



COALITION DEFENSE
OF **TAIWAN**

China's Three Roads to Controlling Taiwan

Dan Blumenthal and Frederick W. Kagan

MARCH 2023

A M E R I C A N E N T E R P R I S E I N S T I T U T E

Executive Summary

US policy to defend Taiwan from Chinese aggression is overly focused on the risk that China will attempt an amphibious invasion of Taiwan. The US is not paying sufficient heed to Chinese efforts to regain control of Taiwan through persuasion and coercion, and US strategies to block a Chinese invasion may actually undermine efforts to block the persuasion and coercion roads to Chinese success. Xi Jinping likely prefers to accomplish his aims by means short of war. Those roads offer Xi the prospect of success at much lower risk and cost than fighting a war. The US must develop strategies to defeat these campaigns while deterring an invasion.

Beijing faces a difficult set of choices between military considerations and geopolitical dilemmas that US discussions of a putative Chinese invasion often fail to consider adequately. A militarily optimal Chinese invasion strategy would require that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) strike American bases in Japan, a US treaty ally, and Guam, US territory, early in a conflict. Such attacks would bring the US fully into the war and expand the conflict to include Japan and other East Asian states. American strategists may worry that the US would not commit fully even after Guam was attacked or that the Japanese would try to remain neutral, but neither scenario is likely.

Xi has no reason to be confident in outcomes that would be optimal for China. Such attacks, after all, would be even more radical moves than Vladimir Putin's have been in Europe. American strategists cannot take for granted that the US and its allies will behave optimally, but Xi cannot dismiss the possibility that they would. He will thus face an unpleasant choice once he decides to invade—accept the risk of expanding the war greatly or leave fully operational the bases from which a possibly devastating US military response might come. These considerations, among others, make strategies of persuasion,

coercion, and military isolation short of invasion far more attractive to Xi.

China's persuasion and coercion campaigns target the will of Taiwan, the United States, and America's allies to support and defend the island. Ongoing Chinese demonstrations of military capability accompanied by "lawfare"—the weaponization of legal arguments for political purposes—and information operations aim to convince the American people, US allies, and the Taiwanese people that the Taiwan issue is a domestic Chinese matter that other countries should leave to Beijing to "resolve." They also try to demonstrate that Taiwan is not defensible and that any use of force to resist Chinese aggression would result in a catastrophe for Taiwan and any intervening force. China's persuasion campaign works to rewrite history and convince other nations of things that are not true in order to erode resistance to its aggression against Taiwan. China's coercion campaign is a form of "violent bargaining" meant to use means short of large-scale war to force other nations to comply with its demands and defer to its interests.

China also aims by persuasion and coercion to set the conditions for a campaign of compellence: the use of force through blockade or invasion. That is why it is vital Washington not allow Beijing to isolate Taipei, push America into a standoff defensive posture that pulls the bulk of its military forces outside the Chinese anti-access and area-denial zones within which US forces are most at risk, and undermine US efforts to build a coalition. A blockade accompanied by other means of isolating Taiwan is an attractive option for China. Beijing could force ships en route to Taiwan to stop for inspections, disrupting the supply of resources to the island. The Chinese Communist Party could then attempt to use the PLA to convince the American people and US allies that a US response to break the blockade would be escalatory. Chinese persuasion and coercion campaigns are meant to

induce precisely such responses should Beijing escalate to the overt use of force on a limited basis.

The US must urgently reorient its approach to defending Taiwan against all three of China's roads to controlling the island. Deterring and ability to defeat an invasion are necessary but insufficient conditions for success in maintaining the status quo: a de facto independent Taiwan. US approaches to those challenges must reinforce rather than undermine US and coalition efforts to defeat China's persuasion and coercion campaigns. US strategy for defending

Taiwan must defeat each of China's interrelated campaigns separately and all of them together. Policy-makers must explain and defeat Chinese information operations aimed at the American and global publics so that they understand and can resist China's persuasion campaign. The US must demonstrate its commitment to the defense of Taiwan to its own public, Taiwan and potential coalition partners, and Xi himself. America must defend the rules-based international order specifically as it applies to Taiwan against the incremental escalations of Beijing's coercion.

China's Three Roads to Controlling Taiwan

Dan Blumenthal and Frederick W. Kagan

China has been moving along three roads to fully integrating Taiwan into the People's Republic of China (PRC) and extinguishing Taiwan's autonomy: persuasion, coercion, and compellence.¹ American policy has focused increasingly on preventing China from seizing Taiwan by force—blocking the compellence road. But China can still secure its goals through persuasion and coercion.

General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping likely prefers those roads to the much riskier path of overt military attack on the island. Blocking the Chinese roads through persuasion and coercion is not a marginal task, nor is it inherent in the effort to deter or defeat a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The current US approach to blocking the compellence road may in fact increase the likelihood that Xi will reach his objectives by these other two paths. The US must urgently rethink its approach to the problem of defending Taiwan's autonomy so that it blocks all three roads to PRC victory rather than focusing on only one—at the expense or to the detriment of defending Taiwan against ongoing persuasion and coercion campaigns.

Persuasion

One can easily overstate the Chinese preference for “winning without fighting” or ascribe to Chinese military thought an intellectual patent on an idea that other societies and cultures value and share. Frequent and facile references to Sun Tzu's aphorism that “those who render others' armies helpless without fighting are the best of all”² contribute to this danger.

The fact that repetition of this aphorism has made it seem trite, however, does not strip it of its force in Chinese thought. The concept of *buzhan ersheng* (不战而胜)—to “subdue the enemy without fighting”—has been a cornerstone of Chinese strategic thinking for centuries.³ The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has pursued a massive military reform and modernization program since 1993⁴ in preparation for modern, great-power warfare, even as Beijing has intensified a coercion campaign that uses real and threatened power to achieve its aims. But China has not abandoned the psychological strategies that helped the CCP successfully topple the Republic of China (ROC) during the Chinese civil war and take over mainland China.⁵

The aim of so shaping an adversary's understanding of the world that it voluntarily chooses one's own preferred course of action is a highly evolved part of Chinese strategic thought and practice. The idea of causing the enemy to perceive its own benefit in choosing the path most favorable to oneself is heavily discussed in Sun Tzu, encapsulated in the observation that “what causes opponents to come of their own accord is the prospect of gain.”⁶ Mao Zedong translated that aphorism into an accessible analogy, describing

three ways to make a cat eat a hot pepper: stuff it down the cat's throat, disguise the pepper by wrapping it in cheese, or grind the pepper up and spread it on the cat's back. In the latter case, the cat will lick itself, thinking it is doing something for itself when it is actually doing what you want. This is the essence of strategy.⁷

Soviet theorists expanded on this idea in considerable and meticulous detail under the rubric of “reflexive control.” Soviet writer Vladimir Lefebvre described reflexive control in the following manner:

In making his decision the adversary uses information about the area of conflict, about his own troops and ours, about their ability to fight, etc. We can influence his channels of information and send messages, which shift the flow of information in a way favorable for us. The adversary uses the most contemporary method of optimization and finds the optimal decision. However, it will not be a true optimum, but a decision predetermined by us.⁸

Reflexive control is at the heart of Russian information operations and hybrid war theories. The CCP has long studied and learned from Russian thought and experiences.

Mao’s theory of how to prevail in war was based on what he called the “three magic weapons.” The CCP, or politics, is in the lead. It wields armed force together with “the united front” to “storm and shatter the enemy’s positions.”⁹ Armed force is calibrated to support the ongoing work of political struggle to defeat an enemy.

The PLA has always had robust political warfare units alongside its conventional units. Its General Political Department (GPD) was devoted to undermining enemy morale and building international support. The GPD helped build the United Front with the Kuomintang (KMT) against the Japanese while subverting the KMT military to further its aims in the Chinese civil war. The GPD was reorganized in 2015 into the Central Military Commission’s Political Work Department. Its responsibilities are to conduct the “three warfares”: public opinion warfare, legal warfare, and psychological warfare.¹⁰ This department, along with the new Strategic Support Force, where the PLA’s cyber, space, electronic warfare, and information warfare units reside, is responsible for conducting political warfare in peace and war, including the ongoing coercive campaign against Taiwan.¹¹

Beijing’s theory of victory rests on the destruction of Taiwan’s morale: If Taiwan believes that the US

will not or cannot help undermine China’s escalating threats, it will have to accede to Beijing’s demands. Taiwan is a small, isolated island with little acceptance as an independent state. It is *sui generis* in international relations. Absent US support, it is not difficult to imagine morale on the island collapsing.

China’s persuasion campaign is thus aimed at not only Taiwan but also the US and its key allies and partners. Beijing continues to use all the tools at its disposal to drive general acceptance of the reality it desires to instantiate—that Taiwan is part of China, not an independent country, and that all other states agree with that premise. Its goal in doing so is to achieve preemptive recognition of its objectives and thereby collapse Taipei’s will to resist by demonstrating that Taiwan is fully isolated and alone.

This objective is the primary motivation behind the CCP’s constant efforts to rewrite history and current events in what often appears to be a ham-fisted way. The CCP has thus continually portrayed itself as the victim and the US and Taiwan as the aggressors in the cross-Strait dispute, despite enormous concessions and diplomatic generosity by Washington and Taipei. This argument resonates in parts of the non-aligned world and among potential US partners who would rather stay neutral in a conflict over Taiwan and more broadly in the US-China global competition.

