved via denial and/or punishment in conjunction with compellence toward an acceptable outcome. Deterrence operations and strategies must be narrow enough to address specific adversaries but also broad enough to address widely varying risk-taking propensities. Different adversaries have different interests, values, and decision-making processes and vary in their tolerances of risks for different threats. Risk-averse adversaries will view uncertainty and ambiguity as threatening because it complicates clear and rational decision-making. More risk-tolerant adversaries will view uncertainty and ambiguity as potential opportunities to be exploited. Political scientist T. V. Paul calls this “complex deterrence” to describe the ambiguous and indeterminate deterrence relationships between various types of actors, such as great powers, nonstate actors, and third party weak states etc.²⁶⁹ For this reason, deterrence operations need to be flexible enough to address the variations in strategic interaction and both risk-averse and risk-tolerant adversaries.

Deterrence strategies also need to be flexible enough to adapt to changing environments and situations. JP 5-0 labels these as flexible deterrent options (FDO):

²⁶⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Psychological Operations*, JP 3-13.2 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010), GL-8, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp3-13-2.pdf>.

²⁶⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept*, 3.

²⁶⁹ T. V. Paul, “Complex Deterrence: An Introduction,” in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, ed. T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 8–9.

“preplanned deterrence-oriented actions to signal to and influence an adversary’s actions.”²⁷⁰ FDOs facilitate a commander’s decision-making process by “laying out a wide range of interrelated response paths that are carefully tailored to avoid the classic response of ‘too much, too soon, or too little, too late.’”²⁷¹ Joint commands develop FDOs within each of the instruments of national power (DIME) to deter adversarial actions before or during a crisis. Figure 7 depicts various examples of military FDOs.

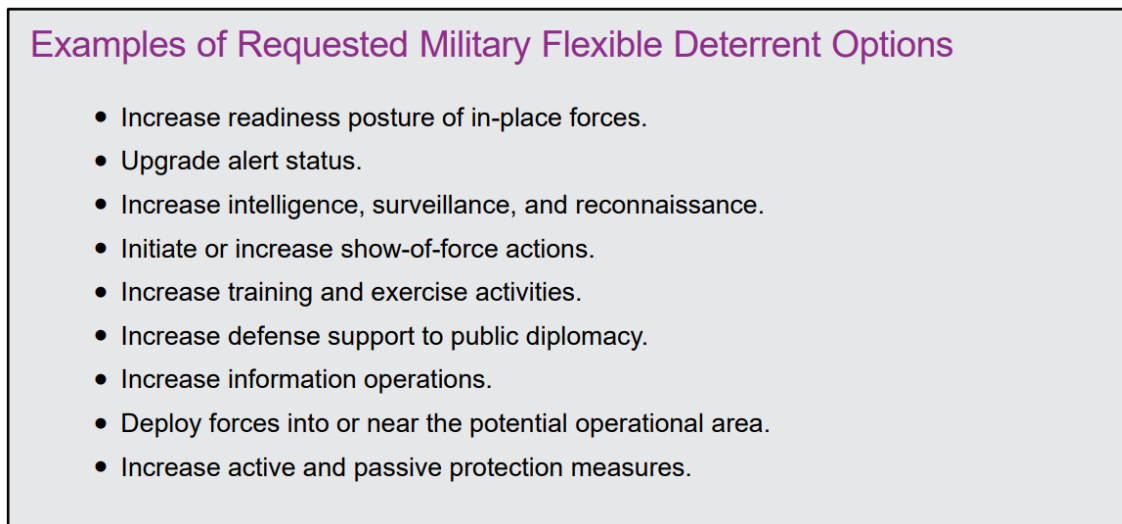


Figure 7. Examples of Requested Military Flexible Deterrent options (FDO).²⁷²

3. Deterrence by Punishment versus Denial

There are two foundational forms of deterrence: “deterrence by punishment” and “deterrence by denial.” There are also two related forms: “deterrence by entanglement” and “deterrence by assurance” or inducement.”²⁷³ The fundamental difference between the two primary forms is their directional focus vis-à-vis the aggressor. The first form focuses

²⁷⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, E-1.

²⁷¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, E-2.

²⁷² Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, E-4.

²⁷³ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*.

on *reactive* measures to punish aggression while the second focuses on *proactive* measures to deny aggression. The first focuses on *raising the costs* in the aggressor's "cost-benefit" analysis while the second focuses on *reducing the benefits*.

"Deterrence by punishment" refers to dissuading aggression by threatening the imposition of costs that are higher than the anticipated benefits.²⁷⁴ It is the threat of retaliation or reprisal. Punishment strategies focus principally on affecting the second factor of Snyder's "risk calculus:" assessment of the expected costs of action.²⁷⁵ "Deterrence by entanglement" is similar to deterrence by punishment in that the end result of each is the same: costs that are higher than the anticipated benefits. With "deterrence by punishment," the deterrer imposes the costs, whereas with "deterrence by entanglement" the costs are self-imposed. Many experts argue that "deterrence by entanglement" is the dominant form between China and the United States due to their economic and financial involvements. For example, Graham Allison invokes the concept of mutual assured economic destruction (MAED) as a powerful deterrent against the Thucydides Trap.²⁷⁶

"Deterrence by denial," in contrast, refers to dissuading aggression by signaling to the aggressor that the deterrer can easily absorb an attack with minimal costs and recover quickly.²⁷⁷ This denial capacity makes it infeasible or unlikely that the aggressor will attain its objectives, neutralizing its confidence in its theory of victory.²⁷⁸ Denial strategies focus principally on effecting the fourth factor of Snyder's "risk calculus:" the probability of gaining the objectives.²⁷⁹ "Deterrence by assurance" or inducement is related to "deterrence by denial" in that the end result is the same: the aggressor does not achieve his goals. With "deterrence by denial" the goals are negated, whereas with "deterrence by assurance" or inducement the goals are foreclosed or substituted by offering alternate ones.

²⁷⁴ Kersanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach*, 12.

²⁷⁵ Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security*, 15.

²⁷⁶ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, 210–11.

²⁷⁷ Kersanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach*, 11.

²⁷⁸ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 2.

²⁷⁹ Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security*, 15.

Notwithstanding, some form of reassurance is desirable for any successful deterrence strategy.²⁸⁰

There are fundamentally two ways to think about “deterrence by denial.” First, the general tendency is to think of denial as preventing or blocking an aggressor’s action. This conception, however, can easily be confused with “deterrence by punishment.” Positioning denial capabilities to prevent an aggressor’s action is essentially a threat to impose costs should the aggressor take that action. But this conception of deterrence is in reality a form of *defense*; “deterrence and defense are analytically distinct but thoroughly interrelated in practice.”²⁸¹ An example which elucidates these distinctions is the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996, when Washington sent two carrier strike groups to dissuade Beijing from aggressive action against Taiwan. This was simultaneously a threat of *punishment* to impose costs if Beijing escalated tensions and a *denial* strategy to prevent Beijing from achieving its political and military objectives. However, it was also a rapid counter-maneuver to intervene in the strait and *defend* Taiwan.

The other way to think of “deterrence by denial” is denying the benefit and viability of an aggressor’s objective. This can be achieved by making it difficult for the aggressor to *attain* its objectives, by making it harder to *retain* its objectives, or by making it difficult to *accrue* any benefit from the attainment of its objectives. The first and second approaches employ a “porcupine” stratagem, while the third employs a “poison pill” stratagem. Both punishment and denial rely considerably on the three pillars of deterrence: capability, commitment, and communication. But the nature of each pillar differs. With punishment, the deterrer communicates its *retaliatory* capabilities and commitment to use them in order to *impose* costs should the aggressor attack. But with denial, the deterrer communicates its *resilience* capabilities and commitment to *absorb* costs. The subtle difference is critical. With punishment, if the aggressor perceives the threat as credible and costly, it will likely not change its objectives. It will simply reassess its response options and develop

²⁸⁰ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 5.

²⁸¹ Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983), 32.

countervailing capabilities to mitigate the costs. But with denial, if the aggressor perceives the deterrer's resilience as high and the probability of success as low, it may reassess its response options and develop countervailing capabilities, but it will also be forced to *reassess its objectives*. This is the fundamental value proposition of an extended deterrence by denial versus punishment approach for Taiwan. Due to China's resolute objective of reunifying the island, it is unlikely that any amount of punishment threats will alter its cost-benefit analysis. Instead, extended deterrence strategies must incorporate denial approaches that focus on making the perceived benefits unfeasible and unviable.

Many continue to advocate a strategy of "deterrence by punishment" for Taiwan based off its success in the past. In their research note, "The Power and Limits of Compellence," Robert Art and Kelly Greenhill illustrate two successful instances of extended compellence, both originating in the Taiwan Strait between China and the United States (1954-55 and 1958). In both instances, Art and Greenhill argue that Washington's compellent threats (which included naval maneuvers as well as nuclear threats) were issued to "shore up" deterrence against China.²⁸² Compellence worked hand-in-hand with deterrence to signal U.S. resolve and credibility. In both these cases, Washington threatened the imposition of costs against China in a conventional military manner, but Beijing has since pursued a drastic military modernization program to ensure it cannot be compelled so easily in the future.

The greatest problem with current strategic thinking and design for the Taiwan security dilemma is that actors within the system have failed to reassess the mental model for Taiwan to see if the current strategy of deterrence is the most appropriate. This is a classic example of "bounded rationality," whereby actors within a system act rationally and for the best interests of the system's objectives, but operate within limited bounds of information, a flawed mental model, or simply too small a subset of the system to fully know how their actions affect the system overall. Their actions can impede or contradict the actions of others operating from a different perspective or location within the system.

²⁸² Robert J. Art and Kelly M. Greenhill, "The Power and Limits of Compellence: A Research Note," *Political Science Quarterly* 133, no. 1 (2018): 91–92.

An example of this dynamic is the recent Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI), a \$6 billion fund authorized by Congress in the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to “send a strong signal to the Chinese Communist Party that America is deeply committed to defending our interests in the Indo-Pacific.”²⁸³ The PDI will primarily invest in more modern, dispersed, and resilient capabilities and force postures throughout the Pacific, such as upgrading Guam’s missile defense systems. But the PDI is fraught with problems, not least of which is a lack of emphasis on security cooperation—leaving a mere \$500 million to “strengthening alliances and partnerships.” This has led some analysts to call the PDI a “band-aid” solution and the “Platform” Deterrence Initiative.²⁸⁴ The initiative is a good example of strategic programming versus strategic planning, wherein planners assemble a strategy from previously existing ones rather than designing one anew. The DOD modeled the PDI after the European Defense Initiative (EDI) which it introduced to deter Russian aggression in Europe shortly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. With the PDI, the DOD is “doubling down” on punishment and “third offset” measures to deter Beijing.²⁸⁵ But many experts are calling for the Pentagon and Congress to amend the PDI so as to reflect a denial approach instead and focus on partners rather than platforms. A 2020 article from *The Diplomat* astutely postulated the benefits of such an approach:

Getting the PDI right means understanding which model is more strategically stable and palatable to U.S. allies without spooking them into thinking that the PDI is too overtly antagonistic. Deterrence by punishment would be fundamentally destabilizing and create more problems than it would solve.

Utilizing the resources provided by the PDI to formalize a deterrence by denial doctrine would be the far more stabilizing and diplomatically realistic

²⁸³ Joe Gould, “Senate Panel OKs \$6 Billion Military Fund to Confront China,” *Defense News*, last modified June 11, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2020/06/11/senate-panel-oks-6-billion-military-fund-to-confront-china/>.

²⁸⁴ Bryan Clark and Dan Patt, “Fix the Pacific Deterrence Fund—and the Deeper Problem It Reveals,” *Defense One*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2021/06/fix-pacific-deterrence-fundand-deeper-problem-it-reveals/174898/>; Dustin Walker, “Congress Should Rewrite the Pentagon’s Pacific Deterrence Budget Request,” *Defense News*, June 2, 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2021/06/02/congress-should-rewrite-the-pentagons-pacific-deterrence-budget-request/>.

²⁸⁵ A. Wess Mitchell, “The Case for Deterrence by Denial,” *The American Interest*, August 12, 2015, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/08/12/the-case-for-deterrence-by-denial/>.

option. Many U.S. allies and partners already follow a denial doctrine themselves, giving U.S. planners a solid basis to argue for building upon already existing capabilities.

While allies and partners play a major role in a PDI informed by denial, they are largely bystanders in a PDI informed by punishment.²⁸⁶

The authors go on to argue that a PDI informed by denial would also promote less expensive and more independent partner capabilities; help to overcome the “tyranny of distance” and challenges for U.S. power projection into the region; facilitate the services’ new force design plans and concepts such as the Marine Corps’ expeditionary advanced basing operations (EABO); and avoid the dyadic narrative of ideological competition between Washington and Beijing which tends to cloud any discussion of the topic.

One of the plausible reasons why current strategic thinking favors an extended “deterrence by punishment” strategy for Taiwan may be because of the growing call for a policy of greater “strategic clarity” in order to increase formal relations with Taiwan and intensify anti-invasion rhetoric. The belief is that threats of punishment must be clear in order to be credible. Therefore, without clarity for deterrent signaling, Beijing will not perceive any U.S. deterrence activities as credible. “Strategic ambiguity” supposedly inhibits this deterrent signaling. But with an extended “deterrence by denial” strategy, “strategic ambiguity” would actually *enhance* deterrent signaling because the goal of a denial strategy is to *increase* the ambiguity and uncertainty for an aggressor that it will be able to achieve its objectives. What Washington and Taipei need is not to provide Beijing with greater clarity regarding the potential conditions and costs of war but to induce greater ambiguity and uncertainty into Beijing’s decision cycle. Alternatively, some suggest that Taiwan should develop the capabilities needed to strike strategic sites on the mainland and hold Chinese population centers at risk as a punishment strategy. But such a strategy would be counterproductive for Taiwan, as it would likely only serve to increase China’s asymmetry of resolve vis-à-vis the international community. It would reduce Taipei and

²⁸⁶ Benjamin Rimland and Patrick Buchan, “Getting the Pacific Deterrence Initiative Right,” *The Diplomat*, May 2, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/getting-the-pacific-deterrence-initiative-right/>.

Washington's collective ability to message Taiwan's victimhood and to thereby garner international backing for Taiwan and political ire for China.

Conventional deterrence of China has worked in the past primarily because of U.S. conventional military superiority, as well as its relative credibility and resolve. However, conventional deterrence efforts may have no coercive psychological effect if China comes to perceive in the future that it has conventional superiority—at least to achieve local and limited goals. China is nearly there. Conditions have changed, and conventional deterrence alone is no longer enough. Contrary to the initial inclinations when considering different extended deterrence strategies, the appropriate solution for the United States and Taiwan is not to select one form of deterrence to the exclusion of the others. While this study primarily focuses on a “deterrence by denial” strategy for Taiwan, it does not seek to invalidate all other strategies.

There is no “one size fits all” for deterrence. The requirements for effective deterrence vary given the need to address the unique perceptions, goals, interests, strengths, strategies, and vulnerabilities of different potential adversaries. The deterrence strategy effective against one potential adversary may not deter another.²⁸⁷

The optimal solution is to diversify and integrate multiple forms of deterrence in tandem with and in mutual support of each other. A comprehensive defense strategy for Taiwan which combines conventional and unconventional, direct and indirect, and symmetric and asymmetric approaches should also combine a comprehensive deterrence strategy of both punishment and denial approaches at each phase of the operational campaign. For example, prior to armed conflict, the aim should be to deter the initiation of high-end conflict by threatening to impose significant costs (punishment) while simultaneously mitigating low-end hybrid activities by denying their negative effect (denial). During conflict, the aim should be to deter escalation of the invasion and to protract a *fait accompli* indefinitely through organized resistance—a combination of both punishment and denial plans.

²⁸⁷ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 26, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>.

This diversified and differentiated combination of deterrence activities can be viewed as a form of “tailored deterrence” and is likely at the heart of the Pentagon’s new concept of “integrated deterrence” with partners and allies. Tailored and integrated extended deterrence is particularly effective for small states like Taiwan. With an asymmetric defense strategy which combines both punishment and denial approaches, Taiwan “can succeed by deploying sufficient local forces to raise the cost of a potential attack, to make escalation inevitable, and to deny the possibility of a low-risk fait accompli.”²⁸⁸ This raises “a specter of costs” for the enemy, as Snyder describes.²⁸⁹ Leading economist and game theorist Thomas Schelling concurs: “forces that might seem to be quite ‘inadequate’ by ordinary tactical standards... can serve a purpose, particularly if they can threaten to keep the situation in turmoil for some period of time. The important thing is to preclude a quick, clean [enemy] victory that quiets things down in short order.”²⁹⁰ In short, resilience and resistance provide time and, “in asymmetric conflicts, delay favors the weak.”²⁹¹

4. Unconventional Deterrence

Unconventional deterrence is a strategy to persuade an adversary not to attack via threats of unconventional warfare (UW), such as guerilla resistance, sabotage, and terrorism.²⁹² JP 3-05 *Special Operations* states that the focus of UW is to build and enable indigenous resistance forces or insurgencies “to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.”²⁹³ The JP defines a resistance movement as “an organized effort by some portion of the civil population of a country to resist the legally established

²⁸⁸ Mazarr, *Understanding Deterrence*, 6.

²⁸⁹ Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence by Denial and Punishment* (Princeton, NJ: Center of International Studies, 1959), 4.

²⁹⁰ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 112.

²⁹¹ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” 107.

²⁹² Rekasius, “Unconventional Deterrence Strategy,” v.

²⁹³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, JP 3-05 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), xi, http://edocs.nps.edu/2014/July/jp3_05.pdf.

government or an occupying power and to disrupt civil order and stability.”²⁹⁴ A resistance movement can involve civil resistance, guerilla resistance, organized insurgency, or even civil war. But it can also include nonviolent forms of social movement. Resistance movements rely on strong and unifying narratives such as national identity, culture, and shared values. They also tend to mobilize around counter-narratives of victimization or threats to their identity. American social philosopher Eric Hoffer commented on this phenomenon: “Mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil.”²⁹⁵

It is important to note that unconventional deterrence is *not* a UW or special operations approach, nor is it conducted only by SOF or unconventional forces. Rather it is “unconventional” because it goes against the conventional logic of deterrence. In the case of Taiwan, this logical argument goes something like this:

1. If X, then Y (if invasion, then reunification)
2. No X (deter invasion)
- ∴ No Y (therefore, no reunification)

This argument may be valid but it is *unsound*, meaning one or more of its premises is not entirely true. The argument fails a common fallacy test known as “denying the antecedent” wherein the conclusion (∴) does not logically follow when the first proposition (X) is denied. Unconventional deterrence recognizes that an invasion (X) is not *causally sufficient* to bring about reunification (Y). It may make it more likely, but what *is* necessary is that China *controls* Taiwan politically. This can occur through peaceful concession from the Taiwanese to unify with China, coercive measures which compel them to unify, or a Taiwanese surrender after a period of armed conflict. It is not the *means* of reunification that matter but the end *result*: political control. China could accomplish this by utterly destroying Taiwan like Athens did to Melos or it could accomplish it without any force whatsoever.

²⁹⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, GL-10.

²⁹⁵ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 91.

An apt example of this played out during the NPS-MIT geostrategic wargame in October 2021. In the wake of a 7.9 magnitude earthquake and meltdown of a nuclear power plant reactor, PLA forces landed “humanitarian relief” forces at a small airport in Taiwan. Over the course of several moves, the PLA slowly increased its footprint, incorporated Taiwanese “liaisons” to deconflict air traffic, and renamed the airport the “PRC friendship airport” in a gesture of peaceful intentions. This wargame scenario plainly demonstrates how a PLA invasion of Taiwan is not the only situation in which Chinese forces could arrive and gain a foothold on the island. But Taiwan can still deny China from controlling its populace no matter how Chinese forces arrive on the island.

It is very difficult for Taiwan—and increasingly less likely in the face of China’s rapid military growth and modernization—to prevent PLA forces from putting “boots on the ground.” It may not even be possible either for Taiwan to prevent the PLA from defeating its military forces. But that does not logically entail that China will “win” reunification until it has first secured the entire populace and stamped out all violent and non-violent resistance. Taiwan’s goal need not be to keep PLA troops off the island or defeat the PLA in decisive battle. Taiwan should certainly strive to deter and deny China from landing and defeating its forces, but it should not be its *only* goal. Instead, Taiwan should strive to resist a Chinese occupation and deny it freedom of maneuver and freedom of operation. In this way, unconventional deterrence is not about blocking an invasion from happening, but making it so that if an invasion occurs, the populace keeps it from having its desired effect. As a thriving democracy facing an authoritarian occupier, Taiwan has a unique potential to resist foreign subjugation. John Steinbeck captured the essence of a democracy’s advantage over illiberal authoritarianism in his widely distributed propaganda novel during WWII, *The Moon is Down*. In response to the occupying enemy’s attempts to arrest a mayor in order to suppress the town’s growing guerilla resistance, a character retorts, “They can’t arrest the Mayor. The Mayor is an idea conceived by free men. It will escape arrest.”²⁹⁶ In other words, the huge advantage of liberal democracy over other political systems is its *resiliency* and its inability to be stamped out. Clausewitz wrote

²⁹⁶ John Steinbeck, *The Moon Is Down* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 102.

sparingly about limited conflicts but commented that, “Preserving our own forces has a negative purpose; it frustrates the enemy’s intentions—that is, it amounts to pure resistance, whose ultimate aim can only be to prolong the war until the enemy is exhausted.”²⁹⁷ Or in the words of Taiwan’s former enemy, Mao Zedong, “the guerilla wins if he does not lose.”

Some analysts, like Stanford China expert Oriana Skylar Mastro, argue that this prospect of an insurgency or protracted conflict would not be a deterrent for Beijing. Mastro and others contend that PLA doctrine is well-versed in the preparation for a follow-on campaign to consolidate power after a successful invasion and that China could employ its People’s Armed Police (PAP) force of 1.5 million to suppress any resistance on the island.²⁹⁸ But this analysis is short-sighted. An organized resistance campaign or insurgency is not a mere policing problem that the PAP could simply pick up and readily address. Despite its large size, the PAP would not be adequately trained, equipped, or organized to adapt its operations for a full-scale insurgency. Additionally, the more PAP and PLA forces and resources which Beijing needs to commit to Taiwan means the less forces and resources that are available for restive places like Hong Kong, Xinjiang, or Tibet etc. COIN operations in Taiwan would stretch these forces thin and leave the CCP more vulnerable to opposition throughout the country. In other words, “the more credibly Taiwan can threaten insurgency, the more China’s leaders will have to decide whether they are willing to trade Xinjiang for Taiwan.”²⁹⁹

Instead of following the conventional paradigm for deterrence, unconventional deterrence strategies analyze the entire security ecosystem to identify causes and correlations below the surface. The boundaries between punishment and denial coalesce and blend together.³⁰⁰ Although an aggressor’s ostensible goal may be to initiate an attack,

²⁹⁷ Clausewitz, Howard, and Paret, *On War*, 98.

²⁹⁸ Mastro, “The Taiwan Temptation.”

²⁹⁹ Michael A. Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time: Enhancing Taiwan’s Conventional Deterrence Posture* (Fairfax, VA: Center for Security Policy Studies at George Mason University, 2018), 102, <https://csp.s.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/A-Question-of-Time.pdf>.

³⁰⁰ Rekasius, “Unconventional Deterrence Strategy,” 14.

the implicit goal is the political objective which the attack seeks to achieve. An unconventional deterrence strategy correctly shifts the focus away from trying to deter the initiation of conflict to trying to deter the *completion* of it. Resistance and insurgency thwart an enemy's attempts to defeat it in a decisive engagement. In other words, while conventional deterrence strategists ask, "How do we prevent the enemy from attacking?," unconventional deterrence strategists ask, "Even if the enemy does attack, how do we prevent him from achieving his political end state." Conventional deterrence strategies tend to think one dimensionally in terms of military objectives—crossing the strait, landing on the beach, taking the capital etc. But unconventional deterrence strategies tend to think in non-material terms of political or informational objectives—concluding the civil war, annexing the island, subduing the opposition etc. If the defender can hold these objectives at risk, then the need to repulse the large-scale attack or defeat the invader's forces on the battlefield becomes less salient. If the defender ensures a protracted guerilla resistance and locks the invader in an un-winnable counterinsurgency fight, will the invader have the political resolve and resiliency to continue indefinitely after having just fought a costly battle—diplomatically, informationally, militarily, and economically (DIME)—to land ashore in the first place? In other words, what if the defender were to negate the invader's military superiority by denying it the probability of decisive victory?³⁰¹ As Andrew Mack exclaimed, "If the external power's 'will' to continue the struggle is destroyed, then its military capability—no matter how powerful—is totally irrelevant."³⁰²

Some of the best examples and case studies of guerilla resistance originate from occupied Europe during WWII, such as the French Resistance or the various clandestine operations conducted by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS). But an interesting thought experiment is to imagine how things would have been different if the Allies had anticipated the nature of the coming war instead of preparing to fight the last one—e.g., if France had invested in guerilla warfare instead of the Maginot Line prior to Nazi Germany's invasion. If they had, they may have had the

³⁰¹ Rekasius, 4.

³⁰² Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," 179.

foresight to create their respective clandestine and resistance organizations beforehand and employ them throughout Europe to build an unconventional deterrence and resistance capability. Unlike the Allies in France and other occupied territories before WWII, the United States and its partners have the prerequisite organizations, doctrine, and historical understanding to develop an unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan.

An unconventional deterrence strategy is particularly well suited for “weak” states like Taiwan that are unable to defend themselves without outside support or intervention. As the acclaimed political scientist and IR scholar John J. Mearsheimer (1983) described, weak states are those where “the asymmetry is so great that the attacker does not have the slightest doubt that he will succeed on the battlefield” and where “the concept of [conventional] deterrence does not really apply.”³⁰³ Taiwan aptly fits this depiction of a weak power vis-à-vis China, but can it still be considered weak when the United States provides “defense articles and defense services” to Taiwan or if it were evident that the United States would intervene militarily to defend Taiwan? An unconventional deterrence strategy would not be ideal for Taiwan if this were the case.

Generally speaking, a weak state that concentrates its defense according to the expectations of an external military assistance, normally needs to defend some important strategic points of their national territory, in order to facilitate the intervention of its allies. In turn, that is inherently inconsistent with unconventional capabilities, which are not the best means for holding territory.³⁰⁴

But it is precisely because the United States’ commitment to defend Taiwan is uncertain that Taiwan should “concentrate its defenses according to the expectations” of *no* external military assistance, and therefore should adopt an unconventional deterrence strategy which does not focus on holding territory. An unconventional deterrence strategy would also be optimal for the United States because it would align with the current policy of “strategic ambiguity.” In fact, the strategy would thrive under such conditions and would alleviate any political pressure to change the policy.

³⁰³ John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 59.

³⁰⁴ Rekasius, “Unconventional Deterrence Strategy,” 7.

Although an unconventional deterrence strategy involves unconventional means and methods, it is *not* an unconventional strategy per se. While SOF are uniquely skilled to plan and implement an unconventional deterrence strategy, it requires interservice, interagency, and civil-military cooperation. Likewise, neither conventional nor unconventional alone is sufficient. As Arreguín-Toft exclaims, “conventional deterrence works best when both sides define power in similar ways,” while unconventional deterrence works when “the benefits of a positive outcome [for the aggressor] are low to nil, and the costs are likely to be high—perhaps a Vietnam-like quagmire.”³⁰⁵ Once again, the strategic goal is to create as many dilemmas as possible for China to have to account for and to have to develop countervailing capabilities for. By combining an unconventional deterrence plan with a conventional one, Taiwan would create a “deterrence-in-depth” or “elastic denial-in-depth” as Michael Hunzeker et. al ascribe in a 2018 report from the Center of Security Policy Studies at George Mason University entitled *A Question of Time: Enhancing Taiwan’s Conventional Deterrence Posture*.³⁰⁶ In one sense, unconventional deterrence is an insurance policy for conventional deterrence—a fail-safe in case the first layer of deterrence is insufficient. Furthermore, it forces China to prepare for both conventional as well as irregular warfare. Currently, the PLA knows the location of most Taiwan military forces and how they will be employed. But with a guerilla resistance force embedded within the dense urban environment of Taiwan’s cities, the PLA has no way of anticipating what threats they will face from street to street. This is the U.S. concept of dynamic force employment (DFE): flexible and scalable response options. The 2018 *NDS* describes this concept as being “strategically predictable, but operationally unpredictable.”³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “Unconventional Deterrence: How the Weak Deter the Strong,” in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, ed. T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 217–18.

³⁰⁶ Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time*.

³⁰⁷ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 5.

D. WHAT DETERS CHINA?

Leading American economist and game theorist Thomas Schelling described deterrence and coercion as a bargaining process between actors. To threaten the imposition of costs credibly, one needs “to know what an adversary treasures and what scares him and one needs the adversary to understand what behavior of his will cause the violence to be inflicted and what will cause it to be withheld.”³⁰⁸ Therefore, an effective deterrence strategy will only be possible if it is tailored to a specific adversary and specific issue.³⁰⁹ This requires what NPS professor of history Zachary Shore describes as “strategic empathy” or the ability to think like one’s opponent.³¹⁰ Different actors have different interests, values, decision-making processes, and vulnerabilities. Therefore, to understand what will deter China it is vital to first understand the Chinese strategic psyche. How do they conceive of and formulate strategy? How do they conceive of and approach warfare? What is their theory of victory? Second, it is important to identify China’s strategy for Taiwan and how it aligns with its global strategic goals and policy objectives. Lastly, it is important to understand China’s grand strategy and how Taiwan is the critical linchpin within it.

1. Understanding China’s Strategic Psyche

There are multiple ways to understand the Chinese strategic psyche, but there are four principal components that are relevant to this study: (1) history as a mirror to guide present strategy, (2) strategic patience and shih, (3) the indirect approach and Go versus Chess mindset, and (4) deception and stratagem.

³⁰⁸ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 3–4.

³⁰⁹ Kersanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach*, 14.

³¹⁰ Shore, *A Sense of the Enemy*.

a. *History as a Mirror to Guide Present Strategy*

The first component of the Chinese strategic psyche is the utilization of “history as a mirror to guide the present.”³¹¹ This does not just include modern history but also “civilizational history going back millennia.”³¹² After his visits to China, Henry Kissinger assessed that China is singular because, “In no other country is it conceivable that a modern leader would initiate a major national undertaking by invoking strategic principles from a millennium-old event—nor that he would confidently expect his colleagues to understand the significance of his allusions.”³¹³ Chinese perceptions of Taiwan stretch much further back in time than just the Chinese Civil War in the first half of the 20th century. Taiwan represents more than just lost territory; it represents a common occurrence throughout much of its existence: a threat along the periphery. China sees any threat along its long land and maritime borders as a potential threat to sovereignty. Speaking of Chinese actions in the 1930s to suppress potential vulnerabilities in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia, historian Michael H. Hunt described how China “acted in line with the same compelling strategic logic that had long informed imperial policy. Loss of control on the periphery had repeatedly—both in the Qing and under other dynasties—rendered the cultural core vulnerable to penetration and attack.”³¹⁴ Furthermore, many foreign and imperialist powers have exploited China’s weak periphery and posed a threat to China’s rule in the past. Similar to the United States’ interventions in Korea and Vietnam, China sees Taiwan as a U.S. hedge to contain China’s historic rise. Given China’s penchant for viewing the “past as prologue,” the question becomes, as Hunt poses, “Which of the remembered pasts, we want to know, is likely to have the liveliest influence on policy?”³¹⁵

³¹¹ Shi Naian, *The Water Margin: Outlaws of the Marsh* (Hong Kong: Tuttle Publishing, 2010), xxxvi.

³¹² Eu Yen Kong and Kuei-Lin Yu, “Deciphering Chinese Strategic Deception: The Middle Kingdom’s First Aircraft Carrier” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2013), 17, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/34690>.

³¹³ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 2.

³¹⁴ Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 16.

³¹⁵ Hunt, 26.

Many experts believe Beijing has consternations regarding the so-called Thucydides Trap—the seeming inevitability of one rising power to go to war with an established great power.³¹⁶ But some depict an alternate interpretation of the Thucydides Trap by applying it to a Chinese conception of history and expanding the time horizon of interactions between the United States and China. In this context, the United States is the rising power over the past two centuries while China is the *historically* dominant power.³¹⁷ China is not rising, it is merely rejuvenating. There are two ways to interpret this narrative in light of China’s strategic psyche. First, because the United States is seen as the rising power, then it is the one most likely to initiate war with China. This would explain the PLA’s concerns that the United States might attack near the end of President Trump’s term, requiring Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Milley to call his PLA counterpart and assuage the PLA’s fears.³¹⁸ The second interpretation is that the United States represents the rise of democracies worldwide which China sees as a threat to its authoritarian, party-centric governance model. With either interpretation, the CCP is apprehensively aware that few dominant political parties survive for more than 100 years (the CCP celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2021), therefore the idea of a rising democratic America may have the effect of making the CCP feel increasingly vulnerable and perhaps desperate.³¹⁹ The rise of America and democratic values at a time when China is also attempting to return to its former prestige may cause the very structural stress which Allison Graham claims is the fateful trigger of the Thucydides Trap. Furthermore, Beijing may perceive that the United States is attempting to prevent, hedge, or reverse China’s rise.

³¹⁶ “Thucydides Trap: An Overview,” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, accessed November 25, 2020, <https://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/overview-thucydides-trap>.

³¹⁷ Patrick Jenevein, “In the Context of History, China Is Not the Ascending Power, It’s the Descending Power,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 1, 2019, <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/01/01/in-the-context-of-history-china-is-not-the-ascending-power-it-s-the-descending-power/>.

³¹⁸ Andrew Desiderio, “Milley: Beijing’s Fears of U.S. Attack Prompted Call to Chinese General,” *Politico*, last modified September 28, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/28/milley-china-congress-hearing-514488>.

³¹⁹ Patrick Jenevein, “Alibaba Founder Ma Spoke Truth to Chinese Communist Party Power in His Retirement Letter,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 23, 2018, sec. Commentary, <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2018/09/23/alibaba-founder-ma-spoke-truth-to-chinese-communist-party-power-in-his-retirement-letter/>.

The official AUKUS partnership and unofficial QUAD relationship reiterate the commitment to a “free and open Indo-Pacific” that is “undaunted by coercion.” The danger is that Beijing may feel that it is running out of options except a military one.

b. Strategic Patience and Shih

Due in part to their far-reaching temporal view of history and the future, the Chinese strategic psyche displays tremendous strategic patience. “Given China’s view that progress advances in decades and centuries rather than days and months, it has historically shown a capacity to set problems aside for long periods”³²⁰ The time horizon for strategy formulation is likewise often in decades or even generations, rather than years. Henry Kissinger remarked that the Chinese think in terms of “multi-year maneuvers” and stress “*subtlety, indirection, and the patient accumulation of relative advantage.*”³²¹ The concept of relative advantage, or shih, is central to Chinese strategic thinking and derives from the ancient general and military strategist, Sun Tzu, as recorded in his treatise, *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu and many other Chinese scholars highlight the concept of shih, with varying translations such as strategic positional advantage or strategic configuration of combat power, potential, force, momentum, or energy. According to Sun Tzu, commanders achieve shih through the artful employment of regular (zheng) and extraordinary (qi) forces and ways whose permutations are infinite and “mutually reproductive,” similar to symmetric and asymmetric advantages.³²² The goal of shih is to utilize a limitless combination of approaches to develop a position of relative advantage vis-à-vis the enemy. “Those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform.”³²³

The Chinese concept of shih and the “patient accumulation of relative advantage” is at the center of China’s “combination warfare” and “unrestricted warfare” approaches to

³²⁰ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?*, 226.

³²¹ Kissinger, *On China*, 23.

³²² David Lai, *Learning from the Stones: A Go Approach to Mastering China’s Strategic Concept, Shi*, Advancing Strategic Thought Series (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), 1–2, <https://man.fas.org/eprint/lai.pdf>; Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 92.

³²³ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 93.

reunify Taiwan without firing a shot. China has developed a long-term strategic time horizon to accomplish its objectives and has developed many levers of influence to combine “10,000 methods” as one from all the DIMEFIL instruments of national power.³²⁴ China typically employs these approaches in the “gray zone” below the threshold of armed conflict, but it has never forfeited the possibility of forceful means to reunify Taiwan.

c. The Indirect Approach and Go versus Chess Mindset

Due to the Chinese concept of shih and “multi-year maneuvers,” the Chinese naturally see the value of positive asymmetry and the indirect approach as conceived by Arreguín-Toft. Sun Tzu surmised the indirect approach in *The Art of War*:

Those adept in warfare can conquer the enemy without fighting battles, capture cities without laying siege to them, and annex states without prolonged warfare. They can preserve their own forces whole and intact while struggling for the mastery of the entire Empire. They can win a victory without wearying their men. All this is due to strategy.³²⁵

The concept of the indirect approach is central to the Chinese game Go, where players take turns placing white versus black stones on the intersections of a 19x19 grid of lines. The goal is not to attrit or remove pieces from the board, like Chess, but to surround more territory than the opponent. Many experts compare and contrast Go and Chess as different conceptual approaches to warfare from Eastern and Western traditions (see Figure 8). Each conceives of asymmetry and strategic advantage differently. Chess has asymmetric pieces with unique maneuver and strike capabilities but fights symmetrically to attrit the opponent. Go has symmetric pieces (each piece is identical) but fights asymmetrically to isolate and surround the opponent. Chess seeks to create an asymmetric imbalance of forces by removing the opponent’s key pieces through maneuver and attrition warfare, then striking at decisive victory—the King. Go seeks to create asymmetry by developing shih through stratagem and deception and attacking an opponent’s strategy, then winning *de facto* by holding greater territorial overmatch and positional advantage

³²⁴ Callard and Faber, “An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation,” 62–63.

