



***THE WORLD AFTER TAIWAN'S FALL -
PART TWO***

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This is Part Two of our two-part PacNet on our [study](#) “The World After Taiwan’s Fall,” which reviews the key findings and recommendations:

Finding: The only thing slightly worse than the United States intervening and failing to reverse a PRC invasion of Taiwan would be the United States not intervening. A failure to come to Taiwan’s aid would be devastating to US credibility and could damage if not destroy the entire US alliance network. It would embolden the PRC, Russia, North Korea, and others to be more aggressive. If the United States tried but failed, all eyes would be on what Washington would do next. If the decision were to retreat to “Fortress America,” the damage to US and alliance credibility would again be devastating.

Recommendation: The United States should assume that it would be in its interests to respond—and win—should the PRC move to invade Taiwan. Because it should account for the possibility of a failed intervention, the United States should also reflect on its next moves to engage its allies and partners if China takes Taiwan. The United States should work with its allies and partners to help reverse the PRC *fait accompli*. It should thus rule out retreating to Fortress America.

Finding: There is uncertainty about Washington’s next move after Taiwan’s fall. While the Indian author was confident that the result would be a Fortress America approach, others were not so sure. Some argued that turning and running is not in America’s DNA. Others said it would be much more situation-dependent but believed the United States should work to restore the credibility of its alliances and continue to confront the PRC. To several authors, there would be a need to build an Asian equivalent to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to prevent PRC adventurism and ultimately retake Taiwan.

Recommendation: The United States should be clear that its allies, partners, and friends expect leadership from Washington, especially in difficult times. Even if retreating to Fortress America were not an option after Taiwan’s fall, failure to lean in and rebuild could sink the US leading role in the world. The United States should thus bring its allies and partners together to halt further adventurism and ultimately mount a counteroffensive against the PRC.

Finding: The PRC would become more aggressive toward its neighbors if it were successful in taking over Taiwan. A few, including our Japanese author, feared that Japan would be next. Others saw the South China Sea as a likely area for increased PRC assertiveness. The Indian author worried about a flare-up on the PRC-Indian border, while the Australian author saw an expansion of PRC influence in the South Pacific. The Korean author, while likewise worried about increased PRC assertiveness, was more concerned that the PRC would give a green light to North Korea to march south.

Recommendation: The United States should rally the region and the world to help prevent the PRC from taking Taiwan by showing how such a development would have a direct impact on many countries, exacerbating risks and threats that these countries deemed “more immediate” or “more urgent.” Rallying the region entails raising awareness of the costs and risks involved in a PRC win over Taiwan and urging every regional player to help build a stronger collective deterrence and defense architecture in the Indo-Pacific.

Finding: Taiwan is in a strategic location. Its military and intelligence capacity can help Japan and other East Asian countries to avoid the threat of PRC expansionism. If Taiwan fell to the PRC, Beijing would gain unique military bases and intelligence facilities and would have unencumbered access deep into the Pacific. Beijing would be able to hold US forces in Okinawa and Guam at risk and invade vast territories of Japan and the Philippines, while also strengthening its dominance in the South China Sea and Southeast Asia. Beijing could also deny the United States and its allies the ability to maintain a forward presence in the Pacific.

Recommendation: Rallying the region around the danger of a PRC takeover of Taiwan should emphasize the dangers that would come next: greater PRC dominance of the region and a PRC sphere of influence tightly controlled by Beijing.

Finding: Nuclear proliferation would likely follow the fall of Taiwan in parts of Asia because regional states would fear that they could be next on the PRC's hit list and would have reasons to doubt the ability (even the willingness) of the United States to defend them. Japan, South Korea, and Australia would consider going nuclear, though all three would also want to maintain their alliance relationship with the United States. Of note, however: the US, Japanese, Australian, and South Korean authors all regarded proliferation by others as inevitable, while being more nuanced when it comes to proliferation by "their" country.

Recommendation: Today there are many good reasons to strengthen US extended deterrence because the balance of power is shifting fast in the PRC's favor. In the event of a PRC military takeover of Taiwan, strengthening US extended deterrence would become an utmost priority.