Even as the CCP engages in highly destabilizing shows of force, it accuses the US and Taiwan of violating an “agreement” that was never made, in which the US supposedly recognized Beijing’s right to control Taiwan’s affairs. A brief excursion into the actual history of PRC-ROC relations—and America’s relations with both—is necessary to understand the scope and scale of Beijing’s revisionism as part of its persuasion campaign to isolate Taiwan.

The ROC, not the PRC, was China’s sovereign government after the fall of the Qing dynasty. Though the ROC never controlled all the lands it claimed, it had all the trappings and juridical elements of a state for most of the period in which it ruled mainland China.¹² The ROC conducted all official diplomatic business for China before the CCP’s victory in 1949. The ROC was part of the grand alliance in World War II and a charter member of the United Nations Security

Council. Consistent with the prominent role it was to have after the war, the ROC, not the CCP, accepted the surrender of the Japanese on Taiwan. The CCP only came to power after its violent rebellion against the duly constituted ROC government run by the KMT.

The CCP prevailed on the mainland, but the ROC survived and retreated to Taiwan. The CCP governed, had sovereignty, and was the legitimate ruler only over the mainland of China, while the KMT had sovereignty and legitimate rule over the island of Taiwan and the offshore Matsu, Pescadores, and Quemoy islands.¹³

The CCP consistently denies and attempts to persuade others to deny the historical and geopolitical reality that there have been two Chinas since 1949: an ROC on Taiwan and a PRC on the mainland. The US recognized the ROC (including its claims to rule all of China) from 1949 to 1979 and the PRC (which also claims to rule all of China) from 1979 onward.¹⁴

The shift in US recognition did not change the reality of the two Chinas. The US made a policy choice to accommodate the PRC, a decision that had no bearing on the continued reality that the ROC legitimately governed Taiwan.¹⁵ Though the US made an enormous concession to its erstwhile enemy by switching its official recognition from the ROC to the PRC and abrogating its treaty with the island, the ROC still ruled Taiwan and had sovereignty over its people. The shift in US recognition was not accompanied by a formal agreement that the CCP was the legitimate ruler of Taiwan and that the ROC was therefore illegitimate. Beijing demanded such an agreement, but it only received an “acknowledgement” from Washington of the CCP’s position that Taiwan was a sovereign part of China.¹⁶

Even when the US broke formal ties with Taipei—but still refused to recognize the CCP’s formal claims—the US Congress protested and enacted with bipartisan support the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), which provides the legal basis for strong if unofficial relations with Taiwan today. The US thus never officially recognized China’s claim of sovereignty over Taiwan.¹⁷ Washington’s robust political, commercial, cultural, and educational ties with Taiwan are required by law. The PRC knows this yet

insists that the US can somehow stop supporting Taiwan. Further, the US has a legal requirement to help Taiwan resist coercion. The TRA was passed in 1979, yet China continued with the process of diplomatic normalization. It thus implicitly acknowledged that US unofficial relations with Taiwan are part of what Washington calls “our one China policy.”¹⁸

The CCP not only denies this reality but also portrays itself as an aggrieved party, despite the concessions the US has made to its demands. The US shifted its recognition from the ROC to the PRC at a time when China was especially weak: ravaged by Mao’s Cultural Revolution, threatened by the Soviets with nuclear war, and readying for war with a Vietnam that was becoming hegemonic and hostile. It has still not acknowledged this tremendous US concession, but rather continues trying to force more change.

To understand Beijing’s persuasion campaign, it is useful to understand what the US did *not* agree to in its “One China” policy and what Congress insisted on through the TRA and associated actions. First, the US does not take a position on Taiwan’s sovereignty. It insists that the dispute over sovereignty between Taipei and Beijing is to be worked out peacefully, without preconditions. That is why the TRA’s language requiring the US to resist Chinese coercion of Taiwan is so crucial: Washington has always maintained that Taiwan should not have to negotiate with a gun pointed at its head. That the US does not take a position on sovereignty does not negate Taiwan’s sovereignty; under international law, Taiwan is a sovereign entity. The US is making a reversible policy concession to the PRC in not officially recognizing the ROC, and it certainly never agreed to the “One China” *principle* (as opposed to America’s “One China” *policy*), which Beijing tries to persuade countries to accept. The supposed “principle” is that Taiwan has always been part of the PRC. The principle is a lie—Taiwan has *never* been part of the People’s Republic of China. It has been part of past Chinese empires (as well as Dutch, Portuguese, and Japanese empires), but it has never been part of the political entity that is the PRC.

Second, the US never agreed to cut off unofficial ties with Taiwan or limit the seniority of officials who conduct the operations of this unofficial relationship.

Indeed, the presidents of Taiwan and the US can meet if they so choose. Such meetings cannot have the trappings of official state meetings because treating the Taiwanese leader as the president of Taiwan would violate America's definition of its "One China" policy—not because it would violate international law or any promise to Beijing.¹⁹ Yet the PRC protests meetings between lower levels of the US government and Taiwanese officials, increasingly through demonstrations of force.

Third, while the US stated in a 1982 diplomatic communiqué that it would cap arms sales to Taiwan, it made abundantly clear that this cap was contingent on China's commitment to peace as manifested in China's military posture. But China's military posture has grown more menacing. Given Washington's historic position that it will calibrate its Taiwan policy based on the threat China poses to Taiwan, the US has no formal obligation to limit its military relationship with Taiwan. It has limited this relationship as a concession to China. But it can exercise with and train the ROC armed forces, and it can sell any military equipment it deems necessary to keep the peace across the strait.

Fourth, the US never agreed to limit Taiwan's international political and economic identity. Washington can push for Taiwan's participation in any international organization for which statehood is not a requirement. China has in the past acquiesced to Taiwan's participation as a separate legal entity in the World Trade Organization.²⁰ China, not the US, has changed policy. Beijing is trying to persuade the US and its allies that the "One China" principle governs cross-strait relations, that Taiwan is part of the PRC, and that the US is abrogating promises to China to this effect.

The US must undermine this persuasion campaign and provide its allies with the political cover to develop the kind of relations with Taiwan that they want, free from Chinese intimidation. There is simply nothing provocative about this policy. The US promised not to unilaterally confer diplomatic recognition on the ROC, and it is abiding by that promise. On the other hand, the PRC is not abiding by its promise of peacefully resolving its differences with Taiwan.

Coercion

The CCP has not been content to rely on persuasion to secure final control of Taiwan, of course. It has long accompanied its persuasion campaign with an expanding coercion effort. This effort fits with Thomas Schelling's definition of coercion as a kind of "violent communications about intentions and commitment."²¹ Schelling's insight was that the power to hurt gives states tremendous bargaining power. Expounding on his work, scholar Tami Davis Biddle evokes one of the most memorable scenes in modern cinematic history to explain how coercion works: In *The Godfather*, Don Corleone tells his consigliere that he will make a noncompliant movie producer an "offer he cannot refuse"²² to get him to do something he otherwise would not do. Following a famous scene involving a decapitated horse's head, the producer subsequently hired the don's friend for an important role in an upcoming movie.

The movie producer felt²³ he had to comply or face more harm. This cinematic example helps illustrate the PRC's coercion tactics toward the US and Taiwan. No serious analyst doubts that Beijing is willing and able to inflict harm against Taiwan and the US if they do not comply with its demands. The act of being coerced is thus a psychological process. The coercer must manipulate the mind of the coerced.²⁴ As Schelling says, the power to hurt is a bargaining power. The willingness to use it is diplomacy—"vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy."²⁵ This strategy is an exploitation of fear. Arguably, a state's leverage over another is at its greatest when its adversary believes it has not yet used all its power, that any display of force is a *restrained* one.

The PLA's Theory of Coercion. The PLA has been interested in US theories of coercion since the first Gulf War. Coercive strategies fit well with a CCP strategic culture that emphasizes the ability to manipulate an adversary's psyche through stratagems. According to Mark Stokes, in the late 1990s the PLA began to theorize that US aerospace coercion was related to China's own concepts of stratagem, which it calls *mouliè* (谋略). Military force could be used to attack "an

opponent's cognitive processes."²⁶ Military strategies of this kind require specific calculations of where pressure or manipulation can be applied to achieve political objectives. The PLA theorizing about coercive tactics closely resembled Mao's writing about the so-called magic weapons of warfare. Force and political manipulation were tightly sewn into strategies that manipulate the enemy and make them concede before all-out warfare is needed.

PLA theorists wrote about the coercion of Taiwan in the context of achieving limited political objectives, short of what could be achieved through an invasion and occupation of the island. Force would be modulated based on the objective and level of resistance to it. Detering *de jure* independence requires a certain level of force; forcing agreement with different forms of unification requires more force.

These PLA writings coincided with the onset of the PLA modernization program in 1993. By the beginning of the 21st century, the PLA was deploying a lethal, precision-guided missile force positioned across the Taiwan Strait, enabled by a modernizing comprehensive command, control, communications, and computers and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (known as C4ISR) program. Indeed, the PLA aerospace force was the leading edge of the modernization program. At the same time, the PLA was developing anti-access and area-denial (A2AD) capabilities that raised the costs of US intervention on Taiwan's behalf. The political message to Taiwan was clear: The PLA could inflict great harm on the island, and the US would not want to risk making a costly defense of it.

As the PLA acquired new capabilities, it developed new options to deter Taipei's moves to formalize its *de facto* independent status, co-opt Washington to contain such perceived moves by Taiwan, and set conditions for intensification of the use of force across the strait. PLA authors stressed that the threat or actual application of force is necessary to ensure its goals regarding Taiwan, and Washington understood the consequences of crossing Beijing's ever-changing political thresholds.