³²⁵ Kong and Yu, “Deciphering Chinese Strategic Deception,” 19.

than the opponent. Go (Weiqi) literally means “envelopment chess.” Ironically, Chess “focuses on what one can achieve given limited resources at the moment, whereas a go player thinks about what he can bring to bear with additional resources... The philosophy behind go therefore is to compete for relative gain.”³²⁶



Figure 8. Relative Complexities of Chess versus Go.³²⁷

In short, China is playing Go to encircle Taiwan and leave it no other options while the United States is playing Chess, biding its time and looking for a decisive moment for maneuver or attrition. The United States must learn to play the same game as China, not necessarily so it can beat China at its own game, but so that it knows how to *keep* China from winning. This does not mean the United States must play the game the same way as China as does. Both Chess and Go strategies can be useful in their own right, but the

³²⁶ Lai, *Learning from the Stones*, 28.

³²⁷ Adapted from French, “Complexity & the Game of Go.”

incorporation of a Go and shih mindset into the United States' conceptual and strategic tool-kit will enhance its ability to wage successful asymmetric warfare and deter China.

d. Deception and Stratagem

“The Chinese have the oldest (and virtually unbroken) tradition of theory and doctrine on surprise and deception.”³²⁸ One of Sun Tzu's most well-known adages from *The Art of War* concerns the art of deception: “All warfare is based on deception. Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity. When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near.”³²⁹ In addition to the traditions of Sun Tzu, the Chinese make frequent use of the *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, an ancient collection of 36 proverbs describing specific deception scenarios. The *Stratagems* are organized into six chapters with six stratagems each:

1. Stratagems employed when in a strategically advantageous position
2. Stratagems employed when one's strategic posture is equal to the enemy
3. Stratagems employed when in an offensive strategic posture
4. Stratagems employed when in a chaotic strategic posture
5. Stratagems employed when in a strategically ambiguous posture
6. Stratagems employed when in a disadvantageous strategic posture³³⁰

Singaporean students Eu Yen Kong and Yu Kuei-Lin demonstrated in their 2013 NPS thesis that the Chinese acquisition and commissioning of the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier in 2011 was a masterful employment of the 36 stratagems by China and a strategic surprise for its opponents.³³¹ For example, the first stratagem is, “Crossing the Oceans without Heaven's Knowledge.” China purchased the carrier from Russia in 1998 for non-military

³²⁸ Barton Whaley, *Stratagem: Deception and Surprise in War* (Massachusetts: Artech House, 2007), 42.

³²⁹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 66.

³³⁰ Kong and Yu, “Deciphering Chinese Strategic Deception,” 57.

³³¹ Kong and Yu, 63.

use, but for the following 13 years China was able to sustain an elaborate cover story to hide its true function.³³²

China may be employing the same stratagem today with its creeping normalization of missile tests and air incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ. Kong and Kuei-Lin translate the first stratagem to mean, "Familiarity breeds desensitization and lowers arousal of suspicions."³³³ Just as China desensitized the purchase and refitting of the Russian carrier over the course of 13 years, China's aggressive actions in Taiwan's ADIZ are lowering the threshold of what "normal" looks like in the Strait. As the associate director of programs at the Project 2049 Institute, Eric Lee, commented about China's maneuvers, "Beijing has routinized their air activity in the region, almost making it their training zone where they can exercise battlefield management."³³⁴ By calling the overflights "expanded drills," China is presenting the world with a new set of facts about its actions over time. In essence, it is accomplishing small-scale *fait accomplis* in the information domain. "Strategic deception occurs whenever a country continues over a period of time deliberately to mislead another regarding its strategic objectives or the forces designed to achieve those objectives."³³⁵ Often, strategic deception must be prepared in peacetime—sometimes years in advance—in order to be available for execution when needed in wartime.³³⁶

There are remarkable similarities with these actions and Nazi Germany's strategic deception activities during the inter-war period leading up to WWII. Nazi Germany manipulated international perceptions of Germany's weakness to downplay its military intentions and capabilities.³³⁷ Hitler leveraged deception and the weak resolve of the international community in order to buy time for the Wehrmacht to sufficiently rearm and

³³² Kong and Yu, 80.

³³³ Kong and Yu, 58.

³³⁴ Haime, "Mainland China Invasion?"

³³⁵ Michael Mihalka, "Soviet Strategic Deception, 1955–1981," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 40.

³³⁶ Walter Jajko, "Deception: Appeal for Acceptance; Discourse on Doctrine; Preface to Planning," *Comparative Strategy* 21, no. 5 (2002): 357.

³³⁷ Michael Mihalka, *German Strategic Deception in the 1930s*, N-1557-NA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1980), 98.

then leveraged the rearmament to deter foreign intervention when the Allies finally realized Germany's true strength. In his detailed 1980 RAND report of Nazi Germany's deception stratagems, Michael Mihalka drew a series of lessons-learned of which many relate directly to China's actions today:

- Stage impressive displays of military capability including demonstrations and maneuvers (like China's record overflight of 149 aircraft in October 2020).
- Exploit procedural uncertainties of intelligence operations.
- Target "sympathetic" groups and political factions.
- When dealing with democratic systems, divide and conquer.
- Act suddenly and swiftly when the opportunity presents itself. Present the world with faits accomplis.
- Espouse only "reasonable" objectives.
- Always play the role of the aggrieved party (Hitler masked his long-term policy of expansion with the short-term attempts to redress the "wrongs" of Versailles, similar to China's "century of humiliation").³³⁸

Like Nazi Germany prior to WWII, China is playing a game of deception and deterrence to prevent intervention in its final approach to power. "Deception is a strategy designed to improve one's prospects in competition."³³⁹ Deception and stratagem, therefore, are the means by which China conducts sophisticated statecraft. Leading Cold War expert on statecraft, R. W. Van de Veld, defined statecraft as, "the process through which a nation attempts to minimize its weaknesses and limitations, and to maximize its strengths and capabilities in a current international situation to achieve its international goals of foreign policy."³⁴⁰ In this sense, Chinese statecraft through deception and stratagem are in many ways the embodiment of China's strategic psyche. Through strategic patience spanning decades and generations, China employs indirect approaches to develop shih in order to achieve its strategic and foreign policy goals and achieve strategic deception and surprise of its opponents.

³³⁸ Mihalka, 100–104.

³³⁹ Erik Gartzke and Jon R. Lindsay, "Weaving Tangled Webs: Offense, Defense, and Deception in Cyberspace," *Security Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 327, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2015.1038188>.

³⁴⁰ R. W. Van de Velde, "Instruments of Statecraft," *Army*, 1962, 2.

2. Understanding China's Strategic Objectives for Taiwan

To develop and implement an effective counterstrategy to China's strategy for Taiwan, it is important to first identify what that strategy is and how it links to China's overall policy and grand strategic objectives. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development (DASD(SFD)) Elbridge Colby makes the case in his book, *The Strategy of Denial*, that U.S. strategy must be matched to China's goals if it is to deter them: "the adversarial process is the one that defines the best standard."³⁴¹ In his extensive review of the evolution of Chinese military strategy, MIT professor of political science M. Taylor Fravel asserts there are four principal guidelines to Chinese strategy formulation.³⁴² First is the identification of the "strategic opponent"—which is presently the United States. Second is the "primary strategic direction" oriented to the geographic center of gravity (COG)—which is presently Taiwan and the surrounding first island chain. The third and most important guideline is the "basis of preparations for military struggle"—which is presently "counter-intervention" and amphibious assault capabilities within that geographic COG. The fourth is the "basic guiding thought" for the use of military power or formulation of operational approaches—which is presently the menu of options such as hybrid or "gray zone" encroachment, naval blockade, missile or cyber barrage, and all-out invasion etc.

a. *The Coupling of Taiwan to China's Grand Strategy*

The "question" of Taiwan is the proverbial "elephant in the room" for Chinese grand strategy. Beijing has employed every lever of national power to coerce and compel Taiwan to concede its position, including the ingenious "one country, two systems" arrangement. Taiwan has effectually answered Beijing's "one country, two systems" plea bargain, but Beijing remains rigid. It is not as flexible as it once was. But at the same time,

³⁴¹ Suzanne Maloney et al., "What Is a Strategy of Denial and Does It Make Sense for America?," November 5, 2021, in *Brookings Events*, produced by the Brookings Institution, virtual event, video, 1:04:56, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/what-is-a-strategy-of-denial-and-does-it-make-sense-for-america/>.

³⁴² M. Taylor Fravel, "Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China's Changes in Military Strategy," *International Security* 42, no. 3 (Winter /2018 2017): 48, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/685689>.

it has always been inflexible about Taiwan. Why? Because Taiwan—more than any other “core interest” of China—is a “trigger point” which awakens “fierce emotional reaction” in Beijing.³⁴³ China’s preoccupation with Taiwan transcends rational IR theory explanations. After 71 years, Taiwanese autonomy or independence now pose little physical threat to China, yet it appears at times like an existential threat to Chinese perceived sovereignty and legitimacy.

The reunification of Taiwan assuredly has significant strategic, political, and economic value for China. But it also has several important ideological implications as well. Below the surface of Taiwan’s tangible significance, China views Taiwan as an affront to its perceived self-identify and legitimacy. Taiwan is the result of an unfinished civil war which reunification would finally and decisively conclude. One analogy is if the Confederacy had fled to the island of Puerto Rico during the American Civil War and continued to maintain claims of sovereignty over the Southern states after 1865. This would represent a rival government which the United States would seek to remove. In a similar fashion, Taiwan represents an alternate form of Chinese government. Since Taiwan instituted democratic reforms in the 1980s, it has demonstrated to the world and particularly to mainland Chinese what a democratic China could look like. This has been especially poignant in light of Taiwan’s remarkably effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and President Biden’s invitation of Taiwan to attend the virtual Summit on Democracy in December. Additionally, because Taiwan’s continued existence is the result of consistent U.S. intervention in the region, a free and independent Taiwan represents China’s perceptions of U.S. containment, encroachment, and interference in its “domestic” and regional affairs. For China, the United States is omnipresent in its foreign and domestic affairs.³⁴⁴ All these factors coalesce to form a heated opinion of the Taiwan “question” that is intimately tied to China’s sense of humiliation and self-sovereignty—and thus, China’s grand strategic aims. As China’s defense minister cited during the 1996 Taiwan

³⁴³ Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 188.

³⁴⁴ Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, “How China Sees America: The Sum of Beijing’s Fears,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 2012, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2012-08-16/how-china-sees-america>.

Strait Crisis, “As long as Taiwan is not liberated, the Chinese people’s historical humiliation is not washed away, as long as the Motherland is not reunited, our people’s armed forces responsibility is not fulfilled.”³⁴⁵

For Beijing, there is tremendous pressure to demonstrate resolve regarding Taiwan—not only to foreign target audiences and the Taiwanese populace, but more importantly to its own populace in order to preserve its perceived legitimacy. For example, in 2012 the Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun declared,

The Chinese government has unshakable resolve and will to uphold China’s territorial sovereignty. We have the confidence and the ability to uphold the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. No amount of foreign threats or pressure will shake, in the slightest, the resolve of the Chinese government and people.³⁴⁶

In 2013 Xi Jinping said, “No foreign country should expect us to make a deal on our core interests and hope we will swallow the bitter pill that will damage our sovereignty, security and development interests.”³⁴⁷ And in 2017, Xi proclaimed, “We absolutely will not permit any person, any organization, any political party—at any time, in any form—to separate any piece of Chinese territory from China.”³⁴⁸

This level of conviction and rhetoric explains the animus of several statements and actions coming from Beijing in recent months. Following the record 149 PLAAF fighter and bomber incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ in October 2020, Xi vowed to achieve “peaceful unification” and that the “historic mission of achieving the complete unification of our country must be realized, and can be realized... peaceful means is most in line with the overall interests of Chinese People, including Taiwan compatriots.” However, he also warned that “those who forget their heritage, betray their country, and seek to break up

³⁴⁵ Garver, *China’s Quest*, 629–30.

³⁴⁶ Mazarr et al., *What Deters and Why*, 20.

³⁴⁷ “China Will Never Compromise on Security, Says Xi Jinping,” *Telegraph*, January 29, 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9834638/China-will-never-compromise-on-security-says-Xi-Jinping.html>.

³⁴⁸ Associated Press, “Xi Says China Will Never Permit Loss of ‘Any Piece’ of Land,” CNBC, last modified August 1, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/08/01/xi-says-china-will-never-permit-loss-of-any-piece-of-land.html>.

their country, will come to no good end.” Taiwan’s presidential office responded that the future of Taiwan “rests in the hands of Taiwan’s people.”³⁴⁹ But the following month Beijing announced it would essentially blacklist those who support Taiwan independence and hold them criminally liable for life “Those who forget their ancestors, betray the motherland and split the country, will never end up well, and will be spurned by the people and judged by history.”³⁵⁰ Needless to say, Taiwan is much more than just an economic or strategic value-proposition, or a constant reminder of an unfinished civil war or democratic alternative. Taiwan strikes a nerve in the Chinese psyche that is difficult for foreigners to fully comprehend.

Nevertheless, these statements and actions indicate a concerning level of *unease* and *impatience* within the party. A noteworthy *Washington Post* op-ed by David Von Drehle from October 2021 suggests that instead of having to contend against China’s rise, the United States may have to manage its decline:

China is known as the sage of nations, strategically patient, thinking in terms of centuries while the West flits about like a toddler in a toy store. Current events are forcing a reappraisal, however, as China careens wildly—and very dangerously—from one bad decision to the next.

This nation that supposedly thinks in centuries is now issuing sweeping fiat on a seemingly weekly basis. Xi is causing the world to recalculate the risks of doing business with such an unpredictable nation.³⁵¹

b. China’s Fait Accompli Strategic Approach

Beijing’s strategic objective for Taiwan is to achieve a *fait accompli*, meaning China achieves its objectives in such a rapid and decisive manner that any foreign opposition is left with no other option but to accept the new state of affairs. The strategic

³⁴⁹ Suliman, “China’s Xi Vows Peaceful ‘Unification’ with Taiwan, Days After Sending a Surge of Warplanes Near the Island.”

³⁵⁰ Yew Lun Tian, “China Spurs Taiwan Anger with Criminal Liability Threat for Independence Supporters,” Reuters, last modified November 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-it-will-hold-supporters-taiwans-independence-criminally-responsible-2021-11-05/>.

³⁵¹ David Von Drehle, “What If, Instead of Confronting China’s Rise, We Must Manage Its Decline?,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/08/china-rise-vs-authoritarian-decline/>.

calculus for a *fait accompli* strategy is sensible because it would have several first, second, and third order benefits for China.

First, it would accomplish China's long-standing objective and "core interest" of reunifying the island. Doing so would facilitate China to achieve its aspirations of "national rejuvenation" and the "Chinese Dream." Secondly, a *fait accompli* would present a new set of facts to regional and global actors, forcing them to either *band together* (balance) against China or *bandwagon* with China. If there is a formal or informal U.S.-led coalition of allies and partners at the time of the *fait accompli*, the tremendous costs required to retake Taiwan would cause some allies and partners to reconsider the coalition and potentially bandwagon with China in the near term rather than draw the ire of China in the long term. If the coalition or the United States were to fail to respond in any meaningful way, then it would signal *de facto* acceptance of the new status quo and would destroy what Elbridge Colby refers to as the "differentiated credibility" of America's commitment to partners and allies in the region.³⁵² Ironically, China does not need to annex Taiwan in order to accomplish this strategy. In fact, the best strategy would be to invade Taiwan, cripple its defenses, then demonstrate *self-restraint* by allowing Taiwan to negotiate the terms of its special administrative status. This would signal to surrounding nations that it is willing to work with nations peacefully to resolve issues and that it is in their best interests to work with China rather than oppose it. This course of action is highly unlikely on the part of China, but it demonstrates the strategic latitude and advantage of a *fait accompli* strategy. For this reason, Taiwan's goal should be to deny China from selecting this option and prevent it from using Taiwan as a political pawn for future diplomatic gain. Instead, Taiwan should conduct a protracted resistance campaign to leave China no other option but to forcibly annex the entire island.

Third, a *fait accompli* would deal a deeper blow to the legitimacy of democracy worldwide, particular to the Chinese version embodied in Taiwan and the global

³⁵² Daniel Larison, "Why Colby's Strategy of Denial Is Aggression Packaged as 'Management,'" Responsible Statecraft, last modified September 24, 2021, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/09/24/why-colbys-strategy-of-denial-is-aggression-packaged-as-management/>.

democratic leadership of the United States. The victory would demonstrate that democracies are ineffective and incapable of keeping fellow democracies like Taiwan safe. President Tsai drew attention to this fact in a recent *Foreign Affairs* article: “if Taiwan were to fall... it would signal that in today’s global contest of values, authoritarianism has the upper hand over democracy.”³⁵³

A fait accompli is the most optimal and most likely operational approach for China to take Taiwan. Therefore, any U.S. or coalition strategy should aim to deny this approach as a viable option for China. As Colby asserts, if the United States

is not adequately prepared with a denial strategy then China will actually have a rational incentive to push and not to stop at Taiwan, because China’s interests in Taiwan are actually over-determined, it’s not just irredentism. It’s actually critical to the geopolitical balance given its salience and its status as an indicator of what I think of as American differentiated credibility.³⁵⁴

3. Understanding China’s Grand Strategy

Grand strategy is a contentious term. Many contend—as Richard K. Betts claims—that grand strategy is merely a “buzzword.”³⁵⁵ Others, like Nina Silove, posit that grand strategy can alternately refer to one of three conceptions. The first is “grand plans” for the state deliberately crafted by individuals. The second is “grand principles” that serve to guide the decisions and actions of state actors—similar to a “North Star.” The third is “grand behavior” which characterizes patterns of state behavior.³⁵⁶ Common to all conceptions is that grand strategy has a long-term time horizon, is concerned with the state’s core interests and priorities, and involves all the instruments of national statecraft (i.e., DIMEFIL).³⁵⁷ Silove highlights two leading definitions of grand strategy. The first

³⁵³ Ing-wen, “Taiwan and the Fight for Democracy.”

³⁵⁴ Maloney et al., “What Is a Strategy of Denial.”

³⁵⁵ Richard K. Betts, “The Trouble with Strategy: Bridging Policy and Operations,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 29 (Autumn/Winter -2002 2001): 23, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-29.pdf>.

³⁵⁶ Nina Silove, “Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of ‘Grand Strategy,’” *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073>.

³⁵⁷ Silove, 31.

is from Barry R. Posen, which claims grand strategy is “a political-military, means-ends chain, a state’s theory about how it can best ‘cause’ security for itself.”³⁵⁸ The second is from Paul Kennedy, which claims “It [is] about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries. It [does] not cease at a war’s end, nor commence at its beginning.”³⁵⁹ All of these conceptions of grand strategy fit the understanding of China’s grand strategy.

a. China’s Three Sources of Grand Strategy

Many people conceive of China’s grand strategy as a detailed master plan spanning a century or longer, but “rather than a long-term strategy, the Chinese leadership are acutely aware of the here and now...China’s leaders recognize that the road is littered with opportunities and challenges along the way, and it devises its policies accordingly and openly in speeches and other important policy documents.”³⁶⁰ China’s grand strategic thinking derives from three primary sources, one domestic and aspirational, one external and threat-oriented, and one internal and stability-oriented. Together, these inform China’s domestic and foreign policies as well as changes in its military strategy.

(1) Dual Identity of Self-Superiority & Self-Inferiority

The first basis for Chinese grand strategy corresponds with China’s strategic psyche. It has temporal and aspirational aspects and represents the conception of grand strategy as a “North Star” to orient the Chinese people toward a unified goal. It is the Chinese grand strategic narrative of both victimization during the “century of humiliation” and a sense of destiny towards “national rejuvenation.” Nationalism is a strong driver of Chinese grand strategy, but this form of nationalism has a “dual identity: a strange combination of self-superiority and self-inferiority” with a “very deliberate celebration of

³⁵⁸ Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 13.

³⁵⁹ Paul M. Kennedy, “Grand Strategies in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition,” in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Kennedy, Paul M. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 4.

³⁶⁰ Axel Dessen, “Identifying Windows of Opportunity within China’s Rise,” *Military Review*, October 2019, 69, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/September-October-2019/Dessen-China-100-Year/>.

national insecurity.”³⁶¹ From this lens, any challenge to Chinese sovereignty is at once an affront to Chinese national pride and to its insecurity. Upholding sovereign claims is used to justify increasingly assertive and optimistic rhetoric and behavior.

In the last decade, Chinese officials have increasingly referred to the advent of a “period of historic opportunity.” This language fully emerged in 2017, when Xi Jinping announced a new phase in Chinese grand strategy by declaring the world was in the midst of “great changes unseen in a century.” The significance was not lost on his audience. Xi had recast a well-known phrase from general Li Hongzhang in 1872 pronouncing China’s humiliation at the hand of Western powers: the world was experiencing “great changes unseen in 3,000 years.”³⁶² The simple yet profound juxtaposition of these two statements is the foundation for understanding Chinese grand strategy. Li foresaw the end of an era; Xi foresaw the beginning of a new era. Li proclaimed China’s humiliation; Xi proclaimed China’s rejuvenation. For Li, there was tragedy, but for Xi there is only opportunity. This is the assessment of the current National Security Council (NSC) China director and founding director of the Brookings China Strategy Initiative, Rush Doshi, in his 2021 book *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Replace American Order*. While the phrase originated years before Xi’s announcement, it was Xi who tied it to the birth of a new era for China and the world, making it a cornerstone to his foreign policy in countless speeches. In the same speech in 2017, Xi proclaimed China’s future: “nourished by a nation’s culture of more than 5,000 years, and backed by the invincible force of more than 1.3 billion people, we have an infinitely vast stage of our era, a *historical heritage* of unmatched depth, and incomparable resolve that enable us to forge ahead. [emphasis added].”³⁶³ Moreover, in November 2021, the CCP designated Xi as a “historic figure” on par with Mao Zedong

³⁶¹ Jing Men, “China’s Peaceful Rise?,” *Studia Diplomatica* 56, no. 6 (2003): 17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44838432>; William A. Callahan, “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism,” *Alternatives* 29 (2004): 199, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540402900204>.

³⁶² Rush Doshi, “Featured Excerpt from *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*,” *China Leadership Monitor*, September 1, 2021, <https://www.prcleader.org/dashi>.

³⁶³ “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Report at 19th CPC National Congress,” *China Daily*, November 4, 2017, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.

and Deng Ziaoping—one who has “promoted historic achievements and historic changes.”³⁶⁴ The choice of descriptors is no coincidence.

(2) Grand Strategic Adjustments vis-à-vis the United States

The second basis for Chinese grand strategy is a close assessment of its greatest “strategic opponent:” the United States. Doshi argues that “China’s assessment of American power has long been critical to its grand strategy.”³⁶⁵ China has always been a careful student of history, following Sun Tzu’s wise counsel to “know the enemy and know yourself.” This strategic practice has been the case for Beijing since Washington first lent its support to Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Nationalists before WWII. It continued through the Cold War periods of containment and rapprochement, then accentuated during crises such as the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the Taiwan Strait Crises, Tiananmen Square, and the global financial crisis of 2008. China has understood and internalized the dangers of the Thucydides Trap long before Allison Graham coined the term in a Western conception in 2012. Doshi believes there have been three policy and grand strategic adjustments for China vis-à-vis the United States which help to understand China’s current grand strategic mindset.

The first adjustment came in the 1990s following the events of Tiananmen Square, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the stunning military success of the United States during Operation Desert Storm in Iraq. China feared that the United States—now freed from its strategic and ideological rivalry with the Soviet Union and emboldened by its unmatched military and technological overmatch—would turn its gaze toward China “in search of monsters to destroy,” as John Quincy Adams warned in 1821. “This could destroy the favorable macro-climate for development arduously created by Chinese diplomacy over the previous decade, possibly aborting China’s development drive before it advanced very far. Even more, U.S. hostility might pose grave danger to regime survival.”³⁶⁶ Consequently, China’s leaders during that period (Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin) urged

³⁶⁴ Zhai, “China’s Xi Gains Power as Communist Party Designates Him a Historic Figure.”

³⁶⁵ Doshi, “Featured Excerpt from The Long Game.”

³⁶⁶ Garver, *China’s Quest*, 529.

the nation to “hide its capabilities and bide its time.” The concept draws on not only the Chinese psyche of strategic patience, but also “the grudging acceptance of *humiliation* by a stronger adversary until one is ready and the time is right. [emphasis added]”³⁶⁷ The resulting Chinese grand strategy from this period was to *blunt* the United States advancement in the region.

The second strategic adjustment followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks on U.S. soil in 2001 and the global financial crisis in 2008, which convinced China that the United States was now in decline. In 2002, Jiang Zemin declared a twenty-year “period of strategic opportunity”—another familiar phrase used at various points in China’s history. During this twenty-year period China began to take greater initiative worldwide as its economy grew and its greatest rival found itself strategically occupied in the Middle East. It was during this time that Chinese leaders began to speak of China’s “peaceful rise” or “peaceful development.”³⁶⁸ The resulting Chinese grand strategy was to *build* regional order.

The third adjustment began after Xi’s announcement in 2017 of “great changes unseen in a century.” Jiang Zemin’s “period of strategic opportunity” transitioned into Xi’s “period of historic opportunity.” The focus changed from “doing some things” under Deng to “striving for achievements” under Xi.³⁶⁹ China now believes the United States is in inevitable decline and from now until the final achievement of “national rejuvenation” by 2049, the goal of Chinese grand strategy is to capitalize on opportunities while avoiding the risk of sparking conflict with the United States—in other words, to avoid the last stages of the Thucydides Trap. The resulting Chinese grand strategy is now *expansion* as it moves into a period of greater optimism, sense of urgency, and assertiveness.³⁷⁰ As a timely marker of this growing sense of inevitability and unstoppable momentum, just this year in 2021 China completed the first of its “two centenaries” and is now poised to achieve its second. The first “centenary” was to “build a moderately prosperous society” by 2021—

³⁶⁷ Kong and Yu, “Deciphering Chinese Strategic Deception,” 55.

³⁶⁸ Dessein, “Identifying Windows of Opportunity within China’s Rise,” 73.

³⁶⁹ Dessein, 73.

³⁷⁰ Doshi, “Featured Excerpt from The Long Game”; Dessein, “Identifying Windows of Opportunity within China’s Rise,” 75–76.

the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding. The second is to build a "strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and modern socialist country" by 2049—the 100th anniversary of the PRC's founding. The 2022 Winter Olympics are just months away and may function as a watershed mile-marker for the transition from one "centenary" to the next.

(3) Regime Security and Legitimacy

The third basis for Chinese grand strategy is the supreme imperative of maintaining regime security and legitimacy. The CCP's overarching grand strategy has remained surprisingly contiguous and pragmatically simple from Mao to recent times: to keep China secure through military modernization and economic development to underwrite that security. Since 1949, the CCP regime has been one of constant caution and insecurity. Its greatest perceived risk was and still is its claim to sovereignty and political recognition by others. But today, the CCP under Xi Jinping has strayed from the adaptive flexibility of its earlier "pragmatic coexistence" and has run counter to the very policies that led to rapprochement with Washington and international recognition of sovereignty—in other words, policies that advanced its grand strategy.

Actions like the repression of protests in Hong Kong undercut the credibility of the "one country, two systems" policy for Taiwan. The recent decision in August by Lithuania to allow Taiwan to establish a *de facto* embassy with "Taiwanese" in its name is causing deep consternations for Beijing that other European countries could follow in domino fashion.³⁷¹ In the ensuing months, the EU Parliament passed a non-binding resolution 580–26 to increase relations with Taiwan and sent a delegation of lawmakers from France, Lithuania, Italy, and the Czech Republic to Taiwan.³⁷² Taiwan's foreign minister also

³⁷¹ Laura Zhou, "China Wary of Lithuanian Domino Effect Over De Facto Taiwan Embassy," *South China Morning Post*, August 11, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3144712/china-wary-lithuanian-domino-effect-over-de-facto-taiwan>.

³⁷² Huizhong Wu, "EU Lawmakers Meet Taiwan Premier in First Official Visit," Associated Press, last modified November 3, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-china-taiwan-european-union-tsai-ing-wen-7d3646b91187590f4edc34b4b3ea5d10>.

traveled to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Lithuania followed by a joint delegation to Taiwan from all three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia).³⁷³

Closer to home, Beijing criticized NBC news for not showing Taiwan and its SCS claims on a map of the PRC during NBC's broadcast of the 2021 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.³⁷⁴ Beijing also made sure a high school from Colorado acquiesced to its "One-China principle" by revoking its application to a UN event because the school's website referred to Taiwan as a country instead of a province of China.³⁷⁵ Beijing is so concerned about any infraction against its legitimacy that it even censors and prohibits images of Winnie the Pooh due to social media trolling which compares Xi to the lovable cartoon.³⁷⁶

These "infractions" paint a picture of the CCP as deeply insecure and virtually obsessed with domestic and party stability. CCP leaders fear chaos more than anything, which can breed irrationality at times. Furthermore, when domestic events disturb party stability and question its legitimacy, the CCP tends to incite nationalist sentiment and turn it externally as an outlet. "The pattern seems fairly clear: when the regime worries about major challenges to its legitimacy, it tries to redirect blame to (mostly foreign) 'hostile forces.'"³⁷⁷

³⁷³ Samson Ellis, "EU Parliament Tests China's Warnings With First Visit to Taiwan," Bloomberg, last modified November 3, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-03/eu-parliament-tests-china-s-warnings-with-first-visit-to-taiwan>; "Baltic Lawmakers Meet Taiwan's Tsai, Stepping up Cooperation," Associated Press, last modified November 29, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-china-estonia-taiwan-latvia-de0c6b41ad5a50e9d4089ad9bb2c144d>.

³⁷⁴ Lexi Lonas, "China Criticizes NBC for Not Showing Taiwan, South China Sea in Olympic Map," *The Hill*, July 24, 2021, <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/564673-china-criticizes-nbc-for-not-showing-taiwan-south-china-sea-in-countrys-map>.

³⁷⁵ Stu Woo, "China Makes Sure Everyone Writes Taiwan's Name Just So—Even a Colorado High School," *Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-makes-sure-everyone-writes-taiwans-name-just-soeven-a-colorado-high-school-11631304386>.

³⁷⁶ Benjamin Haas, "China Bans Winnie the Pooh Film After Comparisons to President Xi," *The Guardian*, last modified August 7, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/07/china-bans-winnie-the-pooh-film-to-stop-comparisons-to-president-xi>.

³⁷⁷ Johnston, "Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing," 37.

b. China's Grand Strategy Causal Loop Diagram

The three principal sources of Chinese grand strategy—*historic opportunity*, *assessment of the enemy*, and *regime security*—are the primary feedback loops for Chinese strategic and foreign policy thinking (see the causal loop diagram (CLD) in Figure 9). Most analysts and commentators portray China's grand strategy and foreign policy as a master plan comprised of one deterministic event after another in a long-term linear progression toward inevitable greatness. But the reality is that all strategy formulation occurs in a *non-linear* environment of constantly shifting interpretations, priorities, and opportunities resulting from unpredictable events. “Nonlinearities abound in the real world and confound linear, event-based modeling.” From a systems-perspective, China's three sources are feedback loops that provide double-loop learning for Chinese leadership, meaning they provide feedback for future decisions as well as feedback to the grand strategy mental model. They are similar to the familiar OODA loop (observe, orient, decide, act), but provide additional information for adjusting the mental model. As the model changes, the beliefs about the system change, creating new decision rules and criteria for formulating new grand strategy.

The goal for China is for each of the feedback loops in the center of the CLD (depicted in red) to be *reinforcing* and to prevent any shift in polarity (+ to -). Reinforcing loops (R) with positive polarity amplify what is already occurring. For example, any actions which increase China's “Historic & Strategic Opportunities” without disproportionately provoking the United States or risking regime security or legitimacy will reinforce and align with China's grand strategic goals (depicted in the center of the CLD). Additionally, each source reinforces the others in a unidirectional manner. Increases or decreases in “Regime Security & Legitimacy” will increase or decrease positive “Assessment of the United States,” which will increase or decrease “Historic & Strategic Opportunities.”

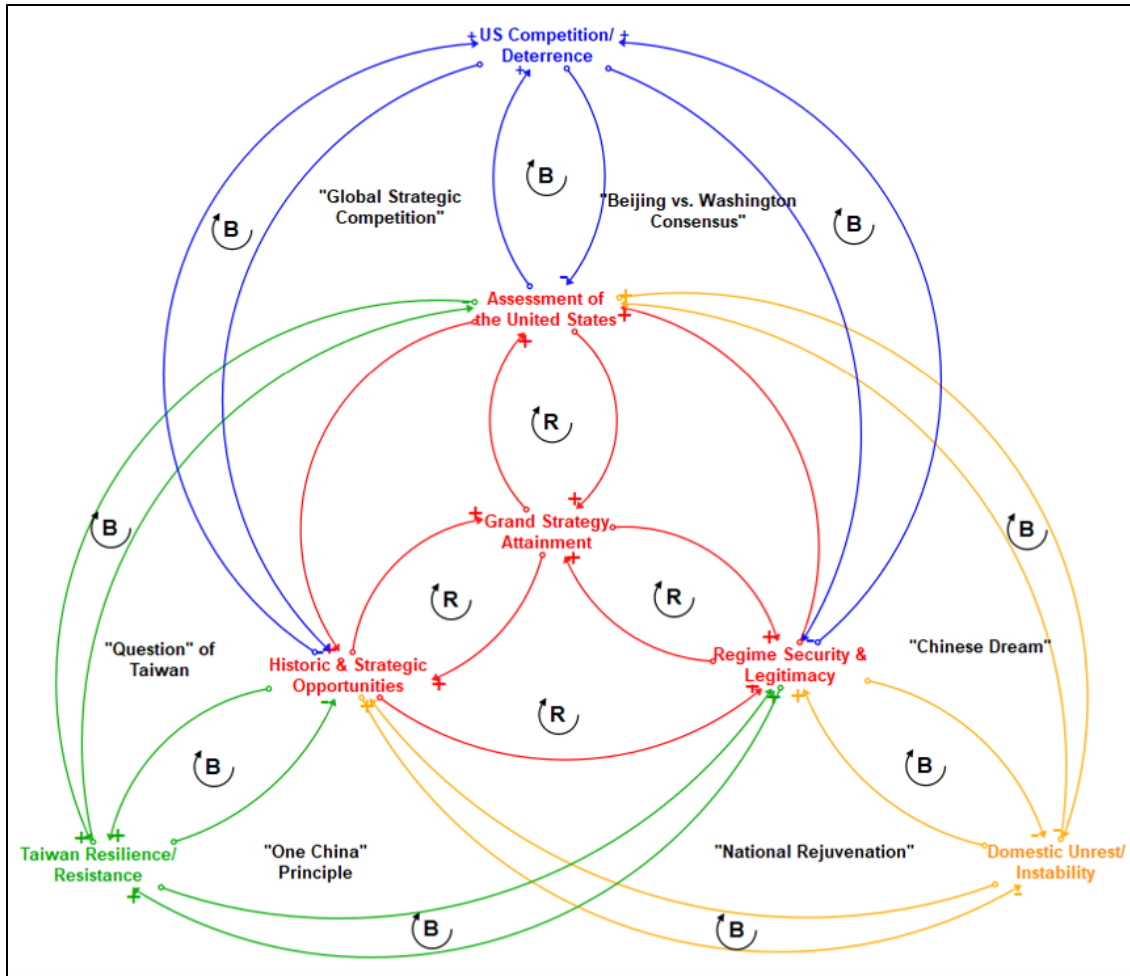


Figure 9. Chinese Grand Strategy Causal Loop Diagram (CLD)

Eventually, if China’s reinforcing loops are left unchecked, there will be a shift in feedback loop dominance, meaning they will reverse polarity and become balancing loops (B). They will reach their carrying capacity and begin to level-off to a sustainable degree, or they will oscillate and collapse. The goal, therefore, is to drive reinforcement in a negative rather than positive direction of China’s attainment of grand strategy to the point that it converts into balancing loops. But given the non-linear dynamics of most systems, this is very difficult to achieve. If it is not feasible, then the goal is to minimize, halt, or reverse China from attaining its grand strategy. The reason for focusing on reinforcing rather than balancing loops is because “reducing the gain around a reinforcing loop—slowing the growth—is usually a more powerful leverage point in systems than

strengthening balancing loops, and far more preferable than letting the reinforcing loop run.”³⁷⁸ Therefore, it is important to identify potential leverage points—ideally other balancing loops in the system which will reduce the gain around China’s reinforcing loops. There are multiple factors which form balancing loops with each of the three sources and can affect each of them either positively or negatively. Only one potential factor is depicted in the CLD for each source. For example, if “Taiwan Resilience/Resistance” (depicted in green) increases, it will reduce each of the three grand strategic sources, which will have a cascading negative reinforcing effect within the grand strategy feedback loops. As they reduce, they will reduce Taiwan’s need for resilience and resistance capacity, so the feedback loops are *balancing* (B). A balancing loop represents goal seeking behavior. When the system is dominated by one or more of the balancing loops, China will seek to correct the imbalance.

The utility of using a CLD to depict Chinese grand strategy is its flexibility to account for additional factors or changes to factors in the future. If someone believes there are more (or fewer) than three primary sources for Chinese grand strategy, or a different source replaces one of the three in the future (e.g., Japan or India replaces the United States as the greatest threat of foreign interference), the logic of the feedback loops remains. The overall *structure* of the feedback loops may change while the underlying *architecture* remains the same. The United States and Taiwan can sabotage China’s grand strategy by focusing on key balancing leverage points to reduce the gain from one or more of China’s sources of grand strategy. One such leverage point is an unconventional deterrence strategy to increase Taiwan’s capacity for resistance and resilience. This is the fundamental value proposition of an unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan. Not only does it have a greater probability to deter a Chinese attack, but by doing so it would prevent China from achieving its grand strategy by sending it into a negative reinforcing spiral.

