



US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue Responding to Increased Chinese Aggressiveness

BY
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	3
OVERVIEW	3
POENTIAL FOR CONFLICT?	4
CHINA'S MILITARY PREPARES FOR WAR	
TAIWAN DEFENSE PRIORITIES AND CONTINGENCY PREPARATIONS	6
UNITED STATES DEFENSE PREPARDNESS AND PRIORITIES	7
ARMS SALES	
STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY	
INCREASING DOMESTIC AWARENESS	8
IMPLICATIONS SHOULD TAIWAN FALL	
ENHANCING DETERRENCE	10
DETECTING GRAY ZONE ATTACKS	
DETECTING AN INVASION	
NUCLEAR DETERRENCE	
COUNTERING COERCION	13
TAKING STOCK: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?	14
KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	15
RESPONDING TO PRC PRESSURE	
HELPING TAIWAN DEFEND ITSELF	
CLARIFYING US DEFENSE POLICY	
ENHANCING DETERRENCE	
INCREASING PUBLIC/ALLIED AWARENESS	
OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS	
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	21

US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue: Responding to Increased Chinese Aggressiveness

Executive Summary

Taiwan is already under attack by the People's Republic of China (PRC) politically, economically, psychologically, and militarily – the latter through more aggressive Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) gray zone military operations short of actual direct conflict. This multidimensional threat requires a multidimensional response in ways that complement and enhance military deterrence. PRC behavior represents a global problem that demands a global response.

PRC pressure on Taiwan has increased considerably over the past year, even before Beijing used the visit by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as an excuse to further ramp up pressure. The August 2022 PLA military exercise around Taiwan appears aimed at further creating a “new normal” that could reduce warning times should Beijing invade. However, such PRC actions are not “normal.” They are unilateral, destabilizing, and, in some instances, illegal changes to the status quo. Such Chinese pressure tactics, combined with the “wake up call” provided by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have sensitized the citizens and governments of Taiwan, the United States, and the international community to the growing possibility – if not probability – of a PRC invasion and have increased public perceptions about the need and willingness to defend Taiwan democracy.

The PRC's nuclear build-up is also a great cause of concern. This concern is driven not by the threat of nuclear war (given US nuclear superiority) but by the possibility of nuclear blackmail aimed at discouraging Washington from getting involved in a Taiwan confrontation. Taiwanese are concerned about crisis escalation (especially to the nuclear level) but worry more about the PRC deterring the United States.

The United States, working closely with allies and other like-minded states, should be more proactive and less reactive in responding to increased PRC aggressive behavior. With the US Department of Defense (DoD) in the lead, the US Government needs to better assess Chinese strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis Taiwan with an eye toward countering strengths and exploiting weaknesses, while also examining ways to broaden the

challenge along multiple fronts in cooperation with various allies and partners. Think tanks can and should supplement this analysis.

While continued strong support for Ukraine is important to demonstrate Western resolve and prevent more Russian territorial gains, the PRC remains the “pacing threat” and thus should remain the focus of US national security policy and defense procurement strategy.

Introduction

On Aug. 15-16, 2022, at a time when increased Chinese pressure, including aggressive gray zone tactics, was raising the threat of conflict across the Taiwan Strait, 70 US and Taiwan scholars, experts, and former and current government officials (the latter in their private capacities as observers) convened for the second Track 2 US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue. The Pacific Forum hosted the dialogue, with sponsorship by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and in partnership with Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR).

The dialogue addressed a range of key strategic issues pertinent to the bilateral security relationship, especially in the military realm. Its focus was on defense and deterrence measures both partners could take, together and separately to raise the costs and risks and thus lower the odds of Chinese military action. The objective was to produce actionable and operationally relevant recommendations aimed at improving and enhancing the security relationship.

The August 2022 dialogue built upon the recommendations resulting from the 2021 inaugural dialogue with a greater sense of urgency as a result of both Beijing's increasingly aggressive actions toward Taiwan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the latter of which demonstrated that naked aggression is no longer unthinkable.

Most of the participants convened in person in Honolulu with a small number of participants joining virtually. The dialogue addressed the following topics: current/looming cross-Strait challenges and increasing risks of conflict; Taiwanese defense goals and priorities and the extent of planning for worst-case contingencies; US defense policy goals, priorities, and motivations related to cross-Strait conflict; domestic attitudes in Taiwan and the United States and how they relate to cross-Strait defense preparations; current deterrence-related policy and

capabilities and how best to enhance them to decrease the likelihood of Beijing taking military action against Taiwan; and options to counter coercion that would complement and enhance military deterrence.

Participants also reviewed the key findings and recommendations from the Pacific Forum's 2021 *US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue: Dealing with Increased Chinese Aggressiveness* report¹ and discussed the road ahead, with a focus on identifying priority solutions to near-term problems. The dialogue also continued to build a community of senior and rising officials and strategists well versed in these issues in the United States and Taiwan.