The PLA continues to debate the efficacy of demonstrations of power to affect political dynamics.

The 2020 version of the *Science of Military Strategy* describes *weishe* (威慑), often translated as "deterrence," as

a method of military conflict to achieve a political goal based on military strength . . . and determination to use strength [that] makes the other side face unworthy or even unbearable consequences.²⁷

The intended political outcome of this method of military conflict is to make the adversary "give in, compromise, or surrender," ideally without having to engage in large-scale fighting.²⁸

The PLA may use military conflict at a low level to achieve a political goal. The *Science of Military Strategy* identifies "warning military strikes" as part of strategies to both forestall adversary actions and coerce compliance. Indeed, limited uses of military strikes against precise and specific targets can showcase the ability and determination to achieve military and political objectives and may obviate the need for larger military campaigns and operations. The PLA does not see itself as moving through distinct phases of war, from "shaping" and "influence" operations to "kinetic" use of force operations.²⁹ Rather, it intertwines shaping and influence operations with kinetic operations.

All militaries are instruments of politics, but in the PRC the relationship has historically been more direct. The PLA is the party's armed wing, not China's professional military. The PLA's foundational purpose is to help the party win political struggles and develop new political realities. In turn, the CCP's main purpose is to expand its power over territory and peoples. The party's history as an insurgency engaged in "people's war" informs its current conduct as it expands its writ over Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

In Taiwan's case, the CCP seeks to expand its political power over new territory and 24 million additional people that it has never ruled. This is difficult to do and would require much more force than any of the other populations and territories it now controls. The PLA is thus a crucial tool, and intensifying applications of actual—rather than "only" demonstrations of—force may be necessary.

The coercive campaign offers the PRC distinct advantages over a campaign to invade and occupy Taiwan. It also provides Beijing flexibility to continually redefine what it considers the bounds of acceptable political behavior by Taipei and Washington. First, unlike a campaign of brute force annihilation, Beijing can redefine success if it needs to. Second, Beijing's negotiating leverage keeps increasing as the PLA grows stronger.

The coercive campaign offers the PRC distinct advantages over a campaign to invade and occupy Taiwan.

The CCP's coercion campaign has expanded even as Taipei has made concessions. The ROC abandoned its claim to be the sole legitimate ruler of all of China in 1991. In effect, Taiwan declared peace, abandoning its stated policy of unification through force, and aligned its polity with geopolitical realities. The overwhelming majority of Taiwanese residents did not come to Taiwan during the KMT retreat, and they had no say and little interest in perpetuating the Chinese civil war. They disagree with Washington's "One China" policy and never had a say in its foundational 1972 statement that "all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but One China."³⁰ Yet they have accepted it.

A substantial group of voters now supports Taiwan's newer Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), an erstwhile opposition party that rose to power as part of the independence movement in Taiwan. But the once-oppressed DPP voters made an enormous concession by accepting that they were citizens of the ROC, not of a new state called Taiwan. The ROC is a preexisting political entity whose existence the CCP recognizes in practice even while denying its

right to rule over anything. Any declaration of the existence of a new Republic of Taiwan would seem to Beijing a declaration of independence and therefore an escalation rather than a concession.³¹ But the US does not support such a political escalation and thus this option is all but impossible. Rather, the US supports the political status quo, which means that the ROC rules Taiwan and the PRC rules mainland China.

Taipei also suspended martial law in 1987, which had been put in place to fight Communist subversion and infiltration. It made political changes to better reflect the reality that its government only has sovereignty over the people and territory of Taiwan, though it did not formally amend its constitution to relinquish its claims to mainland China, which ironically would have angered the PRC. The ROC thus set the conditions for a diplomatic breakthrough across the strait. Officials from each side of the strait met to work out practical matters of cooperation, from the governance of postal services to consular services. The two sides implicitly agreed to compromise on a political formulation, now referred to as the 1992 Consensus. They agreed to disagree on the meaning of "One China."³²

The ROC's unilateral abandonment of the threat of force and the forfeiture of claims of jurisdiction over the mainland should have been the basis for a lasting peace. But Beijing's response to Taipei's cessation of a state of hostilities was an escalation of its coercion campaign. Before Taiwan's first democratic election in June 1995, Taiwan's president, Lee Teng-hui, made a high-profile visit to his alma mater, Cornell University. The PRC then conducted a series of missile tests in the waters surrounding Taiwan and other military maneuvers in response to what CCP leaders called Lee's attempts to "split the motherland."³³ The US and Taiwan had never formally agreed to limit the visits of Taiwan presidents, and the US does not agree that there is a "motherland" that Taiwan is trying to "split." There has never been a single political CCP-run entity that included Taiwan. This was a provocative escalation by Beijing.

The PRC initiated another set of missile tests in the run-up to Taiwan's first presidential election in 1996

in an attempt to frighten Taiwan's electorate into voting against Lee and compel the US to rein in what they called Taiwan's pro-independence forces.³⁴ In 1999, Lee suggested the two sides negotiate on a "special state-to-state basis"³⁵ in an effort to break Taipei and Beijing out of a diplomatic stalemate, just seven years after its partial breakthrough. The response from Beijing was a stepped-up rhetorical assault with escalating military maneuvers. Beijing focused on Lee's use of the term "state-to-state," despite Lee's use of the modifier "special" to connote something less than official country-to-country relations. His creative formulation was meant to co-opt independence-minded Taiwanese while providing Beijing with a face-saving way to conduct relations with Taiwan.

Taiwan's efforts to normalize relations based on a reasonable diplomatic formula that recognized CCP rule over the mainland while avoiding declaring Taiwanese independence were seen in Beijing as dangerous "splittism" (the term the CCP uses for political separatism). Beijing pocketed Taiwanese concessions as it had previous American concessions, but it failed to make any concessions of its own. Moreover, the PRC treated these concessions as provocations justifying further demands and coercion.

This response was delivered by the Chinese General Secretary Jiang Zemin at the height of the US effort to integrate China into the global economy and establish warm commercial relations with Beijing. It occurred as the US dramatically downsized its military following the end of the Cold War. There was certainly cause for Beijing to worry about the military balance with the US after America's thumping of Saddam Hussein's military in 1991—and the pro-democratic rhetoric of both the George H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations. But US actions indicated that the threat to the PRC was receding rather than growing. The Chinese coercion campaign thus began during a time of peace and prosperity for Beijing, when it enjoyed friendly relations with the West.

Countries and companies had rushed into China to explore commercial opportunities while the PRC embraced foreign expertise and know-how. The Soviet Union had collapsed, removing a long-standing threat to Beijing's north. Beijing's ideological problem

remained, however: Democracy in Taiwan undermines the CCP's core tenet that democracy is unsuitable for the Chinese cultural context. The existence of a legitimate constitutional government actually ruling Taiwan, moreover, discredited the CCP's claim to speak for all Chinese people.

Having received US and Taiwanese concessions as if they were acts of escalation, the CCP learned during this period of peace and Western outreach and engagement that threats of force could push the US to pressure Taipei. The US sent ships to the Taiwan Strait in response to Chinese missile tests in 1995 and 1996, to be sure. But the PRC convinced then-President Clinton to publicly affirm China's position on Taiwan, rather than Taipei's or Washington's, while speaking on Chinese soil in Shanghai.³⁶ Beijing demanded that President Clinton repeat the so-called three nos: that the US would not support (1) Taiwan independence, (2) "Two Chinas" or "One China One Taiwan," or (3) Taiwan's efforts to participate in international organizations in which statehood is a requirement.³⁷

The events of 1995–97 also exposed the PRC's relative military impotence at that time, as the PLA had no military answer to the arrival of US warships in the strait. But Beijing accomplished the political outcome it sought, despite its military weakness, through an apparent escalation that was not backed by actual capability. It made a political demand of Washington based on a military bluff, and Washington complied.

A DPP government under Chen Shui-bian was elected in 2000, partially in reaction to China's military intimidation. As the CCP's pressure grew on the Chen government, Taipei pushed for greater recognition of Taiwan's independence. Yet Beijing convinced President George W. Bush to publicly rebuke Taiwan's president in the company of PRC Premier Wen Jiabao, humiliating Chen in the process.³⁸

When Xi became general secretary of the CCP in 2012, his initial approach to Taiwan was relatively moderate. Taiwan was governed by a KMT leader, Ma Ying-jeou, who sought more conciliation with Beijing. Xi and Ma met in Singapore in 2015, the first meeting between the leaders of Taiwan and China and a notable Chinese diplomatic olive branch to Taiwan. Moreover, Xi did not protest when Ma took the public

position that the two sides had “agreed to disagree” about the meaning of “One China,” another apparent PRC concession.³⁹ The formula of “One China, different interpretations” was apparently back on the table. This formulation was in essence the same as Lee’s “special state-to-state relations” comment in 1999, as the leaders of the government of Taiwan and China met as coequals.

This history is not merely of academic interest. To counter CCP revisionism, US policymakers need to understand it. And, as a matter of policy, the US should insist that Beijing does not get to choose which elected leaders of the ROC it deals with. To date, the US has not called on the PRC to return to the negotiating table with the current Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen based on this precedent.

