

U.S.-TAIWAN DETERRENCE AND DEFENSE DIALOGUE: DEALING WITH INCREASED CHINESE AGGRESSIVENESS

BY RALPH A. COSSA

ISSUES & INSIGHTS

VOL. 21, CR 3

OCTOBER 2021



US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue: Dealing with Increased Chinese Aggressiveness

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ISSUES & INSIGHTS

CONFERENCE REPORT

VOL. 21, CR3 | October 2021

Pacific Forum

Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum (www.pacforum.org) is a foreign policy research institute focused on the Asia-Pacific Region. Founded in 1975, the Pacific Forum collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to global leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region. The Forum's programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, and maritime policy issues, and works to help stimulate cooperative policies through rigorous research, analyses and dialogues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION..... | IV |
| US-TAIWAN COMPARATIVE SECURITY ASSESSMENTS | 1 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 2 |
| CURRENT US/TAIWAN DEFENSE POLICY | 2 |
| TAIWAN DEFENSE POSTURE | 3 |
| US DEFENSE POSTURE | 4 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 5 |
| UNDERSTANDING DETERRENCE | 6 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 7 |
| IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ATTITUDES | 8 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 9 |
| WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?..... | 10 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 10 |
| ABOUT THE AUTHOR | 16 |

INTRODUCTION

Taiwan needs much stronger friendships and more support, particularly from the United States, to counter Chinese moves and enhance deterrence of, and its defense potential against, Beijing. This is urgent because Taiwan no longer holds the qualitative advantage it once had over China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

The United States supports a strong, resilient, and democratic Taiwan capable of maintaining its autonomy and ability to counter coercion and defend itself from any source, especially from China. Absent this, Washington's widely shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific would be permanently undermined.

It is clear, therefore, that the United States and Taiwan should step up their joint work and strengthen their security relationship, and it is critical that they do so expeditiously. At the same time, from a US perspective, it is important not to embolden Taipei or exceedingly raise its expectations about the US role to deter and defend against Beijing. While Washington has an interest in strengthening the island's deterrence and defense potential vis-à-vis Beijing, it also does not want to encourage Taipei to become belligerent toward Beijing. Engagement, therefore, involves striking a tough balance, and many topics to that effect remain difficult—and much too sensitive—to address and discuss at the official level, particularly when it comes to deterrence and defense questions.

To this end, the Pacific Forum, in partnership with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and in cooperation with the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR), organized the inaugural Track 2¹ US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue. The dialogue aimed to: initiate a discussion between the United States and Taiwan on deterrence and defense, and produce actionable and operationally relevant recommendations for policy; and to build a community of senior and young, up-and-coming officials and strategists well-versed in these issues both in the United States and Taiwan.

On Aug. 31-Sept. 1, 2021, more than 80 scholars, experts, and former and current government officials (the latter in their private capacities) from the United States and Taiwan convened for the inaugural Track 2 US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue in a hybrid format² (in Honolulu, and with participants joining virtually) to examine growing Chinese assertiveness vis-a-vis Taiwan and its impact on Taiwan's security and Taiwan-US relations. Topics for discussion included US and Taiwan comparative threat assessments focused on the near-, mid-, and long-term threat posed by China toward Taiwan; Taiwanese and US defense policy plans, goals, and priorities; an examination of

¹ Track 2 dialogues are conferences and workshops that bring together subject-matter experts, academics, policy analysts and, on certain occasions, unofficial representatives from governments, to discuss thematic issues and generate insights and nonbinding recommendations. Participants in track 2 dialogues are invited in their private capacity.

² In keeping with State of Hawaii COVID protocols, two back-to-back conference rooms were set up and video linked, each containing no more than 10 participants at any one time; the remaining participants, both in Honolulu and elsewhere, participated via WebEx, in strict compliance with State of Hawaii safety regulations.

the whole spectrum of US strategic and conventional deterrence and defense, from gray-zone challenges to high-end contingencies; domestic attitudes in Taiwan and the United States and their impact on national decision-making; and the prospects for future cooperation aimed at strengthening deterrence without undermining the prospects for cross-Strait stability. The dialogue's agenda underwent extensive pre-dialogue "socialization" with key stakeholders from both the United States and Taiwan to ensure that topics for discussions and eventual actionable recommendations generated were relevant to the national security interests and priorities of both countries.

The discussions, held under the Chatham House rule, were candid and cordial with the common purpose of improving Taiwan-US defense cooperation and enhancing Taiwan's ability to defend itself. Disagreements existed on a number of issues both within and between the two delegations but the discussion, while frank and direct, was respectful and insightful. The recommendations contained in this report, unless otherwise specifically noted, were generated by the discussions as interpreted by this author. Both the agenda and participant list are included in the appendix; all participants attended in their private capacity.