Finding: Nuclear proliferation is unlikely to extend beyond Asia. The European author, for instance, suggested that proliferation would not happen in Europe after Taiwan's fall to China. The nonproliferation norm is strong there and for that to happen, it would take both a complete loss of US credibility and a direct and perennial threat to Europe.

Recommendation: The United States should keep in mind that nuclear proliferation is primarily a response to local or regional issues. Resolving these issues is thus essential to stall, stop, or reverse proliferation. The United States should also not underestimate the power of nonproliferation norms and of its stabilizing role as a regional and global security guarantor. In addition to reinforcing its defense commitments to its allies and partners, the United States should thus seek to strengthen the nonproliferation regime.

Finding: Taiwan's fall to China would likely break some US alliances and reshape strategic relations in the Indo-Pacific. One author assessed that the Philippines and Thailand would likely break their alliance relationships with the United States and surrender to PRC hegemony. In addition, others talked about the possible (and for some the likely) bandwagoning of many states towards the PRC as the new center of power. That would be likely if an "axis of authoritarian states" emerges, dominated by China and Russia, that has drawn the conclusion that nuclear coercion (or nuclear use) helps score geopolitical points.

Recommendation: In addition to strengthening its alliances and nuclear umbrella with its current allies, the United States should consider deploying it over other countries or, at minimum, engage in much closer security cooperation with them.

Finding: There is disagreement as to whether a region-wide nuclear sharing arrangement would be beneficial. Our Korean and Indian authors ruled out the option. The latter said that it is something that the United States can foster before there is an invasion, not after. The former, meanwhile, said that it is not an option, especially under the current administration. Others were not as blunt. Our US author explained that such an arrangement has potential with the United States, but not without. Others hoped to keep the United States in a regional-wide nuclear sharing arrangement but did not rule out arrangements without it.

Recommendation: The United States should conduct a wide-ranging research effort to reflect on the ends, ways, and means of concluding nuclear sharing arrangements with its Indo-Pacific allies. This effort

should draw on the NATO experience but be tailored to the Indo-Pacific, and it should explore the potential benefits, costs, and risks that such arrangements would entail.

Finding: Even before the latest PRC show of force around Taiwan in August 2022 (when the PRC conducted military exercises around the Island), there was general agreement that the United States and its allies and partners should coordinate more closely to signal resolve and enhance collective deterrence and defense in the Indo-Pacific. Reflecting on the implications of a PRC military takeover of Taiwan has made this project even more of a priority.

Recommendation: The United States should double down on its defense arrangements and security assistance to threatened allies and partners, especially Taiwan. Practically, that means it should make its defense commitments clearer and take steps to develop and deploy with them new capabilities. While the differences between Ukraine and Taiwan are clear, there is a danger that the PRC might equate Washington's and/or NATO's reluctance to engage a nuclear-armed Russia directly, especially if Russia is issuing not-so-veiled nuclear threats, with a similar reluctance or refusal to confront a nuclear-armed PRC. The United States should thus strengthen deterrence, including nuclear deterrence, and reject any "sole purpose" or "no first use" statement.

Finding: Thinking about US policy vis-à-vis Taiwan is evolving. All but two authors argued in favor of abandoning strategic ambiguity today; the Japanese and Korean authors worried about the PRC's reaction to an explicit policy change. However, they, and everyone else, saw the need for the United States to articulate and demonstrate its resolve and preparedness to respond more clearly to defend Taiwan. The bottom line: the PRC should not doubt that the United States will respond to an invasion of Taiwan.

Recommendation: The study's conclusion is that the best US response to the fall of Taiwan would be a concerted effort with like-minded US friends and allies to prevent further PRC aggression, if not through an "Asian NATO" then through a

reinvigoration of existing alliances and new defense arrangements. It thus makes sense for the United States to enhance Indo-Pacific deterrence now to dissuade the PRC from moving against Taiwan in the first place, or to ensure that such an effort would fail. Action must be coordinated with allies and partners that also have much to lose should Taiwan fall under Beijing's control.

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