Xi’s relatively conciliatory approach to Taiwan did not survive Ma’s presidency, however. When Tsai succeeded Ma in 2016, Xi reverted to the previous CCP posture of threats and demands. During his meeting with Ma, Xi said that “as long as the 1992 Consensus and its core values are acknowledged, we stand ready to have contact.”⁴⁰ Tsai did not explicitly accept the language of the 1992 Consensus, charting a different course from an agreement made by her political opponent’s party. This is, of course, the prerogative of any new government. China’s Taiwan Affairs Office criticized her and demanded that she recognize the PRC’s “One China” principle.⁴¹ Tsai nevertheless went as far toward conciliation as Taiwan’s new politics would allow. By 2016, the electorate in Taiwan had little connection to mainland China. The grandchildren of the old KMT were voters who had grown up in a democratic Taiwan. Ties with China were akin to those of Canadians with the US: a shared culture, history, and language but little else, despite the CCP’s insistence otherwise.

While Beijing was warning Washington about Tsai’s “separatist” and independence proclivities, Tsai conceded in her May 2016 inauguration speech that “the new government will conduct cross-strait affairs in accordance with the Republic of China Constitution, the Act Governing Relations between the People of Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, and other relevant legislation.”⁴²

This statement was another major concession by a Taiwanese leader. That Tsai represented the native Taiwanese DPP yet accepted that the ROC and Taiwan were the same entity was a difficult internal political maneuver. Crucially, she embraced the reality that the PRC governs the mainland and the ROC on Taiwan does not; she thereby opened the door to diplomatic solutions similar to those of her predecessors. But for Tsai, the meaning of “One China” was to be negotiated, not simply conceded to the PRC. Washington encouraged Tsai’s concession, but it never insisted that the CCP make any similar compromise or live up to Xi’s implicit acceptance of the “different interpretations.”⁴³

Xi has years of experience dealing with Taiwan as a former party secretary of Fujian province, directly across the strait from Taiwan. He is versed in Taiwanese politics and knows that Tsai went as far as she could go on the issue of “One China.” Yet he chose to escalate the coercion campaign, blaming Tsai for recalcitrance. The US and its allies should have made a more concerted effort, beginning then to call on Xi to return to the negotiating table and not escalate his disagreements with Taiwan’s new government through force and diplomatic pressure.

Soon after Tsai was elected, Beijing pressured Panama and São Tomé and Príncipe to shift diplomatic relations from the ROC to the PRC.⁴⁴ Beijing shut Taiwan out of international organizations, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization⁴⁵ and the International Criminal Police Organization,⁴⁶ among others. During Tsai’s presidency, the CCP has pressured companies ranging from United Airlines to Snickers to call Taiwan a province of China or face economic penalty.⁴⁷

Beijing also accelerated its campaign of military coercion following Tsai’s accession. The PLA increased the frequency of bomber circumnavigations of Taiwan in late 2016 and made such circumnavigations an enduring reality for the Tsai administration.⁴⁸ By late 2017, PLA bombers and support aircraft circumnavigated the island.⁴⁹ Beijing modified a civil aviation route near the centerline of the Taiwan Strait in January 2018 to allow commercial airlines to fly over open ocean in the strait, severely taxing

Taiwan's air defense system and air traffic controls.⁵⁰ Since February 2018, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) intensified a pattern of flights through the Miyako Strait, off the east coast of Taiwan in the Philippine Sea, and the Bashi Channel. These flights demonstrate the PLAAF's ability to "break" the first island chain and establish air dominance over key life-lines for Taiwan and its geographical connection to the outside world.⁵¹

In March 2019, two PLAAF fighters crossed into Taiwan's side of the median line—an unofficial boundary between Taiwan and the PRC not challenged by the Chinese military since 1999.⁵² The military maneuvers were accompanied by statements from China's Taiwan Affairs Office and the PLA's Eastern Theater Command about their necessity to guard against "separatists," as if the PLA were conducting legitimate counterterror operations.⁵³ In September 2020 a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman stated, "There is no so-called median line in the Strait."⁵⁴

This line had been another means of keeping peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. The CCP's violation and rejection of it was an incremental move to claim the waters and air around Taiwan as its own. The PRC continued this coercive campaign by increasing air incursions into the Taiwanese Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Taiwan recorded 969 incursions by Chinese warplanes into its ADIZ in 2021—more than double the roughly 380 carried out in 2020.⁵⁵ In 2022, total Chinese air incursions into the ADIZ were 1,115.⁵⁶ The PLA continually issues threatening messages in native Taiwanese dialects and allows military commentators to describe the ability of their jets to decapitate the Taiwanese leadership.⁵⁷

These PLA operations are part of Chinese cognitive warfare, what Taiwan calls "cognitive domain warfare" or *renzhi yu zuozhan* (认知域作战). A Taiwan defense analyst has captured the purpose of this aerospace campaign: "PLA exercises first create an environment of fear, and then the responsibility of causing tension is blamed on 'Taiwan's ambitious politicians.'"⁵⁸ The CCP aims to influence Taiwanese and American politics through the tension it creates. In manipulating the information space through demonstrations of force, its goal is to get important

audiences in Taipei, Washington, and allied capitals to believe more pliant Taiwanese leaders could make this threat go away.⁵⁹

The CCP has thus put the Taiwanese under the constant threat of ever-escalating violence and political pressure. One purpose of these shows of force across the strait is to coerce the US to change its policy, curtail its relations with Taiwan, come closer to the CCP's definition of what "One China" means, and force Taipei to come with it on that journey of concessions. The second purpose is to wear down Taiwan's resistance, undermine DPP rule, and persuade the Taiwanese of their own accord to elect and follow leaders who will concede to China's demands.

The PRC can fully secure its objectives vis-à-vis Taiwan if it achieves either aim. Taiwan cannot continue to resist growing PRC pressure without the active support of Washington and its allies in and beyond the region. If Beijing can reduce or *break* that support, Taiwan will have no option but to give the PRC what it desires. The CCP can succeed even more fully if it can actually break the will of Taiwanese supporters of policies of autonomy and resistance and elevate compliant Taiwanese politicians to power.

US policy risks making a grave error by seeing China's expanding military operations around Taiwan only through the prism of preparations for an invasion. Those operations may be part of such preparations and may help with them in various ways, but they are also strategic undertakings in their own right and are directly aimed at accomplishing Beijing's goals. Developing strategies to deter or defeat a Chinese invasion of Taiwan may be ineffective or even counterproductive in preventing the PRC from subjugating Taiwan through a combination of these coercion efforts and the continuing persuasion efforts that accompany them, as we consider below.

A strategy to protect Taiwan's autonomy and freedom from Chinese control requires blocking the persuasion and coercion roads to PRC domination of the island and deterring or defeating the compellence road. A US counter-persuasion and -coercion strategy should be focused, tightly sequenced and phased, and deliberate. Chinese political and

economic moves to undermine Taiwan's isolation should be coordinated with demonstrations of US and allied force that can ensure open strategic lines of communication and resupply around Taiwan. The increasingly myopic focus on the supposedly imminent Chinese invasion threat can seriously hinder or prevent entirely the development and implementation of such a strategy. This outcome may be in part what China seeks.

Compellence

The PRC has unquestionably been developing the capability to compel Taiwanese capitulation by force if coercion and persuasion fail, but Xi's determination to move to compellence and the imminence of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan both require more rigorous interrogation than either is currently receiving. It would be more strategically apposite for the US to approach concerns about an impending Chinese invasion in the context of ongoing Chinese persuasion and coercion approaches. An invasion or other compellent strategies are possible, but such scenarios would be escalations of current campaigns carrying significant risks and downsides for Beijing.

The narrow focus on the threat of Chinese invasion, moreover, marginalizes an alternative compellence strategy that would flow far more naturally from China's persuasion and coercion efforts—a strategy of isolation. The US would do well, therefore, to take a step back from the increasingly frantic discussion of ways and means to deter or stop a cross-Strait invasion and instead reconsider the PRC strategic context from which any such decision and operation would emerge.

China did not begin its military modernization with the express purpose of invading Taiwan. As we have stated, the PLA modernization campaign started in the early 1990s, when the PRC observed America's military modernization demonstrated in the deserts of Iraq and Kuwait.⁶⁰ The Gulf War shocked the world's major militaries by demonstrating that a highly trained, professional, all-volunteer force equipped with precision strike and stealth

capabilities could humiliate the world's fourth largest army rapidly and with extremely low casualties.

Russian military theorists were seized by this phenomenon and pushed for the modernization and professionalization of the Russian military in the following decades. Many other countries began abandoning long-held conscription practices and turning to professional volunteer militaries equipped with more advanced technology. The Chinese did the same and for the same reasons.

US policy risks making a grave error by seeing China's expanding military operations around Taiwan only through the prism of preparations for an invasion.

Defense analysts have grown increasingly concerned that the PLA has a set goal of 2027 to invade Taiwan, based on comments by outgoing commander of US Indo-Pacific Command Adm. Phil Davidson (ret.).⁶¹ But the primary importance of 2027 is that it is the 100-year anniversary of the PLA's founding and is thus likely a deadline for it to reach new modernization milestones. The PLA can likely already conduct an invasion if ordered, albeit with high risk; as the modernization process continues, and in every year that passes, the PLA will have more capability to do so.⁶²

The PLA's modernization effort is general-purpose, rather than narrowly optimized for a cross-Strait invasion. It began at a time when the PRC was pocketing US and Taiwanese concessions and increasing its

demands; it continued through periods of apparent Taiwanese and American conciliation of Beijing and through periods of easing of tensions between Beijing and Taipei. Xi may have accelerated the expected date of completion of this decades-long general military buildup, shifting it into a specific preparation for a particular invasion scenario, but there is no direct and publicly available evidence of this assessment.⁶³ US policymakers would do well to question the notion that this program's date of completion represents some kind of specified invasion date.