The statements made and views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Pacific Forum, the project sponsor, or the dialogue participants' respective organizations and affiliations. For questions, please email Ralph@pacforum.org.

US-TAIWAN COMPARATIVE SECURITY ASSESSMENTS

The China threat to Taiwan is real and growing. China has become more assertive, even aggressive as it has steadily improved its military capabilities and poses a multidimensional threat to Taiwan today, not just via the threat of a full-scale invasion, but also in so-called “gray zone” challenges involving more limited military operations/provocations and through political, diplomatic, and psychological operations as well. In this regard, Taiwan is already under intense Chinese assault today.

While participants discussed how imminent the Chinese threat of a kinetic attack may be, there was no question that China’s military capabilities had improved significantly and that the primary mission of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) was to be able to conquer Taiwan by force if necessary. Both US and Taiwan participants noted former Indo-Pacific (I-PACOM) Commander Philip Davidson’s Senate Armed Services Committee testimony³ that “Taiwan is clearly one of their ambitions. ... And I think the threat is manifest during this decade, in fact, in the next six years,” and some on the US side argued that that day was more rapidly approaching.

China specialists tended to argue that China’s current emphasis is on preventing independence rather than achieving unification and that current pressure tactics were aimed first and foremost at preventing the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) from winning the next presidential election. They also argued that China was pursuing a “win without fighting” strategy aimed at demoralizing the people of Taiwan and undermining their confidence in the US defense commitment. Others argued that Beijing was preparing for and perhaps even seeks/prefers a military solution. Defense experts generally worried more about an imminent Chinese full-scale invasion than China hands. All participants, however, recognized that everyone was guessing when it comes to Chinese President and Chinese Communist Party Chairman Xi’s next move and that China’s actions versus Hong Kong show that Xi is a risk-taker who seems unconstrained by prior agreements and is “willing to use all tools at his disposal and to pay costs to achieve his objectives.” Nonetheless, Xi does not need to absorb Taiwan to stay in power and the real risk may be in trying and failing rather than in not trying since, to date, no timetable has been set for reunification.

Because China has always proclaimed that reunification (including by force if necessary) is the goal, and because China now has increasingly sophisticated capabilities to act, participants did not debate the need to take the threat seriously and the need for both sides to better prepare for military contingencies, with the aim of increasing the “risk” factor in any Chinese “risk-reward” calculus. Both sides described the changing balance of power as “alarming” and many worried about a lack of sense of urgency among their respective publics. No one disputed a senior Taiwan participant’s assertion that “China poses an existential threat to Taiwan today.” Some pointed to war games and tabletop exercises (TTXs) that show that China is already

³Mallory Shelbourne, “Davidson: China Could Try to Take Control of Taiwan In ‘Next Six Years’,” *USNI News*, March 9, 2021. <<https://news.usni.org/2021/03/09/davidson-china-could-try-to-take-control-of-taiwan-in-next-six-years>>

capable of taking Taiwan by force. Others cautioned that TTXs are controlled events aimed at identifying deficiencies and making corrections: “losing is learning and learning is winning.” Americans were divided over the degree of emphasis Taipei and Washington need to place on preparing for/responding to the gray zone challenges versus preparation for an all-out invasion scenario. While some argued for near-exclusive focus on the latter (with a few suggesting that it could condition the odds of a US intervention in the event of a Chinese attack), others noted that a failure to effectively respond to Chinese ongoing gray-zone activities could demoralize the people of Taiwan and contribute to Beijing’s “win without fighting” strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepare for the worst case

The US and Republic of China (ROC) governments and militaries must prepare for the worst-case all-out invasion scenario, even while identifying measures to combat Chinese gray-zone activities. The United States should more clearly articulating not just the military but also the political and economic costs associated with any Chinese kinetic action against Taiwan, thus increasing the risk factor in Chinese eyes.

Raise public awareness of threat implications

The US government should consider conducting and publicizing the results of a TTX that begins with a successful Chinese occupation of Taiwan and then outlines the implications for US regional and global strategy and policy and for the security of Taiwan’s neighbors, the intent being to better inform the US public (and those of its allies) on the critical importance of defending Taiwan to US (and allied) national security interests. In other words, it is not sufficient to plan and exercise to win the war; also critical is to have a clear idea of why it must not be lost. While understanding and supporting this aim, some Taiwan colleagues expressed concern that the scenario could have a negative effect on Taiwan's public morale and/or lend itself to Chinese disinformation efforts if not approached very carefully.