³⁷⁸ Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, ed. Diana Wright (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Pub, 2008), 155–56.

4. Grand Strategy Sabotage

In its most basic form, there are three different conceptual approaches to competition with a strategic rival: (1) compete to win, (2) compete to make the competitor lose, or (3) compete to ensure neither wins and maintain the balance of power or status quo. The concept of grand strategy sabotage focuses on the second approach: how to thwart a competitor's national security objectives and sabotage its grand strategy—in this case, the CCP's "core" interest of "national reunification"—i.e., Taiwan. If the United States were to adopt a counterstrategy which targets the vulnerabilities and sensibilities surrounding Taiwan and sabotages the CCP's grand strategy by preventing it from achieving its most vulnerable objective, then not only will it have deterred conflict in the Taiwan Strait but it will have placed China in a position of political and grand strategic disadvantage vis-à-vis the United States and its allies.

a. Grand Strategic Interaction

A nation's grand strategy does not exist in a vacuum. There is always an element of strategic interaction, "which requires predicting, evading, blocking, and otherwise adjusting to the countermoves of principal adversaries."³⁷⁹ "Every strategy has an ideal counterstrategy," according to Arreguin-Toft, and his theory of strategic interaction provides a theoretical approach to the concept of grand strategy sabotage. If strong and weak powers employ same-approach strategies against each other, the outcome should favor the stronger power. But if the strategies are mismatched—i.e., direct versus indirect—the outcome will favor the weaker power.

If the contest of U.S. and CCP grand strategies is framed in terms of direct versus indirect, then the CCP is the weak-actor employing an indirect approach, and the United States is the strong-actor currently employing a direct approach. If the United States persists with a direct counterstrategy, however, the CCP will likely prevail. But if the United States adopts an indirect counterstrategy, all other things being equal, the United

³⁷⁹ Amy R. Zegart, *Complexity and the Misguided Search for Grand Strategy*, Foreign Policy and Grand Strategy (Stanford University: Hoover Institution, 2013), 1, www.hoover.org/taskforces/foreign-policy.

States should prevail. Authoritarian single-party states like China tend to have more articulated and identifiable grand strategies, therefore they are easier to target and sabotage. Democratic governments like the United States tend to struggle in crafting and articulating a unified grand strategy, therefore the focus on counterstrategy. However, democratic nations have a formidable propensity to unify against a common threat and coalesce a unified grand strategy when the threat is clear and the situation is dire. A counterstrategy of sabotage could transition into a larger, unified strategy if this becomes the national situation, or it could prevent this situation from coming to fruition.

b. China's Critical Vulnerability: Taiwan

If one were to conduct a center of gravity (COG) analysis of the CCP's grand strategy, Taiwan would be its most critical vulnerability. A COG is any "source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act."³⁸⁰ The actions or functions that enable the COG, or which give it its power or strength, are known as critical capabilities (CC). Critical requirements (CR) are the conditions, resources, and means required for the COG to achieve its CCs. And critical vulnerabilities (CV) are those CRs, or components of CRs, that are vulnerable to neutralization or defeat, thus denying the COG from achieving its CCs. CVs are the linchpins that—when damaged or removed—bring the entire COG machine to a grinding halt. CVs may be attacked or exploited in the case of enemy COGs, or they may be reinforced or bolstered in the case of friendly COGs.³⁸¹

In the case of China, the CCP's COG is the grand "Chinese Dream" of "national rejuvenation." Its CCs include the three principal sources for Chinese domestic and foreign policy: historic opportunity, strategic position vis-à-vis the United States, and regime security. Its myriad CRs include things like military modernization and economic

³⁸⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, GL-6.

³⁸¹ Joe Strange, *Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clausewitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language*, 2nd ed., vol. 4, Perspectives on Warfighting (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2005), https://jpsc.ndu.edu/Portals/72/Documents/JC2IOS/Additional_Reading/3B_COG_and_Critical_Vulnerabilities.pdf; Dale C Eikmeier, "Center of Gravity Analysis," *Military Review* 84, no. 5 (2004): 2–5.

development, but also the underpinnings of its strategic psyche, like strategic patience and deception. Among the CVs that could disrupt the innerworkings of this framework are the protests in Hong Kong, economic sanctions, but most importantly, the “question” of Taiwan. By coupling Taiwan so closely with its grand strategic plan, it is the CCP’s greatest vulnerability to continued legitimacy. During multiple interviews with Taiwanese officials for their 2018 report *A Question of Time: Enhancing Taiwan’s Conventional Deterrence Posture*, Michael Hunzeker et. al found that Chinese officials were afraid of the prospect of a protracted conflict for Taiwan because “after all, the longer a military conflict with Taiwan drags on, the more likely it is that the United States will intervene.”³⁸²

Furthermore, China is extraordinarily wedded to the significance of anniversaries and important dates. The three most likely milestones for the reunification of Taiwan are 2027 (the 100th anniversary of the PLA), 2035 (when Xi is projected to step down at the age of 82, putting him on the same pedestal as Mao who died at that age), and 2049 (the 100th anniversary of the PRC). If the United States and Taiwan are able to deter and prevent China from annexing Taiwan within these milestones, it would foil Xi’s personal ambitions and present him with a domestic political dilemma in which he would be forced to act rashly or play the blame-game and punt the issue of Taiwan to a new era of Chinese grand strategy. Deterrence would subvert China’s COG and sabotage its grand strategy. Many like to highlight and laud Beijing’s long-term, steady strategic advancement and contrast it with Washington’s oscillating and divided political system, but as Beijing approaches its self-appointed deadlines in the near future, it will be forced to speed-up its plan. If it does not, it will have to find some way to move the goalpost to a new milestone (a new 100 year plan?). The protracted unconventional deterrence strategy would force China to choose between rigid adherence to its 100 year plan, concession to forging a new plan, or diplomatic negotiations for a peaceful settlement. In this scenario, deterrence for long enough could lead to compellence at that point. All that is needed is to outlast China’s own appointed timeline. The main question is whether the CCP would change its grand

³⁸² Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time*, 80.

strategy and alter course, or would it remain rigid and stay the course? Would it continue to force the reinforcing feedback loops or accept a balancing shift in polarity?

E. SUMMARY

The overall strategic “end-state” of a U.S.-led counterstrategy is to deny China’s *theory of victory*. The goal is to continually force the burden of escalation back onto the Chinese. The United States should seek to deny China from invading Taiwan not simply to deter war but so that China will have to act in a way which escalates U.S., Taiwanese, and the international community’s resolve. This requires a deeper incorporation of irregular warfare and political warfare into coalition “integrated deterrence” activities. A coalition counterstrategy of “deterrence by denial” could not only deny China’s strategic objectives, but also thwart its foreign policy and grand strategic objectives.

Despite the supposed advantage of Beijing’s long-term, generational grand strategy, Washington could actually sustain a better long-term strategy—perhaps not in terms of consistency or unity—but in terms of longevity, resilience, and long-term stability. Washington’s policy of “strategic ambiguity” and the TRA provide the necessary set of options and flexibility to adopt an indirect counterstrategy involving unconventional deterrence, asymmetric defense, security assistance, strategic deception and communication, public diplomacy, and political warfare.

V. STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL WAYS

The “ways” to operationalize an unconventional deterrence strategy are theoretically endless. Given enough resources and a long enough time horizon to plan, any option could be feasible. However, given the constraints of the operational environment (including policy restraints) and the compressed time horizon—i.e., the six-year “Davidson Window”—this chapter focuses on existing frameworks and constructs that are low resource-intensive and available for immediate implementation. Each proposed “way” meets the SMART criteria (specificity, measurability, achievability, relevance and results-oriented, and time-bound).³⁸³ This chapter presents the primary *strategic* and corresponding *operational* “ways” which represent the initial contours of a “campaign plan” or “series of operations aimed at achieving strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space.”³⁸⁴

The overarching “way” for the United States and Taiwan to execute an unconventional deterrence strategy is to engage in *proactive* and *enduring* irregular warfare (IW). The basis for this proposition comes from the *Irregular Warfare Annex* of the 2018 *NDS*, wherein the DOD describes the purpose of IW:

To expand the competitive space, shape the environment, and prepare for escalation to conflict, if required. To control the tempo of adversarial competition... manage escalation dynamics and dictate the character, scope, intensity, and terms of this competition to our adversaries. We will apply IW to shape our adversaries’ behavior to our advantage, increase the cost of hostile action against the United States and its allies, and pursue innovative ways to disrupt, counter, and preempt coercion and subversion.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Michael J. McNerney et al., *SMART Security Cooperation Objectives*, RR-1430-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1430>.

³⁸⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, I-8.

³⁸⁵ Department of Defense, *Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex*, 7.

The current definition of IW is “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).”³⁸⁶ But the 2018 NDAA proposed a new definition that is more applicable and broader:

Activities in support of predetermined United States policy and military objectives conducted by, with, and through regular forces, irregular forces, groups, and individuals participating in competition between state and non-state actors short of traditional armed conflict.³⁸⁷

This definition more accurately describes the concepts of operational advisory support to Taiwan, the building of resilience and resistance, and the interweaving of strategic communication and deception described in this chapter.

A. THE ASYMMETRIC OPERATIONS WORKING GROUP

The “asymmetric operations working group” was an initiative led by the U.S. Army’s Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) in partnership with the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab (JHU/APL). The periodic AOWGs were strategic-level joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) forums with public/private collaboration in which participants shared asymmetric operations perspectives to better understand and mitigate U.S. and allies’ vulnerabilities. The Taiwan AOWG serves as a good model for future advisory support for comprehensive or asymmetric defense.

1. AWG Background

In 2006, the Department of the Army (DA) created AWG as a special mission unit (SMU) under the G-3/5/7 in order to mitigate current and emerging asymmetric threats worldwide. The SMU comprised of approximately 350 specially-selected and trained senior officers and noncommissioned officers (NCO) as well as DA civilians and contracted consultants—typically retired service-members with specialized expertise. AWG’s charter mission was to (1) provide operational advisory support globally to Army and Joint force commanders; (2) identify emerging threats and capability gaps; (3) conduct

³⁸⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, II-1.

³⁸⁷ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-404, § 1203, 12 Stat. 363 (2017). <https://www.congress.gov/115/crpt/hrpt404/CRPT-115hrpt404.pdf>.

rapid solution development to enhance combat lethality and soldier survivability; and (4) assist DOTMLPF integration.³⁸⁸ In 2011, AWG became a direct reporting unit to the four-star commanding general of Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) in order to form a linkage between the Army's operational and institutional forces. AWG systematically identified and captured (1) emerging threat TTPs; (2) friendly trends, lessons learned, and best practices; and (3) DOTMLPF capability gaps and vulnerabilities to inform future force development. As the Army's "global scouts" and asymmetric warfare experts, AWG operational advisors (OA) deployed globally to declared theaters of active armed conflict (DTAAC) and politically sensitive environments, as well as partner nations and allied operations. In 2021, the Army officially discontinued AWG as part of a force restructure to transition from a focus on CT and COIN operations to GPC, MDO, and LSCO—and the modernization requirements these efforts require.³⁸⁹

2. Baltic States AOWG

In 2014, following Russia's annexation of Crimea, AWG and JHU/APL initiated a Baltic States AOWG to study Russia's strategic aims and tactics in Ukraine and assess the potential threat in territories beyond Crimea. The result of the study was a two-part unclassified report entitled *Ambiguous Threats and External Influences in the Baltic States and Poland*. Phase One published in October 2014 and Phase Two in November 2015.³⁹⁰ The reports were highly informative within the Army and led to the subsequent creation of a *Russian New Generation Handbook* in 2016. The reports garnered interest and attention in Taiwan due to concerns that China may employ similar tactics as Russia demonstrated

³⁸⁸ Asymmetric Warfare Group, *Operational and Organizational (O&O) Concept for the U.S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG)*, 12th ed. (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2013), 9–13.

³⁸⁹ Todd South, "The Army Is Shutting down Its Highly Praised Asymmetric Warfare Group," *Army Times*, October 2, 2020, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/10/02/the-army-is-shutting-down-its-much-lauded-asymmetric-warfare-group/>.

³⁹⁰ Asymmetric Warfare Group, (UNCLASSIFIED) *Ambiguous Threats and External Influences in the Baltic States, Phase 1: Understanding the Threat* (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2014), <https://community.apan.org/wg/gckn/m/mediagallery/204629>; Asymmetric Operations Working Group, (UNCLASSIFIED) *Ambiguous Threats and External Influences in the Baltic States, Phase 2: Assessing the Threat* (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2015), <https://community.apan.org/wg/gckn/m/mediagallery/205135>.

in Crimea. Shortly after, AWG and JHU/APL began a second AOWG to provide advisory support to AIT, U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC), and Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC). The goal of the Taiwan AOWG was to plan and execute a strategic study with the purpose of identifying areas in which to build future partner capacity efforts in both the development of and defense from asymmetric capabilities to enhance security cooperation activities with the Taiwan Army (TA). The intent was to increase Taiwan’s military credibility for general deterrence and assist in revising doctrine, training, professional military education (PME), acquisition, national level exercises, and the national defense plan. Specially selected subject matter experts across the DIMEFIL spectrum—including a former AIT director—chaired several steering committees or “gray cells” to continually inform the study.

3. Taiwan AOWG

The life cycle of the study—entitled *Cross-Strait Asymmetric Warfare*—began with a research intensive primer in July 2015, “Phase One: Understanding the Threat.” The AOWG conducted site visits and designed a small tabletop exercise (TTX), called the threat assessment exercise (ThreatEx). The ThreatEx led to “Phase Two: Assessing the Threat,” designed to understand and enable a response continuum. Again, leveraging expertise from across the JIIM, the AOWG produced the “Phase Two: Assessing the Threat” publication in order to facilitate a final exercise called the competitive influence exercise (CIEx). The publications and the CIEx facilitated dialogue for how U.S. and Taiwan units could cooperate beyond the realm of tactical-level exercises such as joint combined exchange trainings (JCET).

The aim is to engender in the TA a gray zone-like, unconventional warfare (UW) approach to operations. Although the TA still must plan for the full-scale invasion scenario, what actions might it take in the shaping phase to make an invasion less likely? In other words, how might Taiwan “win” without fighting?³⁹¹

³⁹¹ Asymmetric Operations Working Group, (UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO) *Cross-Strait Asymmetric Warfare: Project Overview* (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2016), 2.

4. Asymmetric Warfare Symposium

Following the success of the AOWG, AWG continued its persistent advisory support to SOCPAC, the USARPAC Security Cooperation & Policy (SCP) division, and the TA's "Lu Wei" security cooperation program. With U.S.-Taiwan consensus, the Taiwan AOWG transitioned into the Asymmetric Warfare Symposium (AWS), a series of subject matter expert exchanges (SMEE), seminars, and TTXs from 2015 to 2018—with implementation of the findings and recommendations through 2020.³⁹² The collaborative venues explored asymmetric options for Taiwan to deter Chinese aggression along four focus areas: (1) conventional force adaptation (active and reserve); (2) special operations capability development; (3) political and information warfare; and (4) professional military education and DOTMLPF integration.

Figure 10 shows two unclassified example slides from the exchanges which highlight the nature of some of the problems and questions discussed during the AWS series. For example, "How do you complicate the challenges associated with post-landing operations?" While the AWG and U.S. delegations made proposals throughout the exchanges, the Taiwanese counterparts determined which to accept or adapt. The TA had oversight for the entire program with direct involvement from its Education, Training, and Doctrine Development Command (ETDDC), Political Warfare Department (PWD), special operations command, as well as other branches of the Taiwan military and relevant civilian agencies. Of note, the Taiwan Military Police Command (MPC) is a separate service and is responsible for urban-area defense in wartime, including the jurisdiction of Taipei and all government and military facilities. AWG conducted concurrent events with the MPC from 2018–2019 specifically focused on dense-urban terrain walks and the defense of Taipei and key infrastructure.

³⁹² The implementation phase of the AWS outcomes was cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic and announcement of the closure of AWG in 2020.

Two Perspectives on Asymmetric Options: 1. How do you protect your vulnerabilities against their strengths, esp. in overmatch conditions? 2. How do you exploit their vulnerabilities with your strengths?		
Taiwan	Potential Vulnerabilities That Must Be Transformed into Strengths	How Can You Protect?
Strategic	International Support/Materiel Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter PRC Three Warfare Strategy • Taiwan's legitimacy matters (conduct of War matters) • Not just an Army or MND solution; requires integration of national power • At what point will Taiwan expend critical munitions?
Operational	Reserve Mobilization and Deployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration of political will and popular support • Must still provide a credible and an effective warfighting capability
Tactical	PLA Air Superiority against Taiwan Army Maneuver Forces (Strike Brigades)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge PLA air superiority (to include UAVs) thru active and passive measures • Impose a high cost (Density of SHORAD systems)

** Not official DOD position/analysis. These are personal thoughts to help generate discussion. **

Two Perspectives on Asymmetric Options: 1. How do you protect your vulnerabilities against their strengths, esp. in overmatch conditions? 2. How do you exploit their vulnerabilities with your strengths?		
Mainland	Potential Vulnerabilities	How can you target or exploit?
Strategic	CCP-PLA Split/Factionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you target this? • Not just an Army/MND solution; requires integration of national power
Operational	Maritime Logistics/Amphibious Lift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Taiwan Army's role? • Cross-domain (joint) fires
Tactical	Ground Force C2 after Landing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lethal / Non-lethal • Active Measures / Passive Measures

How do you complicate the challenges associated with post-landing operations?

- PLA must establish logistics and replenishment (PLA is not an expeditionary force)
- PLA must mass forces in assembly areas, esp. armor reinforcements, to reorganize for ground combat operations and population control
- PLA must re-task ISR and reposition Artillery, Air Defense, and C2 nodes
- PLA must establish ports and airbases

** Not official DOD position/analysis. These are personal thoughts to help generate discussion. **

Figure 10. AWS Perspectives on Asymmetric Options and Vulnerabilities for Taiwan and China.³⁹³

³⁹³ Source: (UNCLASSIFIED//FOUO//REL TO USA, TWN) "Taiwan Deep Dive."

During the first iterations of the AWS, participants focused on the shaping phase (D-180 to D-90 days) and the pre-crisis phase (D-90 to D-7), while the final iterations of the AWS focused on the invasion phase (D-7 to D+3) and the post-invasion resistance phase (D+3 to D+X). AWG created and refined a conflict scenario for the wargames and TTXs, with detailed results for each phase. Below are some of the observations from the post-invasion phase that are relevant to this study:

- PLA ground units have difficulty regrouping and reconstituting several of the divisions and brigades that made it to the beaches. After seizing airfields, some PLA SOF units were not reinforced and were surrounded by Taiwan Army units and SOF and wiped out while attempting to hold the airfields. Similarly, some PLA SOF units were unable to hold the Taiwan ports before being surrounded and killed by Taiwan SOF.
- Although some PLA ground forces, including armor units, successfully regrouped, they are held to positions outside of the interior of Taiwan. Taiwan's mountainous terrain, held by Taiwan Army SOF, has prevented PLA ground forces from moving into the interior of island.
- PLA ground forces find that *popular resistance is becoming an issue*, with local militia supported by SOF mounting a guerrilla-like campaign against progressing PLA units.
- PLA units that had successfully landed on offshore islands they believed were secure find out that Taiwan SOF have conducted counter-landings and are engaging in espionage and special operations on these islands. Additionally, to the surprise of some PLA commanders, Taiwan SOF appear to have been inserted on mainland China and to be engaging in espionage and special operations there.
- There is some *fifth column activity*, but *popular resistance is also apparent* in this scenario, as are the *coordinated efforts of the local population and Taiwan SOF*. [emphasis added]³⁹⁴

Additionally, Figure 11 from this scenario visually depicts the military and non-military activities during each phase, with the threshold for armed conflict or “use of deadly force” running down the center. On the right side of the figure under “Protracted Struggle,”

³⁹⁴ Asymmetric Operations Working Group, (UNCLASSIFIED) *Cross-Strait Asymmetric Warfare, Phase 1: Understanding the Threat, Annex 1: Scenario* (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2015), 5.

the AWS identified resistance, UW, and resilience as top priorities, with SOF/Counter-SOF, decentralized ops, political resilience, government stability, national will, and interagency coordination in support.

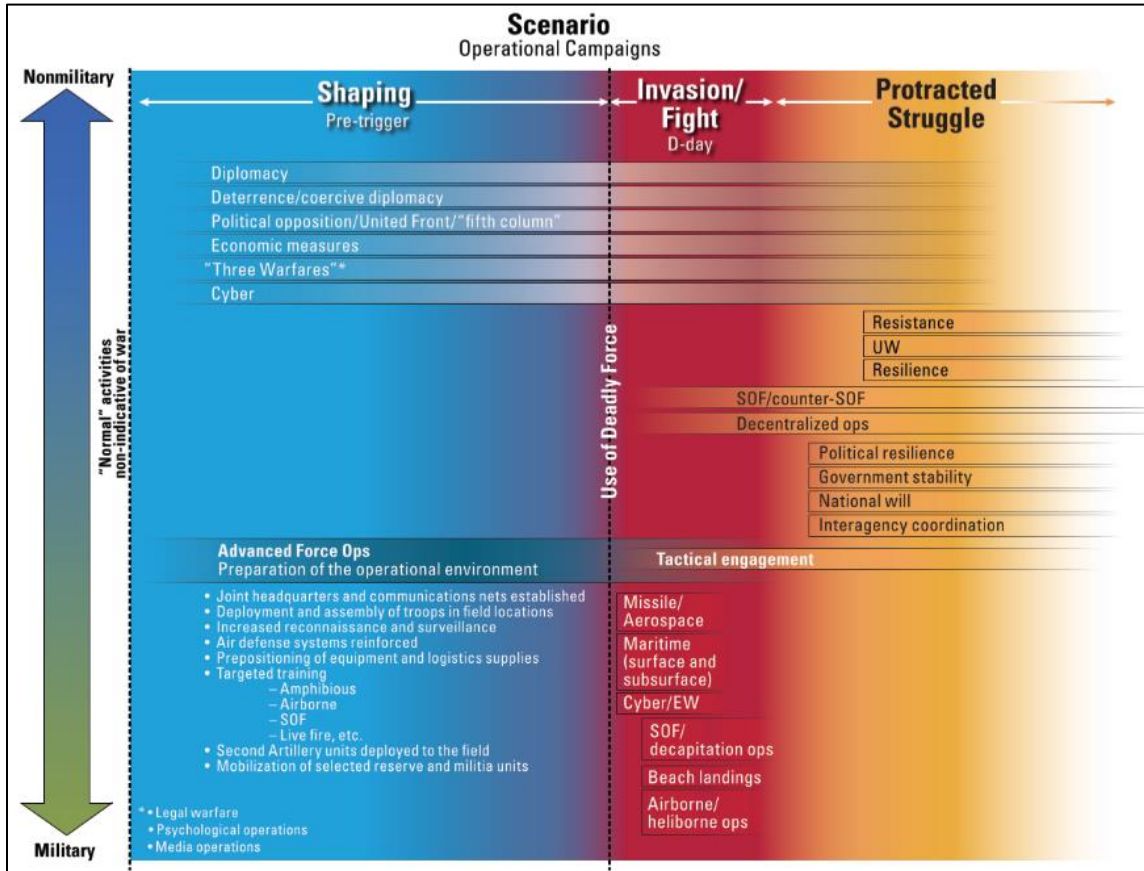


Figure 11. Taiwan Army Asymmetric Vulnerabilities and Potential Solutions.³⁹⁵

At the conclusion of the AWS series in 2018, AWG presented the findings and recommendations to the TA and Ministry of National Defense (MND), focusing primarily on operational, tactical, and institutional level recommendations for a strategy of asymmetric defense. The AWS helped the TA integrate asymmetric and innovative options into their DOTMLPF-P process, informed future FMS purchases, provided increased

³⁹⁵ Source: Asymmetric Operations Working Group, (UNCLASSIFIED) *Cross-Strait Asymmetric Warfare, Phase 1: Understanding the Threat, Annex 1: Scenario*, 6.

understanding of Chinese hybrid warfare tactics, and helped shape conditions to prevent Chinese force projection by denying confidence in operational success. Appendix B of this study lists the final AWS outcomes in six categories: overview, training, mission command, weapon systems, asymmetric defense, and ideas for adapting the force.

The AWS was not the first occasion to identify these types of conclusions, but it was one of the first official and comprehensive assessments of the problem set. Similar collaborative efforts and organizations like AWG and the AOWG could further help Taiwan—as well as other U.S. partner nations—to institutionalize needed defense transformation and innovation. While the AWS concluded in 2018, its legacy lived-on as USARPAC and the TA broadly integrated the outcomes into official “Lu Wei” objectives, with “Asymmetric Measures and Force Preservation” becoming Line of Effort (LOE) One.³⁹⁶ Indeed, the term “asymmetric” has now become a cornerstone for Taiwanese strategic thought, with its formal incorporation into its 2017 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) and culmination in President Tsai Ing-wen’s reelection inaugural address on May 20, 2020: “While we work to bolster our defense capabilities, future combat capacity development will also emphasize mobility, countermeasures, and non-traditional asymmetrical capabilities.”³⁹⁷

Unfortunately, there are recent indicators that Taiwan may be reversing this trend towards asymmetric defense reform. In Taiwan’s recent 2021 *QDR* and its *National Defense Review*, the term “asymmetric” now seems to be a mere buzzword that encompasses more and more symmetric capabilities and concepts. Assistant professor at George Mason University’s Schar School of Policy and Government Michael Hunzeker postulates that Taiwan is gradually abandoning an asymmetric strategy while still seeking to appease U.S. petitions for Taiwan to further adopt such an approach: “rather than

³⁹⁶ U.S. Army Pacific, (UNCLASSIFIED) *Taiwan 5-Year Engagement Strategy* (Ft. Shafter, HI: U.S. Army Pacific, 2020).

³⁹⁷ Ministry of National Defense, “Quadrennial Defense Review” (Republic of China: Ministry of National Defense, 2017), <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2000/01/2017-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>; Tsai Ing-wen, “Full Text of President Tsai Ing-Wen’s Inaugural Address,” *Taipei Times*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/05/21/2003736799>.

acquiesce to these painful and costly demands, the [MND] has instead coopted and repurposed asymmetry's lexicon so as to rationalize their decidedly symmetric plans.³⁹⁸ *Foreign Policy* journalist Tanner Greer contends that while Taiwan's strategy may not seem viable or feasible, it does make political sense as Taiwan's leaders must signal a credible defense to its populace.³⁹⁹ As Hunzeker remarked in his critique, "Taiwanese voters can see their tax dollars at work whenever a F-16 flies overhead, whereas asymmetric capabilities are low-profile and designed to remain unseen."⁴⁰⁰

B. THE RESISTANCE OPERATING CONCEPT (ROC)

In 2019 the Swedish Defence University published the *Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)* in conjunction with U.S. Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR). Much of the *ROC* derives from the ongoing U.S. Army Special Operation Command's (USASOC) "Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies" (ARIS) project in conjunction with JHU/APL.⁴⁰¹ The ARIS project is itself a derivative of the research conducted by the Special Operations Research Office (SORO) in the early Cold War, so the *ROC* provides an academically rigorous linkage to decades of research on the topic of resistance and revolution. The *ROC* primarily envisions resistance operations for European nations facing Russian aggression, but the guide can apply globally for any small nation facing threats of conventional and/or hybrid aggression from a larger nation—like Taiwan against China. The recommendations put forward in the *ROC* align closely with the AWS proceedings and recommendations found in Appendix B.

1. Resilience & Resistance along the Conflict Continuum

The central idea of the *ROC* is the integral relationship of resilience as the foundation for successful resistance. Resilience and resistance form a positive reinforcing

³⁹⁸ Michael A. Hunzeker, "Taiwan's Defense Plans Are Going Off the Rails," War on the Rocks, last modified November 18, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/11/taiwans-defense-plans-are-going-off-the-rails/>.

³⁹⁹ Greer, "Taiwan's Defense Strategy Doesn't Make Military Sense."

⁴⁰⁰ Hunzeker, "Taiwan's Defense Plans Are Going Off the Rails."

⁴⁰¹ United States Army Special Operations Command, "ARIS Studies," Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies (ARIS) Studies, accessed December 1, 2021, <https://www.soc.mil/ARIS/ARIS.html>.

feedback loop for unconventional deterrence. As resilience increases, the capacity to organize for resistance increases. As the capacity for resistance increases, the will and resiliency to withstand increases. The *ROC*'s definitions for each are:

Resilience: the will and ability to withstand external pressure and influences and/or recover from the effects of those pressures or influences.

Resistance: a nation's organized, whole-of-society effort, encompassing the full range of activities from nonviolent to violent, led by a legally established government (potentially exiled/displaced or shadow) to reestablish independence and autonomy within its sovereign territory that has been wholly or partially occupied by a foreign power.⁴⁰²

The purpose of the *ROC* is to provide a planning guide for nations to “increase national resilience against incursion by planning for, establishing, and developing organized national resistance capabilities.”⁴⁰³ Figure 12 depicts the relationship between resilience and resistance planning through the continuum of competition and conflict.

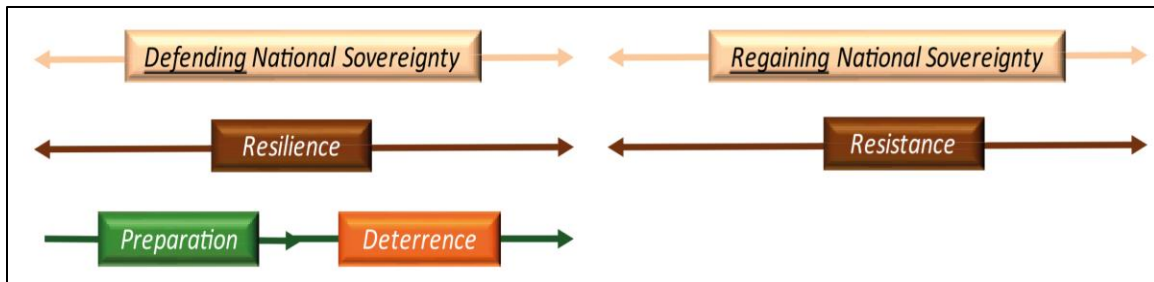


Figure 12. The Role of Resilience and Resistance in Defending and Regaining National Sovereignty.⁴⁰⁴

The focus before conflict is to *defend* national sovereignty through resilience preparation and deterrence efforts. Additionally, the focus is to prepare a government-led professional and legitimate resistance capability in order to set the necessary conditions for resisting

⁴⁰² Otto C. Fiala, ed., *Resistance Operating Concept* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence University, 2019), 15, <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1392106/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

⁴⁰³ Fiala, 9.

⁴⁰⁴ Source: Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept*, 21.

foreign occupation should conflict begin. After foreign incursion and occupation, the focus shifts to *regaining* national sovereignty through resistance. This is the central framework of the *ROC* and from this understanding, resilience, resistance, and the deterrent communication value of these capacities creates a “layered national defense-in-depth.”⁴⁰⁵

2. Total Defense and Comprehensive Defense

For nations like Taiwan that face an aggressive or revisionist adversary with expansive intent, it is imperative to develop the prerequisite legal frameworks, policies, and systems prior to their necessity if crisis erupts. It must also involve not only the military, but also government and civil organizations at the national and local levels. Government agencies, private and commercial entities, voluntary organizations, and individual citizens must be included and committed to the national effort and must see the resistance capability as “a legitimate form of warfare, grounded in law, which is acceptable and suitable.”⁴⁰⁶ This combines the concepts of “military defense” and “civil defense.” Military defense entails the ability of professional regular or irregular armed forces to defend the nation against attack or regain national sovereignty. Civil defense entails the ability to protect the civilian population and public services, to mitigate the effects to these during conflict, and to support the functions of the armed forces during conflict.⁴⁰⁷ Together, the concept of civil-military defense fusion comprises the concept of “total defense” or “comprehensive defense.” Total defense is a concept which grew out of WWII and Cold War efforts to elevate the role of the population in deterrence and national defense in addition to and in concert with traditional military defense measures. One of the early adopters and best examples of total defense, Estonia, defined total defense in 2012 as “the permanent, readiness of states’ civilian structures, local governments, the [defense forces], and the mental, physical, economic, and other potential of the whole nation to resolve crisis and coordinated and united action to prevent and deter a threat of an attack for nations’

⁴⁰⁵ Fiala, 17.

⁴⁰⁶ Fiala, 16.

⁴⁰⁷ Fiala, 19.

survival”⁴⁰⁸ Comprehensive defense grew out of this concept as the modern equivalent to total defense adopted by NATO and many other nations to emphasize a whole-of-society approach to national defense as the official and legitimate government strategy.

3. Resilience Preparation as the Foundation for Resistance

In the *ROC*, resilience is the foundation for resistance. In many contexts of defense and deterrence, the concept of resilience often signifies resilience against cyber or nuclear threats—the ability of key infrastructure and systems to survive and recover quickly. But the *ROC* speaks more to the *human* and *cognitive* dimension of resilience, to include *social* and *psychological* resilience.⁴⁰⁹ This involves a concerted, whole-of-society effort to identify and mitigate potential vulnerabilities and threats well in advance.

For example, one of the greatest threats to *social* and *psychological* resilience as a foundation for resistance is the *continuity of governance*. During AWG’s interactions with Taiwan’s MPC in Taipei, the MPC described how the PLA’s strategy during the initial phase of an attack against Taiwan would be to destroy or neutralize 50% of Taiwan’s warfighting functions, which include their “leadership” and “will to fight.”⁴¹⁰ As a separate branch of the military from the Taiwan Army, the MPC has two distinct, yet critical missions sets: national and military security in peacetime and defense of the capital garrison and urban population centers in wartime. Therefore, the MPC already possesses the requisite legal framework and capabilities to ensure the continuity of government. If it does not already have a pre-planned contingency in place for the government to internally displace or go into foreign exile, U.S. advisors should partner with the MPC to develop this political resilience capacity.

Another example of building *social* and *psychological* resilience as a foundation for resistance is the continuity of *medical care*. As U.S. special operations medical

⁴⁰⁸ Viljar Veebel et al., “Territorial Defence, Comprehensive Defence and Total Defence: Meanings and Differences in the Estonian Defence Force,” *Journal on Baltic Security* 6, no. 2 (2020): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jobs-2020-0007>.

⁴⁰⁹ Fiala, *ROC*, 19.

⁴¹⁰ John Waits, *Tactical Mission Summary: MPC Planning Workshop*, TMS 18–772 (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2018), 2.

personnel remarked in a 2019 *Special Warfare* magazine article on this topic, “Hope is a primary driver of resistance movements, and the best way to keep hope alive in a resistance movement is to keep people alive.”⁴¹¹ Additionally, in her NPS thesis on resistance medical networks, USAF Lt Col (Dr.) Regan Lyon asserts that the level of medical care that a resistance medical network can achieve depends on the baseline medical skills and capabilities that exist prior to conflict. For example, a shortage of trained surgeons requires approximately 5–15 years to fill. Also, the level of training and medical standards in some countries may be very limited or constrained. For example, some PN militaries do not allow their medics to administer IVs, even in training, without losing credentials, which means the first time medical personnel conduct life-saving trauma care may be in the midst of a resistance campaign. Even if the medical network possesses the requisite skills and abilities, there may be tangible challenges (blood, medical supplies, evacuation assets, technological capabilities, etc.) as well as non-tangible challenges (freedom of movement, risk of compromise, interoperability with foreign medical personnel, etc.) that the PN and U.S. advisors must account for and mitigate well in advance of conflict.⁴¹²

4. Outside Support for Resilience and Resistance

Implementation of the *ROC* within a comprehensive defense approach is not contingent or dependent on outside support, although foreign security cooperation and SFA activities will greatly enhance it. Prior to conflict, U.S. support to resilience and resistance planning will take the form of security cooperation, DOD-administered security assistance and FMS, and SFA. Specifically, prior to conflict, advisors would conduct foreign internal defense (FID) and defense institution building (DIB) to enhance and support the PN’s internal defense and development (IDAD). After conflict, the United States could transition to UW activities to support and enable the PN’s underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla forces

⁴¹¹ Jake Hickman, Jay Baker, and Elizabeth Erickson, “Survivability: Medical Support to Resistance,” *Special Warfare* 32, no. 3 (December 2019): 17, https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW3203/32-3_JUL-SEP_2019_web.pdf.

⁴¹² For more information on this topic see: Regan Lyon, “When the ‘Golden Hour’ Is Dead: Preparing Indigenous Guerrilla Medical Networks for Unconventional Conflicts” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2021).

in the occupied territory.⁴¹³ This is also why it is crucial for the PN to develop the legal criteria and policies for integrating resistance into its national defense strategy. It allows foreign partners such as the United States to support the PN legally and readily prior to and during conflict. As a 2015 CRS report on BPC stated, “A common denominator in most of the successful cases [of BPC] is that the recipient of assistance was a legitimate, relatively effective institution of governance.”⁴¹⁴

The added benefit of an operational approach of building resilience is that it is less likely to draw the aggressor’s attention in the same way that a carrier strike group conducting FONOPS through the Taiwan Strait or a contingent of U.S. Marines on the island training amphibious operations would. In fact, resilience is difficult to even identify or measure, let alone target. That is not to say that the enemy cannot pursue a strategy of sowing chaos and disrupting civil society, but resilience is the counter-strategy to inoculate the populace against this strategy. For example, Beijing’s public opinion or media warfare against the Taiwanese has been detrimental and has influenced elections and pressured the populace to oppose independence and accept reunification. But at the same time, Taiwan’s repeated exposure to China’s tactics and recognition of its own susceptibilities to division has the potential to build public resilience and inoculate against foreign attacks. Beijing’s disinformation tactics in the “gray zone” could have the opposite intended effect and serve to reinforce public opinion and media antibodies within the body politic.