The modernization program naturally enhances the PRC's military abilities to invade Taiwan even against US resistance, but it also enhances the PLA's abilities to pursue another form of compellence— isolation.

Isolation. A strategy of isolating Taiwan by air and sea flows naturally from China's ongoing persuasion and coercion efforts. Those efforts explicitly aim to get the last few states that diplomatically recognize Taiwan to shift their recognition to Beijing. They aim to cajole states and businesses to accept and promulgate the Chinese version of the Beijing-Taipei relationship, rather than Taiwan's—a form of informational isolation. That aim includes efforts to prevent other heads and senior leaders of foreign states from visiting Taipei or receiving Taiwanese officials in their capitals.

It is thus in part also a strategy of diplomatic isolation. And Beijing constantly presses other countries to refrain from providing Taiwan with military equipment—a form of military-cooperation isolation. One set of aims of the current coercion and persuasion efforts is thus to use means short of the actual use of force to cut Taipei's connections to the outside world, other than those that might run through Beijing.

The natural next escalation in these efforts is not invasion, but rather adding the overt use of force to complete the isolation. Beijing could declare a quarantine or blockade of Taiwan on some pretext and deploy its maritime power and airpower to enforce such a policy. The blockade need not be total from the start. The PRC could begin by deploying ships covered

by aircraft around the island to inspect all vessels entering and leaving Taiwan's ports for some claimed contraband—advanced weapons systems, perhaps. Beijing could similarly insist on inspecting aircraft, although attempting to enforce such a demand without actually shooting down civilian aircraft would be challenging. How many civilian aircraft, on the other hand, would continue operating through skies full of PLAAF aircraft threatening to down them?

If such initial efforts failed to bring Taipei to a position satisfactory to Beijing, the PRC could escalate further to an actual blockade. Taiwan is unalterably dependent on external resources to survive, so it is almost impossible to imagine that a protracted blockade could fail to secure Taipei's surrender on almost any terms Beijing might dictate. Moreover, given its unique lack of official status in international affairs, it may be especially vulnerable to demonstrations that it can be isolated. It would be difficult to muster the kind of defiance that Britain did under attack from Nazi Germany: Taiwan lacks Britain's long history and strategic traditions, general cohesion, and unbreakable morale.

This form of compellence not only is the most natural and obvious progression from the current PRC campaigns but also seems to present a far more attractive balance of risk and reward to Beijing. It does not in principle require the PLA to engage in combat. If Taiwan's supporters make clear they will not challenge such a blockade, then Taiwan might surrender without fighting. If either Taiwan or its supporters decide to challenge it, moreover, they run the risk of appearing to have fired the first shot, provided the PRC has arranged matters such that running the blockade requires shooting at ships or aircraft blocking routes to ports or airfields.⁶⁴

If the PRC has not managed such an arrangement, then the PLA might need to shoot first, but it might begin by hitting a civilian plane or ship. Such an action would obviously incur outrage and opprobrium, on the one hand, but it would also place Taiwan and its partners in the position of having to decide how to respond. That position would likely be uncomfortable, as competing pressures to respond to the Chinese action and support Taiwan would be offset by fears

that the pro-Taiwan coalition would be initiating a war. To see this dynamic at work, we have only to look at the extensive Western discourse about the fears of prompting Russian escalation by providing defensive systems to Ukraine following Moscow's unprovoked and illegal invasion. The West's early wavering about supporting Ukraine against a blatantly illegal and unjust invasion requires considerably more attention than it has received, since it offers Beijing encouragement as it considers escalation toward Taiwan.

This isolation strategy has some downsides for Beijing, to be sure. It would be an obvious escalation to the use of force and could trigger the US and regional states to mobilize for war, thereby depriving the PRC of the element of surprise it might otherwise hope to achieve at some level in a no-notice invasion scenario. If the US and its partners responded to the isolation rapidly and in force, Beijing could find it has made the prospects of a successful invasion much worse by bringing its adversaries' advanced military capabilities into the vicinity of Taiwan without interdicting them.

The PRC would thus need to be prepared to choose either of the two most plausible actions in response to the deployment of considerable US and allied firepower toward Taiwan: de-escalate and await another moment or escalate to regional war. If the strength and determination of the US and partner response seemed to Beijing too high to challenge, then the PRC could back away, accept a temporary defeat, and develop alternative approaches for another try later on. Beijing could prepare in advance to mitigate the unpleasantness of having to climb down by defining a lesser political objective that it could be reasonably sure to accomplish—or plausibly claim to have accomplished—before it had to back away.

The PRC could alternatively ensure that its initial preparations for the isolation campaign include preparations to escalate to major conflict if a US-led coalition challenged it seriously. This approach might not be easily distinguishable from preparations for a full-scale invasion in that it would likely include putting in place all the capabilities needed to exclude US-led forces from the vicinity of Taiwan and drive off or destroy any already near the

island. It might include the preparation of an invasion force, depending on whether Beijing believed it could achieve its aims by the escalatory application of the isolation approach. The PLA would face a potentially much worse military position at the start of such an escalation than it could hope to face in a surprise invasion scenario, but Beijing might also calculate that the threat of invasion could reduce the willingness of the US-led coalition to push matters to full-scale war.

Time-space relationships could also be central to any PRC isolation approach. The PRC appears to believe it is developing a strong network of collaborators and fellow travelers in Taiwan and that its own political warfare elements on the island may be able to paralyze initial Taiwanese responses and quickly sap the island's will to resist. An isolation strategy would almost certainly begin with the successful isolation of the island by air and sea; any response to break blockades or quarantines would likely take days or weeks to negotiate and then bring into effect.

The initial shock of isolation could engender strong psychological effects, especially if China manages to cut Taiwan's internet connectivity and other means of communicating with the outside world. Beijing might calculate that its efforts and agents could bring Taiwan to surrender before the US is able to break through Taiwan's isolation. The PRC leadership is moderately likely to be wrong in such a calculation; overestimating one's ability to break the will of an adversary is one of the most common mistakes in coercion and compulsion strategies. But miscalculation would change the outcome, not the decision to make the attempt.

If Beijing pursued an isolation strategy, it would undermine the prospects of an immediate escalation to full-scale attack. But this approach is still attractive as it offers the possibility of achieving Beijing's aims without having to engage in a complicated amphibious invasion. An isolation strategy poses a potentially higher risk that the PRC might have to back down in an embarrassing fashion, but it offsets that risk by offering a climbdown before major hostilities break out and therefore before China suffers significant combat losses. It also flows most naturally from

the long-standing persuasion and coercion campaigns China has been pursuing.

Invasion. Xi might nevertheless decide not to bother with isolation efforts, instead driving straight toward his final objective via invasion. The Chinese idealized version of this strategy would of course be attractive to Beijing: A brief period of increased tension covers the execution of well-planned and rehearsed PLA mobilization for an invasion. A short air-missile campaign shatters Taiwan's defense and government structures while Chinese political warfare agents on the island become active, wrecking any hope of coherent Taiwanese preparations for defense. The massive Chinese fleet sweeps quickly across the strait and begins disembarking troops and vehicles onto Taiwanese beaches almost before Taipei knows what's happening, and Chinese troops raise the PRC flag over government buildings in Taipei while policymakers in Washington and Tokyo debate what to do. Xi makes a speech from the Presidential Office in Taipei, and "splittism" is forever defeated.

It is unlikely that even Xi seriously entertains this fantasy. The statements and actions of American and Japanese leaders and officials offer no reason for Xi to be confident that the US and Japan (or Australia) would stand idly by and watch this spectacle. On the contrary, from the PRC's perspective, President Joe Biden has been setting informational and military conditions to prepare to defend Taiwan against an invasion.

Xi has clearly also been observing the disastrous Russian invasion of Ukraine that highlighted additional factors of concern. The Russians thought they had thoroughly penetrated Ukrainian society and government with their own agents and fellow travelers and built a campaign on the assumption that Ukrainians would not fight. They were wrong on all counts. The Russians also wildly overestimated their own military capabilities and competence and underestimated the inevitable effects of battlefield friction. The PLA is almost certainly more competent and able to handle friction than the Potemkin army with which Russia invaded, but friction is real in any war and the more so in complex large-scale amphibious invasions.

Chinese military leaders and Xi himself must therefore take seriously the possibilities that Taiwan will fight and that the political warfare efforts on the island will be only partially successful, that the US and its allies will respond with force rapidly and determinedly, that the PLA will not perform optimally, and, even if nothing else does, that the friction inherent in war will lead to setbacks and losses. None of these observations are groundbreaking. They serve only to say that Xi must recognize the high risks associated with invading Taiwan—unless he is a thoroughgoing fool, which he does not in any way appear to be.

It is clear enough that an island of 24 million people cannot hope to defeat the massed forces of a country of 1.4 billion. The best that Taiwan on its own could hope would be to inflict painful losses on an invading Chinese force. Properly equipped and determined to fight, Taiwan might be able to do so. We shall set aside further consideration of this aspect of the scenario, however, to focus on those that are more dangerous to Beijing.