CURRENT US/TAIWAN DEFENSE POLICY

Responding to the current China challenge has been a primary and consistent feature both in the previous and current US administration’s Asia/Indo-Pacific strategy and in Taiwan’s defense priorities, although few disagreed that more emphasis, and more defense spending, were needed by both countries in the face of the rising challenge. The primary responsibility for responding to this challenge rests with Taiwan; US reassurances of its continuing commitment “to help Taiwan defend itself” were a critical component, however, and the US commitment was itself linked to US perceptions of Taiwan’s ability and willingness to defend itself.

TAIWAN DEFENSE POSTURE

Taiwan's most recent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)⁴ outlines Taipei's military strategy aimed at building "Resolute Defense and Multi-Domain Deterrence" as part of a national strategy centered on "fortifying national security, dealing defense affairs with professionalism, realizing self-reliant defense, protecting well-being of the people, and expanding strategic cooperation." Taiwan participants repeatedly stressed the importance of cooperation with "like-minded countries to contribute collectively to regional peace and stability."

While acknowledging the need to "balance defense requirements with domestic considerations," the QDR still places great importance on the development of asymmetric capabilities, continued arms acquisition, military training, and improving its reserve system during the transition to all-volunteer force. Command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (C4ISR), information warfare (IW), and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities are also to be enhanced and an intelligent network of information, communications, and electronic (ICE) warfare is to be constructed. Taiwan participants also highlighted the need to counter Chinese information warfare and other gray zone tactics.

It is unclear how all this is being operationalized, however, and Taiwan does not produce a National Security Strategy (NSS) that would put its defense strategy in broader context. US experts and officials expressed concern, repeatedly, over Taiwan's commitment to its previously well-received (by Washington) *Overall Defense Concept (ODC)*⁵ amid continued uncertainty regarding current Taiwan defense priorities. There is no reference to the ODC in the QDR and US officials, in particular, sought greater clarity on Taiwan's defense choices and priorities to ensure that they are fit for purpose and in sync with US efforts and actions. In response to Taiwanese indicating that big military items (such as long-range missiles) are politically popular, for instance, several Americans suggested that Taiwan's focus should be on "large numbers of small things" instead.

Taiwan participants made the distinction between one's willingness to fight if invaded (which, as will be discussed shortly, remains high and is increasing) and one's willingness to sign up for military service in peacetime (which remains a challenge). Those who have recently received military training expressed concern that Taiwanese military recruits and reservists are not receiving the type of realistic training necessary to adequately prepare themselves to defend the nation. "All-out defense education" and "reserve force reform," as called for in the QDR, are aimed at addressing this challenge. Some saw the creation of a territorial defense force as a step in both increasing awareness of the threat and demonstrating a commitment and capability to enhance resilience, and therefore deterrence. This is apparently being discussed in Taipei but is not in the recent QDR. A few US participants expressed skepticism about such a territorial defense force, arguing that Chinese forces on the island would likely mean "game over" for Taiwan. Others countered that a credible homeland defense capability would serve as an important deterrent to an attack.

⁴ 2021 *Quadrennial Defense Review of The Republic of China*, Sept 3, 2021, *USNI News* [<https://news.usni.org/2021/09/03/taiwans-quadrennial-defense-review>]

⁵ Lee His-min and Eric Lee, "Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept, Explained," *The Diplomat*, Nov. 3, 2020 [<https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained/>]

US DEFENSE POSTURE

Americans argued that, in terms of assessing the Chinese threat and as regards “rock solid” support for Taiwan, there has been great continuity despite this year’s change in US administrations. Both the prior administration’s *National Security Strategy* (NSS)⁶ and this administration’s *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*⁷ clearly identify China as a revisionist power that poses a serious and growing threat to US interests and allies in the Indo-Pacific region. As one senior US participant noted, the change in US administrations has not changed US commitment to “peaceful resolution without coercion”; what has changed is Beijing’s belligerence, and thus the need for greater resolve, commitment, and cooperation. The US stands ready to help Taiwan further develop its military capabilities, with emphasis on “defense in depth.” Several American participants predicted that the next *National Security Strategy* and accompanying documents would remain consistent in terms of America’s commitment to allies, friends, and partners in the Indo-Pacific region and on the need to address the growing Chinese challenge to their collective interests. Meanwhile, the current *Indo-Pacific Strategy*⁸ attaches great importance to defense of the first island chain, including Taiwan, and that is not expected to change.

Americans and Taiwanese were both divided about the advisability of maintaining the longstanding US policy of “strategic ambiguity” as opposed to a move towards greater “strategic clarity.” Some insisted that the way forward may require a move away from “strict” strategic ambiguity and toward “more” clarity, encouraging Americans not to regard this question as a binary. Others promoted “strategic clarity but operational ambiguity,” seemingly in line with the language of the 2018 *US National Defense Strategy*,⁹ which calls for the United States to be “strategically predictable and operational unpredictable.” Even within the current policy framework, many saw the room—and the need—for stronger expressions of US commitment and support as an important component in bolstering Taiwan’s ability and willingness to fight.