5. The Population as the Primary Actor

One of the chief principles of resistance states that, “resistance is fundamentally a political activity.”⁴¹⁵ And in comprehensive defense, the population is the primary actor in this political activity.⁴¹⁶ As an aggressor moves further along the conflict continuum

⁴¹³ Fiala, *ROC*, 20.

⁴¹⁴ McInnis and Lucas, *What Is “Building Partner Capacity?”*, 4.

⁴¹⁵ Department of the Army, *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare*, ATP 3-18 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019), 2–2, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_c/pdf/web/ARN16180_ATP%203-18x1%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf.

⁴¹⁶ Fiala, *ROC*, 17.

depicted in Figure 12 and the state loses more and more sovereignty, the locus of action shifts from the state's military and more to the population. "If the totality of the population can be made to resist surrender, this resistance can be turned into a war of attrition which will eventually and inevitably be victorious."⁴¹⁷ According to Andrew Mack, success in insurgencies does not come from military victories, "but rather from the progressive attrition of their opponents' *political* capability to wage war."⁴¹⁸ In other words, the goal of a comprehensive defense plan is to be able to transition conventional warfare into irregular warfare; to transform the conflict from a fight for territory into a struggle for legitimacy. In the case of Taiwan, China's strategic goal is—in essence—to *conclude* the civil war which began nearly one hundred years ago. The strategic goal for Taiwan, therefore, is to *prevent* China from concluding it. Both resilience and resistance are critical to achieve this—the willingness to absorb costs and redirect them to China through protracted resistance.

In a 2018 report from the Center of Security Policy Studies at George Mason University entitled *A Question of Time: Enhancing Taiwan's Conventional Deterrence Posture*, Michael Hunzeker et. al proposed an "elastic denial-in-depth" approach for Taiwan in four denial zones: air denial, sea denial, ground denial, and what they term "social denial"—which corresponds with the ROC's conception of social resilience and resistance.⁴¹⁹ They recommend that Taiwan create a Territorial Defense Force similar to the Baltic and Scandinavian versions, "designed to resist a foreign occupation via a prolonged insurgency campaign waged in the cities, jungles, and mountains."⁴²⁰ The Territorial Defense Force should be trained to fight like guerrillas and the new capability should be signaled to China through mobilization exercises that highlight their guerrilla capacities.

⁴¹⁷ E. L. Katzenbach, "Time, Space and Will: The Politico-Military Strategy of Mao Tse-Tung," in *The Guerrilla and How to Fight Him*, ed. T. N. Greene (New York: Praeger, 1962), 18.

⁴¹⁸ Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," 177.

⁴¹⁹ Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time*, 81.

⁴²⁰ Hunzeker et al., 99.

C. THE *COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE HANDBOOK* (CDH)

In December 2020, NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) published the two volume *CDH* to provide a planning guide for nations to develop and implement comprehensive defense: “an official Government strategy, which encompasses a whole-of-society approach to protecting the nation against potential threats.”⁴²¹ The *CDH* builds on previous sources from countries such the Baltic and Nordic states, as well as texts like *Total Resistance* written by Swiss Army officer Hans von Dach in 1965 to prepare Switzerland for a potential invasion by Warsaw Pact forces. As stated in the foreword of the *CDH*, comprehensive defense grew out of the resilience and resistance principles “enshrined” in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Less familiar than the collective self-defense pact in Article 5, Article 3 directs each member nation to “maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack,” to include civil preparedness for resilience and the ability to recover from major shock such as natural disasters or hybrid warfare like cyber or political warfare.⁴²²

The *CDH* divides the sectors of society into governmental and non-governmental actors. The government category or “public sector” consists of the military and civil government, while the non-governmental category consists of the “private sector” (comprised of business and key infrastructure such as hospitals etc.) and the “civic sector” (comprised of citizens and local organizations). Volume one of the *CDH* is intended for the public sector or the “2% of the nation’s prevention and response capability” while volume two is directed to the private and civic sectors—the remaining 98%.⁴²³

The *CDH* expands upon the *ROC* and establishes a useful framework of five conditions for nations and foreign supporters to build comprehensive defense: national support, education, coordination architecture, human infrastructure, and legal frameworks.

⁴²¹ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *Comprehensive Defence Handbook*, A, vol. 1 (SHAPE, Belgium: NATO Special Operations Headquarters, 2020), 15, <https://www.nshq.nato.int/nshq/library/nshq-comprehensive-defence-handbook-volume-1/>.

⁴²² NATO, “Resilience and Article 3,” NATO, last modified June 11, 2021, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm.

⁴²³ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *CDH*, 1:15, 21.

These conditions are built on the six pillars of comprehensive defense: social & psychological defense, economic & essential services, military, cyber, civil, and internal & border security (see Figure 13). The *CDH* then provides a checklist for planners to establish the framework’s five conditions—depicted in Figure 14.

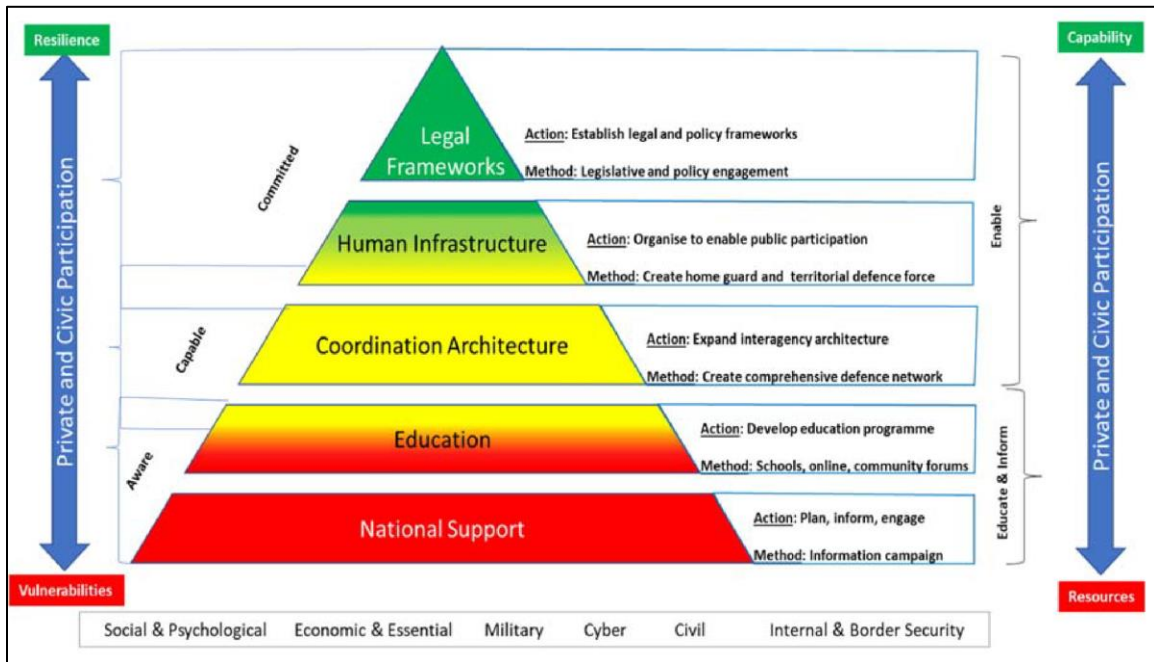


Figure 13. The Six Pillars and Five Conditions of Comprehensive Defense.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ Source: NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *CDH* 1:21.

Focus Area/Condition	Primary Action	Supporting Action	References
Gain Concurrence	Identify key stakeholders		
	Build concept development team		
	Develop concept to address following		
	Conduct consultations		
	Adjust concept and/or messages		
	Conduct campaign		
	Collect feedback		
Comprehensive Risk Assessment	Identify Risks		
Comprehensive Defence Plan	Develop Comprehensive Defence Framework		
Human infrastructure	Select defence force model		
	Advocate programmes to encourage volunteerism		
	Enable individual resilience		
	Enable and encourage non-volunteers		
	Establish home guard		
	Establish Asymmetric Defence Component		
Coordination architecture	Establish leadership component		
	Establish collaboration component		
Education	Establish learning groups		
	Determine subject areas		
	Build learning modules		
	Determine delivery methods		
Legal Frameworks	Interagency coordination		
	Private sector participation		
	Civic participation		
	Continuity of government		
Deterrence	Develop Strategic Narrative		
	Ensure population is familiar with strategic narrative		
	Develop communications plan		
	Associate actions with communications		
Response	Respond to malicious acts		

Figure 14. Comprehensive Defense Checklist.⁴²⁵

The *CDH* recommends what it calls an “integrated layered defense” structure consisting of four layers: (1) resilience, (2) standing armed forces and emergency response services, (3) a Home Guard, and (4) an Asymmetric Defense Component (ADC). The

⁴²⁵ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *CDH* 1:24.

Home Guard is distinct from a nation's reserve force. Instead, it entails any system of civil volunteer integration into the integrated defense structure to help protect the population, support military and emergency response efforts, and ensure the continuity of essential goods and services.⁴²⁶ This could be a formal or informal capability, but serves as the “cornerstone” for the continued resilience and support for resistance operations.

The ADC, in contrast, is a term used by the *CDH* to describe the nation's official resistance organization.⁴²⁷ It is the component of a comprehensive defense strategy which most embodies the concepts put forward in the *ROC*. However, the *CDH* makes the distinction between the ADC and a guerilla or insurgent force. Because the ADC is a standing component of a government-led, whole-of-society resistance capability, it differs from guerilla, insurgent, or terrorist organizations which may form *in extremis* apart from or in opposition to legitimate authority structures.⁴²⁸ The nation must establish, equip, and train the ADC prior to conflict for it have a deterrent effect on the aggressor and it will consist almost entirely of civilians and volunteers from the populace. However, because the ADC will ultimately comprise of a blended combination of regular and irregular armed forces into the ADC as the conflict worsens and the nation's capacity for traditional defense erodes, the exact makeup and organization of the ADC will vary by nation. The *CDH* calls this the “adapted force.”⁴²⁹

It is also important to clarify the difference between the ADC and reserve forces. The purpose of the ADC is not to supplement regular forces or serve as a secondary or paramilitary force. The ADC should not integrate into regular formations or battle plans. For example, a Taiwanese ADC should not mobilize to defend the beaches. Rather, as PLA forces begin crossing the Strait, the ADC should immediately begin conducting decentralized operations throughout the population centers to transform the urban environment into a mobility nightmare for the PLA. Furthermore, while the Home Guard

⁴²⁶ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, 1:37.

⁴²⁷ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, 1:43–50.

⁴²⁸ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, 1:46.

⁴²⁹ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, 1:46.

may provide support to the ADC, it is distinct to the populace's participation in the ADC, otherwise known as the "auxiliary." Members of the auxiliary may also be part of the Home Guard, but their support functions are distinct.

A BPC strategy for unconventional deterrence in Taiwan should focus on enhancing each of the four layers of *CDH*'s integrated layered defense structure: resilience, armed forces, Home Guard, and the ADC. The primary focus of security cooperation and related activities such as SFA, DIB, and FID should be to organize, equip, and train a professional ADC and corresponding auxiliary network in order to enhance Taiwan's resistance capacity and signal to China.

D. THE ROC FOR THE ROC

The *ROC* and *CDH* offers a compelling case for adoption or adaptation by Taiwan to deter and if necessary, resist an invasion by the PLA and subsequent annexation by China. The need and timing for Taiwan to adopt a *whole-of-society* approach as proposed by the *ROC* and *CDH* and the has never been more clear or advantageous than it is today. Adoption of the *ROC* and *CDH* by Taiwan in whole or in part would effectively resolve its current strategy shortfalls and imbalances as articulated in Richard Betts's ten critiques of strategy. The *ROC* and *CDH* would also provide a clear role for outside support—specifically from the United States.⁴³⁰

Moreover, there is a synergistic relationship between a nation's resilient legitimacy and perseverance and the influence this plays on outside, intervening support. The greater the resilience and potential of a nation to resist and deter a belligerent, the greater the likelihood that outside powers will join-in and support that nation for the advantages it would afford them over the belligerent. In other words, there is greater potential for extended coercion and deterrence. While this remains only a theory, recent events such as Taiwan's remarkably effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the World Health Organization's (WHO) complicity with China to exclude Taiwan from its assembly

⁴³⁰ For more information on how the *ROC* and *CDH* could apply for Taiwan, reference the 2021 NPS master's thesis "Weathering the Storm: A European Model for Taiwan," by Chris Pinkerton and Jay Gambill.

meetings have engendered positive reactions to Taiwan’s plight worldwide.⁴³¹ The recent PLAAF incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ have also sparked international debate and fellow small states like Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have showed resolve to increase relations with Taiwan while absorbing costs from China.

Given this geopolitical dilemma, the *ROC* for Taiwan seems like a foregone conclusion. Many assume that Taiwan already has a well-developed civil defense and resistance plan, complete with a robust island defense network like that found on the Korean Peninsula, but this is not the case. The truth is that until relatively recently since 1949, Taiwan’s objective has been to return to the mainland and reclaim political sovereignty—in other words, to conclude the Chinese Civil War. A case in point is that Taiwan’s MND designed all of its urban training centers on the island to replicate *mainland* rather than Taiwanese architecture and building construction.⁴³² In its estimation, the purpose of urban training has always been to fight in the streets of Beijing or Shanghai, *not* Taipei or Kaohsiung. And despite Taiwan’s significant steps of late to adopt an ever-increasing asymmetric approach to fend off mainland aggression, it is still exhibiting considerable growing pains in this transformation and has come up short in adopting a truly whole-of-society defense concept that will be necessary to deter or defeat a Chinese *fait accompli*. However, the recently proposed 2021 Arm Taiwan Act intends to redirect and refocus U.S.-Taiwan defense relations on the condition of asymmetric defense capabilities:

To defend itself effectively, especially in the initial period of war, it is imperative that Taiwan accelerate deployment of cost-effective and resilient asymmetric defense capabilities, including mobile coastal and air defenses, naval mines, missile boats, man-portable anti-armor weapons, civil defense forces, and their enablers.⁴³³

1. Taiwan’s Overall Defense Concept (ODC)

The problem stems from key elements of Taiwan’s Overall Defense Concept (ODC): (1) force preservation; (2) decisive battle in the littoral; and (3) annihilation of the

⁴³¹ Yu-Jie Chen and Jerome. A. Cohen, “Why Does the WHO Exclude Taiwan?”

⁴³² John Waits, *Tactical Mission Summary: Taiwan Urban Defense SMEE*, TMS 20–032 (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2019).

⁴³³ Arm Taiwan Act of 2021, S.3131, 117th Cong. (2021), 4.

enemy at the beach.⁴³⁴ Debate persists as to the suitability, feasibility, and acceptability of this unilateral approach given China's growing overmatch and Taiwan's lack of treaty defense allies. Instead of changing the ODC to match its available "means" and "ways," Taiwan continues to rely too heavily on military and platform-centric solutions to accomplish this high-stakes objective, seeking high-end FMS cases with the United States such as F-16 fighter jets, M1A2T Abrams tanks, and MQ-9B Reaper Drones.

Moreover, there are recent indicators that Taiwan may be abandoning the short-lived ODC and reversing its trend towards asymmetric defense reform. The term "ODC" does not appear in Taiwan's new 2021 *QDR* or *National Defense Review* and there are rumors that it has been discouraged or even banned from use within the MND.⁴³⁵ It appears instead that Taiwan's new military strategy is "Resolute Defense and Multi-domain Deterrence" with new guiding principles to "resist the enemy on the opposite shore, attack it at sea, destroy it in the littoral area, and annihilate it on the beachhead."⁴³⁶ While there is ample mention of asymmetric capabilities, resilience, and "All-out Defense," there is no mention of resistance or operations beyond PLA forces landing on the island. The entire strategy is predicated on defeating the PLA in a largely conventional fight in the strait.

Taiwan also asserts its capability to mobilize approximately 2.5 million reserve forces with an additional 1 million additional civil defense volunteers—approximately 15 percent of Taiwan's 23.8 million population—as part of the "All-out Defense Mobilization" plan.⁴³⁷ If the PLA were to mobilize an invasion force of approximately 1.5 to 2 million troops, it would land on the island to face a total Taiwanese defense force of nearly 4 million soldiers, reservists, and civilian volunteers. From a purely force number

⁴³⁴ Lee Hsi-min and Eric Lee, "Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept, Explained," *The Diplomat*, November 3, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained/>.

⁴³⁵ Michael A. Hunzeker, "Taiwan's Defense Plans Are Going Off the Rails," *War on the Rocks*, last modified November 18, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/11/taiwans-defense-plans-are-going-off-the-rails/>.

⁴³⁶ Ministry of National Defense, *2021 Quadrennial Defense Review* (Taipei: Ministry of National Defense, 2021), 19, <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>.

⁴³⁷ Ian Easton, *Transformation of Taiwan's Reserve Force*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), 11–12.

ratio, the odds seem to be in Taiwan's favor, but Taiwan's reserve force and mobilization plan are drastically lacking in resources, training, resolve, and credibility, and they still do not adequately address the concept of an integrated civil resistance plan. U.S. advisors to Taiwan have frequently recommended to the MND that it examine the reserve systems of other relevant nations facing threats of large-scale invasions, most notably Israel, South Korea, Finland, and the Baltic States. But it was not until early 2020 that re-elected President Tsai Ing-wen formally announced the initiation of reserve force reforms, with a five-year blueprint beginning with an exchange with the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) planned for 2021.⁴³⁸ The timing has never been better for Taiwan to overhaul its reserve system and incorporate the *ROC* and *CDH* into its ODC and All-out Defense Mobilization plans in order to adequately develop civil resilience and resistance concepts sufficient to alter China's invasion calculus.

In April 2021, the MND announced it will integrate the All-out Defense Mobilization Office and the Armed Forces Reserve Command into a "Defense Reserve Mobilization Agency" by January 2022. The new organization will coordinate with the Ministry of Interior to "expand the scope of civilian forces and volunteers" and form "the legal basis for the defense ministry to mobilize civilian forces."⁴³⁹ The new policy will also extend reservist training from five days to two weeks per year. This change may be the needed step for Taiwan to begin transformation efforts towards implementing a resistance operating concept. The *ROC* recommends that a nation establish a lead agency or office of primary responsibility for resistance planning. For Taiwan, the Defense Reserve Mobilization Agency may fulfill that function when it becomes fully functional by 2024.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Huang Tzu-ti, "Taiwan Looks to Israel for Reserve Forces Overhaul," *Taiwan News*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3999995>.

⁴³⁹ Taipei Times, "New Agency to Oversee Mobilization of Reserves," *Taipei Times*, April 21, 2021, <https://taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2021/04/21/2003756078>.

⁴⁴⁰ Fiala, *ROC*, 18.

2. Policy Resistance to the Concept of Resistance

The *ROC* seems like a natural and timely strategy for Taiwan, but is it a strategy of wishful illusion? Some of the most difficult obstacles for Taiwan to adopt the *ROC* and *CDH* are the civil-military and generational divides that exist among the populace. In private settings, many Taiwanese officials—particularly from the younger generation—admit that the current ODC is impractical and needs to change, but the sensitive social-political situation forbids it. Simply put, the current administration cannot endorse a defense concept that does not center on defeat of the enemy at sea or shore because it would appear like a public acknowledgement of its inability to defend the populace. A defense concept with a high likelihood of close-quarters, street-to-street urban fighting by military and civilians alike would likely be a campaign non-starter and tantamount to political suicide in a time when party support from the populace is all-important. Therefore, there is tremendous political pressure to defend the island at the beachhead, even if this concept does not originate from sound military strategy. Richard Betts describes this as the problem of *psychoanalysis versus conscious choice*, wherein unconscious motives and biases prevent the logical integration of “means” to “ends.”⁴⁴¹

There is also an undercurrent of organizational reticence and policy resistance—particularly among the older generation—to fully adopt the idea of an asymmetric defensive strategy or resistance concept. This is simply because the concepts do not align with their self-ascribed notion as a superior, world-class, and technologically sophisticated fighting force—an image which Taiwan has enjoyed for most of its 71-year existence. Moreover, for many Taiwanese, to adopt an asymmetric, protracted strategy of civil resistance is to adopt the very strategy of their former enemy, Mao Zedong. Civil resistance is the antithesis of the hard-fought, counter-revolutionary civil war waged by many a Taiwanese grandparent—some who are still alive to remember the Communists’ brutality. For this reason, many Taiwanese view the form of warfare proposed by the *ROC* and by outside advisors as a conceptual and institutional bridge-too-far. This is Betts’s problem of *goal displacement versus policy control*, which describes how organizational process and

⁴⁴¹ Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 22.

bureaucratic parochialism often default to habits of operation and institutional interests. Policymakers and strategic planners divert means and resources toward internal goals rather than subordinate them to necessary, higher policy ends.⁴⁴²

3. Taiwan's Strategy Stool

These internal challenges are formidable obstacles to adopting the *ROC* and *CDH* in Taiwan, but framing the problem within Art Lykke's strategy stool model further reveals the pressing need for Taiwan to adapt its current strategy. Currently, the "ends, ways, and means" of Taiwan's strategy stool are drastically imbalanced. As Betts remarks, "strategy fails when the chosen means prove insufficient to the ends. This can happen because the wrong means are chosen or because the ends are too ambitious or slippery."⁴⁴³ This is the case with Taiwan. On one end, Taiwan's policy and military objectives are unrealistically high: the unilateral defeat of a two million-strong PLA invasion force and the preservation of territorial sovereignty. Next to this towering leg and its high-stakes, Taiwan's "ways" or concepts are rapidly eroding. Taiwan's diplomatic, informational, and economic clout with China and the international community are increasingly diminishing, leaving the military's deterrence-factor to bear the burden of Taipei's skeletonized instruments of national power (DIME). Lastly, the available "means" associated with those instruments are equally diminishing, with the administration and populace relying more and more on the military to single-handedly deter and defeat a Chinese *fait accompli*. Bridging the gap between "ways" and "means," the MND announced in 2019 that it will transition its brigades into combined arms formations in order to defeat the enemy at the beach. But western defense experts and commentators have long criticized Taiwan's penchant for high-profile, expensive weapons, rather than multiple redundant and survivable systems—given the PLA's apparent and growing overmatch. Again, many cite Taiwan's large reserve force as its ace-in-the-hole and defensive COG. But as noted above, without significant reform and integration of civil resistance concepts, it places too much dependence on only

⁴⁴² Betts, 32.

⁴⁴³ Betts, 50.

a limited menu of “means” rather than a myriad of resources—both tangible and intangible—from amongst the entire society.

Adoption or integration of the *ROC* and *CDH* into Taiwan’s ODC or a new military strategy as outlined in its 2021 *QDR* would reduce much of the inherent risk by balancing the three legs of the strategy stool in the following ways. First, by adopting the *ROC* as an alternative or additional concept to the ODC, it would elevate the “ways” leg to a level in which it can adequately link “means” to “ends,” while simultaneously reducing the scale of the political-military “ends” themselves. As Betts remarks, “strategy can be salvaged more often if peacetime planning gives as much consideration to limiting the range of ends as to expanding the menu of means.”⁴⁴⁴ In other words, the ODC is insufficient by itself to accomplish the monumental objective of defeating a Chinese *fait-accomplis*, let alone deterring it. But the addition of the *ROC* and *CDH* alters China’s cost-benefit analysis by introducing the concept of civil resilience and resistance as a “layered national defense in-depth.”⁴⁴⁵ Defeat of Taiwan’s armed forces? That is a relatively simple, albeit costly, endeavor for China. The defeat and subjugation of an island-wide resistance campaign? That does not fit into China’s idea of a *fait accompli* or ultimate goal of reunifying the Taiwanese into a single Chinese ethnic solidarity.

Secondly, the *ROC* and *CDH* would open the aperture of Taiwan’s available means and resources in a multitude of ways. A reserve force comprising 15 percent of the population is certainly impressive, but a civil resistance corps or ADC comprising the majority of Taiwan’s 23.8 million populace is a much more formidable deterrent and is more equal to the task of deterring or resisting a Chinese invasion. As the authors of the *ROC* stress throughout, “the population is the primary actor.”⁴⁴⁶ The *ROC* and *CDH* would also free-up pre-existing means and resources to pursue defensive options in alternative ways than before. For example, Taiwan SOF Special Service Companies (SSC) could move away from direct action, commando-type operations and focus instead on a more

⁴⁴⁴ Betts, 50.

⁴⁴⁵ Fiala, *ROC*, 17.

⁴⁴⁶ Fiala, 17.

unconventional warfare (UW) posture. Organized instead as “stay-behind” forces, they could organize, train, and lead local civil defense forces in accordance with the *ROC*.

4. Resistance in Dense Urban Terrain

The *ROC* and *CDH* are also ideally suited for the dense urban and mountainous terrain of Taiwan. Andrew Mack describes the role of cities in guerilla warfare as, “the ‘people sea’ forms a sanctuary of popular support for the ‘guerrilla fish’; in urban guerilla warfare the anonymity of the city provides protection.”⁴⁴⁷ The city is not neutral, as a 2020 Modern War Institute article professed, and urban defense favors the defender by naturally creating infinite positions of advantage for the defender.⁴⁴⁸ In his book, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, David Kilcullen describes how “cities disaggregate combat—reducing even large battles to a series of small, fleeting, short-range engagements.”⁴⁴⁹ Dense urban terrain reduces the enemy’s technological and numerical advantage by limiting the effectiveness of ISR and indirect fires and by heavily restricting enemy maneuver. Dense urban terrain can also be an effective *counter* force-multiplier, meaning it requires the enemy to commit a higher force ratio than the traditional 3:1 ratio of attacking to defending forces. During an AWG urban defense SMEE in 2019 in Taiwan’s second largest city, Kaohsiung, AWG operational advisors (OA) assessed that the force ratio would likely need to be between 5:1 to 10:1 PLA to Taiwanese forces.⁴⁵⁰ During that SMEE and other exchanges and workshops in Taiwan during the AWS series, AWG OAs encouraged leaders from the TA and MPC to emphasize urban defense training and education, urging them to transform into the world’s “leading experts in dense urban resistance operations” (see Appendix C, II. Training Recommendations and V. Asymmetric Defense Recommendations). Although the island is relatively small compared to the mainland, “Taiwan makes up for its lack of size with its geographic complexity. PLA

⁴⁴⁷ Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars,” 177.

⁴⁴⁸ John Spencer, “The City Is Not Neutral: Why Urban Warfare Is So Hard,” Modern War Institute, last modified March 4, 2020, <https://mwi.usma.edu/city-not-neutral-urban-warfare-hard/>.

⁴⁴⁹ David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 264.

⁴⁵⁰ John Waits, *Tactical Mission Summary: Taiwan Urban Defense SMEE*.

forces will have to conduct counterinsurgency operations in some of the harshest conditions imaginable: jungles, mountains, and megacities.”⁴⁵¹

Due to Taiwan’s extensive urban environment which is concentrated in the littoral zone of the West side of the island, AWG urged TA and MPC leaders to take advantage of their intimate knowledge of the terrain and ability to rehearse defense plans. Two of the most challenging issues in urban warfare are the ability to understand the urban environment and understand how to operate in that environment.⁴⁵² Taiwan has the benefit of overcoming both these challenges before conflict even begins. Furthermore, the vast majority of Taiwan’s regular and reserve forces would be operating in their local cities. By utilizing frequent “terrain walks” and “tactical exercises without troops” (TEWT), units could conduct detailed rehearsals and engagement area development to identify likely enemy avenues of approach, pre-plan weapon system emplacements and indirect fire targets, and plan obstacle emplacement.

5. Outside Support

In his 2005 article “Why the Strong Lose,” Dr. Jeffrey Record asserted that a “weaker side’s possession of superior will and strategy is hardly a guarantee of success. Substantial external assistance may be required to convert superior will and strategy into victory.”⁴⁵³ Richard Betts echoes this when he notes that “half of all strategies—the losers’—must fail by definition.”⁴⁵⁴ This implies that even though a strategy which incorporates the *ROC* and *CDH* in Taiwan may be fully rational and the most effective use of available “means” to achieve policy and strategic “ends,” historical hindsight is replete with examples of how *randomness* and *non-linearity* are often better predictors of success—absent significant outside support. Therefore, the injection of outside support is necessary to shore up the deterrent value of the *ROC* and *CDH* in Taiwan.

⁴⁵¹ Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time*, 102.

⁴⁵² John Spencer, “The City Is Not Neutral: Why Urban Warfare Is So Hard,” Modern War Institute, last modified March 4, 2020, <https://mwi.usma.edu/city-not-neutral-urban-warfare-hard/>.

⁴⁵³ Jeffrey Record, “Why the Strong Lose,” *Parameters* 35, no. 4 (2005): 22.

⁴⁵⁴ Betts, 16.

The United States has the greatest interest and available means to provide outside support to a Taiwanese *ROC* and is already the largest defense partner with Taiwan as it has been since the passage of the TRA in 1979. But in accordance with the *ROC* and *CDH*, the United States could alter the traditional model by providing outside support to Taiwan in a combination of ways within the DIMEFIL framework. The most substantial way in which the United States could support Taiwan's *ROC* is to bolster its diplomatic, economic, and informational shortcomings in the international arena. At the operational level, the United States has an array of pre-established and emerging means such as SOF or the Army's new Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB) to implement various, multifaceted operational approaches specifically along (1) direct-overt, (2) indirect-covert, and (3) clandestine operational approaches.

a. Direct & Overt Approaches

Bilaterally, the United States should follow its recent FMS cases with Taiwan with an equally robust *direct* and *overt* approach to security cooperation and SFA, focused on a persistent engagement strategy in which Taiwan could credibly compete with and deter its much larger adversary. The goal for the United States would be to codify the *ROC* and *CDH* in Taiwan's national defense strategy. If Taiwan officially incorporates elements from the *ROC* and *CDH* into its ODC, then it provides a legal approach to U.S. security cooperation and SFA with Taiwan. BPC programs and activities to increase Taiwan's capacities for resilience and resistance would merely be the provision of "defense services" as authorized by TRA. The training between Taiwan and USMC Raiders—the first of its kind since 1979—is a superb example.⁴⁵⁵ Coordinated, persistent and episodic exchanges of professional SOF and SFA advisors would be "low-cost, small-footprint" solutions well-suited to assist Taiwan with tasks related to making Taiwan a harder target for the PLA. The U.S. Army's newly created SFABs could form the core of a persistent engagement strategy and work in conjunction with other SFA efforts, such as JCETs, the National Guard (NG) State Partnership Program (SPP), and Security Assistance Training

⁴⁵⁵ Abhijnan Rej, "US Marine Raiders Arrive in Taiwan to Train Taiwanese Marines," *The Diplomat*, November 11, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/us-marine-raiders-arrive-in-taiwan-to-train-taiwanese-marines/>.

Management Organization (SATMO) Technical Assistance Fielding Teams (TAFT). Moreover, the SFAB could organize as a brigade combat team (BCT) with augmentation which would provide additional forces in theater for possible large-scale operations, or assist with the receiving and staging of coalition forces arriving on-island.

b. Indirect and Covert Approaches

One of the most substantial ways in which the United States could support Taiwan *indirectly* is through *covert* political and information warfare off-island. Because the greatest threat to the CCP’s authoritarian regime is the loss of control and legitimacy within its own populace, the United States could target peripheral areas of Chinese domestic instability, such as the Tibet or Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regions (TAR & XUAR) or the Special Administrative Regions (SAR) of Hong Kong or Macau. The reason for targeting these locations rather than others is because the Taiwanese tend to *project themselves*—whether subconsciously or consciously—onto these populations and assess China’s overtures of peace to them through this lens. In other words, to understand how China might respect and deal with Taiwan if it were to acquiesce to the “one country, two systems” proposal, Taiwan need look no further than Hong Kong or Tibet. U.S. covert action could range from unattributable cyber or economic intrusions designed to incite political discontent or a fully-formed UW campaign orchestrated by SOF and the CIA. Despite the political and ethical implications and risks, covert action would nevertheless accomplish two things for Taiwan’s resistance efforts. First, it would alleviate pressure off of Taiwan by compelling China to focus internally and maintain domestic security and legitimacy at all costs, simultaneously providing Taiwan with time and space to build its defensive and resistance capabilities and capacities to the necessary levels. Secondly, it would indirectly cultivate increased resiliency, unity, and legitimacy among the Taiwanese people. As Taiwan observes China’s increasingly repressive responses in its peripheral brushfire conflicts, it would prompt a psychological response to work toward national resilience. This is what the ROC’s authors refer to as *psychological or social defense*.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁶ Fiala, *ROC*, 19.

c. Clandestine Approaches

Lastly, the United States could pursue clandestine options to support Taiwan in the form of operational preparation of the environment (OPE). This would entail a persistent forward presence to form the nucleus of an increased intelligence capability on-island, under the auspices of SOCPAC or the CIA. This small, permanent liaison element—augmented officially or unofficially by SOF, SFAB, and other SFA elements on-island—would be responsible for coordinating the human and physical infrastructure for direct U.S. support of resistance operations in the event of an impending invasion. The team could facilitate rapid infiltration of follow-on forces and then direct subsequent paramilitary and unconventional warfare support to resistance forces as stay-behind forces.⁴⁵⁷ It could also prepare for Joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (JRSOI) to receive follow-on U.S. and coalition forces.

6. Adoption or Adaptation of the ROC and CDH

In conclusion, the adoption or adaptation of the *ROC* and *CDH* by Taiwan would be a timely and effective strategy tool to develop the much-needed resilience, resistance, and legitimacy that is necessary to deter Chinese aggression and garner sufficient outside support. Although the *ROC* and *CDH* seems like a natural choice for Taiwan, it must first surmount multiple internal challenges such as its mismatched ODC, reserve force reform, and various cultural and generational biases. Through the lens of Art Lykke’s strategy stool, the *ROC* and *CDH* would effectually moderate Taiwan’s inordinate “ends,” diversify its “ways,” and multiply its “means” and resources (both tangible and intangible). This would produce a force-multiplying effect not only domestically, but internationally as well, and would produce a balanced national security strategy. As the *ROC*’s authors suggest, “Strategy is most important when it provides value added to resources, functions as a force multiplier, and offers a way to beat an adversary with equivalent resources.”⁴⁵⁸ Lastly, the role of outside support to a Taiwanese *ROC* cannot be overstated. The United States has

⁴⁵⁷ Appendix E of the *ROC* details several Cold War resistance case studies to include the United States’ support to NATO stay-behind groups and underground forces, pp. 167–169.

⁴⁵⁸ Betts, 6.

an array of pre-established and emerging strategy tools such as SOF and the Army’s new SFABs to implement various, multifaceted operational approaches specifically designed along direct-overt and indirect-covert lines of operation. This synergistic relationship between a nation’s resiliency and its role in influencing outside intervening support makes the *ROC* and *CDH* exceptionally appealing for Taiwan.

E. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The three pillars of deterrence—capability, commitment, and communication—cannot stand apart from each other. They are fundamentally interdependent and, most of all, the credibility of deterrence capabilities and commitments relies on the ability to communicate them to adversaries, allies and partners, and domestic audiences. According to the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, “Successful deterrence, in the form of a decision not to pursue intended action, is induced in the mind of the hostile actor, meaning both public and private communication play an important role in shaping the perception.”⁴⁵⁹ Moreover, because of the ambiguous and civil-systemic nature of an unconventional deterrence strategy, strategic communication becomes one of the most important components. “Communication itself will not solve everything, but as deterrence is very much cognitive and psychological, it is at the heart of the deterrence process and should be coordinated and resourced.”⁴⁶⁰ See Appendix A for a visualization and explanation of the causal loop dynamics of strategic communication in the trilateral capability development relationship between Taiwan, China, and the United States.

1. Direct versus Indirect Deterrence Communication

The DOD’s conception of deterrence in the *Deterrence Operations JOC* divides its deterrence into “direct” versus “enabling” means. Whereas security cooperation is listed as an “enabling” means to achieve decisive influence in deterrence, strategic communication is listed as a “direct” means.⁴⁶¹ The doctrinal definition of strategic communication is:

⁴⁵⁹ Kersanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach*, 18.

⁴⁶⁰ Kersanskas, 18.

⁴⁶¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept*, 6.

[A state's] efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of [state] interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments.⁴⁶²

In other words, strategic communication is the language and syntax of political statecraft. It is the means by which a state *influences* key audiences or decision-makers to achieve the state's policy and strategic objectives. As R. W. Van de Velde noted in "Instruments of Statecraft,"

Even though the military instrument does exist, a threat to use it will not constitute effective use unless the threat is believed and feared. Thus we come to an almost complete mixture of two or three of the instruments of statecraft, because when it comes to belief and fear, we have entered the areas of intellect and emotion—the areas of the diplomatic and psychological instruments.⁴⁶³

a. Difference between Conventional and Unconventional Communication

One of the greatest differences between a conventional versus unconventional deterrence strategy is the interrelation and complexity of their respective strategic communication plans. "Deterrence is an iterative relationship that requires regular communications between parties."⁴⁶⁴ With conventional deterrence, the deterrer acts unilaterally to message or signal its deterrence activities—whether direct or extended forms of deterrence. This is a *direct* communication model—the deterrer communicates *directly* to the aggressor. Even in the case of the DOD's incipient "integrated deterrence" concept, allies and partners are "interwoven" and "networked" into a strategy which "integrates them into our understanding of what deterrence means," as USD-P Kahl described.⁴⁶⁵ But with unconventional deterrence, the security partner providing security cooperation and SFA to the PN must integrate into the PN's strategic communication plan instead. The

⁴⁶² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009), ii.