Debate roils the US national security establishment about America's capacity to stop a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Some argue that the PLA's ballistic, cruise, and now hypersonic missiles render America's aircraft carriers hopelessly vulnerable and that China's air and missile arsenal and A2AD systems force the US to rely on bases far from Taiwan and on long-range standoff missiles alone, ultimately dooming any chance the US might have to stop the attack.⁶⁵

Much hinges in these scenarios on when and whether Beijing would attack US bases at Guam and Okinawa, at least, and on assumptions about America's ability to use bases in South Korea and the Japanese home islands. If the US retains the ability to use Guam and Okinawa, so the reasoning often goes, then it might be able to challenge the PLA's ability to cross the strait or at least to impose losses that Beijing would find unbearable.⁶⁶

These discussions are important for considerations of invasion scenarios. One struggles to recall a successful amphibious invasion in the era of combat aircraft conducted without at least localized air supremacy. Amphibious ships are large, vulnerable

targets whose sinking entails the deaths of hundreds or thousands of soldiers and the loss of large amounts of vehicles and supplies. Few if any militaries have been willing to risk sailing them to shore in the face of enemy aircraft or an enemy's ability to concentrate volumes of high-payload munitions on them.

China cannot deprive the US of all ability to strike a PLA landing force. Long-range stealth bombers can refuel out of the A2AD bubble and fire missiles, some of which will almost surely hit and destroy their targets. US attack submarines and other platforms can fire volleys of cruise missiles that PLA air defenses will not completely shoot down. If China invades and the US is determined to defend Taiwan, the PLA will take losses.

The scale and consequences of those losses depend heavily, however, on whether the US can use its carriers and regional bases. The more of those assets the American military can use, the more severe the damage it can impose on the invasion force, possibly up to and including its destruction. That is one of the reasons many discussions of a Chinese invasion scenario assume that the PLA would attack US bases on Guam and Okinawa, at least, and possibly on the Japanese home islands.⁶⁷ They often assume that South Korea would not allow the US to use its bases on the Korean Peninsula in a war that, in principle, interests Seoul very little.⁶⁸

Chinese military technocrats would likely prefer to begin the attack in this fashion and deprive the US of as much regional capacity as possible. The geostrategic advisability of doing so, however, rests on political rather than military considerations. Would the US absorb an attack on Guam and not thereafter regard itself as at war with China? Would Tokyo regard attacks on US bases on Japanese territory as bilateral US-China affairs that do not constitute acts of war against Japan? Would the US, having lost immediate use of its other regional bases, not activate the US–Republic of Korea mutual defense treaty (which, unlike the US treaty with Japan, actually is mutual and obliges Seoul to come to the aid of the US if the US is attacked in the region)?⁶⁹ Would Seoul refuse that activation, thereby risking the loss of its most important ally?

As both Russia and the allies have learned, no pre-war assumption holds after a war begins. Ukraine's fighting will be beyond what analysts imagined before the conflict, the US and NATO are equipping Ukraine far beyond what was thought possible, Washington has reinforced NATO forces on the eastern flank, and there are now two new NATO members under consideration. Turning back to Asia, it is hard to imagine South Korea wanting to remain neutral once Australia, Japan, and the US (and possibly some other NATO countries) are in the fight; in a scenario in which US ships, territory, and allies are struck, the US will likely pay whatever price its allies Thailand and the Philippines demand for the use of their airspace and bases in their territory. The issue of South Korean sympathy for Taiwan (or lack thereof) is a red herring. Seoul will have to make decisions in the context of the viability of its long-term reliance on the US and America's allies—and the possible impact of refusing US requests for help on that reliance.

Surely Xi and his lieutenants have considered the geopolitical consequences of trying to succeed operationally. If not, the China problem may be bigger than most analysts realize. In that case, either Xi is as isolated and delusional as Putin was before invading Ukraine, and therefore is undeterrable, or his grand strategic objectives have changed. From building up comprehensive national power and making incremental gains to undermine US alliances and reshape the world order, Xi would have transformed his grand strategy into one of forcefully obtaining hegemony in Asia. If Xi's objectives have changed in such a fashion, then the US should not be preparing to counter only an invasion of Taiwan but rather a series of Chinese campaigns for hegemony. The assumption of this report is that China's strategy toward Taiwan is part of a unification campaign, a close cousin of the successful Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang campaigns, and that any other gains Xi thinks he can secure from successful unification are secondary and opportunistic.

One might restate these considerations more straightforwardly. A PRC invasion plan that relies on attacking Guam and US positions in Japan early in the conflict would immediately bring China into open war

with the US, Japan, and possibly South Korea. US policy analysts might broodingly fear that the US and its regional allies would allow even such attacks to glance off them from a geopolitical standpoint and work to treat the war as a “Taiwan crisis” with no larger ramifications. We needn’t get into that argument ourselves to observe that Xi would, again, be a complete fool to be confident of such a response.

Serious political and military leaders in Beijing must thus consider that a decision to invade Taiwan immediately confronts them with a second extremely thorny decision: Either Xi accepts the much greater risks to the success of the military operation if China does not attack US bases at once, or he must accept the real possibility that the limited invasion of Taiwan could rapidly become a full-scale regional or even global war with the US and its allies.

An invasion would be an extraordinarily risky undertaking to any Chinese leader not besotted with his own power and deluded by stupid or dishonest generals and political advisers.

We do not by any means intend to suggest that Xi might not decide that either risk is acceptable; he might. We certainly do not mean to say that strong and prompt US responses or US and American-allied escalations are certain or would be successful. Those arguing that, as things stand today, China could invade Taiwan and the US couldn’t stop the invasion

might be right. Calls for increasing America’s military capabilities to defeat such a Chinese attack at acceptable costs to the US and its allies are surely cogent and should be heeded.

But even this cursory examination of some of the invasion-scenario implications suggests that it would be an extraordinarily risky undertaking to any Chinese leader not besotted with his own power and deluded by stupid or dishonest generals and political advisers. Most leaders would prefer less risky approaches that offer the promise of securing the same outcome at lower cost.

US policy therefore cannot accept as a given that Xi is simply preparing to invade and that, when the PLA is ready, he will. We must instead reopen the aperture to see other plausible roads Xi could take to seizing Taiwan and develop strategies to block all of them rather than focusing on only one.

Implications

This discussion would be of merely academic interest if preparations to defeat the cross-Strait invasion also included blocking the persuasion, coercion, and isolation-compellence roads. Unfortunately, though, the approaches generally advocated to stop the invasion actively undermine efforts to block Xi’s other roads.

If the invasion scenario is the only one the US and its allies plan to block, the temptation will grow to pull back from the Chinese A2AD bubble, abandon reliance on Guam and Okinawa, and focus on increasing America’s long-range strike capabilities.⁷⁰ Maximizing perceived operational effectiveness would override geopolitical necessity. Such a move would potentiate the PRC’s persuasion, coercion, and isolation efforts. It could be the case that these efforts actually enhance America’s ability to defend Taiwan and therefore increase the likelihood the US would come to Taiwan’s defense, although we question both assumptions. But would it seem that way to the Taiwanese?

The actual optics of that strategy involve withdrawing visible US presence from the near vicinity of

Taiwan, after all. The more imminent war becomes, under this approach, the faster US carrier battle groups steam away from the island, the more US strike aircraft fly north and west from Okinawa and Guam, and the more American military bases throughout the region move into defensive rather than offensive postures. The Taiwanese would be remarkable people indeed to observe those phenomena, see the growing concentration of Chinese military assets around their island, and conclude that they should be ready to fight to the death, confident that America will be with them.

Openly accepting the premise that US carriers cannot survive Chinese attacks also means openly stating that moving carriers toward Taiwan, Japan, or through the strait is always an American bluff and should not be seen as a serious demonstration of Washington's willingness or ability to fight.⁷¹ The utility of such freedom of navigation operations could be questioned in any event, but accepting the widely held premises about the poor US prospects for defeating a cross-Strait invasion today makes them worse than meaningless.⁷²

These discussions all tend to undermine the likely effectiveness of any strategies the US and its partners might develop to try to block the persuasion and coercion roads to the conquest of Taiwan, but they don't preclude the construction and implementation of such strategies. Even advocates of the standoff approach to defending Taiwan against invasion, after all, generally agree that the US should develop such counterstrategies even if they also generally dismiss the significance of Chinese persuasion and coercion campaigns through their confidence that invasion is inevitable and even imminent.⁷³

The most serious problem with focusing narrowly on preventing the cross-Strait invasion from standoff ranges is that it almost invites Xi to try the isolation strategy. Breaking blockades requires presence. The US certainly could use long-range precision weapons to sink Chinese ships blocking or interfering with merchant vessels trying to move into and out of Taiwan's ports—until those Chinese ships move too close to those merchant vessels to permit their safe destruction. And driving PLAAF aircraft out of Taiwan's

skies is not likely a task that can be undertaken from far-over-the-horizon bases except by destroying all the PLAAF bases on the mainland from which such operations are conducted.

Even assuming that that is a feasible military undertaking, it nevertheless would move the US rapidly toward the tremendously escalatory step of conducting a large-scale air attack on the Chinese homeland. Any approach to breaking the blockade with standoff munitions, finally, requires the US to use an immediate lethal approach to respond to a Chinese effort conducted, possibly, with less-than-lethal force. It could put the responsibility for escalating to a shooting war on the US, even though China created the crisis.

The main problem with approaches seeking to break a blockade from standoff distances is not that doing so is impossible but rather that promising to do so is insufficiently credible. It is almost impossible to imagine a scenario in which the Chinese begin to interfere with Taiwan's communications and trade with the rest of the world, whereafter the US instantly responds by sinking Chinese ships. Beijing's isolation strategy would almost inevitably have some time to work before a serious US response along these lines even started—let alone before it succeeded, if it could. Xi might miscalculate the odds of securing Taiwan's concession in that interval, as we have observed above, but the relatively low risks he would run compared with those entailed in a full-scale invasion make it more plausible that he would accept the risk of miscalculation here.