Finally, participants discussed but generally downplayed the implications of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. One former US official argued that the United States “ceded opportunities to China” as it focused on the Middle East and Afghanistan and that Washington was now (correctly) shifting to great power competition: “Afghanistan was a strategic distraction and we are now self-correcting.”

⁶ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, December 2017. <<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>

⁷ *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, The White House, March 03, 2021. <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>>

⁸ *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, US Department of Defense, June 1, 2019 <<https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>>

⁹ Jim Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, US Department of Defense, January, 2018. <<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Clarify Taipei's defense choices

Washington needs to seek greater clarity from Taipei regarding its defense choices and priorities to ensure that they are fit for purpose and in sync with US efforts and actions. The Taiwan government needs to more clearly articulate how the defense policies and practices previously outlined in the ODC are being addressed and prioritized in the QDR or in any subsequent ODC 2.0 version. Is the need for “large numbers of small things” being addressed? Is there a role and rationale for territorial defense forces? How is “defense in depth” being operationalized? How is cyber security and information warfare being addressed? Can military training be more realistic and relevant to the growing challenge at hand? Can public awareness of the nature of the growing threat be enhanced? What is the proper mix between improvements and reforms aimed at addressing gray zone challenges and those aimed at countering a direct invasion (understanding that some measures address both)? These questions should form the basis of follow-on discussions and research, including at the next US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue.

Clarify Taipei's defense priorities

The Pentagon needs to assist Taiwan in identifying weapons systems and strategies that can deal with both gray zone challenges and an all-out invasion scenario and then help attach priorities to each depending on Taipei's assessment of its security needs and priorities, understanding that the US commitment to help Taiwan defend itself is related directly to US perceptions of Taiwan's willingness and ability to do so. Scholars in both countries could examine what constitutes multidimensional “gray zone” operations and conduct a review of past practices aimed at countering them. The United States should also encourage the ROC to develop a National Security Strategy that better articulates the nature of the Chinese threat and a whole of government approach, including the role of civil society, in responding to this growing challenge. Taipei should be encouraged to more closely examine the feasibility and desirability of a territorial defense force and the requirements to establish one if it is deemed to be an effective added deterrent.

Provide weapons at no cost

The United States might consider providing Taiwan weapons at no charge with the proviso that the money saved would be directly earmarked to increasing military training and preparedness in ways that would increase the credibility and sustainability of Taiwan's military deterrence.

Involve Taiwan in NSS drafting

The United States should involve Taiwan early on in the drafting process of the next National Security Strategy and associated documents to ensure that regional anxieties are addressed and they contain no big surprises. Taiwanese will be closely watching for reaffirmation of the need

for stability in the Taiwan Strait and a reassertion of the foundational role of Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships.

Review “strategic clarity” alternatives

US and Taiwan officials need to continue this important debate, while recognizing that, even within the current policy framework, there is room—and a growing need—for stronger expressions of US commitment and support as an important component in bolstering Taiwan’s ability and willingness to fight. Concerns about Taiwan overconfidence have been overshadowed by the importance of US reassurance.

UNDERSTANDING DETERRENCE

No one expects that the Taiwan military, by itself, can deter much less defeat a Chinese military invasion. Some assurance that others, and especially the United States will be prepared to help Taiwan defend itself is critical in providing credible deterrence or an effective response to any Chinese use of force. Taiwan forces must be (and be seen as) capable of putting up successful resistance to allow time for others to react or intervene, however. In the final analysis, deterrence is not about winning, it’s about convincing; words must match with actions.

The Taiwan Relations Act’s “grave concern” warning and its commitment “to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion” has thus far provided sufficient deterrence to Beijing to deter an all-out Chinese attack, although this has not been sufficient—nor was it designed—to prevent gray-zone challenges short of kinetic Chinese actions. As Chinese capabilities improve, however, further action is required by both Washington and Taipei to continue to deter an all-out invasion while addressing and lessening, if not negating, the impact of Chinese gray-zone operations. At the end of the day, deterrence will only be effective if China believes that the United States has the will and capacity to respond and Taiwan remains demonstrably committed to its own defense.