⁴⁶³ Van de Velde, "Instruments of Statecraft," 3.

⁴⁶⁴ Paul, "Complex Deterrence," 9.

⁴⁶⁵ Garamone, "Official Talks DOD Policy Role in Chinese Pacing Threat, Integrated Deterrence."

degree to which the two nations are allies determines the relative overlap or unison of their strategic communication plans. For example, BPC between the United States and a NATO ally will have a unified, NATO-led communication plan. However, BPC with the United States and Taiwan requires a Taiwan-led strategic communication plan, with the United States in support. This is an *indirect* communication model—the deterrer communicates *indirectly* with the aggressor through the intermediary PN.

b. Direct versus Indirect Communication Models

The distinction between direct and indirect communication models is important for an unconventional deterrence strategy because *how* a message is encoded and sent is often more important than the message itself. Wilbur Schramm, the pioneer and founder of communication theory, described the communication process as a cycle (see Figure 15).

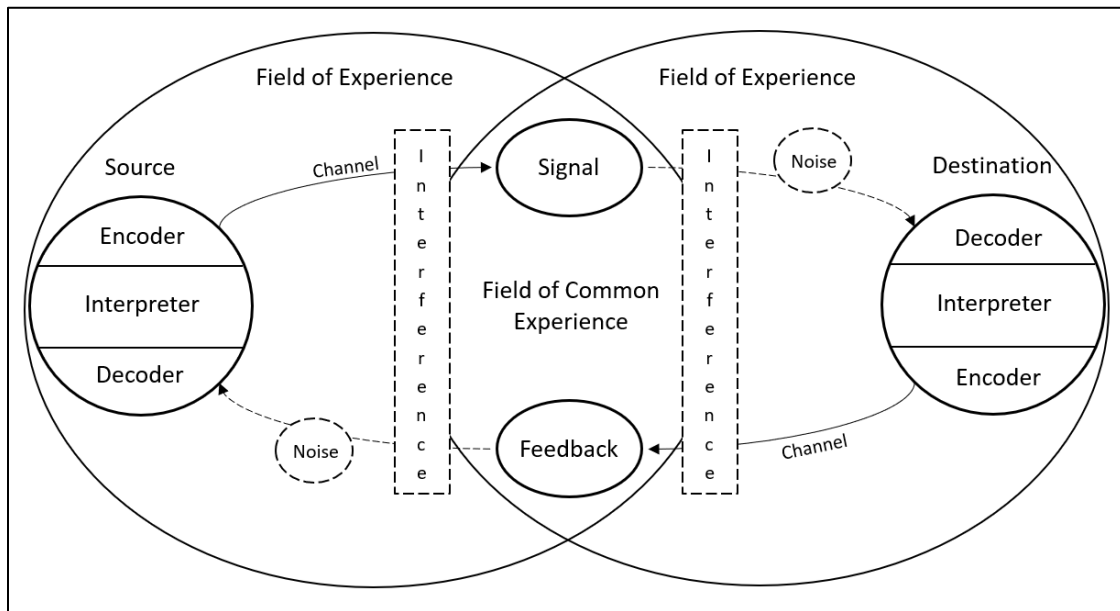


Figure 15. Model of Communication Adapted from Wilbur Schramm.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁶ Adapted from Schramm, “How Communication Works,” 3–26.

The cycle begins when a “source” “encodes” a “signal” and sends it along a specific “channel.” The “destination” or target of the signal receives the signal and “decodes” it. The receiving destination then encodes and sends a return signal in the form of “feedback,” which the source receives and decodes to determine the effectiveness of the original signal. This cyclical process is only possible within a “field of common experience” between the two sides. For example, the signal must be encoded in some form of language and meaning that both sides understand. Furthermore, each side must “interpret” incoming signals and feedback to correctly understand the intended meaning and distinguish it from the “noise” or “interference” which may confuse or impede the clear transmission of meaning.⁴⁶⁷

A deterrer can send a *direct* signal to an aggressor by encoding it in such a way that it will be received with little interference or noise and by sending along a channel that is sure to reach the destination. For example, U.S. officials can release a press statement regarding China or Taiwan on a major news network that is sure to be seen by China and requires little to no active interpretation. A direct communication model is beneficial because it is simple, unambiguous, and minimizes the misinterpretation of the message. However, a direct approach is unlikely to hide the source and intent of the message and is limited to only those channels which the aggressor can monitor. In contrast, a deterrer can send an *indirect* signal to an aggressor by encoding it in such a way that it is not clear if the aggressor was the intended recipient or by sending it on a channel that is monitored by the aggressor, but not specifically for the aggressor. It can also be indirect by obfuscating where or from whom the signal originated. For example, immediately after China flew a record 149 aircraft into Taiwan’s ADIZ in October 2021, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that a small contingent of 24 special forces operators and an unknown number of Marines had been conducting training with Taiwanese forces on a rotational basis for at least a year.⁴⁶⁸ It is not clear from where or from whom the information originated. The message is intended for a wide audience, but it is a form of *indirect* signaling to China in response

⁴⁶⁷ Wilbur Schramm, “How Communication Works,” in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, ed. Wilbur Schramm, 1st ed. (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1954), 3–26.

⁴⁶⁸ Gordon Lubold, “U.S. Troops Have Been Deployed in Taiwan for at Least a Year,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-troops-have-been-deployed-in-taiwan-for-at-least-a-year-11633614043>.

to their incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ. The benefit of this approach is that it provides an overt means to signal an aggressor without unnecessarily provoking escalation.

The simplicity of the direct model is partly the impetus for calls to shift from “strategic ambiguity” to “strategic clarity.” To deter China, the logic goes, the United States must communicate its capabilities and resolve effectively if they are to be seen as credible in the eyes of Beijing, and it cannot do so without a position of “strategic clarity.” But some level of ambiguity is desirable in order to prevent the adversary from fully knowing a deterrer's capability or “red-line” and thus from developing countermeasures that avoid or negate them. “Strategic ambiguity” provides the ability to message China both directly and indirectly. In fact, the TRA provides the necessary legal language to do so. Nearly every news media publication and commentary on Taiwan today references its history and the general clause from the TRA for the United States to provide Taiwan with the ability “to maintain a sufficient self-defense capacity.”⁴⁶⁹ But few are aware that Congress was very clear about one thing in the statute: the nature of China's reunification efforts. One of the stated purposes for the TRA is “to *make clear* that the United States decision to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China rests upon the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by *peaceful means*. [emphasis added]”⁴⁷⁰ While Congress was careful not to make a *pledge* to Taiwan, it was explicit about maintaining the *capacity* to “resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan.”⁴⁷¹ This language gives Congress and the president extraordinary *latitude* and *flexibility* to come to Taiwan's aid for a wide-range of Chinese “force” or “forms of coercion.”

The DOD and INDOPACOM specifically should develop a suite of flexible deterrent options (FDO) that align within this understanding of the TRA and which support an unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan. JP 5-0 *Joint Planning* provides multiple

⁴⁶⁹ Taiwan Relations Act. 3, 93 Stat. 15.

⁴⁷⁰ Taiwan Relations Act. 2, 93 Stat. 14.

⁴⁷¹ Taiwan Relations Act. 2, 93 Stat. 14.

examples of military, diplomatic, economic, and informational FDOs for combatant commanders to utilize as contingency situations arise. Figure 16 provides several examples of informational FDOs. All of them are viable options, but JP 5-0 does not explicitly provide guidance for how to encode and deliver these FDOs, either directly or indirectly. For example, what is the best way to encode strategic communication to “influence adversary decision makers (political, military, and social)” and what are the best channels for either direct or indirect signaling?

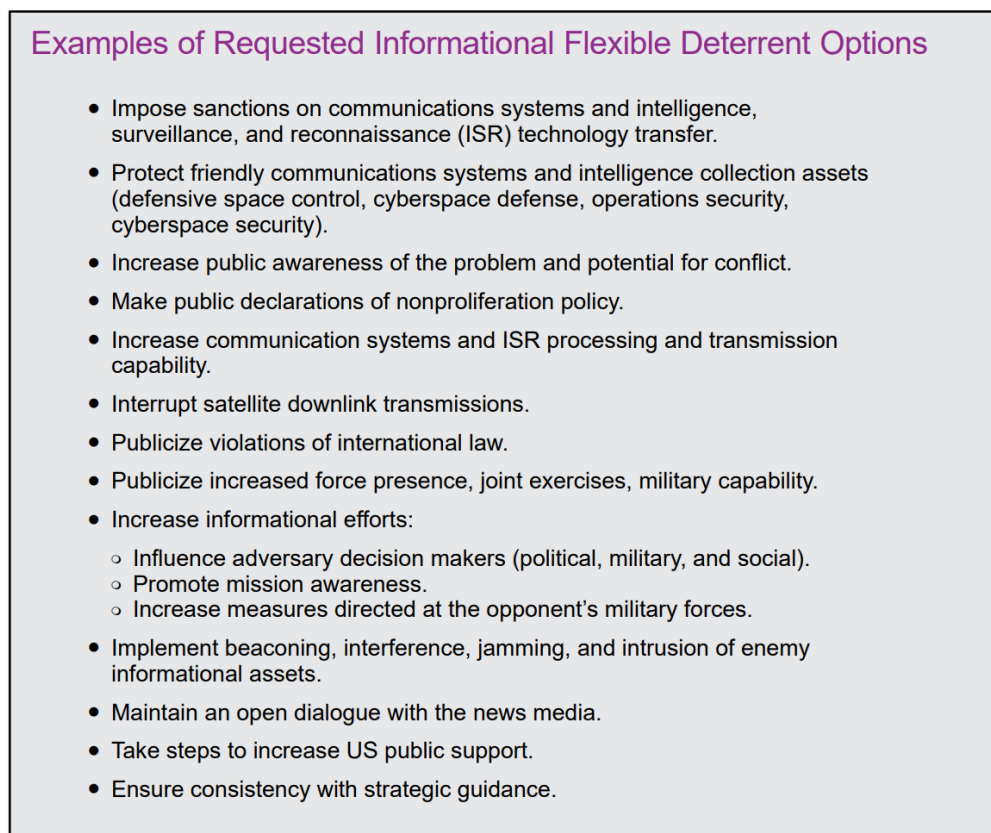


Figure 16. Examples of Requested Informational Flexible Deterrent Options (FDO).⁴⁷²

⁴⁷² Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, E-3.

2. Strategic Communication for Resistance and Resilience

There are four main goals for strategic communication, according to the *Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept* (JIC): (1) improve U.S. credibility and legitimacy; (2) weaken an adversary’s credibility and legitimacy; (3) convince selected audiences to take specific actions that support U.S. or international objectives, and (4) cause a competitor or adversary to take (or refrain from taking) specific actions.⁴⁷³ The third and fourth goals correspond closely with the concepts of compellence and deterrence.

The *ROC* mentions deterrence 68 times, with special emphasis on how resilience and resistance preparations are low-risk activities that can effectively communicate costs to a potential adversary.⁴⁷⁴ The *CDH* mentions deterrence 90 times, with special emphasis on how a professional ADC can serve as a strong deterrent. But strategic communication does not just apply to foreign target audiences. Communication with one’s own population is important in order to maintain popular support, raise awareness of threats and preparedness levels, and increase resilience. This is especially true in democratic states such as Taiwan and the United States, as the *ROC* notes,

As part of resilience-building, communication with one’s population is important. It is important to make sure the public is aware of both the threats to national security and the state’s preparedness to respond. The same applies to international partners and allies – popular support is a powerful and important tool in democratic states.⁴⁷⁵

Taiwan is well aware of its need to signal its resilience internally and externally. Its leadership has demonstrated extraordinary resiliency and the ability to communicate to domestic and foreign audiences over the course of its 71-year existence. After the United States abrogated its defense treaty with Taiwan and switched diplomatic recognition of “One China” from Taipei to Beijing in 1979, Taiwan adroitly adjusted its foreign policy objectives to gain as much international backing as possible—diplomatically and commercially. Despite having only 13 remaining nations recognizing Taiwan today, Taipei

⁴⁷³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept*, 7–9.

⁴⁷⁴ Fiala, *ROC*, 32.

⁴⁷⁵ Kersanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach*, 18.

looks for and exploits any opportunity to expand relations with foreign entities. For example, in October 2021, the Taipei Zoo announced it will transport two pangolins to the Prague Zoo as part of a breeding loan project. Commentators were quick to label the “informal ambassadors” as “Pangolin Diplomacy”—akin to China’s “Panda Diplomacy” beginning in the 1950s when the PRC donated giant pandas to nations in an effort to gain diplomatic recognition.⁴⁷⁶

It is also important to communicate one’s resilience to the aggressor state in order to signal that any coercive aggression will not achieve its desired effect. “Hostile actors should also have an understanding of a deterring actor’s resilience, with the aim of showing that hostility will be futile.”⁴⁷⁷ But communication strategies should adjust according to the phase of operation, according to the *ROC*:

In the resilience phase, the government will communicate the national narrative within its borders and to allies, partners, the international community, and the potential adversary... During resistance, an exiled government must tailor messages to different internal populations: supporters of resistance, supporters of the adversary, and those who are neutral.⁴⁷⁸

Strategic communication of capabilities and intentions can be overt or covert, public or private. They can also be delivered through a myriad of possible channels and mediums which can have dual-audiences and dual-purposes as a functional as well as deterrent message. For example, it is interesting that the *ROC* and *CDH* are unclassified documents. By publishing them and disseminating them overtly and publicly, it serves to inform and educate U.S. and partner audiences, but it also sends a message to aggressors like Russia and China that the nations which are the target of their aggression now have a means to build resilience and resistance capacities. Even contributions to the growing body of literature like this study send an indirect, yet overt signal to China. After the United

⁴⁷⁶ Maria Siow, “Will Taiwan’s ‘Pangolin Diplomacy’ Be a Double-Edged Sword?,” *South China Morning Post*, November 5, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3154839/will-taiwans-pangolin-diplomacy-be-turning-point-or-double-edged>.

⁴⁷⁷ Kersanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach*, 18.

⁴⁷⁸ Fiala, *ROC*, 46.

States, China downloads more NPS publications than any other country, and with the word “Taiwan” in the title, there is little doubt that China will read this thesis and understand its strategic message.⁴⁷⁹

a. Public Opinion Warfare and Public Diplomacy

Strategic communication in the form of public opinion warfare and public diplomacy, particularly to the target audience of the Chinese people, is vital to the success of an unconventional deterrence strategy. As Taiwan’s capacity for resilience and resistance increases, both Taiwan and the United States must message the Chinese directly and indirectly—through official channels or through public and social media—in order to draw attention to the increasingly unlikelihood that any forceful or hybrid means to reunify Taiwan will be unsuccessful.

Public opinion messaging which aligns with a “deterrence by punishment” approach should emphasize the unlikelihood of success due to the tremendous costs and losses that would result from a protracted island resistance. One tactic could be to message the disastrous impact such a war would have due to China’s one-child policy. Countless Chinese family lines—some spanning back hundreds of years—would be irrevocably eliminated with the death of the last living male descendent fighting in the war.

In contrast, public opinion messaging which aligns with a “deterrence by denial” approach should emphasize the unlikelihood of political vice military success in a fight to annex Taiwan due to Taiwan’s resilience capacity to absorb costs and survive occupation. One tactic could be to message how Taiwan’s Home Guard and ADC capacities would render any Chinese military superiority over Taiwan irrelevant. Urban warfare in the streets of Taiwan would be the great equalizer.

Furthermore, the United States and Taiwan must utilize strategic messaging and targeted information operations in the form of public opinion warfare to ensure unconventional deterrence has the desired effect against CCP strategy and policy

⁴⁷⁹ “Statistics by Country,” Calhoun: The Institutional Archive, accessed December 2, 2021, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/most-popular/country#>.

objectives. The declassified 2018 Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework (IPSF) outlines the need to “develop a robust public diplomacy capability, which can compete with China’s information campaigns; puncture the narrative that Chinese regional domination is inevitable.”⁴⁸⁰ For example, the United States and Taiwan should message to the Chinese populace in various ways how the CCP is increasingly unable to achieve its primary policy objectives and apply constant pressure on the CCP—along with diplomatic off ramps—to change its policy and grand strategy. Doing so would also degrade and damage China’s soft power proposition of a “peaceful coexistence” and “community of shared destiny.”

Taiwan is already aware of the stakes and opportunities when it comes to public opinion resilience and public diplomacy to counter Chinese propaganda and false narratives. In October, President Tsai drew attention to the “contest of ideologies” in an essay for *Foreign Affairs*.⁴⁸¹ Her opening words began with resilience: “The story of Taiwan is one of resilience—of a country upholding democratic, progressive values while facing a constant challenge to its existence. Our success is a testament to what a determined practitioner of democracy, characterized by good governance and transparency, can achieve.” She likens the determination and resilience of Taiwan to a “firewall against forces, both internal and external, seeking to undermine [Taiwan’s] hard-won democratic institutions.” In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, she highlights, authoritarian regimes like China attempted to demonstrate the superiority of their political systems. But she fires back at this narrative, declaring, “Taiwan, by virtue of both its very existence and its continued prosperity, represents at once an affront to the narrative and an impediment to the regional ambitions of the Chinese Communist Party.”

Following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, when Chinese state media agencies called into question the credibility of Washington’s security commitments and partnership with Beijing, Taiwanese officials quickly responded with acumen to signal Taiwan’s resilience. For example, responding to China’s comparisons of the U.S.

⁴⁸⁰ National Security Council, *Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework*, 4.

⁴⁸¹ Ing-wen, “Taiwan and the Fight for Democracy.”

withdrawal from Afghanistan to abandonment of Taiwan, a local Taiwanese government official tweeted,

If we're going to make Afghan comparisons, Taiwan survived that moment 40+ years ago. U.S. troops left Taiwan in 1979 after recognizing the PRC. Entirely different context now... So no, Taiwan is not Afghanistan. (Profoundly confusing statement in itself, since the very people trying to suggest this would definitely refuse to compare China to the Taliban).⁴⁸²

Taiwan's Premier also reminded the world of Taiwan's resolve during a press conference:

Today, there are powerful countries that want to swallow up Taiwan using force, and likewise we are also not afraid of being killed or imprisoned... We must guard this country and this land, and not be like certain people who always talk up the enemy's prestige and talk down our resolve... We also tell foreign forces who want to invade and grab Taiwan – don't be deluded.⁴⁸³

Even President Tsai also took to social media, exhorting the Taiwanese to practice self-reliance: the “only option is to make ourselves stronger, more united and more resolute in our determination to protect ourselves... It's not an option for us to do nothing on our own and just to rely on other people's protection.”⁴⁸⁴ Together, these are powerful statements of resolve, resilience, and the willingness to speak “truth to facts” in the face of pressure from China.

b. Seeking “Truth from Facts”

The United States could also employ the concept of seeking “truth from facts. The phrase is a traditional Chinese expression that became a central element of Maoism, then further promoted under Deng Ziaoping as a part of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” It embodied the principle of political and economic pragmatism and the flexibility to adopt models and markets that work. It led to a period of “pragmatic

⁴⁸² Wen Lii (@wen1949), “If We're Going to Make Afghanistan Comparisons,” Twitter, August 16, 2021, <https://twitter.com/wen1949/status/1427277802148040706>.

⁴⁸³ Ben Blanchard, “Taiwan Would Not Collapse Like Afghanistan, Premier Says,” Reuters, last modified August 17, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-would-not-collapse-like-afghanistan-premier-says-2021-08-17/>.

⁴⁸⁴ The Straits Times, “Taiwan Needs to Be ‘Stronger.’”

coexistence,” rapprochement with the United States, and international recognition of sovereignty; in other words, policies that advanced its grand strategy. But of late, actions like repression in Hong Kong and Xinjiang has undercut the credibility and political philosophy of seeking “truth from facts” and seems to suggest that China may be renouncing its own “two systems” approach and idea of “peaceful coexistence.”

Given this evidence, there is an opportunity for Washington to amplify its strategic communication and public diplomacy approach by adopting the language of seeking “truth from facts” during dealings with China over Taiwan—effectually flipping the script on China. For example, China often employs “cheap propaganda” to sway public opinion regarding Taiwan, asking questions like “how Americans would feel if China were to have an Alaska or Hawaii Relations Act?” similar to the TRA. The rhetoric is similar to China’s complaint in April 2020 about U.S. naval operations in the Taiwan Strait: “Would a Chinese warship go to the Gulf of Mexico to make a show of strength?”⁴⁸⁵ Washington should counter this rhetoric by stating “truth from facts” according to China’s prior model. Unlike Taiwan, Alaska and Hawaii are not governments that fled due to a civil war with the mainland, nor do the inhabitants renounce political affiliation with the mainland, as the Taiwanese do. Likewise, Washington should repudiate the idea of a Chinese Warship in the Gulf of Mexico because—unlike the United States with Taiwan—China has no Caribbean partner with which it provides for that partner’s defense against repeated attempts of annexation by an aggressive United States, to include incursions into their airspace or missile tests into surrounding waters. The reality is that Taiwan is no more an internal “domestic” issue for China than Cuba or the Bahamas is for the United States. It would be like the U.S. Union government saying to the French during the Civil War that it could not support the Confederacy because it would have been interfering in a “domestic” issue. The arguments and analogies that Chinese officials give to defend China’s sovereignty over Taiwan simply do not hold water, and Washington should be quick to invalidate their claims and garner international backing. The real “truth from facts” is that *emotion*, not grand strategy or pragmatism, drives China’s behavior with respect to Taiwan.

⁴⁸⁵ Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 155–56; “China Says U.S. to Blame for Tensions Over Taiwan,” *Reuters*, April 8, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-taiwan-usa-idUSKBN2BV15J>.

The United States must always refrain from responding with emotion, but instead use the very logic espoused by China: seeking “truth from facts.” The United States could adeptly harken back to China’s own historical successes and celebrated leaders like Mao and Deng as a means to expose and counter China’s own false narratives. In this sense, the tools to refute China can be found in China itself.

F. STRATEGIC DECEPTION

The information environment pervades every operational domain, from the reaches of space to the depths of undersea cables. But it manifests most conspicuously in the human and cognitive domain. This implies that the dynamics of competition in the information environment reside chiefly in human interactions and psychology, and extend to the realm of politics and international relations. In global strategic competition between great powers, strategic deception in the information environment becomes paramount. Controlling the truth in a competitive information environment is less important than controlling the *narrative* and people’s *perceptions* of the truth. The state that is more capable of deceiving the other for longer will gain a considerable position of relative advantage.

1. Deception as an Asymmetric Countervailing Capability

The most significant outcome from the system dynamics model designed for this study (summarized in Appendix A) was that U.S. and Taiwan capability development and BPC is not what drives China to develop countervailing capabilities. Rather it is China’s *perception* of these capacities. Therefore, increasing strategic communication and deception to influence adversarial perceptions is likely to have more of a deterrent effect than accelerating capability development.

There are countless definitions and conceptions of deception, likely due to its purpose of increasing uncertainty and ambiguity. Retired USAF Brigadier General and former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Oversight Walter Jajko offers the following definition, which closely mirrors the Chinese conception of deception, the indirect approach, and shih: “Deception is the deliberate manipulation of an opponent through the employment of stratagem... to render irrelevant an adversary’s operative advantage and to leave relevant only a particular advantage accruing to oneself” and the

“employment of indirect means to advance this advantage.” Deception has several objectives, according to historian Jon Latimer: to divert the adversary’s attention in order to gain freedom of action, to gain surprise over an adversary, to persuade the adversary to take a course of action that is to his disadvantage, or to prevent the adversary from discovering and exploiting a weakness or vulnerability—to include protecting lives and resources.⁴⁸⁶

Authors Erik Gartzke and Jon Lindsay conceive of deception as a distinctive “protective strategy.” It is a hedge or insurance policy which undergirds strategies of disarmament, deterrence, and defense.⁴⁸⁷ If deterrence and defense were to fail and China were to successfully invade Taiwan, the mere possibility of deception would still impose indirect costs on China and delay decisive action, possibly opening up windows of opportunity for Taiwan or a coalition force to exploit. Deception creates additional layers of counterintelligence burdens, operations security (OPSEC) measures, and reduced confidence and speed in decision-making at every step of the operation.⁴⁸⁸ In other words, deception adds multiple *cognitive* dilemmas for the adversary on top of the other dilemmas of deterrence and defense that already exist.

With this perspective, the United States and Taiwan would benefit greatly by incorporating strategic deception into the planning and implementation of an unconventional deterrence and comprehensive defense strategy of BPC. But deception operations take time and preparation to be effective, and often will not be available for use in wartime if they are not prepared and queued during peacetime. There are three broad steps to any deception. The first is to identify and condition a target’s beliefs for deception. This entails exploiting the target’s cognitive biases for either “ambiguity-increasing” or “misleading” type deceptions.⁴⁸⁹ “Ambiguity-increasing” or “A-type” deception

⁴⁸⁶ Jon Latimer, *Deception in War* (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 2001), 62.

⁴⁸⁷ Gartzke and Lindsay, “Weaving Tangled Webs: Offense, Defense, and Deception in Cyberspace,” 336.

⁴⁸⁸ Gartzke and Lindsay, 343.

⁴⁸⁹ Donald C Daniel and Katherine L. Herbig, “Propositions on Military Deception,” in *Strategic Military Deception*, ed. Donald C Daniel and Katherine L. Herbig (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 5–7.

introduces so much uncertainty and “noise” that the target is unsure what to believe, while “misleading” or “M-type” deception reduces ambiguity for the target by increasing the attractiveness of one wrong alternative to the exclusion of one correct one. It may take a long build-up period of preparatory deceptions to lower the target’s sensitivity to “A-type” deceptions or to raise the credibility of “M-type” deceptions in the mind of the target. The second step is to influence the target’s actions. This is the main intended deception operation. The third step is to benefit from the target’s actions. This, in and of itself, is not a deception but the desired freedom of action or surprise over the adversary. The deception operation cannot be considered deception if it provides no competitive advantage.⁴⁹⁰ As Gartzke and Lindsay summarize:

Deception is an exploitative act that takes advantage of a competitor’s preconceptions... It relies on ambiguity as opposed to the bright lines between war and peace... Deception matters most, politically, in increasing the options available for competitive and aggressive interactions other than war or for providing adjunct support to military operations.”⁴⁹¹

2. Democratic Moral Inhibitions and Authoritarian Biases

Democratic and authoritarian states each have diametrically opposed advantages and disadvantages when it comes to strategic deception. In authoritarian regimes like China, deception is more routine and practiced within its societies than in democracies. Centralized state control, particularly of the information environment, makes it very easy to manipulate access to information and to use deception for political gain. With the CCP’s imperative to maintain domestic control and party security, the moral threshold for deception is also much lower. “The secrecy and total control available to dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, and the reduced inhibitions that accompany such exercise of power, facilitate and provide incentives for the exercise of craft, cunning, and deception.”⁴⁹² In democratic regimes, conversely, deception is more uncommon and unpracticed. With a

⁴⁹⁰ Daniel and Herbig, 5.

⁴⁹¹ Gartzke and Lindsay, “Weaving Tangled Webs: Offense, Defense, and Deception in Cyberspace,” 346.

⁴⁹² Herbert Goldhamer, *Reality and Belief in Military Affairs: A First Draft*, ed. Joan Goldhamer, R-2448-NA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1979), 107–8.

political system and culture rooted in openness and unrestricted access to information—to include freedoms of speech and expression—democratic societies often equate deception with corruption and view it as antithetical to its political process.

In 2002, Walter Jajko decried the United States’ tendency to view deception as unacceptable in all but the most extreme circumstances, such as the deception plan for the invasion of Europe in 1944—Operation Bodyguard. Since then, despite a “half century of sustained, systematic, and sophisticated Soviet Russian deception... the United States never resorted to a strategic political deception—not even for its own survival.”⁴⁹³ Jajko believes that the United States does not include deception in its strategic arsenal because it fails to see the “virtue” of strategic deception—a vulnerability that adversaries who do not share the same inhibitions can exploit to their advantage. Thus, “American sensibilities are available as assailable susceptibilities.”⁴⁹⁴

The differences in moral and strategic stances between democratic and authoritarian regimes seem to favor authoritarian regimes like China. However, there are authoritarian vulnerabilities and countervailing democratic advantages that provide democracies with unique deception opportunities—should they resolve to leverage them. First, strong, central leaderships are more vulnerable to “M-type” type deceptions because they tend to believe what they want to hear and because the repressive climate is such that subordinates tend not to report information that is contradictory to the leadership’s beliefs.⁴⁹⁵ Authoritarian decision-making is more vulnerable to cognitive biases such as the representative heuristic, confirmation bias, and the observer-expectancy effect, which all either ignore or misinterpret information in order to support preconceived expectations. In fact, the tendency to perceive and confirm predisposed expectations is stronger than the ability to perceive and assimilate contradictory information, so it is far easier to reinforce a target’s existing beliefs than to persuade the target to change his or her beliefs. Because the target of any deception operation is the adversarial decision-maker—typically through

⁴⁹³ Jajko, “Deception: Appeal for Acceptance; Discourse on Doctrine; Preface to Planning,” 351.

⁴⁹⁴ Jajko, 351–52.

⁴⁹⁵ Latimer, *Deception in War*, 60–61.

his or her intelligence system, which serves to mediate the truth for him or her—democratic deception stratagems can be highly effective in solidifying an authoritarian leader’s certain, yet wrong, expectations.⁴⁹⁶ The result, if successful, is cognitive consonance; and after the deception is realized the result is psychological disequilibrium, which lends itself to “A-type” deceptions. “Deception adds to the ambitious attacker’s already significant intelligence burden. Even if the defensive deception is not completely successful, paranoia about the mere possibility of deception can reduce an attacker’s confidence and encourage some degree of restraint.”⁴⁹⁷

The authoritarian nature of China’s system makes it an ideal target for deception, particularly “M-type” deceptions. Xi Jinping is increasingly becoming more central in the decision-making apparatus of the CCP. The fact that the party abolished term limits and named him a “historic figure” on equal footing with Mao and Deng, and the fact that he has not designated a successor all serve as evidence that there will be less opposition and contradiction from the party which would overcome structural resilience to deception or potential cognitive biases.⁴⁹⁸ For example, one Chinese official revealed that sometimes Xi Jinping “is intentionally given exaggerated assessments.”⁴⁹⁹ In his book about Chinese leadership from Deng to Xi, *Following the leader*, David Lampton highlights the stovepipe nature and “woefully inadequate cross-system integration” of China’s military and foreign policy apparatus, wherein elements of nationalism also make it difficult to cross-communicate effectively.⁵⁰⁰

The overall architecture of the policy-making system... creates a structural problem in decision making because other intelligence and foreign policy institutions report up through separate state and party channels. There

⁴⁹⁶ Jajko, “Deception: Appeal for Acceptance; Discourse on Doctrine; Preface to Planning,” 352; Daniel and Herbig, “Propositions on Military Deception,” 8.

⁴⁹⁷ Gartzke and Lindsay, “Weaving Tangled Webs: Offense, Defense, and Deception in Cyberspace,” 339.

⁴⁹⁸ Rudd, “Short of War,” 60.

⁴⁹⁹ Linda Jakobson, “Domestic Factors and the Fragmentation of China’s Foreign Policy,” in *China in the Era of Xi Jinping: Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges*, ed. Robert S. Ross and Jo Inge Bekkevold (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 157.

⁵⁰⁰ Lampton, *Following the Leader*, 187.

generally is insufficient horizontal coordination between these channels and the military, almost guaranteeing there will be instances (sometimes important) where the left hand (the diplomats) do not know what the right hand (the military) is doing.⁵⁰¹

A good example of this occurred during the 2001 collision and forced landing of a U.S. EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft in Hainan province. Beijing demanded concessions and an apology, which led to an eleven-day period in which the 24 U.S. military personnel were held in Hainan. However, it was revealed later that the initial military reports “were at best inaccurate and at worst misleading” in an effort to exaggerate the threat to get resources and national attention.⁵⁰² The failure in reporting and cross-communication due to the structural problems of China’s authoritarian bureaucracy is something the United States and Taiwan should seek to exploit in future conflicts.

G. SUMMARY

An unconventional deterrence strategy has the potential to deter and deny a Chinese invasion and annexation of Taiwan, but it also has the potential to deny and sabotage China’s grand strategy. Likewise, a strategy focused on resilience and resistance against a Chinese occupation is simultaneously a form of political warfare to resist China’s intensifying revanchism and revisionism. By building Taiwan’s capacity for resilience and resistance, it enables the United States to conduct expanded forms of IW. The Irregular Warfare (IW) Annex to the 2018 *NDS* makes this explicit, “[the shift towards great power competition] requires rethinking how the Joint Force will operationalize forces that are currently employed in disconnected ways to achieve a concerted deterrent and shaping effect through IW.”⁵⁰³ It also enables Taiwan and the United States to conduct political warfare.

⁵⁰¹ Lampton, 171.

⁵⁰² Lampton, 176.

⁵⁰³ Department of Defense, *Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 7, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Oct/02/2002510472/-1/-1/0/Irregular-Warfare-Annex-to-the-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.PDF>.

VI. TACTICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MEANS

In his 2020 study on deterrence for the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Vytautas Keršanskas outlines how to construct an appropriate “deterrence posture” by planning, employing, and communicating a wide range of deterrent measures or “means.”⁵⁰⁴ This includes multilateral as well as national tools, punitive as well as denial measures, and the careful timing and “choreographing” of actions to ensure the greatest “cumulative effect.”

A crucial part of developing a deterrence strategy is for a nation to map its own deterrent tools menu. Classifying them by sector or domain (political, military, diplomatic, culture etc.), type (supporting the denial of benefits or imposing costs on the hostile actor) or scope (national or multilateral) can help to develop this list... unconventional thinking is important – one should consider not only traditional tools, but also consider if some of the tools can have a deterring effect as a secondary outcome.⁵⁰⁵

The tactical and institutional “means” to implement an unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan are the wide range of BPC programs, authorities, and activities derived primarily from security cooperation and security assistance. They also include a wide range of SOF, joint, interagency (IA), multinational, and academia organizations.

A. BPC PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES, AND AUTHORITIES

Figure 17 depicts the full range of foreign assistance missions, programs, activities, and authorities that are available for the Joint Force, SOF, and IA to conduct BPC with PNs. These mediums form the various operations, activities, and investments (OAI) that bridge the “ways” and “means” for a strategy of BPC. The tactical and institutional “means” outlined in this chapter employ these missions, programs, authorities, and activities to achieve these OAIs and their corresponding strategic and operational objectives.

⁵⁰⁴ Kersanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach*, 16.

⁵⁰⁵ Kersanskas, 17.

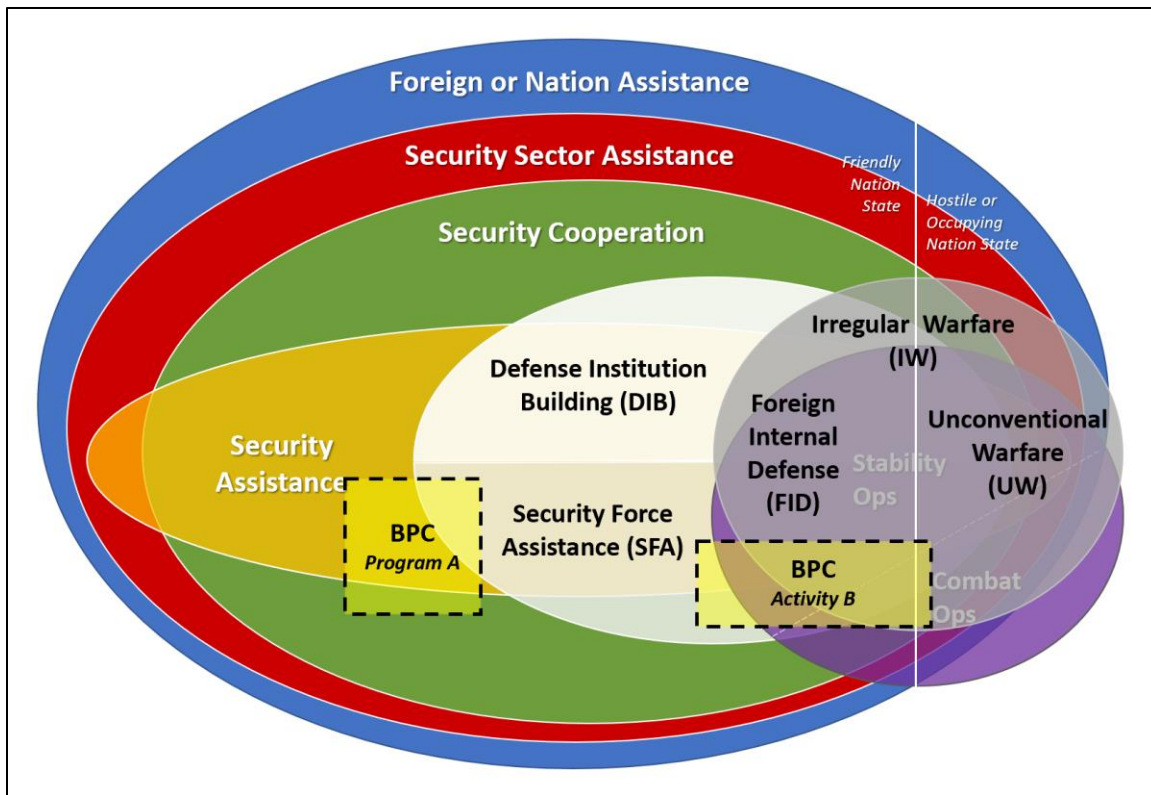


Figure 17. Building Partner Capacity (BPC) Framework.⁵⁰⁶

Within the overall framework of foreign or nation assistance, SSA consists of all U.S. government (USG) interactions with foreign security sectors, to include partner nations and international organizations. Activities outside of SSA would include USG actions under the State Department’s Office of Foreign Assistance—to include the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—which do not overlap with foreign security assistance. Within the umbrella of SSA, security cooperation (SC) and security assistance (SA) overlap considerably with DOD and DOS primary headship, respectively. Examples of SC are official “train and equip” BPC programs and authorities such as Title 10 § 333 “Foreign Security Forces: Authority to Build Capacity,” as well various education, training, and exercises such as “ Title 10 § 322, “Special Operations Forces:

⁵⁰⁶ Adapted from White, “Security Cooperation: How It All Fits,” 107; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, JP 3-05, II-2.

