



DEALING WITH INCREASED CHINESE AGGRESSIVENESS -PART TWO

BY RALPH COSSA

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The following are some of the key findings and recommendations from the August 2022 US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue. [PacNet 7](#) provided a summary of the dialogue. The full report, with expanded key findings and recommendations can be found [here](#).

Responding to PRC Pressure

Finding: PRC pressure on Taiwan—economically, politically, and especially militarily—has increased considerably over the past year. The early August 2022 PLA military exercise around Taiwan appears aimed at further creating a “new normal” that will reduce warning times should Beijing invade.

Recommendation: The United States should reject the “new normal” characterization, brand Chinese actions as unilateral, destabilizing changes to the status quo, and press Beijing to honor cross-Strait arrangements that have preserved stability and helped prevent accidents in the past.

Recommendation: The U.S. Navy should continue to transit the Taiwan Strait regularly.

Finding: PLA activities appear aimed, in part, at developing the capability to blockade Taiwan. The PRC has demonstrated increased willingness to take risks while stirring up Chinese nationalism.

Recommendation: The United States should make clear that attempts to blockade Taiwan are not “gray zone” actions but acts of war that are likely to force a U.S. response.

Recommendation: The United States should assist Taiwan in making its ports and airfields more survivable; both should develop plans to combat a Chinese embargo or respond to missile and air assaults or mining operations against Taiwan ports and airfields.

Finding: PRC gray zone pressure against Taiwan will steadily increase. A failure to respond to these provocations will send the wrong signal to Beijing.

Recommendation: The U.S. and Taiwan militaries should individually develop and then coordinate plans to respond to continued PRC provocations.

Helping Taiwan Defend Itself/Clarifying U.S. Defense Policy

Finding: Taiwan’s military is not capable of defending itself against an all-out PLA assault without outside assistance. A lack of clarity regarding the extent of outside support complicates Taiwan defense planning and acquisitions. So does the lack of a common view of the battlefield and a lack of awareness in one another’s plans.

Recommendation: The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) should hold private “roles and missions” discussions with Taiwan defense planners to help Taiwan better understand the types of capabilities the United States could bring to bear in the event of a PLA attack.

Recommendation: DoD planners should assist Taiwan in developing a common operational picture of the battlefield and encourage Taiwan to produce its own National Security Strategy.

Finding: The Russian invasion of Ukraine was a wake up call. As a result, Taiwan is placing increased emphasis on asymmetrical warfare and the development of homeland/territorial defense capabilities.

Recommendation: The United States should assist Taiwan in the development of its homeland/territorial defense capabilities and where they fit in the national defense structure, and should assist Taiwan’s interaction with other nations.

Recommendation: The United States and Taiwan should review Ukraine lessons, focusing on how Ukraine has thus far successfully held its own against

the Russian military, identifying what has and has not worked and what could be improved.

Finding: U.S. arms sales to Taiwan have increased but Washington should do more to help prepare Taiwan to defend itself. Procurement lag times remain a serious problem. Time to prepare remains but the window is closing. Many participants worried that experts are underestimating PLA capabilities or that PLA risk-taking tendencies could lead to an inadvertent or accidental incident that could escalate.

Recommendation: The United States should “fast track” arms sales to Taiwan and examine prepositioning and coproduction alternatives to respond should Beijing attack. Taiwan should focus on “large numbers of small things” to enhance its asymmetric capabilities.

Finding: Taiwanese participants sought clarity as to the details of the U.S. concept of “integrated deterrence” and its application to Taiwan.

Recommendation: The DoD and/or State Department should better explain the concept of integrated deterrence and its implications for Taiwan.

Finding: U.S. officials have been increasingly clear in expressing U.S. commitment to help Taiwan defend itself while still maintaining strategic ambiguity. A more nuanced view calls for strategic ambiguity at the policy level but strategic clarity at the operational level. Some allies are concerned about Chinese reaction to any announced U.S. policy change.

Recommendation: The United States should focus on how to bring strategic clarity at the operational level, as academics debate the benefits and risks of embracing strategic clarity.

Recommendation: The United States should consult closely with allies and partners before making policy pronouncements, to better understand their concerns and give advance warning.

Enhancing Deterrence

Finding: Beijing will most likely have factored a U.S. response into any decision to attack Taiwan.

Recommendation: The deterrence discussion should focus on how Washington and Taipei can increase the costs associated with a Chinese invasion, since the capability to respond is at least as important as the

perceived willingness to do so. Beijing must be aware of what we are doing.

Recommendation: The U.S. Government and think tanks should better assess Chinese strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis Taiwan with an eye toward countering the strengths and exploiting the weaknesses.