While understanding the role and perceived need for some level of strategic ambiguity, Taiwanese argued that the United States must make Taiwan believe it will come to its aid in the event of an unprovoked attack. Otherwise “any sensible person will opt for surrender,” given China’s growing military advantage over Taiwan. Taiwan participants noted that deterrence (and reassurance) can be enhanced by a number of means, not all of which are military. These include increasing political and economic ties, including involving Taiwan in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements; enhancing Taiwan’s “international space” through greater participation in international organizations; integrating Taiwan into US war planning; improving interoperability, not just in terms of military equipment but also in operational doctrine and training; greatly streamlining the security assistance process and reducing lead times; real time intelligence exchanges; the prepositioning of war supplies in Taiwan; and greater focus and assistance in developing asymmetric capabilities, among others.

American participants saw the need for the United States to take stronger, more visible action but some cautioned that such steps needed to be taken cautiously so as not to be self-defeating or actually increase the prospects of conflict. They also noted that defense spending was falling as a percent of Taiwan’s overall budget.

Participants generally agreed that deterrence could be enhanced by clear cut demonstrations to Beijing of the current and potential future economic and political as well as military costs of continued or increased military pressure against Taiwan. Fears of an arms race were discounted since “China will continue its build up regardless of what we do.”

Americans stressed and Taiwan participants recognized the importance of the nuclear dimension of the US strategic deterrence. All agreed that the current US advantage in nuclear capabilities over China must be maintained in the face of growing Chinese nuclear as well as conventional capabilities. Taiwanese expressed concern that adoption of a sole-purpose or no-first-use policy by the United States would be detrimental. (No American at the meeting made such a suggestion but there has been a continuing public debate on this topic in nuclear policy circles in the United States, including by some experts now serving in the current administration.) There was no discussion of any Taiwan need or aspiration to develop or possess its own nuclear deterrent. Almost every security-oriented discussion with South Korean colleagues will invariably include some reference to Republic of Korea (ROK) nuclear aspirations so it was reassuring (and somewhat surprising) this topic did not come up at all, even though the issue was not specifically probed.

Taiwan participants applauded and expressed great interest in the new US “integrated deterrence” concept¹⁰; they expressed eagerness in learning more about the concept and Taiwan’s potential role in contributing to this effort. US efforts to “internationalize” the Taiwan issue, including specific references to the “importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait” in various 2+2 statements with Japan, Korea, Australia and others, including Europeans, were seen as a critical (and much appreciated) component of this approach (and underscored consistency in US support for Taiwan with previous administrations). Taiwanese seek greater participation in various multilateral events and gatherings, including combined military exercises (while realizing the political sensitivity of such events); there was widespread support for involving Taiwan in various QUAD-Plus activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance Taiwan’s ability to resist/buy time

US/Taiwan’s defense cooperation should focus on enhancing Taiwan’s ability to put up sufficient resistance to allow time for the United States (and others) to react. The United States could conduct a TTX postulating a 2027 scenario where China has achieved the ability to successfully invade Taiwan and then work backwards to identify the steps Washington and Taipei need to take to prevent this capability from being achieved.

Coordinate with Taipei when drafting NPS

Pentagon officials should closely consult with Taiwan (and other US allies and partners) during the early preparation stage of the next Nuclear Posture Review, especially when considering

¹⁰ Tony Bertuca, “Austin calls for ‘integrated deterrence’ to block China,” *Inside Defense*, July 27, 2021. <https://insidedefense.com/insider/austin-calls-integrated-deterrence-block-china>

sole purpose or no-first-use pronouncements to avoid surprise and misunderstanding. In so doing, they can also explore Taiwan attitudes toward possession of an indigenous nuclear capability.

Explain integrated deterrence

The Pentagon could consider sending a team to Taipei to further explain the integrated deterrence concept and Taiwan's potential role in it. At a minimum, US officials should be prepared for more questions from Taipei as to concept specifics and how it will involve regional partners and allies such as Taiwan, Japan, and others. An in-depth discussion of integrated deterrence should be a standalone topic in next year's Dialogue.

Internationalize the Taiwan issue

The United States should continue its firm support for greater Taiwan involvement in international organizations and initiatives, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and other trade and economic entities and carefully explore the prospects for Taiwan involvement in bilateral and multilateral military training and exercises. Special attention should be directed to involving Taiwan in various QUAD-Plus activities. More pushback is also needed against Chinese efforts to limit Taiwan's international space; Lithuania is an important test case in this regard. Moreover, the United States can serve deterrence by more clearly articulating not just the military but also the political and economic costs associated with any Chinese kinetic action against Taiwan.

IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ATTITUDES

In democracies, public opinion matters. How the general public in each country assesses the nature and extent of the Chinese threat and its own willingness to confront Chinese intimidation or aggression has policy implications for government leaders, even as they have a role and responsibility in shaping that opinion.