Senior officials from the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Office in Honolulu, provided keynote addresses. To increase understanding of the potential consequences of a successful Chinese invasion of Taiwan, participants also received a summary of the ongoing Pacific Forum study on "Understanding the Implications of a Successful Chinese Invasion of Taiwan," which will be the subject of a companion *Issues & Insights* Report. To better understand the nature of the challenge posed by the PLA, participants also received a briefing on the National Defense University's study, *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*.²

Overview

Taiwan is under attack by the PRC, politically, economically, psychologically, and through more aggressive PLA gray zone military operations. Beijing's pressure tactics against Taiwan have increased appreciably over the past year. The PLA's aggressive behavior, especially when combined with the "wake up call" of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have sensitized the citizens and governments of Taiwan, the United States, and the international community to the growing possibility, if not probability, of a PRC invasion and have increased public perceptions about the need and willingness to

¹ Ralph A. Cossa, "US-Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue: Dealing with Increased Chinese Aggressiveness," *Pacific Form Issues & Insights*, Vol. 21, CR 3, October 2021 [<https://pacforum.org/publication/issues-insights-vol-21-cr-3-us-taiwan-deterrence-and-defense-dialogue-dealing-with-increased-chinese-aggressiveness>], hereafter referred to as the 2021 Dialogue Report.

² Joel Wuthnow, Derek Grossman, Phillip S. Saunders, Andrew Scobell, and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*, [<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/Books/crossing-the-strait/crossing-the-strait.pdf>], National Defense University Press, Washington D.C., 2022.

defend Taiwan. Both the United States and Taiwan have taken measures in the last year to deter or, at the very least, better prepare to respond to Chinese kinetic action against Taiwan. Many of these measures are consistent with the recommendations in the 2021 Dialogue Report, but the United States and Taiwan should do more to increase the risks or costs associated with any PLA military action against Taiwan. This report contains a list of key findings and new recommendations aimed at increasing deterrence and enhancing Taiwan and America's defense capabilities as interpreted by the author, who is solely responsible for the content.

The PRC poses a multidimensional threat that requires a multidimensional response in ways that complement and enhance military deterrence while countering Chinese coercion. The PRC's aggressive behavior represents a global—not a strictly US or Taiwan—problem, which demands a global response, in cooperation with friends and allies and other like-minded states. There was a great convergence of views among American and Taiwanese participants as to the urgency of the challenge and the need for effective countermeasures now to deter further PRC aggression and assist Taiwan in resisting current coercion tactics, even as both prepare for a possible direct conflict with the PRC.

Potential for Conflict?

The potential for conflict across the Taiwan Strait is growing more serious by the day as Xi Jinping's government becomes more oppressive at home and more aggressive abroad. As one US official noted, "military escalation may not be unthinkable for the PRC leadership." Even if Beijing does not intend to attack in the near term, its pressure tactics aimed at demoralizing Taiwan could easily spiral out of control and escalate in the event of an accident, given Beijing's increased recklessness.

Over the past year, Beijing has become increasingly aggressive and assertive toward Taiwan, with almost daily incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone, increased military training exercises, economic pressure tactics, and a declaration that the Taiwan Strait is not international waters. All this occurred before Beijing used the July

2022 visit by US Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi as an excuse to further ratchet up tensions through an unprecedented early August PLA military exercise around Taiwan, including missile launches over the island and into Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Participants saw the PLA actions as an attempt to establish a "new normal," a terminology they rejected. Not only do exercises of this nature improve Chinese capabilities to attack or to impose a blockade, they can also reduce warning times should Beijing decide to invade.

Participants firmly urged both governments and the broader international community to reject the "new normal" concept and brand Chinese actions for what they are: unilateral, unacceptable, destabilizing, and, in some instances, illegal changes to the status quo. They represent a continuing challenge to the rules-based order that has preserved regional and global stability for decades. Beijing should be called upon to honor previous cross-Strait arrangements, including center line delineations, that have preserved stability and helped prevent naval and air accidents in the past. The US Navy and the navies of like-minded states (such as Japan and Australia) and commercial carriers should continue to regularly transit the Taiwan Strait to demonstrate the invalidity of Chinese claims that this broadly recognized international body of water is Chinese internal waters or its territorial sea.

PLA activities in general but especially during the August 2022 military exercise appear aimed, in part, at developing the capability to quarantine or blockade Taiwan either physically or through area denial techniques, such as announcing missile closure zones that would increase the risks of commercial activity in or around Taiwan ports. Any attempt to blockade, quarantine, or otherwise boycott or embargo Taiwan would not, and should not, be considered "gray zone" actions but acts of war. The Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) specifically states, "any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, is considered a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the

United States.”³ As a result, any PRC announcement of an embargo or blockade will likely compel the United States to respond. One US analyst noted that US Navy ship visits to Taiwan would be a logical first reaction to any announced blockade or embargo of Taiwan ports.

While increased PRC aggressiveness, especially as regards its August 2022 military exercise around Taiwan and earlier crackdown on Hong Kong, have increased the sense of urgency in both Taiwan and the United States, differing opinions persist as to the PRC’s readiness to invade (this was the case in last year’s dialogue as well). China hands typically argue that Beijing is still several years away from successfully invading Taiwan, and that current pressure tactics are part of a “win without fighting” strategy aimed at demoralizing the people of Taiwan. Many of the assembled US and Taiwan military experts worried that PLA capabilities are being underestimated, however, and that PLA risk-taking tendencies could lead to an inadvertent or accidental incident that could escalate; even if the PRC is deemed unprepared to invade today, other events could prompt an earlier than anticipated invasion.