Training with Friendly Foreign Forces.”⁵⁰⁷ Examples of SA are foreign military sales (FMS), foreign military financing (FMF), and the international military education and training (IMET) program.⁵⁰⁸

Support to IW comprises of FID and UW. JP 3-22 *Foreign Internal Defense* defines FID as “the participation by civilian agencies and military forces of a government or international organization in any of the programs or activities taken by a host nation (HN) government to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, violent extremism, terrorism, and other threats to its security.”⁵⁰⁹ Within this understanding, the Joint Force and SOF conduct FID within a *friendly* nation state, but it conducts UW within a *hostile* or *occupying* nation state.⁵¹⁰ Both FID and UW assist the internal defense and development (IDAD) of the friendly or occupied nation state.

Within SC and overlapping with a large portion of SA and IW, DIB and SFA are often the primary “means” to accomplish various SC, SA, and support to IW activities. DIB is primarily at the operational level while SFA is primarily at the tactical level.⁵¹¹ The *ROC* delineates these activities according to pre- and post-crisis:

Within these U.S. DOD definitions, the U.S. engages in SC and SFA when supporting a partner nation’s development of an organized resistance capability. If that partner nation loses full or partial sovereignty over its territory to a hostile actor, then the U.S. can engage in UW to assist the resistance forces. If that partner nation is under pre- or post-crisis threat from a foreign actor interfering in the partner nation domestically, then the U.S. engages in FID to help free and protect the partner from foreign subversion or insurgency.”⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁷ Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, I-7-I-12.

⁵⁰⁸ Defense Security Cooperation University, I-2-I-7.

⁵⁰⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Foreign Internal Defense*, JP 3-22 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), ix, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_22.pdf?ver=A-DLNQ_hONTuZvncu6o0Pw%3d%3d.

⁵¹⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, II-2.

⁵¹¹ Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, I-13.

⁵¹² Fiala, *ROC*, 20.

FID comprises primarily of various DIB and SFA activities, but also of some SC and SA as well as overlapping stability and combat operations. Like DIB and SFA, FID is fully encompassed within SC. Examples of FID are counterinsurgency (COIN), counter terrorism (CT), and counter drug or narcotics (CD/N). UW also comprises of various DIB, SFA, SC, SA, and SSA activities, as well as stability and combat operations. But some of its activities fall just outside the realm of foreign assistance and are conducted directly against an enemy.

Stability and combat operations occupy a corner in the foreign assistance framework as well. Stability and combat operations provide foreign assistance concurrent with FID and UW, and support DIB and SFA, SC and SA, and SSA. But like UW, not all combat operations fall within the realm of foreign assistance. Examples of stability and combat operations that support foreign assistance are foreign humanitarian assistance (FHA), maritime security operations (MSO), civil military operations (CMO), military information support to operations (MISO), counter weapons of mass destruction (CWMD), personnel recovery (PR), and direct action (DA).

Within this overall framework, BPC activities comprise of various cross-sections (of various size and shape) of SC, SA, DIB, SFA, and support to IW missions, programs, activities, and authorities. Combined in various ways, the Joint Force, SOF, and IA partners can synchronize and communicate BPC to achieve “cumulative effects.”

B. FOREIGN AREA OFFICERS

Foreign area officers (FAO) invariably form the core of any security cooperation or BPC initiative or program. FAOs are specially trained and strategically focused officers with language, cultural, sociological, and political expertise in a specific region or country.⁵¹³ They typically serve as either defense attachés within the defense attaché office

⁵¹³ Army FAOs are a functional area (FA 48). The Marine Corps have both a FAO track (994x designator) and regional affairs officer (RAO) track (982x designator). RAOs are similar to FAOs but without language skills. The Navy FAOs have a single track (1710 designator). The Air Force have two tracks: FAO (16F specialty code) and political-military affairs strategist (PAS) (16P). The Army National Guard have bilateral affairs officers (BAO) which manage the State Partnership Program (SPP). USSOCOM also established some special operations liaison officer (SOLO) and special operations forces liaison element (SOFLE) billets to represent SOF equities and BPC efforts within a MILGRP.

(DAO) or as security assistance officers within the security cooperation office (SCO) of the military group (MILGRP) of a U.S. embassy. The DAO is the diplomatic arm of the MILGRP and interacts with senior defense officials at the ministerial level. They also serve as the senior military advisors to the ambassador and U.S. Country Team (USCT). Security assistance officers manage the country's security assistance and security cooperation portfolio. FAOs also serve as country desk officers or strategic political-military planners on a GCC or SCC staff, sometimes known as the Strategic Planning and Policy (SPP) directorate or Security Cooperation and Policy (SCP) division.

Together, FAOs, desk officers, BAOs, and SOLO/SOFLEs serve as the frontline in BPC strategy and policy development and are the focal point for codifying five-year theater and country security cooperation plans. FAOs are often far-removed from current and emerging concepts and strategies. For example, during a security cooperation review meeting in 2019 between an unnamed SE Asia PN and the U.S. SCO in-country, the PN requested information on the U.S. Army's new multi-domain operations (MDO) concept due to China's A2/AD capabilities. The SCO was not well-versed in the concept and requested advisory assistance from AWG and TRADOC. However, AWG advisors drew attention to the fact that MDO would likely not be an applicable concept for the PN to adopt due to its geographic location within the range of China's A2/AD defensive layers. The purpose of MDO is to *penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit* the multi-layered and multi-domain "stand-off" produced by the A2/AD systems. In other words, MDO is an operating concept for forces *outside* the stand-off zone, rather than *inside*. Cases like this illustrate the need for FAOs to be well-versed in current doctrine and operating concepts in order to synthesize and propose appropriate and scalable long-term strategies in conjunction with the PN. Mirror-imaging is a heuristic dynamic that can play out on either side of the relationship, and PNs need concepts and solutions that are relevant and compatible with their operational environment and threat estimates.

C. SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND INTERAGENCY

The 2012 National Strategic Guidance states, "*Whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives,*

relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities.”⁵¹⁴ By nature and by design, this proposition describes the SOF approach. JP 3-05 for *Special Operations* states,

SOF’s primary role in military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence is in support of a broader whole-of-government approach, integrated with both USG and partner capabilities... SOF provides a critical capability for the GCC to support and influence these activities. SOF provides an efficient and effective DOD commitment that builds and develops regional security forces while maintaining a positive forward presence during persistent engagement and pre-crisis periods.⁵¹⁵

The fundamental value proposition of U.S. SOF is the low-signature and cost-effective persistent engagement strategy with partners and the IA to conduct IW, UW, and support to political warfare—what former SF colonel and senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies David Maxwell labels the modern SOF “trinity.”⁵¹⁶ But he also states that “Political warfare is not a SOF mission. It is a national mission. It is statecraft. SOF provides support to political warfare.”⁵¹⁷ This is the essence of *special warfare* or what USASOC labels the “indigenous approach,” wherein Army SOF (ARSOF) “leverage nascent capability within populations, transforming indigenous mass into combat power.”⁵¹⁸ Forward-deployed and dispersed SOF during competition have the requisite capabilities to develop OAI in conjunction with partners. In the event of conflict, SOF can activate their OAI and continue to advise, assist, accompany, and enable (A3E) them and support follow-on U.S. or coalition forces. In their 2018 NPS thesis, Steven Cooper and Fray Doyle created a model to quantify the deterrence value of various Title

⁵¹⁴ Leon Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2012), 3, https://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf.

⁵¹⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, III–12.

⁵¹⁶ David Maxwell, “Resistance and Resilience in Asia – Political Warfare of Revisionist and Rogue Powers” (presentation, Trans-Regional Resistance Working Group, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey CA, February 4, 2020), <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/trans-regional-resistance-working-group/>.

⁵¹⁷ Maxwell. “Resistance and Resilience in Asia.”

⁵¹⁸ U.S. Army Special Operations Command, *USASOC 2035: Communicating the ARSOF Narrative and Setting the Course to 2035* (Special Warfare, n.d.), 4, <https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW3003/USASOC%202035.pdf>.

10 special operations activities, such as FID and operational preparation of the environment (OPE).

Within the model, FID and OPE in the supported role score the highest deterrence values. They score high because they have low risk with respect to escalation, they employ an indirect strategic interaction, and the presence of U.S. forces constitute a trip wire. These tasks also place forces within contested regions for longer durations, allowing them to act as an early warning detector.⁵¹⁹

This study is not the first occasion to recommend the “indigenous approach” for SOF in Taiwan. In May 2021, during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD(SO/LIC)) Christopher Maier suggested to Congress that the United States should employ SOF to help build Taiwan’s resistance capabilities. Sen. Hawley (R-MO) referenced U.S. SOF’s efforts to build the resistance capabilities in the Baltics to deter a Russian invasion (re: the *Resistance Operating Concept*) and questioned Mr. Maier if SOF could replicate the strategy in Taiwan. Mr. Maier replied, “I do think that is something that we should be considering strongly as we think about competition across the span of different capabilities we can apply, SOF being a key contributor to that.”⁵²⁰ Due to SOF’s unique special warfare skills and attributes as IW, UW, and support to PW experts, they are the ideal choice to spearhead an unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan

1. Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET)

Under Title 10 § 167 “Unified Combatant Command for Special Operations Forces,” U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is assigned authority over all special operations activities which include,

1. Direct action.

⁵¹⁹ Steven M. Cooper and Fray B. Doyle, “Special Operations: Quantified Deterrence against Russian Aggression in Eastern Europe” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), 34, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/59640>.

⁵²⁰ Stephen Losey, “US Special Forces Could Help Taiwan Learn to Resist Chinese Invasion, DOD Nominee Says,” *Military.com*, last modified May 27, 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/05/27/us-special-forces-could-help-taiwan-learn-resist-chinese-invasion-dod-nominee-says.html>.

2. Strategic reconnaissance
3. Unconventional warfare
4. Foreign internal defense
5. Civil affairs
6. Military information support operations
7. Counterterrorism
8. Humanitarian assistance
9. Theater search and rescue
10. Such other activities as may be specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.⁵²¹

Furthermore, Title 10 § 322, “Special Operations Forces: Training with Friendly Foreign Forces,” authorizes GCCs and subordinate TSOCs to conduct JCETs. JCETs consist of any number of Special Forces Operational Detachments Alpha (ODA) and/or Operational Detachments Bravo (ODB) from a Special Forces Group (SFG). The “primary purpose” of JCETs is “to train the special operations forces of the combatant command,” but some training benefit for the PN is allowed. Colloquially, SOF and others refer to this allocation of training benefit as the “51/49 percent” divide.⁵²² In other words, a minimum of 51 percent of the benefit must go to SOF while the remaining percentage goes to the PN. In their 2020 NPS thesis, Richard Manley and Gil Bailey argue that this existing legal structure limits the utility of JCETs from achieving PN security objectives as well as U.S. objectives, and Congress should remove the “primary purpose” stipulation from Title 10 § 322.⁵²³ By doing so, JCETs would enable “the flexibility, responsiveness, and focused attention required to develop resilience in our partners and allies abroad, despite originally being designed to focus on training our own SOF forces.”⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ Armed Forces.

⁵²² Richard L. Manley and Gilbert R. Bailey, “Thickening the Contact Layer: Accounting for the Paradox of Purpose in the Joint Combined Exchange Training Program to Anchor Special Operations in Great Power Competition” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020), 40, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/66678>.

⁵²³ Manley and Bailey, 59–61.

⁵²⁴ Manley and Bailey, 3.

In June 2020, 1SFG posted a short video to its Facebook page depicting a JCET of Green Berets training with Taiwanese forces.⁵²⁵ The video was removed shortly after, but over a year later following China’s record number of incursions into Taiwanese airspace, *The Wall Street Journal* released a report saying special forces and marines had been conducting persistent training rotations in Taiwan for at least a year.⁵²⁶ The type and focus of the training is unknown, but SF ODAs and ODBs could utilize the JCET platform to build and train Taiwanese armed forces’ capacity for resistance during an occupation. Specifically, they should focus on the last recommendation of the AWS: SOF is most effective as a force multiplier, training and advising other Taiwan forces for asymmetric defense (see Appendix B). JCETs should partner with each of Taiwan’s special service companies (SSC) from each of their services in a train-the-trainer mentorship program. The SSCs could then form the training cadre for a Taiwanese ADC. Armed with the institutional knowledge from the *ROC* and *CDH*, the SSCs could advise, assist, and accompany ADC forces in key urban centers and near critical lines of communication during occupation. At the ministerial and institutional level, SF should focus on DIB to advise and assist senior defense officials regarding the relevant legal and institutional elements from the *ROC* and *CDH* in order to ensure the transparent and legitimate establishment of an ADC.

2. Civil Affairs Forces

While the optimal role for SF is to help build a PN’s capacity for post-crisis resistance, the optimal role for CA forces is to help build a PN’s governance and resilience capacity by identifying and mitigating civil vulnerabilities. The role of CA is “to engage and leverage the *civil* component of the operating environment while enhancing, enabling, or providing *governance*. [emphasis added]”⁵²⁷ Due to the consistent emphasis on the population as the primary actor in the *ROC* and *CDH* as well as the legitimacy and

⁵²⁵ Joseph Trevithick, “Army Releases Ultra Rare Video Showing Green Berets Training In Taiwan,” *The Drive*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/34474/army-releases-ultra-rare-video-showing-green-berets-training-in-taiwan>.

⁵²⁶ Lubold, “U.S. Troops Have Been Deployed in Taiwan.”

⁵²⁷ Department of the Army, *Civil Affairs Operations*, FM 3-57 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2021), 1–1, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-57.pdf>.

transparency of government-led efforts, CA forces are the natural cornerstone for U.S. BPC efforts to build PN resilience and resistance from an early start. Due to their unique language, cultural, and engagement skills and attributes, CA forces are the “purpose built asset” and “commander’s tool of choice” to help build a PN’s capacity for resilience and resistance.⁵²⁸ CA forces such as civil military support elements (CMSE) and government function specialists conduct civil affairs operations (CAO) and support to civil administration (SCA) through their four core competencies: civil knowledge integration (CKI), civil network development and engagement (CDNE), transitional governance (TG), and civil-military integration (CMI).

a. Civil Military Support Element & Government Function Specialists

The primary SOF CA mechanism is the CMSE, a task-organized CA element of varying size and scope sourced principally from the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (CAB) (Special Operations)(Airborne) with the mission to “plan, facilitate, and execute Civil Affairs operations in support of civil-military engagement in a specified country, region, or theater.”⁵²⁹ CMSEs and SOF CA forces from the 95th CAB (SO)(A) are not the only “means” available. CA reservists can and should play a significant role in the operational approach for Taiwan and other PNs. CA reservists are unique from SOF CA in that many of them are designated as *functional* specialists in government and civil administration. Figure 18 depicts the five specialty areas in which many CA reservists specialize and often possess overlapping civil sector expertise. These specialists could provide purpose-built advisory support to PNs in their respective fields of expertise.

⁵²⁸ Kane Mansir and Ben Grumbach, “Civil Affairs in a Resistance Environment,” *Special Warfare*, June 2019, 22, https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW3202/32-2_APR_JUN_2019.pdf.

⁵²⁹ Department of the Army, *Civil Affairs Operations*, 5–10.

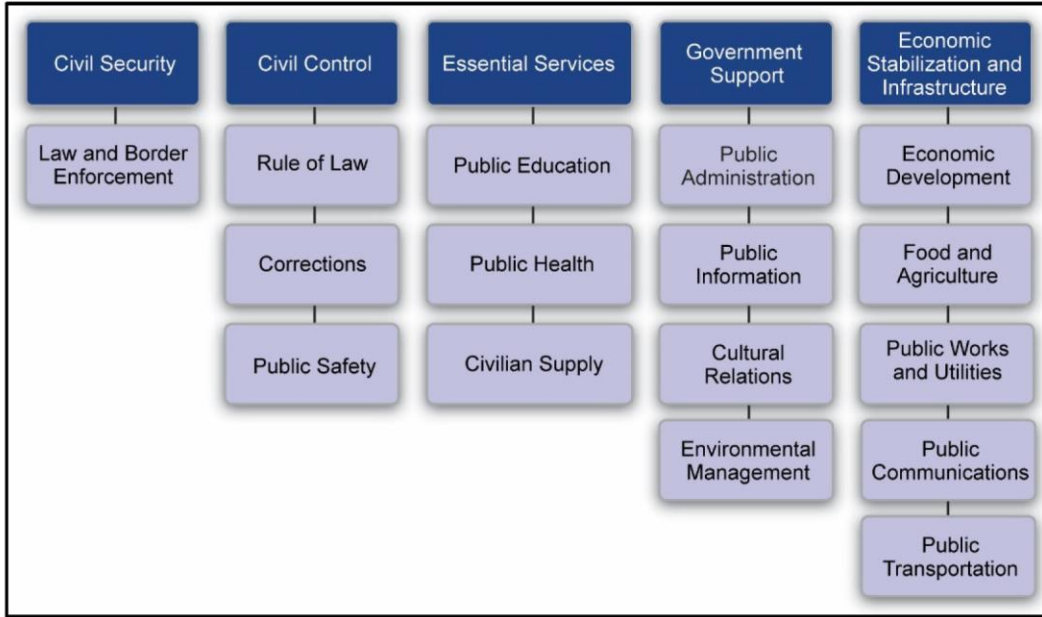


Figure 18. Civil Affairs Government Function Specialty Areas & Focus Areas.⁵³⁰

b. Civil Knowledge Integration

The first CA core competency is civil knowledge integration (CKI). CA forces could conduct CKI through civil reconnaissance (CR) and civil engagement (CE) missions in order to identify PN civil vulnerabilities and resilience gaps. CKI is “the process whereby civil information is collected, analyzed, and evaluated; processed into civil knowledge; and integrated into the planning processes of the supported element” or higher headquarters.⁵³¹ The *ROC* identifies the challenge for PN governments to conduct this process on their own: “Governments, responsible for fostering resilience, face a highly dynamic and complex contemporary operating environment. Self-organizing human networks engage in multifaceted, nonlinear behaviors.”⁵³² Because CA forces specialize in the human and civil domain, they are purpose-built to navigate this terrain in order to develop a framework for an ensuing plan to build resilience. The *ROC* recommends that

⁵³⁰ Source: Department of the Army, 2–5.

⁵³¹ Department of the Army, 2–16.

⁵³² Fiala, *ROC*, 23.

governments conduct detailed self-assessments of the structural elements of their operating environment to determine strengths and weakness or opportunities and vulnerabilities. It recommends beginning with familiar assessment tools such as DIMEFIL, PMESII-PT, ASCOPE, and SWEAT-MSO, all of which are the bread-and-butter of CA forces.⁵³³

For example, CA forces could conduct CR and CE missions to assess the SWEAT-MSO civil capabilities within a specific urban center to identify vulnerabilities that—if left unmitigated—could upend resistance efforts during conflict or which could be exploited by the enemy to coerce the populace into submission. The medical component is particularly amenable to CA forces. CA teams (CAT) typically comprise of four-person teams, one of which is a special operations combat medic (38BW1) or civil affairs trauma medical sergeant (38BW4). CATs with these built-in medical assets can conduct extensive assessments of the PN medical infrastructure in order to identify and collate the medical shortfalls and vulnerabilities discussed in Chapter V. CATs could then develop a medical campaign support plan for the PN and conduct medical civic action programs (MEDCAP) to begin building the PN’s requisite medical capacities for follow-on resistance activities.

c. Civil Network Development & Engagement

Secondly, CA forces can conduct CNDE through CR and CE missions in order to identify key personnel and key nodes within the civil network in order to *develop* them and *integrate* them into the supported element’s civil-military plan. CNDE is “ the activity by which the civil network capabilities and resources are engaged, evaluated, developed, and integrated into operations.”⁵³⁴ In concert with other U.S. advisors and personnel in-country, CA forces can avail of bridging and bonding social capital to create a “small-world” and “benefit-rich network” within the PN. A small-world network, for example, could lay the groundwork for the development of a resistance auxiliary force while a benefit rich network would deliver timely resources and information within that network. By

⁵³³ PMESII-PT: Political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, information, physical environment, and time. ASCOPE: areas, structures, capabilities, people, and events. SWEAT-MSO: Sewage, water, electricity, academics, trash, medical, security, and other. Fiala, 23.

⁵³⁴ Department of the Army, *Civil Affairs Operations*, 1–5.

investing in social capital with key nodes within the network, CA forces can serve as “brokers” between disparate parts of the network and “cutpoints” to other networks—to include connecting individuals with various “reach back” capabilities from the U.S. military or civil sector. CNDE facilitates the rapid understanding and dissemination of information and catalyzes the diffusion of messages, themes, and narratives which enhance resilience and civ-mil cooperation. The additional benefit of CA forces is their ability to operate in permissive as well as semi-permissive or denied environments. This facilitates unified action and the network outreach efforts of other interagency, intergovernmental, non-governmental, and PN organizations—some of which are often unable to access certain environments and therefore rely on CA.

d. Transitional Governance and Support to Civil Administration

Recently, the U.S. Army changed the military occupational specialty (MOS) designation for active duty CA officers from 38A to 38S: “Transitional Governance Expert.”⁵³⁵ The subtle change allows SOF CA forces to better focus and specialize in transitional governance (TG) and support to civil administration (SCA) activities (e.g., from pre-crisis preparation to occupation or the transition from occupation back to full sovereignty). TG is “the actions taken to assure appropriate control and continuity of government functions throughout the range of military operations” while SCA is “assistance given by CA forces to stabilize or enhance the operations of the governing body of a foreign country, by assisting an established or interim government.”⁵³⁶ During the resilience-building phase, CA *governance* experts (38S) and reservist *government* function specialists (38G) could support the establishment of a comprehensive defense plan by assisting the PN government in building the prerequisite legal frameworks, policies, and

⁵³⁵ According to FM 3-57, *governance* differs from *government*: “Governance is the state’s ability to serve the citizens through the rules, processes, and behavior by which interests are articulated, resources are managed, and power is exercised in a society. Governance speaks to the administration of control by authorities exercising the role of the government. Government functions, however, refers to the structure that is used to conduct governance... Expertise in government functions, therefore, is an expertise in those systems. Expertise in governance, however, is an understanding of how those systems are related and utilized to provide for the needs of a population.” Department of the Army, 2–4.

⁵³⁶ Department of the Army, 1–5,2-4.

resistance systems prior to their necessity. This involves not only the military, but also government and civil organizations at the national and local levels, which CA forces' CKI and CNDE operations would help inform and catalyze. Government agencies, private and commercial entities, voluntary organizations, and individual citizens must be included and committed to the national effort and must see the resistance capability as “a legitimate form of warfare, grounded in law, which is acceptable and suitable.”⁵³⁷

During the resistance phase, CA forces could provide TG and SCA to support a “shadow government” or “government in exile” and facilitate the continuity of governance. In 2017, the 95th CAB (SO)(A) and JHU developed a working definition of governance as “population control practices employed by power holders to gain and maintain authority and/or influence over a target populace and its resources within the human environment.”⁵³⁸ CA forces could also provide *countergovernance* support to degrade illegitimate governance structures and to support IW or UW operations with the PN. The 95th CAB (SO)(A) and JHU defined countergovernance as “activities in the human environment that intentionally undermine or compete with power holders' governance practices and their associated authority and influence.”⁵³⁹

e. Civil Military Integration: CMOC, CATF, or JCMOTF

Lastly, CMI is “the actions taken to establish, maintain, influence, or leverage relations between military forces and indigenous populations and institutions to synchronize, coordinate, and enable interorganizational cooperation and to achieve unified action.” During the transition to conflict, CA forces on the ground may have a more central role to play if additional U.S. or coalition forces join the fight. In his book, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, David Kilcullen points to four global “megatrends” that will drive the future character of war: population growth, urbanization, littoralization (the tendency of urban centers to cluster on coastlines), and connectedness.

⁵³⁷ Fiala, *ROC*, 16.

⁵³⁸ S. D. Agan-Newton and C. S. Houfek, *Governance: Defining Governance for the Modern Conflict Environment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2017), 2.

⁵³⁹ S. D. Agan-Newton, C. S. Houfek, and J. R. Macris, *Countergovernance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2018), 1.

All these trends can be seen in Taiwan. According to the CIA Factbook for Taiwan, nearly 80 percent of the population live in cities and its “distribution exhibits a peripheral coastal settlement pattern, with the largest populations on the north and west coasts.”⁵⁴⁰ With twelve cities that have populations over 100,000, nearly all of Taiwan lies in the littoral zone. Due to these trends, Kilcullen posits that CA forces may be the best-suited to be the joint command element:

In the future environment, given the need to keep footprints small, restart stalled urban systems, and deal with governance and capacity problem in a high-threat environment, Civil Affairs units may find themselves acting as the parent organization for task forces... an army Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne) might find itself forming the core of a joint interagency task force.⁵⁴¹

A CA element forward-deployed to Taiwan at the initiation of conflict may find itself laying the groundwork for a larger civil affairs task force (CATF), joint civil-military operations task force (JCMOTF), or even joint interagency task force (JIATF). For this reason, CMSE rotational deployments should consider partnering with Taiwan’s Military Police Command (MPC), which is responsible for the defense and civil support of all urban areas. The MPC also facilitates the activation of reserve forces in urban centers. Because the MPC is a separate military service than the Taiwan Army, they do not typically have a U.S. counterpart but would be a valuable partner force for SOF, especially CA forces.

f. Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Relief

One of the interesting findings from the NPS wargame with 1SFG was that CA forces and their actions did not elicit strong counter-actions from the PRC players. The PRC players were more accepting and/or indifferent of CA activities. For example, the PRC players prevented the movement of ODAs, tactical PSYOP teams (TPT), and marine special operations teams (MSOT) from entering Taiwan, but during the next turn took no

⁵⁴⁰ “Taiwan,” in *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, November 19, 2021), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/taiwan/>.

⁵⁴¹ Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains*, 286–87.

action to prevent a CAT from moving into Taiwan with no objection.⁵⁴² This may be because of a lack of understanding of the capabilities of CA forces or because of CA's *overt* and *humanitarian* nature. But the pertinent conclusion is that CA forces tend to draw less attention or concern from adversarial decision-makers, particularly when those forces are ostensibly contributing to HADR situations. Because of the penchant for frequent natural disasters in Taiwan, the persistent presence of CA forces—partnered with the appropriate Taiwanese military and civil emergency response partners—would pay immense dividends should a disaster occur and should China use it as a pretext for creeping or sudden attempts of annexation.

The fundamental value proposition of CA forces and CMSEs for building partner resilience and resistance is their *overt* and *accessible* nature, coupled with their wide-range of unique and scalable capabilities and skills with which to engage the civil component and bridge the gap between civil and military solutions.

3. Psychological Operations Forces

While the optimal utilization of SF pre-crisis is to help build a PN's capacity for post-crisis resistance and the optimal utilization of CA forces is to identify civil vulnerabilities and help build a PN's governance and resilience capacity pre-crisis, psychological operations (PSYOP) forces play an equal role pre- and post-crisis. In conjunction with other authorities to work by, with, and through host nation partners, a valuable PSYOP mechanism is military information support operations (MISO). In many cases, regional and tactical PSYOP teams (RPT/TPT) establish country-specific military information support teams (MIST), which partner with the U.S. Embassy's public affairs office, interagency organizations such as the State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC), and the PN's relevant communication organizations—both governmental and civil.

⁵⁴² John Waits et al., "Executive Summary: NPS-1SFG Wargame" (unpublished paper, March 18, 2021), 6.

a. Target Audience Analysis & Strategic Communication

Pre-occupation, a MIST could partner with Taiwan’s Political Warfare Department (PWD) and other communication authorities to help build the organization, communication strategy, and resources for an effective comprehensive defense plan. They could also assist with target audience analysis (TAA) and the development of communication products. Post-crisis, a MIST could help those organizations and personnel to conduct strategic communication—both internally and externally—and advise in the planning of resistance deception operations and targeted PSYOP. This could include—as the *ROC* advises—the development of narratives, themes, and messages regarding the sovereign rights of the nation, the legitimacy of government resistance efforts, and the ‘continuous communication of unity of purpose.’⁵⁴³ Throughout this process, a MIST could leverage the “reach-back” capability of U.S. organization such as 1st Special Forces Command’s (SFC) Information Warfare Center (IWC) in 8th PSYOP Group (POG), the improved product-development capable 3rd PSYOP Battalion in 8th POG, and the INDOPACOM-aligned 5th PSYOP Battalion in 4th POG. Where feasible, a MIST or SOF CFT should also incorporate qualified IO officers (FA 30) to help advise and synchronize, coordinate, and deconflict the employment of any information related capabilities (IRC) on the island.

b. Key Communicators

The greatest value of a MIST, however, is its capacity to identify and engage with “key communicators.” Current PSYOP doctrine defines a key communicator as “an individual to whom the target audience turns most often for an analysis or interpretation of information and events” and is “deemed credible by members of a specific [target audience].”⁵⁴⁴ Key communicators can either positively or negatively influence a nation’s resilience capacity, or they can remain neutral. By utilizing social network analysis (SNA) tools, social movement theory (SMT), social identity theory (SIT), and social exchange theory (SET), PSYOP advisors can maximize populace support for resilience and

⁵⁴³ Fiala, *ROC*, 44–45.

⁵⁴⁴ Department of the Army, *Psychological Operations Process Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, FM 3-05.301 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2007), G-7.

resistance by correctly identifying, engaging, and partnering with key influencers to shape the operational environment.⁵⁴⁵ In fact, PSYOP advisors are the best positioned and trained personnel to help catalyze a PN's defense transformation and the diffusion of innovation throughout the network. Because most new ideas and information spread like a "complex contagion," meaning one "exposure" does not always guarantee someone will accept the new ideas, SOF advisors can leverage key communicators to help overcome different people's contagion "thresholds," meaning one person may require only a few instances of exposure while someone else may require a great deal more. Individuals tend to look to their friend network or trusted personalities to interpret and react to new information, and because the PN populace will be the one preparing to resist against an enemy occupation, it is especially important for key communicators from the PN populace to message resilience and resistance, rather than outside or U.S. voices. This invaluable and systemic relationship of key communicators between the populace and government must establish well in advance of any potential crisis so that—if crisis erupts—the populace have readily available and trusted sources to turn to. Secondly, these sources and channels must be exercised regularly so that they are robust and resilient enough to continue operating and expand to fill the role of mainstream sources that will likely collapse during conflict.

4. Cross Functional Teams

1st Special Forces Command's (1SFC) *Vision for 2021 and Beyond* lays out the framework for "cross functional teams" (CFT) comprised from each of the SOF branches: SF, CA, and PSYOP—with multi-domain enablers such as cyber or intelligence. The most significant outcome from the NPS wargame with 1SFG was the critical need for a CFT approach in Taiwan and elsewhere in INDOPACOM:

The Joint SOF Commander's actions were most effective when different SOF capabilities (SF, PSYOP, CA) were used synergistically and in conjunction with one another in a particular country. If one action was

⁵⁴⁵ William R. Orkins and Kiernan, Carla A., "COREnet: The Fusion of Social Network Analysis and Target Audience Analysis" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/44638>; Andrew A. Sadoun, "PSYOP and Social Networks" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/61259>.

successful, supporting actions by adjacent forces amplified the effect of that action (e.g., PSYOP messaging amplifying the effects of a positive Civic Action).⁵⁴⁶

This study recommends the creation and persistent engagement of a CFT model for Taiwan in order to fully develop and implement a BPC strategy of unconventional deterrence in Taiwan by building its capacity for resilience, resistance, and comprehensive defense—a Taiwan Comprehensive Defense or Asymmetric Defense CFT (TCD or TAD CFT).

Each SOF “tribe” could provide specialized capabilities to generate *convergence* windows through which to catalyze comprehensive or asymmetric defense transformation in Taiwan. Prior to conflict, SF could focus on building and preparing the resistance organization in conjunction with Taiwan SOF—to include the establishment of a professional ADC and auxiliary network. CA forces could focus on CKI to identify civil vulnerabilities and CDNE to develop resilient and legitimate local governance structures, to include local medical and disaster response capabilities. PSYOP could focus on developing strategic messaging campaigns and deception capabilities to message or mislead Chinese and international audiences regarding Taiwan’s resilience and resistance capacities. Outside of ARSOF, Marine Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) and Naval Special Warfare (NSW) elements could focus on developing maritime sabotage and interdiction capabilities, and Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) could focus on ensuring joint operational access and non-standard resupply capabilities. In their NPS thesis on the role of NSW in strategic sabotage and maritime GPC, Berry Brown and Michael Walls found that “strategic sabotage capabilities need to be developed well in advance of their potential employment timeline and the sabotage operations need to be initiated in anticipation of competitor malign activities they are trying to deter, disrupt or prevent.”⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ John Waits et al., “Executive Summary: NPS-1SFG Wargame” (Unpublished paper, March 18, 2021), 5.

⁵⁴⁷ Berry T. Brown and Michael P. Walls, “Set the Sea on Fire: Strategic Sabotage and Naval Special Warfare in Maritime Great Power Competition” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2021), xvi.

After crisis, SF would transition to UW operations, CA would focus on CMI, TG, and SCA to support a shadow resistance government or government in exile. PSYOP would focus on enhancing Taiwan's strategic communication and leveraging key communicators for the populace. The core leadership of the CFT could form around a specialized PACOM Augmentation Team (PAT) in conjunction with the SOFLE and with support from Joint Task Force INDOPACOM (JTF-IP) and SOCPAC.

D. ARMY SFAB, SATMO, AND NG SPP

1. Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFAB)

The Army's new SFABs could be an effective means to bolster less powerful allies and partners who face asymmetric disadvantages against U.S. near-peer adversaries, such as Taiwan with China. According to Army Training Publication (ATP) 3-96.1 *Security Force Assistance Brigade*, "The core mission of the SFAB is to assess, train, advise, and assist FSF [Foreign Security Forces] in coordination with joint, interagency, and multinational forces to improve partner capability and capacity and to facilitate achievement of U.S. strategic objectives."⁵⁴⁸ One way to employ an SFAB to achieve U.S. strategic objectives, including deterrence, would be to integrate the SFAB with integrated campaigning, as outlined in the Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC). "The foundational idea of the JCIC is to enable an expanded view of the operating environment by proposing the notion of a competition continuum. This competition continuum offers an alternative to the obsolete peace/war binary with a new model of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict."⁵⁴⁹

Employing the SFAB as a means of integrated campaigning would be in line with the current Army Vision. It states, "[the] Army of 2028 will be ready to deploy, fight and win decisively against any adversary, anytime and anywhere, in a joint, combined, multi-domain, high-intensity conflict, while simultaneously deterring others and maintaining its

⁵⁴⁸ Department of the Army, *Security Force Assistance Brigade*, ATP 3-96.1 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2020), vi.

⁵⁴⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning" (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, March 16, 2018), vi.

ability to conduct irregular warfare.”⁵⁵⁰ In keeping with this vision, the Army Capability Manager for the SFAB (ACM-SFAB) noted in early 2020:

All or part of an SFAB can be employed across the conflict continuum to compete below the threshold of war. We believe that future SFAB’s most significant contribution will come from coordinated episodic advising over time. An SFAB provides a low cost, small footprint professional advisor capability to fill the hundreds of SFA requirements currently filled by volunteers, red cycle taskings, and small unit deployments. An SFAB is capable of almost constant deployment of small elements over days, weeks, months, years, and decades. This would not only free up combat power, but also increase the quality of SFA across the globe. Given episodic employment over time, when the need arises, an SFAB can employ a larger entity from months to years as an effective deterrent to foreign aggression.

An SFAB deters two ways. First, the efforts to build partner capacity provide a stronger foreign security force, the best deterrent to external aggression. Second, the presence of U.S. Troops and their associated access to enablers discourages aggression fearing the result of U.S. intervention is our troops are engaged. As the U.S. moves closer to conflict, the full deployment of an SFAB signals significant support to an adversary as well as sets conditions for the deployment of a larger commitment.⁵⁵¹

This concept provides a framework in which the SFAB could partner with Taiwan in order to deter China. Based on its five years of engagement with the TA, AWG proposed in 2019 that the deployment of an SFAB (in part or in full) to Taiwan, as part of a strategy of persistent engagement, would be consistent with doctrine and could build partner capacity within the TA and serve as part of a deterrence strategy to counter the PRC’s goal of regional hegemony.

In part due to recent FMS purchases, the TA has begun to transition its brigades to combined arms formations. In 2020, AIT and USARPAC discussed how the U.S. Army’s Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) could assist the TA in this transition. Specifically, TRADOC would help implement DOTMLPF-P changes across the operational and institutional formations of the TA. However, this concept lacked a unit of

⁵⁵⁰ Secretary Mark T. Esper and General Mark A. Milley, “The Army Vision” (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2018), 1.

⁵⁵¹ Tom Golder, “Security Force Assistance Brigade” (Army IW COI/COP Working Group, U.S. Army Mission Command Center of Excellence, Fort Leavenworth, KS, February 19, 2020), 9.

action to partner with the TA brigades and divisions scheduled to transform. The SFAB could fill this critical gap by advising the TA at the tactical and operational levels (bottom-up) and providing feedback to USARPAC and AIT, which simultaneously advising at the ministerial and army level (top-down). In addition, TRADOC personnel or experts from the Centers of Excellence (CoEs) could partner with the appropriate TA training institutions. Other advisory teams currently in Taiwan provide technical experts the SFAB and TA could leverage in this effort. Not only could an SFAB uniquely address challenges such as these, an SFAB could offer respective GCCs with the requisite capability to conduct a gap analysis or training needs assessment (TNA) to identify equivalent gaps and outcomes.