Taiwanese polling data over the past several years confirms a strong and steadily increasing willingness of the people of Taiwan to fight in the face of a Chinese invasion (almost 80% in a recent poll¹¹) despite disinformation efforts to suggest otherwise. Even in the case where the ROC government may have been art the origin of the crisis (e.g., through a declaration of independence or by proclaiming a Republic of Taiwan—both presumed Chinese red lines), a solid majority (72%) would resist a Chinese attack. This rise in the polls coincides with increased, more vocal support for Taiwan from the United States, leading one Taiwanese analyst to note that Taiwan domestic attitudes are directly linked to US attitudes: “the more supportive the United States appears, the more confident the people are; when the United States is less supportive, the people then lean toward China.”

Polls also show that younger Taiwanese (20-40 age group) are less tolerant toward the PRC, especially as a greater percentage of the population sees themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. Only 6% of the public still looked favorably on China's “one country, two systems”

¹¹ Wu Su-wei, “More than 77 percent willing to fight in the event of an invasion by China: poll,” *Taipei Times*, Oct. 25, 2020 <<https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/10/25/2003745764>>

formula in the wake of Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong. This has not translated into a willingness to join the Taiwan military, however. As noted earlier, Taiwan participants made the distinction between a willingness to fight if invaded and a willingness to sign up for military service in peacetime, which involves "meaningless training: mowing lawns, cleaning desks, etc."

While specific data was not presented, Taiwanese and US specialists worried that Taiwan citizens do not see the Chinese threat as imminent and there seemed to be a greater sense of urgency among US experts than among their Taiwanese counterparts, although few in either country would dispute that the threat is real and growing. As a result, Taiwan participants saw the current US "competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be" approach to China as appropriate and realistic and largely in line with Taipei's own approach.

Meanwhile, US support for Taiwan is "rock solid," bipartisan, and stronger than ever. An August 2021 Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll¹² for the first time showed more Americans in favor of defending Taiwan than against, with a majority (52%) supporting the use of US troops if China invaded. This coincides with an increased general and largely bipartisan belief, among the US public, the Congress, and successive US administrations, that China presents a growing challenge to US national security interests. Only 16% of Americans now see China favorably. Between 65-69% of Americans now think it is "worth the risk" to come to the aid of Taiwan and US allies like Australia, Japan, and Korea. This is critical since, as Taiwan participants constantly reminded their American counterparts, their will to fight is directly linked to the belief that America would come to Taiwan's aid if attacked, since Taiwanese know that their ability to withstand an all-out Chinese invasion is limited.

In that regard, Taiwan participants found assurances that the withdrawal from Afghanistan was aimed in large part at allowing the United States to shift its attention toward the growing major power challenges posed by China (and Russia) credible and reassuring, despite lingering anxiety. While Taiwanese and Americans understood the difference between Afghanistan and Taiwan, the administration's impending *National Security Strategy* will be closely examined to see if assurances provided in previous NSS documents regarding Taiwan and the foundational role of US Asian alliances are reaffirmed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Counter Chinese disinformation

Both the United States and Taiwan, individually and together, need to develop social media programs aimed at countering China's ongoing disinformation campaign. This should include raising public awareness about the China threat, the costs and risks involved, and the actions needed, understanding that Americans need to be assured that Taiwan retains the will and ability to defend itself and Taiwanese need reaffirmation of America's support; the two are mutually reinforcing.

¹² Daniel Larison, "New poll finds majority of Americans open to sending troops to defend Taiwan," *Responsible Statecraft*, Sept. 2, 2021 <<https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/09/02/new-poll-finds-majority-of-americans-open-to-sending-troops-to-defend-taiwan/>>

Address Afghanistan anxieties

American officials and scholars should continue to stress the differences between Afghanistan and Taiwan and the positive benefits to Taiwan of a refocusing of US attention and emphasis on the Chinese (and Russian) threat. People-to-people (including student) exchanges should be expanded and greater military closeness between Taiwan and America should be high on the agenda of future cooperation.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Taiwan is already under attack today, militarily (through gray zone operations short of war), economically, politically, and psychologically through Beijing's concerted social media disinformation campaign. A multidimensional response is required to deter this threat while keeping primary focus on developing and demonstrating the ability to respond to an all-out Chinese invasion. Americans need to be assured that Taiwan retains the will and ability to defend itself and Taiwanese need reaffirmation of America's "rock solid" support. Together, both governments need to develop effective measure to increase the risks to Beijing associated with future actions against Taiwan and thus fortify their integrated deterrence capability.

Neither Taiwan nor the United States should remain solely reactive; they need to collaborate in identifying measures that more effectively address/counter this growing threat and enhance deterrence. There is an insufficient sense of urgency among the publics and governments not just in the United States and Taiwan, but regional/globally as well. Critical thinking is needed; we need to better deal with China's information warfare campaign. Strategic communication is critical, domestically within both governments, between us, with our friends and allies, and with Beijing. We need to talk about where China is weakest and how we exploit this so we, too, can "win without fighting." Protecting and expanding Taiwan's international space is critical, as is the internationalization of the effort to help Taiwan defend itself. Non-military deterrence (relating to trade, economics, digital currency issues, and social media) cannot be overlooked.