The good news is that the US intelligence success in accurately predicting Putin’s invasion sends a clear signal to Beijing about Washington’s ability to closely monitor its military activities. As one US analyst noted, “a Chinese invasion will not be a surprise; we will see the build-up and invasion preparations.” The United States and Taiwan will likely know if and when the PRC is preparing to attack and Beijing will know that we know. The remaining questions the United States and Taiwan must consider are: How prepared will either or both be to respond? How can the United States assist Taiwan in making its ports and airfields more survivable? Are plans in place to combat a PLA embargo or blockade or to respond to missile and air assaults or mining operations against Taiwan ports and airfields?”

PRC military activity throughout the year and especially during the August 2022 military exercise has demonstrated Xi Jinping’s and the PLA’s increased willingness to take risks. This increases the

probability of accidents or confrontations that could lead to escalation. Beijing has also used the Taiwan issue to stir up nationalism at home. But, as one analyst noted, “China can manufacture nationalism but can’t totally control it.” While domestic pressure, especially by Chinese netizens, is not likely to be determinative, it can put increased pressure on Xi to act. Participants assumed (correctly) that Xi’s “president for life” (or at least the next five to ten years) status would be confirmed at the then-upcoming 20th Party Congress. Once Xi’s continued rule is secured, Xi is likely to be more, not less, aggressive, which again increases the possibility of accidents or miscalculations.

China’s Military Prepares for War

An independent assessment of PLA capabilities and limitations prepared at the National Defense University and reviewed at this dialogue argues that gray zone tactics short of using lethal force are the most likely PLA course of action in the near term. This assessment is based on the PLA’s insufficient lift and the difficulties involved in projecting power across the strait by a military lacking in both actual combat experience and joint military operations. While the United States (but not Taiwan alone) enjoys qualitative and some quantitative advantages over the PRC, Beijing is determined to close these gaps and is steadily improving and modernizing its forces and capabilities. The window of deterrence is closing for Washington and Taipei as the window of opportunity is opening for Beijing.

Participants were not prepared to predict with confidence that Xi would order an invasion of Taiwan in the next year or so, given the PRC’s still somewhat limited (but rapidly improving) military capabilities. However, few were willing to rule out the possibility and no one argued against the widely held belief that Beijing’s military (as well as economic and political) pressure against Taiwan will steadily increase. A failure by Taiwan and the United States to demonstrate their preparedness and willingness to respond will send the wrong signal to Beijing.

³ H.R. 2479, Taiwan Relations Act [https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/2479], 96th Congress (1979-1980), 04/10/1979 Public Law 96-8.

Taiwan Defense Priorities and Contingency Preparations

Dialogue participants examined Taiwanese defense goals, priorities, and the extent to which Taiwan has prepared for worst case contingencies. Taiwan officials stressed that Taipei recognizes and accepts that responsibility for defending itself rests with Taiwan, and the Tsai Ing-wen government has taken significant steps in the past year to better prepare itself to do so, including the establishment of an All-out Defense Mobilization Agency.⁴ The Russian invasion of Ukraine was a sobering wake up call for Taiwan and its international supporters. As a result, Taiwan is placing increased emphasis on asymmetrical warfare and the development of homeland and territorial defense capabilities to improve Taiwan's ability to resist the invasion should PLA troops land on Taiwanese soil (as recommended in last year's dialogue report and as the Ukrainian people were so heroically doing at the time of this writing).

Training of recruits is getting tougher and more realistic and there is growing public support for extending the length of mandatory military training to better prepare conscripts for homeland defense. Reserve reform is underway but still slow and questions remain regarding operational control over

“Taiwan is not capable of defending itself against an all-out PLA assault without outside assistance.”

territorial defense efforts both in peacetime and in the event of war. The Russian invasion and the PRC crackdown on civil liberties in Hong Kong (which effectively ended the “one country, two systems” promise imbedded in the Hong Kong reversion agreement with the United Kingdom) has instilled a sense of urgency among the Taiwan public. This has

resulted in the establishment of organizations like the Kuma Academy, which trains ordinary citizens (at their own expense) to prepare for and defend against foreign invasion. A strong domestic resistance force buys precious time to allow outside assistance to reach Taiwan.

Debate continues in Taiwan over the proper mix of hardware needed to defend against the PLA and what an asymmetric force would look like. While American officials stress the need for “large numbers of small things,” this does not mean that larger weapon systems should not be part of the mix. As one American noted, “asymmetric weapons are weapons that attack enemy weak points; for example, coastal defense cruise missiles are a major deterrent.” The United States is not against Taiwan possessing major weapon systems *per se*—F-16s are a vital element in the defense of Taiwan, for example—but remains concerned about weapon systems that have first strike implications or limited operational or deterrent value.