An SFAB would be a “low-cost, small-footprint” solution well-suited to assist the TA with these and other tasks related to making Taiwan a harder target for the PRC. An SFAB could form the core of a persistent engagement strategy and work in conjunction with other SFA efforts, such as JCETs and the NG’s State Partnership Program (SPP). Moreover, the SFAB could, “organize as a brigade combat team (BCT) with augmentation,” which would provide the U.S. additional forces in the region for possible large-scale operations, or at minimum assist with Joint Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration (JRSOI) of other coalition forces.⁵⁵²

The Army announced in early 2020 that 5th SFAB would be aligned with INDOPACOM. 5th SFAB has already begun to conduct multiple missions and exercises throughout 36 countries. As such, 5th SFAB likely will not deploy as a brigade to any single nation. Instead, it will send company advisor teams to advise at the tactical level and battalion advisor teams for operational and strategic-level engagements. This task force (TF) model is the most feasible and sustainable. Furthermore, SFABs should collaborate with Security Assistance Training Management Organization (SATMO) and their regional Technical Assistance Fielding Teams (TAFT) in order to learn from their respective deployment models. The United States has two TAFTs in Taiwan—tied to FMS cases.

⁵⁵² Department of the Army, *Security Force Assistance Brigade*, 1–11.

As U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) and Security Forces Assistance Command (SFAC) continue to refine the deployment model for SFABs regionally to shape and deter near-peer competitors, there are multiple gaps and challenges that will need a community of effort to address and resolve:

- *Doctrine:* The Army updated ATP 3-96.1 and the SFAB Mission Essential Task List (METL) in 2020. Currently the doctrinal SFAB activities are organize, train, equip, rebuild and build, advise and assist, and assess (OTERA-A). However, the OTERA-A model is a legacy of SFA in a COIN environment and is not entirely applicable to near-peer competition and conflict.
- *Organization:* SFABs require augmentation from external echelons above brigade (EAB) capabilities to conduct SFA in both contested as well as permissive environments.
- *Training:* Deployment to permissive/semi-permissive environments and advising near-peer FSFs require different individual and collective training and validation than the current model for SFABs deploying to the Middle East.
- *Materiel:* Each regionally aligned SFAB may require a separate modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE). Different theaters will require specialized equipment, vehicles, uniforms, medical, and sustainment capabilities. 3D Printers may be an innovative way to sustain small advising teams in remote locations.
- *Leadership and Education:* Exercising Mission Command of multiple advisor teams in multiple countries will be significant challenge for SFAB leadership. Considerations include personnel recovery, medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), and long-range communications. Cultural and emotional intelligence will also be a significant consideration during pre-deployment training.

- *Personnel:* SFABs will require a robust liaison network capability to facilitate mission command. In addition, SFABs are working to incorporate Cross-Domain Integration Teams (C-DIT) comprised of electronic warfare, space, and cyber personnel to facilitate FSF connectivity and force protection.
- *Facilities:* SFABs will need both home-station as well as forward-deployed facilities to house, train, protect, sustain, and conduct mission command for operations.
- *Policy:* As SFABs deploy to multiple countries in theater, brigade personnel will likely require numerous authorities (Title 10, Title 22, National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 38, etc.) Coordination with U.S. Embassies and Department of State officials will be critical to work through various treaties, Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA), and visa policies. Official passports and pre-deployment medical readiness will be high priorities as well.⁵⁵³

2. National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP)

The Army National Guard’s State Partnership Program is a robust and often overlooked resource to execute BPC programs and objectives. The SPP is a program under Title 10 § 341 which authorizes NG units and personnel to interact and conduct exchanges with PN civil, military, and emergency or disaster response personnel.⁵⁵⁴ The program pairs the NG of each U.S. state with respective PNs. To-date there are 85 partnerships with 92 PNs (some partnerships consist of multiple PNs).⁵⁵⁵ With some countries, the SPP is the primary means of engagement and some NG personnel have maintained enduring relationships with their counterparts for more than 25 years—both in the military and

⁵⁵³ Arthur L. Slusher and John B. Waits, “The SFAB and Near-Peer Competitors.”

⁵⁵⁴ Defense Security Cooperation University, *Security Cooperation Management*, 1–14.

⁵⁵⁵ “State Partnership Program,” National Guard, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/leadership/joint-staff/j-5/international-affairs-division/state-partnership-program/>.

civilian realms. With some smaller PNs, their NG counterpart units better reflect the size, scope, and capabilities of their military or emergency response services, making the SPP a more scalable and accessible BPC tool for some PNs. At times, PN forces may request exchanges and training with elite U.S. forces such as the 75th Ranger Regiment or Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) when in reality the mission, focus, and skills of the PN make the NG a much more tailored and operational partner.

The unique characteristics of the SPP make it an ideal and long-term “means” to build a PN’s capacity for resilience and resistance. Furthermore, the guardsmen and women who participate in the SPP also bring their unique civil and private sector skills and expertise to the table. Many are engineers, bankers, medical professionals, or IT technicians, for example, and could provide specialized advisory support in their respective career fields. All of them also have exceptional emergency and disaster response experience, making them ideal for partnering with a PN’s emergency response agency and/or Home Guard as envisioned in the *CDH*. A strategy for building a PN’s comprehensive defense and capacity for unconventional deterrence must incorporate and leverage the respective SPP for long-term access and relationship. Because the United States does not diplomatically recognize Taiwan as a country, it does not have a state NG partner, although Hawaii NG personnel have supported USARPAC “Lu Wei” engagements in the past. However, the Pentagon and Congress should amend Title 10 § 341 to allow for the addition of Taiwan or they should pursue new legislation such as the recent Taiwan Partnership Act introduced in July 2021 intended to add Taiwan as a SPP partner.⁵⁵⁶

E. JOINT, INSTITUTIONAL, AND MULTINATIONAL

1. DSCA, the JCISFA, and MILDEPs

The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) is the DOD’s lead organization that directs “the broader U.S. security cooperation enterprise in its efforts to train, educate, advise, and equip foreign partners.” The DSCA director reports to the USD for Policy

⁵⁵⁶ Stacy Hsu and Teng Pei-ju, “Proposed National Guard-Taiwan Partnership Will Boost Island’s Defense: U.S. Senator,” Focus Taiwan, August 11, 2021, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202108110013>.

(USD(P)). As the lead institution for security cooperation, DSCA would be responsible for the “force development” aspects of the proposed strategy, as conceived by Art Lykke. The strategic planning team for developing and assessing the proposed strategies and their implementation globally would primarily come from the DSCA’s Directorate of Strategy Plans and Policy (SPP), which includes the Strategic Planning and Integration (SPI) division and Planning and Program Design (PPD) division. Together, these divisions and their subordinate teams develop strategic frameworks that align security cooperation with national and PN security challenges, so they are specifically designed to fulfill the function needed to develop innovative strategies. These teams also have a network of regional strategists and liaisons embedded at the various GCCs. Specifically, the core of the planning team would consist of 5–10 Strategic Planners from the SPI division, which is responsible for:

Reviewing and participating in the development of top-level strategic guidance such as the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF) – including Theater Security Cooperation Plans and Country Security Cooperation Plans – and deriving implementation strategies to ensure that agency and SC community-wide efforts and resources align with strategic goals and end-states.”⁵⁵⁷

The remainder of the planning team would derive from the PPD division as well as representatives from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) J7 Directorate for Joint Force Development, specifically the Joint Center for International SFA (JCISFA), which is responsible for the “development, dissemination, and institutionalization of SFA doctrine, standards, tactics, techniques and procedures.”⁵⁵⁸

Additional planning stakeholders would come from the separate military departments (MILDEP) responsible for their respective service’s efforts:

- USA: Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Defense Exports and Cooperation (DASA DE&C)
- USAF: Secretary of the Air Force International Affairs (SAF/IA)
- USN: Navy International Programs Office (NIPO)

⁵⁵⁷ “Directorate of Strategy,” accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.dscamilitary.com/directorate-strategy-str>.

⁵⁵⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance,” Joint Chiefs of Staff, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.jcs.mil/Directorates/J7-Joint-Force-Development/JCISFA/>.

- USMC: Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG)⁵⁵⁹

In support of the MILDEP planning representatives would also be the Joint Staff J5 Strategic Planning and Policy divisions from each of the GCCs and SOCOM, as well as interagency representatives from the DOS Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM), the department's principal link to the DOD in the areas of security assistance, defense strategy, and defense trade. Relevant stakeholders from the U.S. Army may include the following U.S. Army institutions:

- Irregular Warfare Force Modernization Proponent (IWFMP) from the TRADOC Mission Command Center of Excellence (MCCoE)
- Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC) under Forces Command (FORSCOM)
- U.S. Army Security Assistance Command (USASAC)
- U.S. Army Futures Command (AFC)

For the executive board and adjudicating authorities, there is already an existing structure to fulfill this function: the Irregular Warfare (IW) and SFA Executive Steering Committee (IW-SFA ESC), chaired by the ASD(SO/LIC) in conjunction with the J7 JCISFA director (O-6). However, in order to implement any corresponding changes to security cooperation policy and strategy, the ASD for Security Cooperation and DSCA director would need to be involved in the final adjudication process. Since the ASD(SO/LIC), ASD(SC), and DSCA director all fall under the OUSD(P), the final adjudicating authority would likely need to be the USD(P).

2. Academia

AWG's asymmetric operations working group (AOWG) in conjunction with JHU/APL demonstrated the utility of incorporating academic institutions in the development and/or implementation of a BPC strategy. Academic institutions such as JHU or NPS can provide "reach-back" capabilities to research specific problems within the strategic approach. They also can engage directly with PN military, governmental, and/or civil organizations in a capacity that U.S. military cannot, making them ideal partners to incorporate into a PN engagement plan. Academic institutions can conduct subject matter

⁵⁵⁹ The MCSCG recently deactivated in September 2021.

expert exchanges (SMEE) or more informal workshops and seminars to inform and instruct PN audiences. Academia can also employ the concept of “maker-spaces” that “emphasize knowledge sharing, experimentation, and the use of technological tools that have low barriers to entry—this effort would emphasize home-grown solutions that are technologically and financially ‘right sized’ for the host nation and the end-users.”⁵⁶⁰

3. Multinational

Lastly, one of the most effective “means” to catalyze change and implement a new strategy is to involve multinational partners. By involving other PN actors from the region, the PN can learn and observe different approaches and capabilities that may be more right-sized to their needs. Seeing operational success in a fellow PN may also inspire innovation and help to overcome policy resistance in ways that U.S. advisors may struggle to achieve. While this is advantageous approach for many PNs, involving multinational partners in advisory support to Taiwan is the least likely of options due to its diplomatic singularity and reticence of many nations to officially engage with Taiwan. But this dynamic may change in the future. The most plausible third party military support would be from Japan, or perhaps Singapore or Australia. Taiwan has also conducted exchanges in the past with Japan, Singapore, Switzerland, Israel, and the UK.⁵⁶¹

F. SUMMARY

In addition to and in support of recent FMS and congressional acts, the Joint Force and SOF should develop a robust BPC framework for an asymmetric, persistent presence in Taiwan, one in which Taiwan could credibly compete with and deter its much larger adversary. No single “tool” or “means” can accomplish the objectives of an unconventional deterrence strategy on its own. Rather a “menu” of options integrated at the strategic through tactical and institutional levels is necessary. Furthermore, despite the

⁵⁶⁰ Leo Blanken, Romulo G. Dimayuga II, and Kristen Tsolis, “Making Friends in Maker-Spaces: From Grassroots Innovation to Great-Power Competition,” War on the Rocks, January 12, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/making-friends-in-maker-spaces-from-grassroots-innovation-to-great-power-competition/>.

⁵⁶¹ Tzu-ti, “Taiwan Looks to Israel.”

“unconventional” aspect of the strategy, it does not entail a SOF-only approach. Coordinated persistent and episodic exchanges of professional SOF and SFA advisors would be “low-cost, small-footprint” solutions well-suited to assist Taiwan with tasks related to making Taiwan a harder target for the PLA. A SOF CFT comprised of SF, CA, PSYOP, NSW, MARSOC, AFSOC, and enablers could form the core of a persistent engagement strategy, but it should integrate other tactical “means” such as SFAB advisor teams, SATMO TAFTs, NG SPP, and cadre from joint, interagency, multinational, and academia organizations. FAOs in-country and desk offices at the GCC and SCC will provide the long-term strategic continuity and linkage between the PN at the ministerial level, the ambassador and USCT, and the combatant commander.

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VII. CONCLUSION

The systems-based analysis presented in this study reveals several important risks, implications, and recommendations for the Joint Force and SOF as well as allies and partners to include Taiwan at the policy, strategic, operational, and institutional levels.

A. STRATEGIC RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

Art Lykke’s “strategy stool” framework seeks to balance the “ends, ways, and means” of a strategy in order to lower “risks.” While the goal is to completely balance a strategy, there will always be inherent endogenous and exogenous risks. With any strategy of deterrence or competition below the threshold of armed conflict, there is risk of miscalculation and unintended escalation. A 2019 RAND report on response options to “gray zone” activities stated that “any strategy for responding to gray zone aggression must balance excessive risks of escalation—including military, diplomatic, and economic aspects—with the reality that, to be effective, countering gray zone aggression demands some degree of risk tolerance.”⁵⁶²

1. Miscommunication and Miscalculation

The most obvious and likely risk to any strategy of deterrence is the potential for miscalculation and missed reception or interpretation of communication signals. There currently is no channel for communication between Taiwan and the mainland. Even if China and Taiwan were to quickly establish such a channel in the event of a crisis, it would be unrehearsed and both parties would struggle to establish common understandings and protocols. Furthermore, recent news releases such as the Pentagon’s wargame which “failed miserably” may cause China to overestimate and miscalculate their current capability vis-à-vis the United States. Public release of information of such events must be carefully controlled to ensure adversaries do not misrepresent the strategic environment one way or the other.

⁵⁶² Lyle J. Morris et al., *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone*, RR2942 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2019), 132, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2900/RR2942/RAND_RR2942.pdf.

As the window of opportunity to annex Taiwan wanes and China faces increasing international and domestic pressure, the PRC may respond with force to take Taiwan. Furthermore, the CCP may come to the conclusion that the reunification of Taiwan is so important for their regime stability that they will threaten the use of nuclear weapons to achieve it. Growing nationalism may play a role as well. As Chinese nationalism grows, particularly in the wake of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, the CCP may face increasing pressure to assert greater assertiveness on the world stage. “The predominant feature of Chinese conduct today is not grand strategy but a belligerent, defensive nationalism that lashes out without heed of consequences.”⁵⁶³ Furthermore, a strategy which aims to increase Taiwan’s resilience must be careful not to instigate premature reaction from China. One of the components for resilience outlined in the *ROC* is to increase the nation’s national cohesiveness or national identity. This includes “psychological preparations” such as “patriotic education” to “help children build immunity to an adversary’s propaganda.”⁵⁶⁴ If Taiwan increases its “national cohesiveness” and “national identity” to the point that it begins to advocate for full independence, China may intervene militarily before Taiwan has adequately prepared its resistance capabilities. This is a dynamic which all U.S. advisors must take into consideration during every engagement with Taiwanese counterparts and which may engender immediate policy resistance.

2. Policy Resistance and Bounded Rationality

One of the greatest endogenous risks to the proposal of any new strategy or concept is the powerful cognitive tendency toward policy resistance and bounded rationality, wherein actors within the system (both U.S. and PN) fail to implement new policies or adopt innovation due to limited bounds of information, a flawed mental model, or simply too many cognitive biases. This demonstrates the importance of employing design thinking

⁵⁶³ Sulmaan Wasif Khan, “Wolf Warriors Killed China’s Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/28/china-grand-strategy-wolf-warrior-nationalism/>.

⁵⁶⁴ Fiala, *ROC*.

and a systems approach to understand the problem. As system dynamics expert John Sterman asserts,

To avoid policy resistance and find high leverage policies requires us to expand the boundaries of our mental models so that we become aware of and understand the implications of the feedbacks created by the decisions we make. That is, we must learn about the structure and dynamics of the increasingly complex systems in which we are embedded.”⁵⁶⁵

3. Change in U.S., China, or Taiwan Official Policy

Following the 149 PLAAF fighter and bomber incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ in October 2021, CNN recorded a senior Senate Democratic aide’s official comments, “the United States must be crystal clear in our intent -- with both our words and our actions. In our current context, ambiguity has invited miscalculation and risk, and *an effective deterrence posture can only come from clarity.* [emphasis added]”⁵⁶⁶ But former deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg, who was sent to Taiwan in April 2020 as part of the unofficial delegation to mark the 42nd anniversary of the TRA, stated that ending “strategic ambiguity” would be dangerous because then “all bets would be off.” “There are ways to enhance deterrence without sticking our finger in Beijing’s eye.”⁵⁶⁷ Beijing may interpret Washington’s actions as encroachment on China’s “domestic” concerns—a form of “salami-slicing”—but Washington should be cautious not to cut too large a slice in an effort to signal greater “clarity.” “But everyone is afraid,” asserts Steinberg, “that if any side shows weakness or a lack of resolve, then the other side will misinterpret it... It’s a security spiral, and there is no stability in a situation like this.”⁵⁶⁸

It is important to determine thresholds and red-lines internally, but it is not wise to publicize these thresholds or communicate them to the adversary. Furthermore, such a shift in policy could potentially *instigate* war with China rather than *deter* it, as Beijing may

⁵⁶⁵ John Sterman, *Business Dynamics: Systems Thinking and Modeling for a Complex World* (Boston: Irwin/McGraw-Hill, 2000), 12.

⁵⁶⁶ Natasha Bertrand and Oren Liebermann, “China, Taiwan Tensions Spark Debate Inside Biden Admin as Democrats Push for More Forceful Response,” CNN, last modified October 16, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/15/politics/china-taiwan-tension-debate-biden-response/index.html>.

⁵⁶⁷ Bertrand and Liebermann.

⁵⁶⁸ Bertrand and Liebermann.

find itself backed up against the red line it has drawn over Taiwan and reiterated for over 70 years. But even if a shift toward “strategic clarity” and overt military support to Taiwan were to succeed in deterring China, it would fail to alter China’s grand strategy. In fact, it would likely reinforce and intensify Beijing’s rhetoric that the United States is interfering in its “domestic” affairs and trying to prevent China from achieving “national rejuvenation.” “It would likely cement Beijing’s pessimism about trends toward Taiwan independence and the erosion of Washington’s one China commitment.”⁵⁶⁹ Thomas Christensen notes that Beijing’s pessimism regarding devolving conditions which constrain Chinese action has been a major reason for the use of military force in the past.⁵⁷⁰ Ketian Zhang posits that China is a “cautious bully” but tends to engage in coercion more infrequently and rely on military means more when it perceives itself as getting weaker.⁵⁷¹

A change to “strategic clarity” would also make it difficult to maintain a policy of “dual deterrence” between two Chinese nations that each possess “dual identities.” While China maintains a “strange combination of self-superiority and self-inferiority,” Taiwan maintains its identity as the legitimate government of China even as polls increasingly trend towards a Taiwanese rather than Chinese national identity.⁵⁷² It would be difficult for the United States to maintain “strategic clarity” without aligning with one of these ascribed identities to the exclusion of the other. In other words, “strategic clarity” may tip Taiwan to declare independence while striking a significant blow against China’s self-perceived superiority. “Strategic clarity” would also make it difficult to maintain “triple deterrence” with third-party nations, who may feel pressure to also adopt “strategic clarity” and either

⁵⁶⁹ Jie Dalei, “How China Sees the U.S. Policy of ‘Strategic Ambiguity’ in the Taiwan Strait,” *Washington Post*, October 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/10/16/how-china-sees-us-policy-strategic-ambiguity-taiwan-strait/>.

⁵⁷⁰ 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), 50–85.

⁵⁷¹ Ketian Zhang, “Cautious Bully: Reputation, Resolve, and Beijing’s Use of Coercion in the South China Sea,” *International Security* 44, no. 1 (Summer 2019): 158–59, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00354.

⁵⁷² Men, “China’s Peaceful Rise?,” 17.

balance with the United States and Taiwan against China or bandwagon with China to avoid the costs of Beijing's reaction to the change in official policies.

4. Natural Disaster Scenario

Of all the crisis scenarios put forward in this study, the most challenging would be a disaster response scenario. If a large-scale natural or man-made disaster were to occur in Taiwan, such as an earthquake, typhoon, or nuclear powerplant failure, China would be able to exploit the situation in a myriad of ways to impose creeping or sudden annexation measures. Both the NPS-1SFG and NPS-MIT wargames conducted in 2021 demonstrated how China could quickly take control of all international aid flowing into its "province" and use Taiwan's diplomatic status as a means to legally and legitimately force countries to coordinate through Beijing rather than Taipei. China could take advantage of Taiwan's diminished military posture and response capacity to effectively control Taiwan's air and sea space. If Taiwan were to intervene militarily, China could escalate the conflict while painting Taiwan as the perceived aggressor.

The saliency of a natural disaster scenario, however, only further accentuates the need for a corresponding unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan centered around the capacity for resilience and resistance. The more robust and resilient Taiwan's military and civil response capabilities are, the more Taiwan will be able to signal to China that it can absorb costs and that any attempt to control Taiwan militarily or politically will be futile—whether in war or disaster.

5. American Grand Strategy

If America's current grand strategy has a "negative aim" to prevent China from achieving dominance in regional or global strategic competition, then the loss of Taiwan would be significantly detrimental to the United States' ability to achieve this grand strategy. PRC control of Taiwan would place the United States and allies in the region at a significant disadvantage to exert coercive pressure or influence on China. Therefore, in addition to the deterrence measures outlined in this study and elsewhere, the United States must also begin contingency preparations for a potential future of higher costs (operationally, diplomatically etc.) if deterrence should fail. If the United States were to

adopt a counterstrategy which targets the vulnerabilities and sensibilities surrounding Taiwan and which sabotages the CCP’s grand strategy by preventing it from achieving its most vulnerable objective, then the need for a unified grand strategy that has a “positive aim” would be less salient or necessary for the U.S. in GPC with China.

Rather than a grand strategy “lodestar” for the United States, America needs a national strategic *narrative* to help frame existing U.S. domestic and foreign policy and facilitate dialogue regarding potential derivative grand strategic aims. This was the premise of Navy Captain (CAPT) Wayne Porter (now professor at NPS) in 2011 in his influential article “A National Strategic Narrative.”⁵⁷³ President Biden verged upon this notion in the 2021 *INSSG* when he stated, “I believe we are in the midst of an historic and fundamental debate about the future direction of our world,” underscoring throughout the document the importance of democracy as “the single best way to realize the promise of our future.”⁵⁷⁴

B. POLICY AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

There are numerous policy and recommendations resulting from this study—apart from those already outlined in previous chapters. The target audience for these recommendations is primarily the OUSD for Policy, specifically the

- ASD for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities (SPC)
- DASD for Plans and Posture (PP)
- DASD for Strategy and Force Development (SFD)
- DASD for Security Cooperation (SC)
- ASD for International Security Affairs IISA)
- ASD for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs IPSA)
- ASD for Special Operations & Low Intensity Conflict ASD(SO/LIC)
- Defense Security Cooperation Agency
- Defense Policy Board

⁵⁷³ Mr. Y, *A National Strategic Narrative* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/event/ANationalStrategicNarrative.pdf>; “Porter and Mykleby: A Grand Strategy for the Nation,” November 16, 2011, Poptech, video, 20.51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=q5aBOjhoiCw>.

⁵⁷⁴ Biden Jr., *INSSG*, 3.

Additionally, the recommendations are for strategic planners and commanders at the GCC and FCC combatant commands (e.g., INDOPACOM and SOCOM)—including the respective SCC and TSOC (e.g., USARPAC and SOCPAC). The primary goal is to inform Globally Integrated Campaigning (GIC) within the Joint Strategic Planning System (JSPS) and provide recommendations for joint capability development, joint force development, and the Joint Strategic Campaign Plan (JSCP).

1. Maintain Strategic Ambiguity

The extent of success in which the Army has achieved BPC is inversely proportional to the constraints imposed and often times self-imposed. These constraints are derived from operational, organizational, legal, and more recently fiscal limitations or restraints. Taiwan encompasses all the constraints identified above with special emphasis on operational and legal restraints. The complexity of dealing with the environment not only involves cultural differences but the legal ambiguity of the U.S.’s relationship with the island of Taiwan.

One of the most significant value propositions for a strategy of unconventional deterrence focused on BPC is that it requires little to no change to current U.S. policies and authorities. The recommendations remain within existing legal bounds. No congressional or presidential approval is necessary, as the operational approach already fits within existing legal and operational constraints for Taiwan under the TRA and other legislation. The DOD and INDOPACOM may need to review and adjust specific permissions and conduct interagency coordination—specifically with the DOS and AIT—but otherwise they can begin implementing elements of the strategy immediately. The main external factor is the colinear variable with Taiwan mentioned in the limitations section of the Introduction. Bilateral coordination and consensus with the Taiwan government and MND is critical to success.

Therefore, it is essential that the United States maintain its current legal and policy position of “strategic ambiguity” with Taiwan. With any policy or strategy of sufficient complexity and uncertainty, there will always be the temptation to implement some measure that will provide simplicity and clarity—something which will consolidate the

complexity and package it into bite-size segments for clear understanding and action. The argument for “strategic clarity” with Taiwan follows this brand of logic: threats of punishment must be credible and without “clarity,” Beijing will not perceive U.S. deterrence as credible. “Strategic ambiguity” supposedly reduces the potential deterrent value. But as the famous American journalist H. L. Mencken was known to say, “For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.” With an extended “deterrence by denial” strategy, “strategic ambiguity” would actually *enhance* deterrent signaling because the goal of a denial strategy is to *increase* the ambiguity and uncertainty for an aggressor that it will be able to achieve its objectives. It would also amplify both misleading (“M-type”) and ambiguity-increasing (“A-type”) deception activities. Washington does need to provide Beijing with greater “clarity” regarding the potential conditions and costs of war over Taiwan. Instead, it needs to continue inducing greater ambiguity and uncertainty into Beijing’s decision cycle. A policy of “strategic ambiguity” provides flexible options to help work around strategic problems such as these.

2. Export the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA)

Throughout the NPS-MIT geostrategic wargame, the Taiwan players continually tried to leverage multilateralism in order to hedge against the China team’s unilateral attempts to subsume Taiwan under its disaster response auspices. The China team’s agenda diametrically opposed multilateralism at every point, which matches China’s current efforts to diplomatically isolate Taiwan. One way to preclude China from doing this is for other nations to establish official *military* relations with Taiwan’s armed forces distinct from *diplomatic* relations. Washington could widely promulgate its unique partnership model with Taiwan to other nations that are willing to support Taiwan but lack the legal and diplomatic framework to do so. In essence, Washington could export and proliferate the TRA and similar bilateral congressional acts in a networked fashion. The built-in ambiguity may be precisely what other nations need to support Taiwan without infringing upon the “One-China policy.”

None of these actions would amount to a sophisticated treaty alliance on behalf of Taiwan, but merely a hybrid legal and diplomatic framework designed to convince nations

that it is in their best interest that Taiwan remain an autonomous—though not necessarily independent—sovereign polity. This is not to suggest a multilateral or even “minilateral” or “hub and spoke” coalition in support of Taiwan, but a series of individual, bilateral security relationships with Taiwan that could—if needed—act as a “unified front” to counter Chinese public opinion and legal “lawfare” warfare in the future. The deterrent power of this framework is evident in the *ROC*:

When national resistance planning is integrated with allies and partners committed to the ideals of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-determination, it can become a powerful message against a potential adversary. It places a potential adversary on notice that it cannot violate a nation’s territorial integrity and attempt to establish a new status quo.⁵⁷⁵

Ostensibly, the nations most amenable to this kind of ambiguous relationship status would be Japan, Australia, Singapore, and possibly the UK and other EU members such as the Baltic nations or France (based off recent changes in political and economic relations between these countries and Taiwan). The first and most logical nation to adopt this model would be Japan, which stands the most to gain from a resilient Taiwan in order to shore-up deterrence of China in the contested ECS. If Taiwan is the “elephant in the room” for China, then Japan is the “800-pound gorilla.” Since the cessation of Formosa to Japan in 1895, the Japanese invasion and occupation of Manchuria from 1931–1945, and most significantly the Rape of Nanjing in 1937, anti-Japanese sentiment in China remains very strong and largely unresolved. The anti-Japanese component of Chinese nationalism—coupled with Japan’s security relationship with the United States—is one of the strongest narratives which the CCP uses to “legitimate its political monopoly.”⁵⁷⁶ Recently, Japan has shown indications that it is taking a closer interest in the future of Taiwan. In December 2021, former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo warned that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would constitute “an emergency for the Japan-U.S. alliance” and that Beijing “should never have

⁵⁷⁵ Fiala, 9.

⁵⁷⁶ Suisheng Zhao, “Beijing’s Japan Dilemma: Balancing Nationalism, Legitimacy, and Economic Opportunity,” in *Uneasy Partnerships: China’s Engagement with Japan, the Koreans, and Russia in the Era of Reform*, ed. Thomas Fingar (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 71.

a misunderstanding in recognizing this.”⁵⁷⁷ Of note, there have been growing calls within Japan’s legislative ruling party to pass a law similar to the TRA in response to what Japan’s most recent defense white paper described as a need for a “sense of crisis more than ever before.”⁵⁷⁸ Exporting the TRA to Japan would have the added benefit of not violating Japan’s “collective self-defense” legislation. This would also align with the Pentagon’s objectives for Japan in the declassified Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework (IPSF), which calls to “Empower Japan to become a regionally integrated, technologically advanced pillar of the Indo-Pacific security architecture.”⁵⁷⁹

Washington could also export the model to nations in the SCS and Australasia—most notably the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and Australia. The recent AUKUS partnership with Australia and the UK could lay the groundwork for such an arrangement. Beyond the first and second island chains Washington could galvanize Taiwan’s 13 remaining diplomatic allies primarily in the Pacific and South America. Washington could even seek assistance (albeit not militarily) through the Vatican’s Holy See and its worldwide Catholic social network and religious influence.

Moreover, advisors from PN militaries well-versed and adept in the *ROC* and comprehensive defense concepts could bolster efforts to catalyze and accelerate Taiwan’s defense transformation—nations such as Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, the Baltic States, Israel, Finland, and Singapore. USCTs and congressional delegations (CODEL) should engage with their counterparts in these nations to discuss how they could potentially legislate a TRA-like version of bilateral security and/or emergency preparedness relationship with Taiwan. “Exchanging information or engaging with partners and allies for collective action, while synchronising national and multilateral tools, is likely to

⁵⁷⁷ Associated Press, “China Lashes Out at Japan’s Former PM Abe Over Taiwan Warning,” *The Diplomat*, December 2, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/china-lashes-out-at-japans-former-pm-abe-over-taiwan-warning/>.

⁵⁷⁸ Ryan Ashley, “Japan’s Revolution on Taiwan Affairs,” *War on the Rocks*, last modified November 23, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/11/japans-revolution-on-taiwan-affairs/>; Takuya Mizorogi and Masaya Kato, “Japan Lawmakers Want ‘Taiwan Relations Act’ of Their Own,” *Nikkei Asia*, last modified February 6, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-lawmakers-want-Taiwan-Relations-Act-of-their-own>; Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 2021), 19, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2021/DOJ2021_EN_Full.pdf.

⁵⁷⁹ National Security Council, *Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework*, 4.

increase the coherence of deterrence posture and have an impact on the cost-benefit calculus of the hostile actor.”⁵⁸⁰

3. Taiwan Security Assistance Initiative (TSAI)

The DOD should consider utilizing NATO Article 3 as an example template for creating the legal precedent needed for a BPC strategy for Taiwan. Article 3 directs each member nation to “maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack,” to include civil preparedness for resilience and the ability to recover from major shock such as natural disasters or hybrid warfare like cyber or political warfare.⁵⁸¹ The Pentagon and Congress could amend the PDI to allow for specific BPC funds for Taiwan under similar stipulations, or it could create a new Title 10 “train and equip” BPC program specifically for Taiwan, similar to the Afghanistan or Iraq Security Forces Fund (ASFF/ISFF), the Counter ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF), or the recent Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI). A similar Taiwan Security Assistance Initiative (TSAI) would provide a legal funding code—separate from existing FMS and FMF cases with Taiwan—which would quickly and readily allow the United States to build Taiwan’s capacity for resilience and resistance.

This is precisely the intent of the recently proposed Arm Taiwan Act, which proposes the TSAI on the condition that Taiwan

- (A) matches investments by the United States in its asymmetric defense capabilities;
- (B) increases its defense spending to a level commensurate with the threat it faces;
- (C) prioritizes acquiring cost-effective and resilient asymmetric defense capabilities as rapidly as possible, including from foreign suppliers, if necessary; and
- (D) demonstrates progress on defense reforms required to maximize the effectiveness of its asymmetric defenses, with special regard to Taiwan’s reserve forces⁵⁸²

⁵⁸⁰ Kersanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a More Strategic Approach*, 21.

⁵⁸¹ NATO, “Resilience and Article 3.”

⁵⁸² Arm Taiwan Act of 2021, 6.

In addition to these measures, the act states that the United States should

- (A) seek to co-produce or co-develop cost effective and resilient asymmetric defense capabilities with suppliers in Taiwan... and
- (B) encourage other countries, particularly United States allies and partners, to sell, lease, or otherwise provide appropriate asymmetric defense capabilities to Taiwan so as to facilitate Taiwan's rapid deployment of the asymmetric defense capabilities required to deter or, if necessary, defeat an invasion by the People's Republic of China.⁵⁸³

A BPC program like the proposed TSAI (a timely acronym that may engender the initiative to Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen) with language similar to NATO Article 3 would provide the United States with greater latitude and leverage to influence Taiwan's asymmetric and comprehensive defense reform, which Michael Hunzeker claims the MND has recently abandoned.⁵⁸⁴ While Washington should maintain an overall forward-facing policy of "strategic ambiguity," it should be clear with Taiwan about the scope and terms of U.S. BPC as part of a collective defense approach.

4. Integrated Campaigning and Deterrence

In 2018, the Joint Staff J7 (Force Development) identified seven globally integrated operations capability development goals which the Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) used to guide their assessment of globally integrated operations:

1. Identify potential crises before they develop and manage escalation favorable to the U.S.
2. Identify and counter competitor shaping activities that limit U.S. freedom of action.
3. Coordinate, synchronize, and de-conflict activities and messages across COCOMs and with DOD partners (U.S. and coalition).
4. Counter competitor influence messaging when adverse to U.S. objectives.
5. Assess intent of adversary activities (and messaging) and respond where appropriate.
6. Assess adversary assessment of U.S. and partner global activities and messages.

⁵⁸³ Arm Taiwan Act of 2021, 7.

⁵⁸⁴ Hunzeker, "Taiwan's Defense Plans Are Going Off the Rails."

7. Assess risk of potential U.S. and partner mitigation options⁵⁸⁵

The “question” of Taiwan is *central* to each of these in the context of strategic competition with China. Therefore, Taiwan should be the central focus of the Joint Planning and Execution Community (JPEC). The JPEC should integrate the findings from this study and others into the Joint Planning Process (JPP) and the Adaptive Planning and Execution (APEX) enterprise, as well as system dynamics modeling.

Lastly, the DOD should fully incorporate IW into the emerging concept of “integrated deterrence” and codify unconventional approaches to deterrence with partners and allies alongside conventional approaches. The Pentagon and Congress should amend the PDI portfolio in future NDAAs to reflect greater components of “deterrence by denial” rather than “deterrence by punishment” that are less focused on platforms and technology and more integrated with partners and allies.⁵⁸⁶ The DOD and INDOPACOM specifically should develop a suite of flexible deterrent options (FDO) that align within this understanding and which support an unconventional deterrence strategy for Taiwan.

C. OPERATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The most limiting constraint on achieving effective partnering efforts stems from a lack of understanding of the complex operational environment in which to build capacity during the design process and strategy formulation. What is lacking is a collaborative approach in the design process which capitalizes on the critical and creative cross-cultural perspectives by exploiting the similarities and differences of both the U.S. and PN, thus allowing the two to better identify the problem before recommending solutions.

1. Directed Telescopes and Finders of Strategy

With this understanding in mind, BPC planners and advisors should operate as “directed telescopes” to identify key nodes and influencers within the PN network. A

⁵⁸⁵ Robert Elder and Alexander H. Levis, *Global Competition: Planning Globally Integrated Operations* (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, 2019), 7, <https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Global-Competition-SMA-Final-Report-GMU-191001-1.pdf>.

⁵⁸⁶ Clark and Patt, “Fix the Pacific Deterrence Fund—and the Deeper Problem It Reveals.”

directed telescope is a trusted representative of the commander who is able to cut across chains of command and red-tape bureaucracy in order to bring the “ground truth” to the commander expeditiously. Such advisors would also serve as “finders of strategy”—as described by management studies professor Henry Mintzberg—to search for and identify latent or emergent innovation strategies in PN engagements.⁵⁸⁷ These advisor-scouts would then act as both analysts and catalysts on an ad hoc basis to codify, elaborate, and facilitate the formulation of strategies and plans. They would blend formal and informal strategic planning and balance deliberate strategies with emergent strategies. This kind of approach would also cultivate weak ties across the system that would provide bridges between disparate parts of the larger system, bringing in new information and ideas that would help reduce bounded rationality and policy resistance.