There is a solution to the conundrum these challenges pose to the US: Design a counterinvasion strategy that includes a counter-isolation strategy. The far-over-the-horizon counterinvasion strategy is a problem only if it precludes or excludes counter-isolation efforts. The US should and, indeed, must have far-over-the-horizon capabilities in any scenario. But it must also develop ways to operate within China's A2AD zone, including within the range of China's hypersonic missiles. It must be able to meet a Chinese blockade effort centered on nonlethal force with a nonlethal counter-isolation effort of its own. It must avoid the optics of withdrawing its military

power from the theater as the threat of Chinese attack grows and instead, ideally, create the object of credible military power flowing toward Taiwan.

We recognize that these demands are easy to make and hard to meet. We have no specific suggestions to offer about how to do so technically or tactically. Our purpose in this report, rather, is to say that actually

keeping Taiwan free is even harder than it seems to many. We cannot reduce the problem to one specific scenario, and we actually must focus on solving extraordinarily hard military problems to enable strategies that can defeat not only the most dangerous courses of action Beijing might pursue but also the most likely.

About the Authors

Dan Blumenthal is director of Asian studies at AEI and author of *The China Nightmare: The Grand Ambitions of a Decaying State* (AEI Press, 2020).

Frederick W. Kagan is a resident scholar and the director of the Critical Threats Project at AEI. He was previously an associate professor of military history at West Point. He holds a PhD in Russian and Soviet military history from Yale University.

About the Coalition Defense of Taiwan

The Coalition Defense of Taiwan is a partnership between the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War. Its work examines alternative strategies for the United States and its allies to deter China's aggression and, if necessary, defeat the People's Liberation Army. The Coalition Defense of Taiwan evaluates countries' strategic interests and operational capabilities in order to create an effective coalition and identifies coalition courses of action that can counter Chinese campaigns against Taiwan.

About the Institute for the Study of War

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) advances an informed understanding of military affairs through reliable research, trusted analysis, and innovative education. It is committed to improving the nation's ability to execute military operations and respond to emerging threats in order to achieve US strategic objectives. ISW is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, public policy research organization.

Notes

1. By “persuasion,” we mean attempts through information operations and diplomacy, backed by the threat of force, to convince all relevant players to accept China’s definition of “One China,” which is that Taiwan is and has always been a part of China. China is trying to persuade key international stakeholders that the costs of not accepting its preferred reality are high. By “coercion,” we mean more intense military intimidation and threats short of invasion to force Taiwan to accede to China’s demands. In a successful coercion campaign, Taiwan would still have a military that could resist, but one or both of its political leadership and military would have lost the willpower to do so. By “compellence,” we mean the use of force to degrade or destroy Taiwan’s means and will to resist. For example, this could be an invasion and occupation or a blockade accompanied by strikes. The key is that China is forcefully making Taiwan do something it would otherwise not do.

2. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, <https://web.mit.edu/~dcltdw/AOW/3.html>.

3. Mark A. Stokes, “The Chinese Joint Aerospace Campaign: Strategy, Doctrine, and Force Modernization,” in *China’s Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, ed. James Mulvenon and David M. Finklestein (Arlington, VA: CNA Corporation, 2005), 222.

4. Dean Cheng, “Chinese Lessons from the Gulf Wars,” in *Chinese Lessons from Other People’s Wars*, ed. Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), 153–99, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA553490.pdf>.

5. For an excellent analysis of the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) changes in strategy and doctrine, see Joel Wuthnow and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Military Strategy for a ‘New Era’: Some Change, More Continuity, and Tantalizing Hints,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* (March 2022), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2022.2043850>. The PLA is modernizing to fight “joint integrated operations” under conditions of “informatization.” It has been doing so since 1993, driven by a theory that it may have to fight the US. Taiwan is the main theater the PLA is preparing for, but the possible “big war” can start over other issues as well. This general-purpose modernization program is often confused with the Chinese Communist Party’s ongoing, and more comprehensive, Taiwan strategy.

6. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*.

7. This is Timothy Thomas’s paraphrase of Li Bingyan. See Timothy L. Thomas, “China’s Concept of Military Strategy,” ETH Zürich, Center for Security Studies, <https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/190449>; and Li Bingyan, “Applying Military Strategy in the Age of the New Revolution in Military Affairs,” in *The Chinese Revolution in Military Affairs*, ed. Shen Weiguang (Beijing, China: New China Press, 2004), 2–31.

8. Vladimir A. Lefebvre, *Reflexive Control: The Soviet Concept of Influencing an Adversary’s Decision Making Process* (Moscow, Soviet Union: Science Applications, 1984); and Maria Snegovaya, *Putin’s Information Warfare in Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia’s Hybrid Warfare*, Institute for the Study of War, September 2015, <https://www.understandingwar.org/report/putins-information-warfare-ukraine-soviet-origins-russias-hybrid-warfare>.

9. Mao Zedong, “Introducing the Communist,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_20.htm.

10. Dean Cheng, “PLA Perspectives on Network Warfare in ‘Informationized Local Wars,’” testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, February 17, 2022, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/Dean_Cheng_Testimony.pdf.

11. Cheng, “PLA Perspectives on Network Warfare in ‘Informationized Local Wars’”; and John Costello and Joe McReynolds, *China’s Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2018), 17, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/china-perspectives_13.pdf.

12. The Republic of China was the successor state to the Qing dynasty. Its stability was challenged during its tumultuous early years by warlords, attempts to reinstate the Qing dynasty, and, finally, the Communist insurgency.

13. By “legitimate” we do not mean “just” or “decent”; we only mean that under international custom and law, both would be seen as sovereign states.
14. Consistent with its anti-Communist Cold War policy, the US was part of this distortion of reality, and it further acquiesced in it by recognizing the People’s Republic of China (PRC). It brought itself to the brink of recognizing the reality of two Chinas and then decided that such a move would undermine its recognition of the PRC. See John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 218–19, 221–24, 230–31, 249, 256–61, 271, 295.
15. The point is worth restating by the United States government as clearly as possible. The removal of US recognition of the Republic of China (ROC) has no bearing on the ROC’s international legal status as a nation-state. It is, by all indices of international law, a country.
16. Michael J. Green, “What Is the U.S. ‘One China’ Policy, and Why Does It Matter?,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 13, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-us-one-china-policy-and-why-does-it-matter>.
17. Russell Hsiao and David An, “What Is the U.S. ‘One China’ Policy?,” *National Interest*, December 28, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/what-the-us-%E2%80%9Cone-china%E2%80%9D-policy-18882>.
18. James A. Kelly, “Overview of U.S. Policy Toward Taiwan,” testimony before the US House International Relations Committee, April 21, 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2004/31649.htm>. The whole point of the diplomatic formulation that Beijing and Washington agreed to during the long normalization negotiations was that each side would have its own definition of “One China.” For an excellent recent history of Washington’s interpretation of the “One China” policy, see William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink* (New York: Dutton 2022), 27, 76–77, 95–97, 125–26, 170–71, 400.
19. For example, a US president can meet with Taiwan’s president in her capacity as head of government rather than head of state.
20. Elizabeth Olson, “Taiwan is Cleared for Membership in W.T.O.,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/business/taiwan-is-cleared-for-membership-in-wto.html>.
21. Tami Davis Biddle, “Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners,” *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 2 (2020): 95, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/8864>. Tami Davis Biddle notes the discomfort military officers have with the idea of killing and dying as a form of “communications.”
22. *The Godfather* (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1972).
23. The key here is his feeling—his perception that he did not have other choices.
24. It is no accident that Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen recently stated that Taiwan is under a Chinese cognitive attack, one that is trying to “create disturbance in minds of people.” Huizhong Wu, “Taiwan Leader Cites Threat of Chinese ‘Cognitive Warfare,’” September 6, 2022, Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-technology-china-misinformation-f9b030d8c11f2250a2a516d73059b257>.
25. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); and Biddle, “Coercion Theory,” 98.
26. See the quote from Wang Qiming and Chen Feng, “*Daying gaojishu jubu zhanzheng*,” in Mark Stokes, “The Evolution of China’s Military Strategy,” in *China’s Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, ed. James Mulvenon and David M. Finklestein (Arlington, VA: CNA Corporation, 2005), 226.
27. The translation of *weishe* is akin to both “compellence” and “deterrence” in English. It is used as “deterrence,” as in forestalling an unwanted action; it is also used as “compellence,” as in forcing an action that is unwanted by an adversary. Xiao Tianlang et al., *In Their Own Words: Science of Military Strategy 2020* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2020), 126, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2022-01-26%202020%20Science%20of%20Military%20Strategy.pdf>.
28. Here the PLA moves beyond threats of force in a coercive campaign to “methods of military conflict” to create, according to the PLA’s 2019 defense white paper, the means to “use fear to stop.” Xiao, *In Their Own Words*.
29. Xiao, *In Their Own Words*, 138.
30. Wilson Center Digital Archive, “Joint Communiqué Between the United States and China,” February 27, 1972, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/joint-communicue-between-united-states-and-china>.
31. Ironically, given Beijing’s intransigence toward Tsai, the PRC’s new grievance is that a Democratic Progressive Party successor will not accept her careful formulations and instead push for formal independence as a new nation-state. The US should consider

telling Beijing that should it continue to unilaterally attempt to change the status quo, threaten Taiwan, or attack Taiwan, the US will no longer feel obligated to keep its promises on nonrecognition of Taiwan.