Taiwan defense experts are also concerned about the lack of a common operational picture to support joint warfighting. For example, each military service uses its own maps; there is no common view of the battlefield within the Taiwan military. Greater interoperability between the various Taiwan military services is a prerequisite to establishing interoperability with the United States and other countries that could potentially come to Taipei's assistance in the event of hostilities. More broadly speaking, Taiwan needs to reshape its national defense strategy to “outthink” PRC strategy, which focuses on Taiwan vulnerabilities.

In short, while Taiwan has made major strides in improving its defense capabilities over the past year, and while both its willingness to fight and sense of urgency have increased,⁵ participants agreed that Taiwan is not capable of defending itself against an all-out PLA assault without outside assistance. Taiwan participants also credibly argued that a lack

⁴ For details, see “All-out Defense Mobilization” page [https://afrc.mnd.gov.tw/afrcweb/Content_en.aspx?MenuID=6305&MP=2] on the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense Armed Forces Reserve Command, All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency web page.

⁵ These points are documented in the section dealing with “Increasing Domestic Awareness.”

of clarity regarding the nature and extent of outside support complicates Taiwan defense planning and acquisitions. A discussion of roles and missions between US and Taiwan defense planners would help Taiwan better understand the types of capabilities the United States could bring to bear in the event of a Chinese attack, should the political decision be made to intervene militarily on Taiwan's behalf. Such action, while not providing a guarantee of US assistance, would nonetheless assist Taiwan defense planners in developing their own roles, missions, and defense acquisition plans. A case in point: uncertainty regarding the level and nature of outside support has continued to hamper Ukrainian defense efforts, underscoring the nature of this problem.

While recognizing that the war in Ukraine was still on-going and final lessons and outcomes are still to come, participants saw great value in a comprehensive analysis of the immediate lessons, focusing on the manner in which Ukraine has thus far successfully held its own against the Russian military. Identifying what has not worked and what could be improved would be useful as well. Other nations, like Lithuania and Switzerland, which have focused on territorial defense, could serve as useful models as Taiwan improves its overall homeland defense posture.

United States Defense Preparedness and Priorities

As underscored by a senior American participant, the United States has identified the PRC as "our most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge" to US national security interests and the Indo-Pacific as "the center of gravity for US security." This realization helped drive the discussion of US defense policy goals, priorities, and motivations related to cross-Strait conflict. One overarching question posed by a US former official set the tone: "Americans must ask themselves the question, do we want to live in a world where Beijing sets the standards and makes the rules?" It should come as no surprise that no one in the room thought such a world

was acceptable, much less desirable. US and Taiwan participants largely agreed that the United States needs to invest more on defense and, in the face of Russian as well as PRC assertiveness and aggression, must be prepared to fight two wars simultaneously. That is neither current US strategy nor a capability America possesses today.

The continued US defense focus on the Indo-Pacific in general, and the PRC in particular, was encouraging to Taiwan participants from both government and academia, although some feared the Ukraine War and persistent Middle East tensions (especially but not exclusively related to Iran) could draw U.S. focus and resources elsewhere. They welcomed the February 2022 White House release of the *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*,⁶ which clearly identified the PRC as the primary challenge to US interests in the region: "The PRC is combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might as it pursues a sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and seeks to become the world's most influential power." While repeating America's consistent (through prior administrations) commitment to "a free and open Indo-Pacific," the strategy report also directly criticized Beijing's "coercion and aggression," while further warning that "the PRC is also undermining human rights and international law, including freedom of navigation, as well as other principles that have brought stability and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific."

Taiwan participants also applauded the US concept of "integrated deterrence" but sought clarity as to its contents, characteristics, and application to Taiwan. US participants provided some details, drawing from the National Defense Strategy's unclassified Fact Sheet,⁷ which states, "integrated deterrence entails developing and combining our strengths to maximum effect, by working seamlessly across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, other instruments of US national power, and our unmatched network of Alliances and partnerships." While the United States clearly envisions a role for allies and partners, it has not defined this role, especially for Taiwan. Meanwhile, the absence, at the time of our dialogue, of

⁶ *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/US-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf], The White House, Washington, DC, February 2022.

⁷ *Fact Sheet: 2022 National Defense Strategy* [https://media.defense.gov/2022/Mar/28/2002964702/-1/-1/1/NDS-FACT-SHEET.PDF], US Department of Defense, March 28, 2022.

unclassified versions of the *US National Security Strategy*⁸, *National Defense Strategy*, and *Nuclear and Missile Posture Review* documents added to uncertainty regarding US defense priorities.⁹

Arms Sales

US arms sales to Taiwan was another major topic of discussion. Arms sales have increased in recent years through both the Trump and Biden administrations, but participants agreed the United States must do more to help prepare Taiwan to defend itself. American officials agreed that procurement lag times remain a serious problem. As noted earlier, there is disagreement within both the Taiwan and US camps about how much time there is to prepare, but few disputed that both Washington and Taipei need to prepare now for worst-case scenarios. The United States should “fast track” arms sales to Taiwan and examine coproduction and prepositioning alternatives either on Taiwan or nearby (e.g., Okinawa or Guam) to be better prepared to respond should Beijing’s attack plans be accelerated or other events lead to a military confrontation. Last year’s recommendation that the United States consider giving selected weapons systems to Taiwan without charge was repeated again this year.