Recommendation: The United States should assess the impact of its Taiwan-related actions and policy decisions on Taiwan security interests, since Beijing tends to respond to U.S. actions they perceive as “hostile” to Taiwan’s detriment.

Finding: The U.S. desire to strengthen extended deterrence while decreasing the role of nuclear weapons appears contradictory to many Taiwan participants. The role/impact of Russian nuclear threats on the U.S./NATO decision to avoid direct engagement with Russia in Ukraine is also troubling.

Recommendation: The United States should further clarify the role of nuclear weapons within the broader concept of extended deterrence.

Recommendation: The United States should explain precisely how nuclear weapons fit in the new integrated deterrence concept and dispel the idea that efforts to integrate deterrence may reduce the importance of extended deterrence, especially extended nuclear deterrence.

Finding: The greatest concern associated with the PRC’s nuclear build-up is nuclear blackmail aimed at discouraging Washington from getting involved in a Taiwan Strait confrontation. Taiwanese are concerned about crisis escalation, but worry more about the PRC deterring the United States.

Recommendation: The United States should conduct joint assessments with Taiwan about the implications of the PRC’s nuclear-build-up.

Recommendation: The United States and Taiwan (as well as U.S. regional allies) should identify ways to respond to Beijing’s unprecedented build-up by looking at conventional options as well as through nuclear-sharing arrangements in the Indo-Pacific. Such arrangements could help strengthen strategic deterrence and help reduce proliferation incentives.

Increasing Public/Allied Awareness

Finding: The Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased Taiwan public awareness of the similar threat posed by the PRC but has also negatively affected Taiwan public perceptions of U.S. willingness to come to Taiwan's aid. In contrast, the war in Ukraine has increased U.S. willingness to help defend Taiwan.

Recommendation: U.S. officials should put greater emphasis on articulating the differences between Ukraine and Taiwan and publicize U.S. polling that reinforces growing awareness of the PRC threat and the need to respond. Greater public awareness of the consequences should the PRC invade and occupy Taiwan could further strengthen resolve.

Recommendation: Washington and Taipei should better assess and understand the impact of Chinese disinformation and develop information plans to counter these attacks.

Finding: Ukrainian lessons learned have thus far focused on the war's impact on Taiwan threat perceptions and defense preparations, less on lessons that the United States has learned, and even less on lessons Beijing has learned and how it is responding.

Recommendation: U.S. experts should assess emerging lessons learned for Taiwan and U.S. defense strategy and preparedness and the prospects of two simultaneous major conflicts.

Recommendation: U.S. experts should assess the lessons Beijing is learning from the Western response to the Russian invasion and any corrective actions the PRC is taking in response.

Finding: U.S. allies and partners have an important role to play in deterring a PRC invasion of Taiwan.

Recommendation: The United States and its partners should continue stressing the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait in official joint and multilateral statements.

Recommendation: The DoD should develop joint contingency plans with affected allies on how best to counter PRC military action against Taiwan, specifically including a blockade, to be better prepared to respond. Public information campaigns should articulate the implications and/or consequences of a successful Chinese invasion.

Finding: Taiwan is already under attack politically, economically, psychologically, and through more

aggressive gray zone operations. This multidimensional threat requires a multidimensional response. Chinese behavior is a global problem that demands a global response.

Recommendation: The United States should be more proactive and less reactive in responding to PRC aggressive behavior toward Taiwan, including through political and diplomatic efforts.

Recommendation: The United States should implement an aggressive information campaign to counter PRC disinformation and exploit Chinese nationalism, with focus on what the Chinese people stand to lose if war breaks out across the Straits. Attacking the CCP's legitimacy is a good place to start.

Recommendation: The U.S. Government should coordinate closely with allies in responding to both the cross-Strait and global political, economic, and military challenge posed by PRC. The PRC remains the "pacing threat" and should remain the focus of U.S. national security policy.

Recommendation: Given Taiwan's "comprehensive vulnerabilities," the U.S. Government should sponsor research aimed at recognizing non-military security-related vulnerabilities to reduce Taiwan's susceptibility to economic coercion in peacetime and especially during times of conflict.

Recommendation: The U.S. and Taiwan governments and militaries must prepare for the worst-case all-out invasion scenario. Both should improve strategic communication and more clearly articulate the military, political, and economic costs associated with any PRC kinetic action.

Recommendation: The United States needs to better prepare for cross-Strait military contingencies, with the aim of increasing the "risk" factor in any PRC "risk-reward" calculus.

Recommendation: The United States should continue its firm support for greater Taiwan involvement in international organizations and initiatives and explore the prospects for Taiwan involvement in bilateral and multilateral military exercises. More pushback is also needed against Chinese efforts to limit Taiwan's international space.

Recommendation: 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 must develop effective measure to fortify integrated deterrence.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.