In short, the (non-shooting) war has already begun and it's a multidimensional attack that requires a multidimensional response. We can't let Beijing "win without fighting" even as we increase preparations for a possible kinetic fight. At the end of the day, it's Taiwan's decision how best to defend itself but doing so requires close collaboration and consultation with the United States if, together, both are to effectively deter the PRC and, if deterrence fails, win the war.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve strategic communication

In order to do more to enhance deterrence, both the United States and Taiwan need to improve strategic communication. Action is needed, notably in the information space, given the changed and rapidly changing circumstances. (A key issue, however, is that any move to do so must be visible to bear fruit, which brings with it escalation risks, which must be

managed.) Strategic communication is also critical to prepare the Taiwanese and US publics about the China threat, the costs and risks involved, and the actions needed in the face of a very concentrated ongoing Chinese social media disinformation campaign.

Multidimensional response

The United States and the ROC need to develop a coordinated multidimensional response to deter the growing multidimensional military, economic, political, and psychological warfare Chinese threat while keeping primary focus on developing and demonstrating the ability to respond to an all-out Chinese invasion. Together, both countries need to develop effective measure to increase the risks to Beijing associated with future actions against Taiwan and thus fortify our integrated deterrence capability.

More research to enhance future dialogues

More research and analysis is required to better define the steadily increasing Chinese threat to Taiwan and to better identify appropriate responses that would enhance deterrence and defense. Areas for future research identified by dialogue participants included 1) a review of the various recommendations made by US observers during the annual ROC Han Kuang exercises to determine how many had been acted upon; 2) a comprehensive study, insofar as possible, of the various contingency scenarios that have been done about Taiwan, to get a sense of the landscape: what we've been thinking about, what the findings have been, and what we haven't been thinking; and 3) a comprehensive study of Chinese weaknesses and how best to exploit them, including a campaign aimed at increasing Chinese public awareness of Xi's risk-taking and its implications and consequences.

ATTACHMENT A: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: China has become more assertive, even aggressive as it has steadily improved its military capabilities and poses a multidimensional threat to Taiwan today. Everyone is guessing Xi's next move and that China's actions versus Hong Kong show that Xi is a risk-taker who is unconstrained by prior agreements.

Recommendation: The US and ROC governments and militaries must prepare for the worst-case all-out invasion scenario, even while identifying measures to combat Chinese gray-zone activities. Neither Taiwan nor the United States should remain solely reactive; both need to improve strategic communication. The United States should more clearly articulating not just the military but also the political and economic costs associated with any Chinese kinetic action against Taiwan.

Finding 2: Reunification (including by force if necessary) remains Beijing's goal, and it increasingly has the sophisticated capabilities to act. The threat is real and growing. The changing balance of power is "alarming." Many worried about the lack of a sense of urgency among their respective publics and especially that Taiwan citizens do not see the Chinese threat as imminent. The threat is real and growing.

Recommendation: The United States needs to better prepare for military contingencies, with the aim of increasing the "risk" factor in any Chinese "risk-reward" calculus. It should encourage the ROC to develop a National Security Strategy that better articulates the nature of the Chinese threat. The Pentagon could conduct/ publicize the results of a tabletop exercise (TTX) that begins with a successful Chinese occupation of Taiwan and then outlines the implications for US/allied strategy and policy (Some Taiwan colleagues expressed concern that this could have a negative effect on morale and/or lend itself to Chinese disinformation efforts.)

Finding 3: The primary responsibility for responding to the China challenge rests with Taiwan but US continuing commitment "to help Taiwan defend itself" was a critical component to deter or defend against a Chinese attack. US experts and officials expressed concern, repeatedly, over Taiwan's commitment to its well-received (by Washington) *Overall Defense Concept (ODC)* amid uncertainty regarding current Taiwan defense priorities and how it planned to operationalize its recently released Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).

Recommendation: Washington needs to seek greater clarity from Taipei regarding its defense choices and priorities to ensure that they are fit for purpose and in sync with US efforts and actions.

Finding 4: US participants were divided over the degree of emphasis Taipei and Washington need to place on preparing for/responding to the gray zone challenges versus preparation for an all-out invasion scenario.

Recommendation: The United States needs to encourage Taiwan to identify weapons systems and strategies that can deal with both threats and attach priorities to each. Scholars in

both countries could examine what constitutes multidimensional “gray zone” operations and a review of past practices aimed at countering them.