Strategic Ambiguity

As was the case during the 2021 conference, participants again debated the advisability of strategic ambiguity as a central feature in US Taiwan policy throughout the two-day meeting. All acknowledged that senior US officials (including President Biden himself on several occasions) have become increasingly clear in expressing America’s commitment to help Taiwan defend itself if the PRC attacks. While voices calling for strategic clarity have grown louder, a more nuanced view seems to have emerged, calling for strategic ambiguity at the policy level but strategic clarity at the operational level. If one assumes that any PRC invasion will have already factored in a US response, the United States should focus on how (and how much and how fast) to bring

and demonstrate strategic clarity at the operational level through more focused and more visible joint and combined training and exercises.

Several participants noted that they shared the concerns expressed by a number of US allies (and by Japanese experts in particular), about the PRC’s reaction to any announced change in the long-standing practice of strategic ambiguity. To address these concerns, the United States should consult closely with allies and partners like Taiwan, Japan, and Australia, among others, before making any policy pronouncements and, in the event of official policy changes, give them advance warning to prepare.

Increasing Domestic Awareness

The resolve of the people of Taiwan to fight in the event of a PRC invasion of their homeland has steadily increased in the past year. As noted earlier, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased Taiwan public awareness of the similar threat posed by the PRC. So too has the earlier PRC crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong and increased PLA military activity in and around Taiwan, including but not limited to the August 2022 exercise. Participants examined how these events affected domestic attitudes in Taiwan and the United States and how they relate to cross-Strait preparedness. Generally, the people of Taiwan have become more aware of the nature of the PRC threat and more determined to defend their democracy. However, the failure of the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to commit troops to assist Ukraine has also negatively affected Taiwan public perceptions of US willingness to come to Taiwan’s aid. In contrast, the war in Ukraine has increased US public opinion about the need and willingness to help Taiwan defend itself.

Various public opinion polls cited by Taiwan participants show that more than 70% of Taiwan citizens are willing to fight; “If Ukraine can do it, so

⁸ Note: the unclassified 2022 US National Security Strategy [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>] was released on October 12, 2022.

⁹ The Defense Department released an unclassified version of these three documents together on October 27, 2022 [<https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>].

can we,” opined one Taiwanese. An equal number support restoring and lengthening compulsory military service. The number was smaller among 20-29 year-old respondents who would be most directly involved, but a strong majority (roughly 60%) still supported compulsory training. Meanwhile books on how to prepare for a Chinese attack have become best sellers in Taiwan, as has a book “debunking” Chinese misinformation. Taiwanese confidence in their military’s ability to defend against the PRC remains low, however, with a majority (ranging from 56-64% in various polls) believing that Taiwan is incapable of defending itself without US/outside support. While most (but not all) Taiwan polls show that a majority still believe the United States will come to Taiwan’s aid in the event of an invasion, the numbers are decreasing since the Russian invasion of Ukraine (from 60% to 54% in one poll). Taiwan participants speculated that Beijing’s disinformation campaign may have been a factor in the decline.

An extensive poll conducted by our partner organization, INDSR, in early March, 2022¹⁰ (several weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine) reinforced many of the above findings. A strong majority (more than 70% overall and over 60% of 20-29 year-old respondents) thought four months of military service was too short, with a similar number voicing support for an extension to one year of service. Roughly 64% favored continued procurement of arms from the United States while an even greater number (roughly 85%) supported the “independent development of national defense weapons and equipment.” Two-thirds of respondents also supported the military’s possession of “weapons able

to strike Chinese military installations along the coast.” More than 70% were committed to the defense of Taiwan in the event of a PRC attack, but only 40% thought the United States would likely send troops to help defend Taiwan (compared to 49% who thought it unlikely). Many of the earlier cited polls, which showed higher numbers, merely asked if the US would “help defend” Taiwan; this one specifically asked if America would send troops. 31% of respondents identified the PRC as Taiwan’s greatest threat, interestingly followed by declining birth rates (27%), which would have an impact on future numbers of available recruits. Finally, roughly 75% supported disaster prevention drills, even if they disrupted daily life.

US polling regarding Taiwan is much less frequent or precise but the Ukraine War has in fact focused more public and media attention on Taiwan amid concerns that Beijing might similarly invade its “lost territory.” A March 2022 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center¹¹ showed that a large majority of Americans (78%) believe that tensions between the PRC and Taiwan are at least a somewhat serious problem for the United States. 35% described these tensions as very serious, up from 28% last year. Historically Taiwan has ranked very low on the scale of US-PRC

issues of concerns, often ranking last. Of note, an even greater percentage of Americans expressed serious or somewhat serious concern about the Sino-Russia partnership (92%) and Beijing’s involvement in US politics (84%).

“The central question during this deterrence discussion, therefore, was how to raise the costs and risks to Beijing to prevent war in the first place by convincing Beijing that any military attack against Taiwan was bound to fail.”