2. Comprehensive Defense Assistance Advisory Group

It often takes outside observers, or “directed telescopes,” for leaders to flatten the communications hierarchy and reduce uncertainty by sending trusted professionals to gather direct observations and lessons from the force. While all of the tactical and institutional “means” outlined in the previous chapter can serve as “directed telescopes” and “finders of strategy” for building comprehensive defense and unconventional deterrence capacities within PNs, none can fulfill that role to synchronize and manage BPC efforts writ large. Each is able to identify key nodes and influencers within the PN network and identify latent or emergent innovation strategies in PN engagements, but there needs to be an organizing body with the capability and flexibility to cut across Joint and PN echelons of command.

The SFAB and higher headquarters SFAC could form the core for such an organization, but they may not have the sufficient capability to address Joint DIB or FID efforts, nor the requisite SOF institutional knowledge. Perhaps what is needed is a corollary Defense Institution Building or Foreign Internal Defense organization, but neither of these

⁵⁸⁷ Henry Mintzberg, “Rethinking Strategic Planning Part II: New Roles for Planners,” *Long Range Planning* 27, no. 3 (1994): 22–30, https://mintzberg.org/sites/default/files/article/download/rethinking_strategic_planning_2.pdf.

would be comprehensive enough and would invariably encroach on the core activities already conducted by other organizations, such as the SFABs and SFGs. Perhaps the appropriate nexus for BPC would be an Internal Defense and Development Group with SOF and conventional force integration, interoperability, and interdependence (SOF-CF I3), or the transformation of the Joint Center for International SFA (JCISFA) into a Joint Center for International Defense and Development or Comprehensive Defense (JCIDAD or JCICD).

The organizations which most closely approximate this need are the former Military Assistance Advisory Groups (MAAG) and the Army's recently closed AWG. AWG provided "a dedicated, professional team, focused on preparing commanders and units to get beyond 'discovery learning' in order to more rapidly adapt to the requirements of the asymmetric battlefield."⁵⁸⁸ However, the unit was internal to the Army, and a comprehensive defense advisory capacity must be Joint and include representatives from SOF and the IA. The MAAGs were relatively effective, but any reinstatement of them must have the ability to engage with not just a PN's military but also its government, security forces (to include police and paramilitary), and civil agencies.

Regardless of the structure or sourcing organization, the Joint Force and SOF enterprise needs an AWG/MAAG-like organization to be able to deploy, identify emerging strategies and capability gaps in PNs, assist DOTMLPF integration, and serve as "directed telescopes" and "finders of strategy" to assist the PN and U.S. BPC enterprise to implement comprehensive defense strategies. As the Joint Force and SOF transition to global strategic competition with great powers, the DOD—specifically DSCA and the JCISFA—should ensure the seamless capture and transfer of 20-plus years of institutional knowledge and operations from SFA and units such as AWG to a single organization. This study recommends the creation of a Comprehensive Defense Assistance Advisory Group (CDAAG) under the Joint Staff J-7, with directorship from the JCISFA and subordinate components at each of the GCCs and SOCOM.

⁵⁸⁸ Asymmetric Warfare Group, *Operational and Organizational (O&O) Concept for the Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG)* (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2005), 20.

Similar to AWG’s “operational advisors,” this group should consist of “strategic advisors” capable of deploying globally to advise and assist PN and U.S. personnel at the policy, strategic, and institutional levels of warfare—to include governmental, ministerial, and civilian institutions. “Operational advisors” at the operational and tactical level could be billeted within the group or could be sourced from supporting organizations such as SOF, SFABs, and the NG SPP for specific and scalable mission sets. Also similar to AWG, the core cadre of the group should comprise of military, DOD civilian, and contracted consultants and should include liaisons at relevant organizations to ensure unity of effort:

- Joint and Interagency: JCISFA, DSCA, SOCOM, CIA, DOS, USAID
- USA: USASOC, SFAC (FORSCOM), USASAC/SATMO, IWFMP (MCCoE, TRADOC), NG Bureau/International Affairs Division
- USN/USMC/USAF: NSW Command, MARSOC, AFSOC
- Institutions/Academia: Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), the Institute for Security Governance (ISG), NPS, JHU etc.
- Multinational: NATO HQ, NSHQ, other partners or allies as needed

Within this structure, the asymmetric operation working group (AOWG) and corresponding asymmetric warfare symposium (AWS) in Taiwan would be good models for future advisory support for comprehensive or asymmetric defense. The AOWG was designed around a collaborative and fully participatory approach by both U.S. and PN personnel to jointly identify the right people to participate in the right discussions while removing constraints which impede the defense transformation process. Applying the AOWG model to U.S. partnerships such as Taiwan creates a unity of effort to identify vulnerabilities and collaboratively recommend goals and activities to not only focus future exchanges but also determine the means with which to institutionalize change that corresponds to what both partners want and need or what they are capable of absorbing and achieving. The use of an AOWG can be a valuable tool when incorporated as part of the design process when developing BPC strategies and plans.

D. FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Measuring Unconventional Deterrence

As noted in the introduction, the most challenging limitation of the study is how to measure deterrence because—by definition—it entails looking for something that did not

occur. Further research could develop adequate criteria for determining feasible and suitable measure of effectiveness (MOE) for a strategy of unconventional deterrence. Security cooperation initiatives and programs must meet the SMART criteria (specificity, measurability, achievability, relevance and results-oriented, and time-bound) with the addition of two: evaluated and reviewed. Without applicable evaluation criteria, it will be difficult to achieve the SMART-ER conditions. One potential MOE is to identify and measure indicators that the PLA are developing countervailing capabilities to focus more on COIN, CT, and IW in an urban environment. Another potential MOE could be an increase in PRC attempts to target or sabotage (kinetically or non-kinetically) U.S.-Taiwan BPC efforts to build resilience and resistance. These actions would indicate that China may see the BPC strategy as a credible threat.

2. The Need for Compellence

Further research could identify viable options for compellence to coincide with and shore-up deterrence operations. In addition to FDOs, perhaps there could also be flexible compellence options (FCO). If deterrence is the decisive operation or main effort, compellence must be the shaping operation or supporting effort in order to provide the aggressor with viable and credible offramps should deterrence succeed.

3. Comprehensive Defense Assistance Advisory Group

Lastly, future research could collate and analyze the MAAG and AWG organizational templates for the potential formation of a Joint CDAAG. Currently, AWG's knowledge-base is housed within the Army's Combined Arms Center (CAC) in conjunction with the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), as well as in the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS). But many of AWG's previous members and leaders are still serving and could be interviewed to help determine a feasible force structure and operational & organizational (O&O) concept for a potential CDAAG.

E. FINAL SUMMARY

The optimal deterrence strategy for the Joint Force and SOF to deter an invasion and annexation of Taiwan—in the context of global strategic competition with China—is

an *integrated deterrence* strategy to build Taiwan’s capacity for comprehensive defense through resilience and resistance. This strategy advocates for the integration of both conventional as well as unconventional deterrence components, as well as “deterrence by punishment” and “deterrence by denial” approaches to build “deterrence-in-depth” for Taiwan and the United States. By conducting an indirect, unconventional deterrence strategy under existing policy conditions of “strategic ambiguity,” the United States, Taiwan, and other partners can deter and deny China’s core policy and grand strategy objectives by making the probability of protracted violent and non-violent civil resistance highly likely and thus, the probability of political victory in Taiwan highly unlikely.

The *Resistance Operating Concept* and *Comprehensive Defence Handbook*, as well as AWG’s AOWG model provide ready-made frameworks to develop and implement this strategy. The strategy requires the Joint Force and SOF to employ various capabilities in novel and asymmetric ways in order to supplement BPC efforts, communicate resolve to Taiwan and other regional partners, and alter China’s invasion calculus. At the tactical and institutional levels, this includes SOF CFTs of SF, CA, PSYOP, NSW, MARSOC, and AFSOC. SFAB advisor teams, SATMO TAFTs, and the NG SPP also provide a tailorable force posture for persistent engagement in order to shape the forward operational environment and create conditions favorable for U.S. competition in theater. The DOD should also consider creating an AWG/MAAG-like organization to consolidate advisory efforts across the Joint and SOF BPC enterprise.

To accomplish this ambitious yet sensible *integrated deterrence* strategy, U.S. and PN policymakers, strategic planners, and practitioners alike will need to reframe their mental models in order to adapt and overcome policy resistance and bounded rationality, among other cognitive biases. As the popular author of *The Kill Chain*, Christian Brose, admonishes: “Overcoming these obstacles will require leadership at the highest levels of government to set clear priorities, drive change in resistant institutions, remake their incentive structures, and recast their cultures.”⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁹ Christian Brose, “The New Revolution in Military Affairs: War’s Sci-Fi Future,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 2019, 134, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-04-16/new-revolution-military-affairs>.

APPENDIX A. BPC CAUSAL LOOP DIAGRAMS

Causal loop diagrams (CLD) are valuable tools that allow one to test hypotheses about system dynamics and visualize the complex interactions and feedbacks between various elements that may be responsible for perceived problems, thus reevaluating previously held notions of cause and effect. The modeling process itself—from the creation of CLDs to the creation of functioning stock and flow models with initial data and relational equations—can greatly enhance understanding of the problem-set and help to adjust mental models. “Without the discipline and constraint imposed by the rigorous testing enabled by simulation,” John Sterman asserts, “it becomes all too easy for mental models to be driven by ideology or unconscious bias.”⁵⁹⁰ CLDs are often the first step in identifying how variables influence the behavior of other variables. Solid-line arrows—or connectors—represent causal directions and dotted-line arrows represent *information* connectors. Two hash lines overlaid on a connector represent a time delay of unspecified length. CLDs also specify polarities (+ or -) of interaction between variables to indicate the type of effect an action will have on a dependent variable when an independent variable changes. Polarities are either reinforcing or balancing. For example, a positive polarity indicates that when a certain variable increases or decreases, the variable to which it connects will increase or decrease beyond what it otherwise would be. If the second variable connects back to the first variable with positive polarity as well, this creates a *reinforcing* loop relationship (R). A reinforcing loop amplifies what is already occurring; as one variable increases, so does the other. In contrast, a negative polarity indicates that when a certain variable increases or decreases, the variable to which it connects will change in the opposite direction. If the second variable connects back to the first variable with positive polarity, this creates a *balancing* loop relationship (B). A balancing loop represents goal seeking behavior; as one variable changes in one direction, the other changes in the opposite direction to balance it.

⁵⁹⁰ Sterman, *Business Dynamics*, 37.

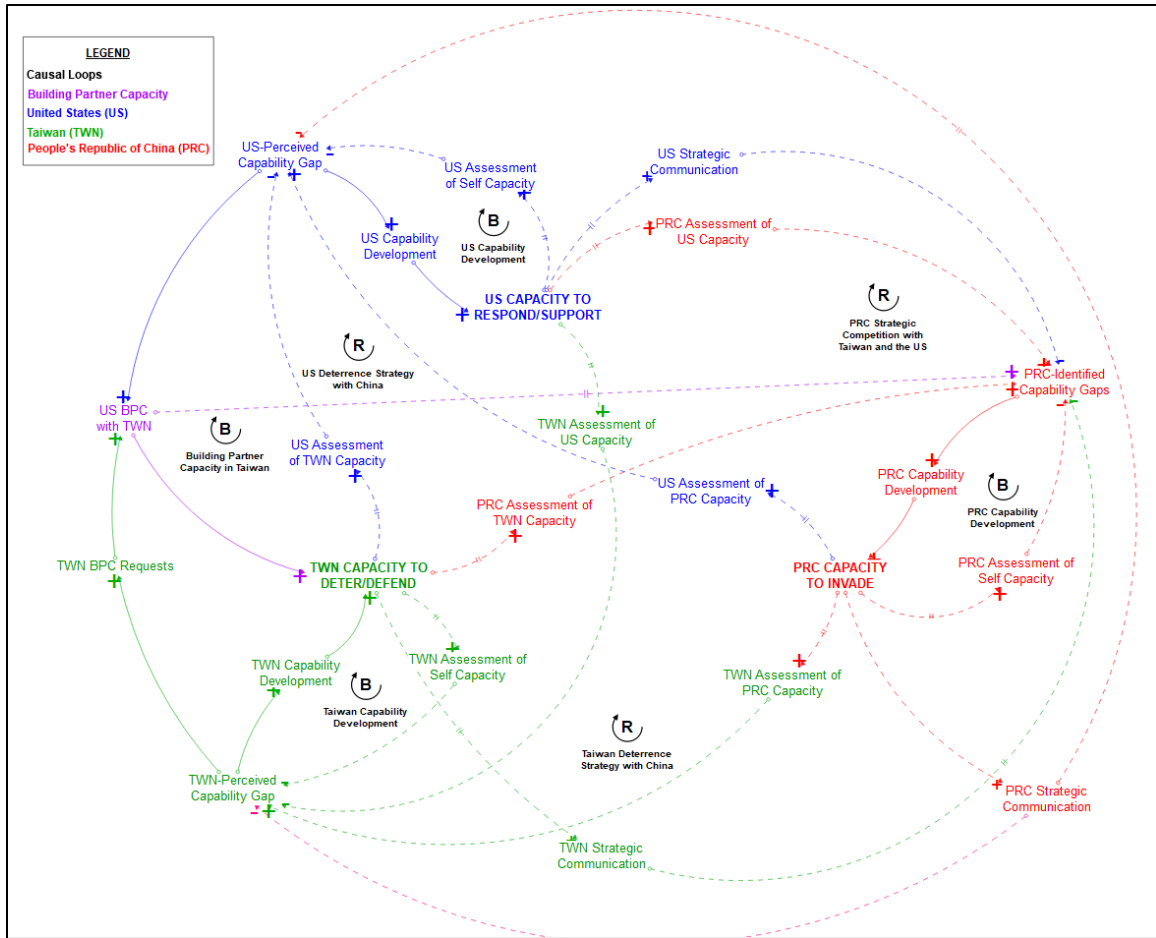


Figure 19. Taiwan BPC Causal Loop Diagram (CLD)

The CLD in Figure 19 shows the variables within the system and how they are connected. Solid-line arrows, or connectors, represent causal directions, and dotted-line arrows represent *information* connectors. Two hash lines overlaid on a connector represents a time delay of unspecified length. CLDs also specify polarities (+ or -) of interaction between variables to indicate the type of effect an action will have on a dependent variable when an independent variable changes. Polarities are either reinforcing or balancing. For example, a positive polarity between “US Capacity” and “US Assessment of Self Capacity” indicates that as “US Capacity” increases, “US Assessment of Self Capacity” will likewise increase beyond what it otherwise would be. This leads to a negative polarity with the “US Perceived Capability Gap,” indicating that as “US Assessment of Self Capacity” increases, the “US Perceived Capability Gap” will behave

in an opposite way and decrease. As the capability gap decreases, “US Capability Development” will also decrease (positive polarity) leading to a final decrease in “US Capacity.” When there is an odd number of negative polarities in this sequence, it forms a balancing feedback loop (B). Balancing loops seek to change the current state of the system into a desired state. In contrast, a loop with an even number of negative polarities or with none creates a reinforcing feedback loop (R). For example, as “US Capacity” increases, “PRC Assessment of U.S. Capacity” increases, as well as “PRC Perceived Capability Gap.” This leads to an increase in “PRC Capability Development” and “PRC Capacity.” But as “PRC Capacity” increases, “US Assessment of PRC Capacity” increases, as well as “US Perceived Capability Gap.” This leads to an increase in “US Capability Development” and “US Capacity,” whereupon the cycle repeats and reinforces itself. Balancing loops represent goal-seeking behavior, whereas a reinforcing loop amplifies what is already occurring. System analyst Donella Meadows describes this kind of reinforcing relationship as an *escalation* system trap, or archetype. Similar to an arms race, “Escalation comes from a reinforcing loop set up by competing actors trying to get ahead of each other.”⁵⁹¹ The BPC CLD in Figure 20 captures this reinforcing, escalation dynamic of competition between the United States, China, and Taiwan, as well as the balancing, goal-seeking behavior of capacity building and strategic communication.

By utilizing a CLD, there are two distinctive lenses through which one could analyze the system dynamics of BPC in Taiwan. First, there are three “capability development” *balancing* loops corresponding with each of the nation actors involved. These loops are intertwined with each other in a *triquetra* pattern or *trefoil knot*, meaning the output for one loop becomes the input for the other two loops. As one nation’s capacity increases, the other nations will adjust their capacities accordingly. Each of these entwined “capability development” loops begins with the countries’ respective capacities (Figures 20–22). With Taiwan, the desired capacity is to deter cross-strait aggression and defend against an invasion if necessary. For the United States, the desired capacity is to support

⁵⁹¹ Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 124.

Taiwan and be able to respond quickly in the event of armed conflict. For China, the desired capacity is to attack and invade Taiwan if necessary.

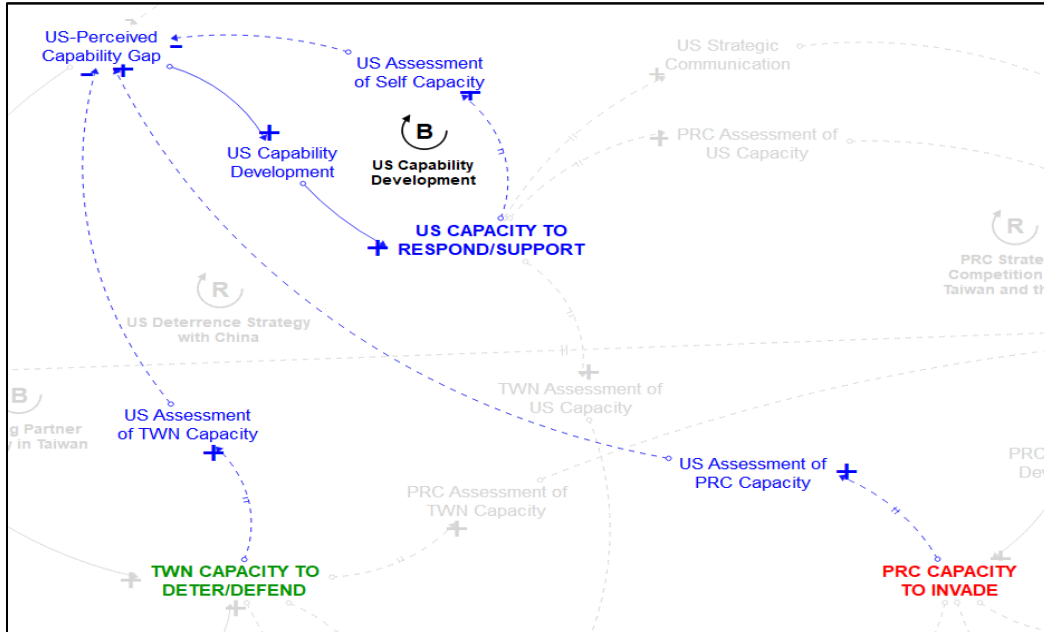


Figure 20. U.S. Capability Development Balancing Loop

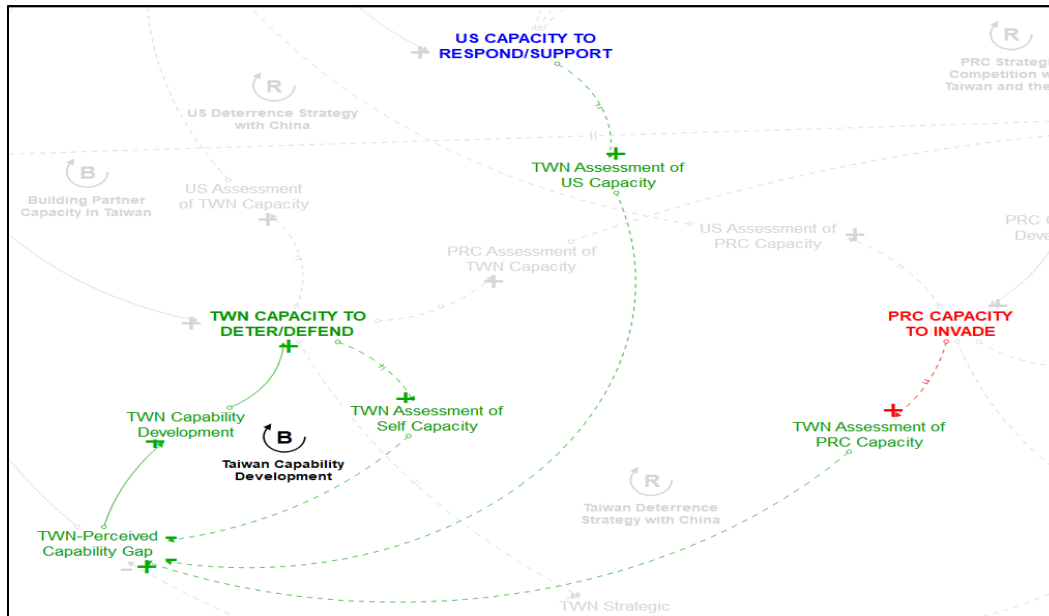


Figure 21. TWN Capability Development Balancing Loop

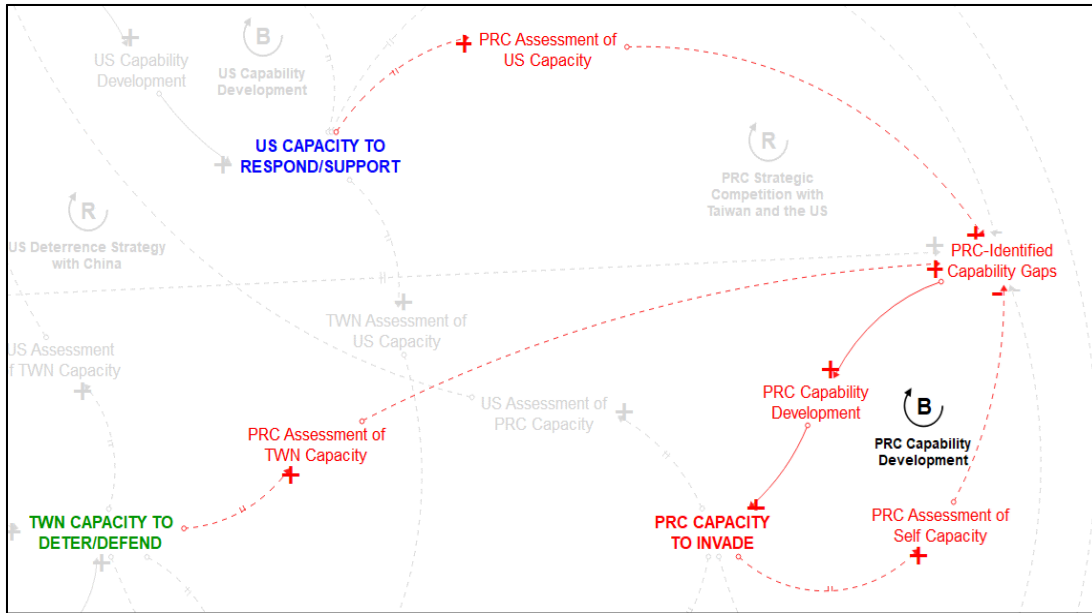


Figure 22. PRC Capability Development Balancing Loop

From the three respective capacities, each country simultaneously conducts a continuous assessment of the other two countries, as well as itself—for a total of three assessments per country and nine assessments in all. These assessments consist of intelligence estimates, capability analysis, information sharing etc., and they change the value of that country’s perceived capability gap. For example, as China and Taiwan’s capacities increase or decrease, the United States will continuously update its perceived capability gaps for them. These perceptions and assessments will drive the rate and level of capability development in order for the United States to adjust its capacity in order to respond and support accordingly. Taiwan and China conduct similar net assessments, which round out the three “capability development” balancing loops along with the United States. These feedback loops serve to balance their respective assessments by reducing the relative capability gaps identified by each actor.

A distinct, fourth balancing loop exists between the United States and Taiwan’s side of the trefoil knot, which is U.S. BPC efforts with Taiwan (Figure 23). From this perspective within the CLD, BPC is an additional variable that can increase Taiwan capacity and support U.S. capacity, providing a potential strategic advantage over China, which lacks this variable.

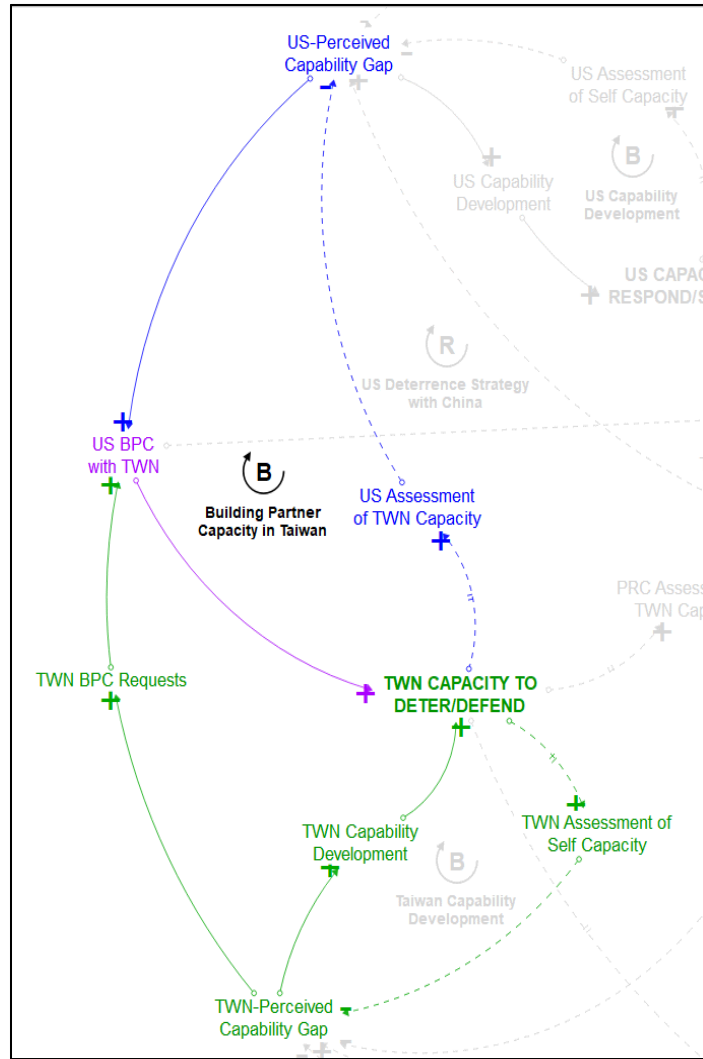


Figure 23. US-TWN BPC Balancing Loop

The second distinctive lens through which one could analyze the system dynamics between the three countries is the “strategic competition and deterrence” lens (Figure 24). Similar to the “capability development” loops, these strategies also form an interlocking trefoil knot, but they are *reinforcing* loops rather than *balancing*. This means that, rather than bringing the respective states of the system closer to a goal, they exponentially grow and feed each other, similar to an arms race or escalation archetype. Because they hold the same goal—to achieve and maintain greater capacity than their enemy—they become locked in an escalation archetype.

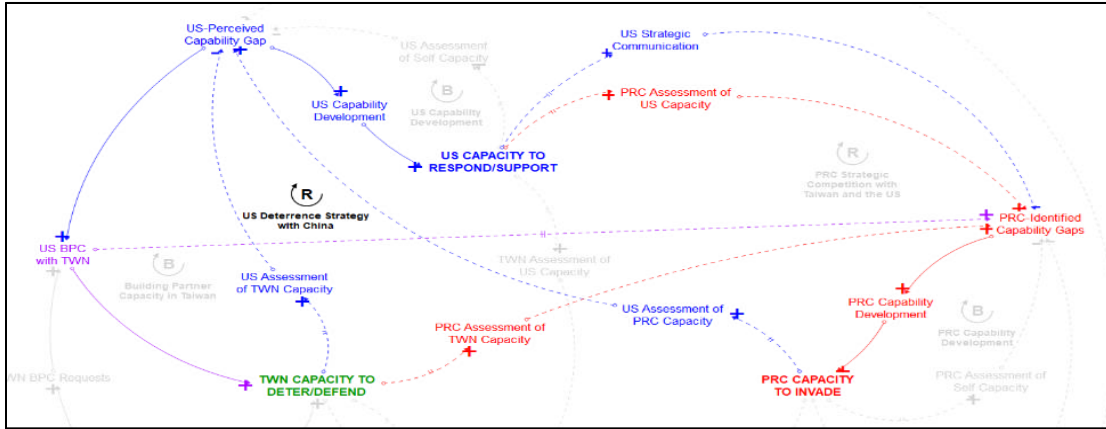


Figure 24. Strategic Competition & Deterrence Reinforcing Loop

These reinforcing loops *contain* the balancing “capability development” loops. That is to say, they also start with the countries’ respective capacities and net assessments that lead to capability development. But from there the resulting increases in capacity further fuel the assessments and capability development of the opponent, leading to a vicious cycle of competition. Furthermore, there is a sublayer of *information* and *disinformation* that maps onto the system structure. For the sake of simplicity, this variable is depicted in the CLD as “strategic communication,” which could range from official diplomatic communication to subversive cyber disinformation, propaganda, or fake news. The purpose of this strategic communication is to alter the perceived values of capability gaps or strengths held by the opponent. This could be propaganda that aggrandizes the true level of a capability in order to instill doubt or fear, or it could be deliberate half-truths designed to conceal the full nature of a capability in order to prevent or delay the enemy from developing a countervailing capability. In the BPC CLD, the strategic communication information connectors have either positive or negative polarities. Positive polarity, such as the positive strategic communication of “US BPC with TWN” to “PRC-Identified Capability Gaps,” indicates that as BPC increases with Taiwan, China’s perception of relative capability gaps will increase, spurring capability development to match. But the polarity could just as easily be negative. For example, as “US Capacity to Respond/Support” increases, “US Strategic Communication” will increase, but the content of that signal could serve to *mask* the United States’ true capacity and therefore decrease

(negative polarity) “**PRC-Identified Capability Gaps,**” causing “**PRC Capability Development**” to decrease. The cumulative effect of this action on China would be a lesser perceived capability deficit than the one that actually exists between the United States and China, giving the United States a favorable advantage and China less time and opportunity to close the gap when it eventually discovers the reality. This dynamic is the foundation of political statecraft and communication.

An apt example of this dynamic played out in late 2020 over a supposed training exercise between Taiwan and U.S. Marine Corps Raiders. *Taiwan News* and other mainstream news outlets reported that Raiders were training with Taiwan Marines—the first public confirmation of its kind since 1979. However, days later Pentagon officials denied the report claiming it to be “inaccurate.”⁵⁹² Whether true or not, the report was an example of strategic communication with positive polarity, while the Pentagon’s refutation was an example of negative polarity. The ensuing debate among news outlets only amplified the fluctuating polarity, no doubt hampering China’s ability to accurately perceive any true change in the security environment and obfuscating any decision to pursue a countervailing capability solution or strategic communication response.

With this perspective in mind, the information sublayer of the system allows for a more complex and accurate mental model of both the physical and cognitive dimensions of the competition, deterrence, and capacity-building systems. It is not so much one’s actual capacity that matters, but rather the other’s *perception* of that capacity. Oftentimes the primary goal of BPC is for diplomatic *signaling* with the actual increase of capacity as only an ancillary benefit. This is the essence of deterrence, to signal and persuade the other actor to desist from aggressive actions. In summary, the BPC CLD and the model below provide a framework for both strategic capacity-building as well as information dominance—in other words, a framework for great power competition and the role that partner nations play in that framework.

⁵⁹² Philip Athey, “Marine Raiders Weren’t Training in Taiwan, Department of Defense Insists,” *Marine Corps Times*, November 12, 2020, sec. Your Marine Corps, <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2020/11/12/marine-raiders-werent-training-in-taiwan-department-of-defense-insists/>.

APPENDIX B. ASYMMETRIC WARFARE SYMPOSIUM OUTCOMES⁵⁹³

I. Recommendations Overview

1. Over the course of three TTX events, TA and U.S. participants developed recommendations for training, organization, equipping, and employment of forces
2. Of these recommendations, those selected by the TA for further research require a system of testing & validation using a combination of digital simulations and live events such as TTXs, terrain walks, and LPDs
3. Several recommendations will be less effective without implementation of other recommendations in conjunction (Example: the addition of ATGM and MANPAD systems will be less effective without training on decentralized mission command)
4. Recommendations for improving training and mission command are more important than specific weapon systems or other technical capabilities (humans over hardware)

II. Training Recommendations

1. Training events should be designed to replicate overmatch conditions and the capabilities of the adversary
 - a. Command and control will be degraded from kinetic strikes and electronic warfare (EW) attacks
 - b. Loss of air superiority is likely—requires emphasis on movement, dispersion, MILDEC, camouflage & concealment, and subterranean operations
 - c. Leadership casualties should be replicated often, forcing subordinate leaders to assume command quickly and allowing for refinement of mission command systems
2. Exercises should emphasize free play
 - a. Utilize adaptive and free-think opposition forces
 - b. Incorporate rapid changes of mission and ambiguous situations
 - c. Allow for failure in training exercises, units learn more from mistakes

⁵⁹³ Asymmetric Warfare Group, (UNCLASSIFIED) “Taiwan Asymmetric Warfare Symposium: Key Recommendations” (presentation, Taiwan Ministry of National Defense, Taipei, 2018); Asymmetric Warfare Group, (UNCLASSIFIED) “Taiwan MP Command Planning Workshop: Key Recommendations” (presentation, Taiwan Military Police Command, Taipei, 2018).

- d. Incorporate honest and open After Action Reviews (AAR) to identify challenges and lessons learned
 - e. Incorporate complex terrain, including urban, mountains, and subterranean environments
3. Continue with training site designs that incorporate complex terrain, new weapon systems and capabilities (MANPAD, ATGM, sniper), mounted urban maneuver, and urban engagement area development etc.

III. Mission Command Recommendations

1. Emphasize decentralized operations in all officer and non-commissioned officer schools (enemy capabilities will force decentralized operations in combat)
2. Develop systems to rapidly decentralize mission command, giving subordinate leaders the confidence to make decisions on the battlefield to stay ahead of the enemy decision cycle
 - a. Requires empowerment of junior officers and non-commissioned officers
 - b. Requires frequent and varied rehearsals
3. Optimize approval processes to shorted artillery and air defense “kill chains” (target identification through target engagement). If the process is too slow and has too many steps, then it is unlikely to work in a high-intensity conflict
4. Battalions & above need to understand and prepare/train for the transition from centralized to decentralized mission command. This includes integrating and rehearsing the following:
 - a. Redundancy of communication systems
 - b. Survivability / mobile C2 capability
 - c. Intelligence collection / fusion ops
 - d. Decision points
 - e. Rapid response / quick reaction
 - f. Integration and employment of reserves

IV. Weapon System Recommendations

1. Focus on redundancy and survivability
 - a. Larger, high-value weapon systems will be priority enemy targets (Example: Patriots, large caliber artillery, tank formations)
 - b. Large numbers of low-cost, less-detectable weapon systems dispersed throughout the island force the enemy to re-think targeting and invasion criteria (Example: ATGMs and MANPADs)

- c. Enemy attacks on C2 nodes and high-end artillery and ADA systems will limit the ability of TA units to request support from these assets; tactical maneuver formations should be equipped with their own anti-tank and air defense capabilities to mitigate
 - 2. Focus on anti-personnel and anti-material sniper capability within TA infantry
 - a. Low-cost solution
 - b. Snipers have been highly effective at disabling armor and APCs in conflicts around the world (targeting driver's sight, commander's cupola, optics, main gun barrels)
 - c. Massive psychological effect on enemy soldiers
 - d. Excellent in Taiwan's rugged and urban terrain
 - 3. Continue with procurement of small, commercial UAS for Squads, as well as military grade UAS less vulnerable to electronic attack/jamming

V. Asymmetric Defense Recommendations

- 1. Avoid decisive engagements that put similar capabilities against each other (Example: Armor versus Armor)
 - a. Focus on capabilities that mitigate enemy strengths (Example: small dismounted anti-tank teams, supported by sniper elements against enemy armor and mechanized forces)
 - b. Asymmetric warfare focuses on attrition and denying enemy success, not winning large decisive engagements; this requires redundant and survivable systems
- 2. Focus on a defense-in-depth and counter-mobility
 - a. Use difficult terrain and limited LOCs to create enemy mobility challenges and countless opportunities for limited engagement areas
 - b. As part of terrain denial/counter-mobility, develop plans to destroy LOCs and isolate likely lodgments
 - c. Utilize locally-mobilized, SOF-supported Reserve forces to build a robust defense-in-depth network
- 3. Utilize terrain that reduces enemy technological and numerical advantage
 - a. Urban and subterranean environments limit the effect of ISR and Fires
 - b. Heavily restricted terrain limits enemy maneuver and the ability to mass effects

VI. Ideas on Adapting the Force

- 1.** Maneuver units (Infantry/Armor) should focus on smaller and more self-sufficient formations to minimize the effects of enemy air power and long-range fires
- 2.** Many enabling capacities, including some mobility/counter-mobility, ADA, and anti-tank assets, should be task organized to the battalion and below
- 3.** Infantry formations should focus on independent small unit (squad and platoon-level) operations
 - a.** Smaller formations reduce visual and RF signatures, and limit enemy ability to mass fires on larger formations
 - b.** These units should include sniper and anti-tank capabilities
 - c.** Training should focus on limited engagements and ambushes to inflict enemy casualties with the least risk to TA forces
- 4.** SOF is most effective as a force multiplier, training and advising other Taiwan forces for asymmetric defense
 - a.** Train and utilize some SOF as asymmetric defense experts/trainers. Partner SOF with select battalions/companies, train-the-trainer mentorship program
 - b.** Partner SOF with select reserve units. In combat, TA SOF could advise and help to employ these reserve units in key urban centers and near critical lines of communication

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