Finding 5: Taiwanese polling data confirms Taiwan’s increased willingness to fight in the face of a Chinese invasion despite disinformation efforts to suggest otherwise but Taiwanese military recruits and reservists are not receiving the type of training to adequately prepare themselves for this task.

Recommendation: The United States might consider providing Taiwan weapons at no charge with the proviso that the money saved would be directly earmarked to increasing military training and preparedness in ways that would increase the credibility and sustainability of Taiwan’s military deterrence.

Finding 6: Taiwan participants made the distinction between one’s willingness to fight if invaded and one’s willingness to sign up for military service in peacetime. Some saw the creation of a territorial defense force as a step to increase threat awareness and demonstrate commitment and capability.

Recommendation: Washington should urge Taipei to more closely examine the feasibility and desirability of a territorial defense force and the requirements to establish one.

Finding 7: No one expects that the Taiwan military, by itself, can deter or defeat a Chinese military invasion but Taiwan forces must be capable of putting up successful resistance to allow time for others to react.

Recommendation: US/Taiwan’s defense cooperation should reflect this focus. The United States could conduct a TTX postulating a 2027 scenario where China has achieved the ability to successfully invade Taiwan and then work backwards to identify the steps Washington and Taipei need to take to prevent this capability from being achieved.

Finding 8: While a few Taiwan participants questioned the firmness of the US commitment, polls show that there is strong, bipartisan support for Taiwan in the United States and that a solid majority of Americans would support a US response to an attack on Taiwan at levels comparable to support for treaty allies.

Recommendation: US/Taiwanese officials and scholars should continue to stress the importance to Americans of a demonstration of Taiwan’s determination to defend itself and the importance to Taiwan of the continued credibility of America’s commitment. People-to-people exchanges should be promoted.

Finding 9: Taiwan participants found US assurances that the withdrawal from Afghanistan was aimed in large part at allowing the United States to shift its attention toward the growing China challenge credible and reassuring, despite lingering anxiety. The administration’s impending National Security Strategy (NSS) will be closely examined to see if assurances provided in previous NSS documents regarding Taiwan and the foundational role of US Asian alliances are reaffirmed.

Recommendation: The United States should involve Taiwan early on in the NSS drafting process to ensure that regional anxieties are addressed and the document contains no big surprises.

Finding 10: Americans and Taiwanese were divided about the advisability of maintaining the longstanding US policy of “strategic ambiguity” as opposed to a move towards greater “strategic clarity.”

Recommendation: US and Taiwan officials need to continue this important debate, while recognizing that, even within the current policy framework, there is room—and a growing need—for stronger expressions of US commitment and support as an important component in bolstering Taiwan’s ability and willingness to fight.

Finding 11: Taiwan participants recognized the importance of the nuclear dimension of US strategic deterrence; they expressed concern that a sole purpose or no-first-use declaration by the United States would be detrimental, however.

Recommendation: Pentagon officials should closely consult with Taiwan during the early preparation stage of the next Nuclear Posture Review to avoid surprises and misunderstanding.

Finding 12: Taiwan participants applauded the new US “integrated deterrence” concept; they expressed eagerness in learning more about the concept and Taiwan’s potential role.

Recommendation: The Pentagon could consider sending a team to Taipei to further explain the concept and Taiwan’s potential role in it. AIT should be prepared for more questions regarding this concept.

Finding 13: US efforts to “internationalize” the Taiwan issue, including specific references to the “importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait” in various 2+2 statements were a critical (and much appreciated) component of this approach (and underscored consistency in US support for Taiwan with previous administrations). Taiwanese seek greater participation in various multilateral events and gatherings, including combined military exercises (while realizing the political sensitivity of such events).

Recommendation: The United States should continue its firm support for greater Taiwan involvement in international organizations and initiatives, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and other trade and economic entities and carefully explore the prospects for Taiwan involvement in bilateral and multilateral military training and exercises. Special attention should be directed to involving Taiwan in various QUAD-Plus activities. More pushback is also needed against Chinese efforts to limit Taiwan’s international space; Lithuania is an important test case in this regard.

Finding 14: Taiwan is already under attack today, militarily (through gray zone operations short of war), economically, politically, and psychologically through Beijing’s concerted social media disinformation campaign.

Recommendation: The United States and the ROC need to develop a coordinated multidimensional response to deter this threat while keeping primary focus on developing and demonstrating the ability to respond to an all-out Chinese invasion. Americans need to be assured that Taiwan retains the will and ability to defend itself and Taiwanese need reaffirmation of America's "rock solid" support. Both countries must develop effective measure to increase the risks to future PRC actions against Taiwan to fortify our integrated deterrence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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