Meanwhile, a more recent poll conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs¹² in late July 2022 (just before Rep. Pelosi’s visit and the PLA exercise)

¹⁰ “Taiwan National Defense Security Poll,” INDSR, 2022 [https://indsr.org.tw/focus?typeid=38&uid=7&pid=431].

¹¹ See Laura Silver, “Fast Facts about Americans’ Views of China-Taiwan Tensions” [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/08/01/fast-facts-about-americans-views-of-china-taiwan-tensions/], Pew Research Center, August 1, 2022.

¹² Dina Smeltz and Craig Kafura, “Americans Favor Aiding Taiwan with Arms but not Troops” [https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/2022%20CCS%20Taiwan%20Brief.pdf], The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, August 2022.

showed that most Americans would support sending arms and military equipment to Taiwan in the event of a PRC invasion (76%), but only 40% would favor sending US ground troops. In a similar poll in August 2021,¹³ 52% of Americans favored sending troops to help defend Taiwan in the event of a PRC attack, the first time a majority has favored such an action since pollster first asked the question in 1982. In this year's poll, three-quarters of Americans (76%) thought Beijing would see Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a precedent, encouraging it to invade Taiwan. Should this occur, a majority of Americans would also support imposing diplomatic and economic sanctions (76%) and, most significantly, using the US Navy to prevent the PLA from imposing a blockade against Taiwan (62%), in effect supporting direct US military involvement in the conflict despite increased caution about committing US ground troops.

Participants believed that Washington and Taipei should put greater emphasis on articulating the differences between Ukraine and Taiwan in the eyes of their respective publics and should take further steps to reinforce both growing awareness of the PRC threat and the need to respond to this challenge. Greater public awareness of the domestic, regional, and global implications and consequences should the PLA invade and occupy Taiwan could further strengthen the resolve among the United States and its regional and global allies and partners to deter such PRC actions. Washington and Taipei also need to better assess and understand the impact of Beijing's disinformation campaigns on public opinion and develop information plans to counter these ongoing disinformation attacks. The United States could learn from Taiwan, which has already developed expertise in this area, at both the governmental and non-governmental levels, including through the establishment of a Taiwanese fact checking center and media literacy campaigns.¹⁴

Implications Should Taiwan Fall

Participants agreed with the assertion that greater public awareness of the domestic, regional, and global implications and consequences should the PRC invade and occupy Taiwan could further strengthen the resolve among the United States and its regional and global allies and partners to deter such PRC actions. This discussion was prompted by a presentation about a related on-going DTRA-supported Pacific Forum research project examining the implications for the United States and selected allies and partners (Australia, the European Union, India, Japan, and Korea), should the PLA take control of Taiwan. A separate *Issues & Insights* report will detail the findings of this research project.

To briefly summarize that report here, all authors essentially agreed that the only thing worse than America trying and failing to defend Taiwan, i.e., a "too little, too late" scenario, would be the United States doing nothing. Failure to aid Taiwan would be devastating to US credibility regionally and globally and would seriously damage, if not destroy, the US alliance network. It would also embolden Beijing, Moscow, and others to be more aggressive. In a scenario where the United States tried but failed to defend Taiwan, the long-term impact would depend on what Washington did next. Most authors believed the United States would stay in the region and fight on, with its allies, to prevent further PRC expansionism, or even to take Taiwan back. Several referenced the need to build an "Asian NATO." All believed the PRC would become more aggressive toward its neighbors once it took Taiwan.

The advantages gained by the PLA if it is able to use Taiwan bases to project power beyond the constraints of the first island chain cannot be overstated. Others saw a global "free for all," with North Korea as a primary concern. Most believed that nuclear proliferation would likely follow, at least in parts of Asia, as faith in US extended deterrence was shattered. Many dialogue participants shared these concerns and all believed that the United States and its allies and partners need to cooperate and

¹³ Dina Smeltz and Craig Kafura, "For the First Time, Half of Americans Favor Defending Taiwan If China Invades" [<https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/first-time-half-americans-favor-defending-taiwan-if-china-invades>], The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, August 26, 2022.

¹⁴ See, for example, "How Taiwan is countering Chinese disinformation" [<https://www.dw.com/en/how-taiwan-is-countering-chinese-disinformation/a-62931086>], *DW Freedom*, August 25, 2022.

coordinate more closely to signal resolve and enhance their collective deterrence and defense.

Enhancing Deterrence

To fully understand deterrence, it is important to examine where it has failed. Despite accurate intelligence regarding Russian intentions and strong statements from the United States and its NATO allies about severe consequences (many subsequently implemented), Putin was not deterred from launching his invasion of Ukraine. A Russian “failure” (however defined) could act as a deterrent to others; likewise Russian success could embolden Xi Jinping (among others) to seek military solutions to disputes. The central question during this deterrence discussion, therefore, was how to raise the costs and risks to Beijing to prevent war in the first place by convincing Beijing that any military attack against Taiwan was bound to fail. One key question for defense planners in the United States and Taiwan was “how must current policies and capabilities be enhanced to decrease the likelihood of Beijing taking military action against Taiwan?”