32. Yu-Jie Chen and Jerome A. Cohen, "China-Taiwan Relations Re-Examined: The '1992 Consensus' and Cross-Strait Agreements," *Asian Law Review* 14 (2019): 10, <https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1039&context=alr>.
33. Rone Tempest, "Taiwan Crisis Tied to China Power Struggle," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1996, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-03-09-mn-44883-story.html>.
34. CNN, "Nations Condemn Chinese Missile Tests," March 8, 1996, http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9603/china_taiwan/08.
35. Chen and Cohen, "China-Taiwan Relations Re-Examined," 15.
36. Barton Gellman, "Reappraisal Led to New China Policy," *Washington Post*, June 22, 1998, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/china/stories/china062298.htm>.
37. Jonathan Peterson and Tyler Marshall, "Clinton Backs China on Issue of Free Taiwan," *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1998, <https://12ft.io/proxy?q=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.latimes.com%2Farchives%2Fla-xpm-1998-jun-30-mn-65011-story.html>.
38. White House, "President Bush and Premier Wen Jiabao Remarks to the Press: Remarks by President Bush and Premier Wen Jiabao in Photo Opportunity," press release, December 9, 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/12/20031209-2.html>; and Michael D. Swaine, "Trouble in Taiwan," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 23, 2004, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2004/02/23/trouble-in-taiwan-pub-1460>.
39. Ma Ying Jeou, "When I Said 'Mr. Xi': Ma Ying Jeou," *USA Today*, November 22, 2015, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/11/22/taiwan-china-xi-jinping-ma-ying-jeou-1992-consensus-column/76215872>.
40. Shannon Tiezzi, "Did China Just Kill Cross-Strait Relations?," *Diplomat*, June 26, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/did-china-just-kill-cross-strait-relations>.
41. Reuters, "'One China' Principle Must Be Basis for Relations with Taiwan: Xinhua," May 21, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-politics-taiwan/one-china-principle-must-be-basis-for-relations-with-taiwan-xinhua-idUSKCN0YCO5X>.
42. Tsai Ing-wen, "Inaugural Address of ROC 14th-Term President Tsai Ing-wen" (speech, Presidential Office Building, Taipei, Taiwan, May 5, 2020), <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/4893>.
43. Stacy Hsu, "MAC Releases Ma-Xi Meeting Transcript," *Taipei Times*, November 10, 2015, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2015/11/10/2003632096>.
44. BBC, "Panama Cuts Ties with Taiwan in Favour of China," June 13, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40256499>.
45. Allison Lampert and J. R. Wu, "U.N. Agency Snubs Taiwan, Recognizing Beijing's 'One China,'" Reuters, September 22, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-china/u-n-agency-snubs-taiwan-recognizing-beijings-one-china-idUSKCN11T08P>.
46. *Taipei Times*, "Foreign Ministry Slams Interpol Snub," October 19, 2022, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/10/19/2003787329>.
47. Tara Francis Chan, "US Airlines Just Gave Into China's 'Orwellian' Demands over Taiwan—Here's Every Company That's Done the Same," *Insider*, July 25, 2018, https://www.businessinsider.com/which-companies-have-changed-taiwan-description-china-2018-7?_gl=1*170zxuo*_ga*MTc5MzE2MzMy4xNjc3NjA5MzI3*_ga_E21CV8oZCZ*MTY3NzYwOTMyNi4xLjEuMTY3NzYwOTM4MS4wLjAuMA..#mariott-international-3.
48. Derek Grossman et al., "China's Long-Range Bomber Flights: Drivers and Implications," RAND Corporation, 2018, 22, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2500/RR2567/RAND_RR2567.pdf.
49. Grossman et al., "China's Long-Range Bomber Flights."
50. Colby Ferland, "Under the Radar: China's Coercive Air Power in the Taiwan Strait," Project 2049 Institute, March 9, 2018, <https://project2049.net/2018/03/09/under-the-radar-chinas-coercive-air-power-in-the-taiwan-strait>.
51. Ferland, "Under the Radar."
52. *Taipei Times*, "Fighter Incursion a Display of China's Displeasure at Taiwan-US Ties: Expert," April 3, 2019, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/04/03/2003712719>.
53. Mathieu Duchâtel, "Anticipating China's Military Coercion of Taiwan," Institut Montaigne, September 15, 2020, <https://www>.

institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/anticipating-chinas-military-coercion-taiwan.

54. Joel Wuthnow et al., eds., *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2022), 95, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/crossing-the-strait/crossing-the-strait.pdf>.

55. CBS News, "China Flies 39 Warplanes into Taiwan's Air Defense Zone in a Day," January 24, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-taiwan-warplanes-fly-incursions-air-defense-zone>. The PLA had been setting conditions for the kind of reaction it had to the visit of Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in August 2022. It had already begun wiping away the median line in the strait and increasing its incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone. It was thus ready to portray its provocative activity in the strait as "merely" a reaction to a US provocation. This psychological warfare strategy succeeds as it counts on lack of regular attention to its incremental provocations.

56. According to Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance, Taiwan Incursion Updates, <https://missiledefenseadvocacy.org/missile-threat-and-proliferation/todays-missile-threat/taiwan-missile-updates>. The Chinese used the visit of Speaker Pelosi to Taiwan to escalate this activity. Beijing would sooner or later have found another excuse to operate in this fashion.

57. Grossman et al., "China's Long-Range Bomber Flights," 24.

58. Kuan-Chen Lee, "zhonggong dui tai junshi donghe yu huyu kezhi de liangshou celue" [The CCP's Dual Strategies of Military Intimidation Against Taiwan and Calling for Restraint], *National Defense Security Biweekly* 11 (2020): 19–25; and Wuthnow et al., eds., *Crossing the Strait*.

59. Wuthnow et al., eds., *Crossing the Strait*, 99–100. The PLA tends to exaggerate the aerospace campaign's geographic scope.

60. Cheng, "Chinese Lessons from the Gulf Wars."

61. Phil Davidson, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on US Indo-Pacific Command Posture, March 9, 2021, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_03-09-21.pdf.

62. See Lonnie Henley, "PLA Operational Concepts and Centers of Gravity in a Taiwan Conflict," testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, February 18, 2021 https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/Lonnie_Henley_Testimony.pdf. In 2004, the PLA may have been ordered to be ready for an invasion by 2020. There are other years identified as milestones for the PLA, including 2035. It is highly unlikely that Xi Jinping would have locked himself in to a set deadline for an invasion; instead, he would seek maximum flexibility and condition his decision for war on the trend of Taiwan's politics; an assessment of US, Japanese, and other coalition responses; and his assessment of PLA readiness.

63. Thomas Shugart has made a compelling case that the combination of capabilities the PLA will have in the next five years and the degradation of relevant US capabilities heightens the danger that Beijing will start a major war over Taiwan. But this scenario implies Xi's willingness to start World War III over Taiwan by attacking US allies throughout the region. See Thomas H. Shugart III, "Trends, Timelines, and Uncertainty: An Assessment of the Military Balance in the Indo-Pacific," testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, March 17, 2021, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/congressional-testimony/trends-timelines-and-uncertainty-an-assessment-of-the-military-balance-in-the-indo-pacific>. There is no evidence that this is Beijing's strategic intent.

64. Beijing will make the case that the Taiwan issue is a "domestic" one and therefore blockading it is not an act of war.

65. For a review of why some believe this, see Michael Kofman, "Getting the Fait Accompli Problem Right in U.S. Strategy," War on the Rocks, November 3, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/getting-the-fait-accompl-problem-right-in-u-s-strategy>.

66. Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Defense, Deterrence, and the Role of Guam," in *Defending Guam*, ed. Rebecca Heinrichs (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2022), 44–48, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/defending-guam>.

67. Elbridge Colby, "How to Win America's Next War," *Foreign Policy*, May 5, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/05/how-to-win-americas-next-war-china-russia-military-infrastructure>.

68. Zach Cooper and Sheena Chestnut Greitens, "Asian Allies and Partners in a Taiwan Contingency: What Should the United States Expect?," American Enterprise Institute, 2022, <https://www.defendingtaiwan.com/asian-allies-and-partners-in-a-taiwan-contingency-what-should-the-united-states-expect>.

69. "Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea," in *American Foreign Policy 1950–1955: Basic Documents Volumes I and II* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1953), https://www.usfk.mil/Portals/105/Documents/SOFA/H_Mutual%20Defense%20Treaty_1953.pdf.

70. A limited number of experts have experimented with arguments along these lines. We have no indications that US policy or strategy has embraced this approach, however, and merely wish to warn against the dangers of doing so.

71. Some experts have made such claims, often referring to hypersonic systems the Chinese may bring online. We have no concrete indications that the US military accepts such claims, but the presentation of such claims without loud and clear contestation by the US military unintentionally strengthens Chinese coercion and persuasion campaigns. For a summary of both sides of the carrier survivability debate, see Jon Harper, "Incoming: Can Aircraft Carriers Survive Hypersonic Weapons?," *National Defense*, March 22, 2019, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2019/3/22/incoming-can-aircraft-carriers-survive-hypersonic-weapons>.

72. "While Chinese strategists acknowledge US military superiority generally, the conventional wisdom is that China's proximity to Taiwan, corresponding access to operational resources and resolute stance makes the local balance of power favorable to Beijing." See Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The Precarious State of Cross-Strait Deterrence," testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, February 18, 2021, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/Oriana_Skylar_Mastro_Testimony.pdf.

73. Elbridge Colby, "America Can Defend Taiwan," *Wall Street Journal*, January 26, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/america-can-defend-taiwan-11611684038>.

© 2023 by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. All rights reserved.

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization and does not take institutional positions on any issues. The views expressed here are those of the author(s).