The first question asked during this session was “what are we trying to deter?” The answer was three-fold: the PRC’s ongoing gray zone tactics, which are becoming increasingly aggressive; a PLA invasion of

“Most participants believe that Beijing will have already factored in a US response to any decision to attack Taiwan.”

Taiwan or other forms of kinetic action; and the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Deterring Gray Zone Attacks

The burden of responding to PLA gray zone tactics fall primarily, although not exclusively, on Taiwan. The PRC has the clear advantage over the United States, given its close proximity to Taiwan and the wide variety of options available to Beijing (many of which have already been explored but could be

repeated or magnified in frequency or intensity). PRC harassment and encroachment at this level also reduces warning times for wider scale operations. The Ukraine conflict is just the latest example of an aggressor using the pretext of an “exercise” to launch an attack.

Deterring an Invasion

In the event of a PRC attack against Taiwan (note that this report considers actions such as an attack on offshore islands or an embargo or blockade acts of war, rather than gray zone activities), the United States has a larger role to play. As previously explained, Taiwan stands little chance of defeating a PRC attack without outside assistance; the belief that outside assistance would not be forthcoming would negatively impact Taiwan’s willingness and ability to respond. While subject to debate, most believed that the advantage here still resides with the United States but that the balance of power was rapidly eroding. Halting or reversing this slide will require action on both sides, including smarter procurement decisions. For example, the current portfolio of US precision guided munitions favors ground attack rather than anti-ship weapons that would be critical in a Taiwan scenario.

As one US defense expert opined, the US Air Force is buying a “shockingly low” number of long-range anti-ship missiles and none of the US services has effective mid-range anti-ship weapons that fifth-generation fighters could carry internally. Most of the ground attack weapons in the current US portfolio are not suited for striking mobile forces; they are optimized for large-scale attacks against fixed land-based targets. If the PRC is indeed the “pacing challenge” and Taiwan represents the issue where conflict is most likely to result, then the US needs to focus procurement efforts accordingly.

Taiwan should also better prepare for conventional conflict, focusing on those weapons systems that provide the greatest asymmetric advantage, including anti-ship missiles (both surface-to-surface and air-to-surface), drones, short-range air defense systems (including man-portable systems), and improved early warning. One Taiwan defense specialist argued that Washington needed to support a tougher Taiwan response to PLA gray zone

activities to increase deterrence since “a failure to respond increases Beijing’s tendency to do more.” The challenge of course is to do this in a way that does not encourage or even “justify” (in Beijing’s eyes) further escalation.

Participants debated the need for greater strategic clarity during this session, not just to deter PRC aggression, but also in terms of Taiwan acquisitions. As one Taiwan analyst argued, “If the United States wants to deny Taiwan certain capabilities, then it needs to provide clear and concrete assurances that it will fill the gap.” More visible US support would both help deter Beijing while increasing hope in Taiwan that it could win (or at least not lose) a conflict with the PRC. One suggestion was for US military trainers to deploy visibly to Taiwan in order to assist in the training of the Taiwan military, rather than the current “train the trainer” US approach. Another was for active-duty US military members to serve as observers at Taiwan exercises such as the annual Han Kuang computer-simulated war games (at present retired senior US military officers play this role). This was based on the belief, as expressed by one Taiwan expert that “for real deterrent value, China must be aware of what we are doing.”

While greater clarity may be more reassuring to Taiwan, most participants believe that Beijing will have already factored in a US response to any decision to attack Taiwan. As a result, the deterrence discussion in Washington and Taipei should focus not on “if the United States will assist” but on how both, individually and collectively, 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. Clarity without capability has limited deterrent value.

Nuclear Deterrence

The greatest concern associated with the PRC nuclear build-up is not nuclear war *per se* (given US preponderance of nuclear weapons) but rather nuclear blackmail by the PRC aimed at discouraging the United States from getting involved in a Taiwan Strait confrontation. The balance of nuclear power clearly favors the United States. While some worry about an attempted “sprint to parity” by the PRC,

especially if the US nuclear inventory is significantly reduced, this was not a major area of concern; the odds of strategic arms limitation talks, much less reductions, appear low today. More worrisome was the PRC expanding and modernizing its nuclear capabilities, not to achieve parity but to give Beijing options it never had before. In theory, as Beijing’s nuclear vulnerability decreases, this is supposed to promote stability. However, as the PRC feels less vulnerable, it may consider nuclear weapons as an “ultimate intervention tool” allowing it to become more aggressive conventionally (the “stability-instability” paradox).

The perception that Putin’s nuclear threats have been an effective deterrent against direct NATO involvement in the Ukraine War may lead Beijing to conclude that it could use its growing nuclear capability in a similar way during any cross-Strait contingency. As a result, a nuclear shadow hangs over everything, resulting in the increased likelihood of aggression at gray zone and conventional levels and potentially nuclear use as well. As has been the case in Ukraine, if Beijing attacks and the war is not going well, this could also prompt it to threaten (or even to exercise) the nuclear option; no one believes that Beijing’s “no first use” doctrine would prevent it from employing nuclear weapons if defeat was imminent.

As a result, the United States needs to think about escalatory options below the use of strategic nuclear systems in the Indo-Pacific to deter PRC nuclear use. Both the United States and Taiwan (as well as US regional allies) should identify ways to respond to the PRC’s nuclear build-up by looking at options at the conventional level as well as possibly through nuclear-sharing arrangements where Taipei (and other allies) would have a more direct role in nuclear deterrence. Such arrangements could help strengthen strategic deterrence and, as an important potential side benefit, could help reduce proliferation incentives, which are rising to unprecedented levels in several allied capitals.

The US government’s desire to strengthen extended deterrence while decreasing the role of nuclear weapons also appeared contradictory to several Taiwanese participants who openly worried about

how nuclear weapons fit in the new integrated deterrence concept. Taiwanese (and other US allies and partners) have expressed the concern that integrated deterrence may reduce the importance of extended deterrence, especially extended nuclear deterrence. These concerns have not been assuaged by the limited amount of information that has been made public thus far regarding the administration's Nuclear Posture Review.

Countering Coercion

The PRC threat toward Taiwan is multidimensional and thus requires a multidimensional response. Taiwan is already under attack, not just through PLA gray zone tactics (which send their own political and psychological messages), but through Chinese political and economic coercion and an intense disinformation campaign aimed at creating domestic political divisions and demoralizing the Taiwanese population. The United States and like-minded allies and partners have a significant role to play in assisting Taiwan in countering these attacks. Non-military responses to these largely non-military actions are essential to Taiwan's sense of well-being and security and are less likely to be escalatory.

Taiwan participants were especially concerned about internal political subversion, which has been ongoing for years and exploits Taiwan's democratic political environment and belief in freedom of speech and expression. (Americans have similar concerns and are now belatedly responding to PRC-sponsored Confucius Institutes, which have been vehicles for spreading propaganda on American campuses.) Particularly troubling are Chinese propaganda and disinformation campaigns, especially through social media, and Beijing's successful attempts to coerce statements from business leaders and Taiwanese celebrities who see endorsing or repeating Chinese messages as a cost of doing business on the mainland. Add to this PRC attempts to limit Taiwan's international space, including by luring away some of Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic partners, and its cyber campaigns and economic warfare. Taiwanese anticipate and in fact are already experiencing a more persistent and aggressive economic punishment campaign in the wake of the Pelosi visit.

Combatting economic coercion in particular requires an international response, similar to the way many in the free world assisted Australia in combatting the Chinese boycott of selected Australian products issued in response to a simple request by Canberra for a fuller accounting of the origins of COVID-19. South Korean businesses experienced PRC strong-arm tactics in the wake of Seoul's decision to allow the United States to deploy the defensive Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile system to counter the North Korea missile threat. They reacted by shifting some PRC-based factories elsewhere. Some Taiwan businesses, with government encouragement, are also considering leaving the PRC but are reportedly having trouble getting out, given the magnitude of their earlier investments there.

Combatting economic coercion also requires a greater understanding of what Taiwan colleagues described as Taiwan's "comprehensive vulnerabilities." Taiwan security specialists expressed particular concern about Taiwan's reliance on outside energy sources, which could increase Taiwan's susceptibility to economic coercion in peacetime and especially during times of conflict. We are seeing this play out in Europe where European willingness to create a greater sense of economic interdependence with Russia (in the belief this would decrease the prospects of conflict, not to mention save money) has now resulted in many countries hurriedly searching for alternative energy suppliers.

The PRC's economic boycott of Taiwan-produced goods has proven to be a double-edged sword, however, since it has undermined political sympathy in Taiwan from individuals and businesses that have been relying on the Chinese market. As Beijing increases domestic controls and clamps down on foreign businesses, lobbying organizations in Taiwan, the United States, and elsewhere that traditionally were the strongest proponents of cooperation with Beijing are now calling for tougher national stances and greater protection of intellectual property rights. This trend is likely to continue to Beijing's detriment.

One of the lessons of the Ukraine conflict (at least thus far) is that the international community can make the aggressor pay a price without directly participating in the conventional conflict. As one

participant noted, “the vernacular of deterrence is changing; the United States’ greatest deterrent toward China is economic, not military.” The Chinese are also watching and learning. The United States should pay particular attention to the lessons Beijing is learning and what steps it is taking to reduce its own economic vulnerability.

Taiwan participants underscored the significance of, and their great appreciation for, official joint and multilateral statements such as the various “two plus two” and broader joint statements specifically referencing the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. All agreed that preserving and enhancing Taiwan’s international space was an important counter to PRC coercion. A number of participants encouraged the United States to be more proactive and less reactive in responding to PRC coercive behavior, including through increased political and diplomatic efforts to articulate the multidimensional nature of the threat and its implications for regional security. This included support for a more aggressive information campaign not only to counter PRC disinformation efforts but also to exploit the double-edged sword of increased Chinese nationalism. Both US and Taiwan information campaigns should also focus on what the Chinese people stand to lose if war breaks out across the Straits, since “internet nationalism” in the PRC part reflects Chinese peoples’ frustration with their own government, which should be exploited.

Taking Stock: Where Do We go from here?

In the final session, participants discussed the road ahead, with a focus on identifying priority solutions to near-term problems. They also reviewed the key findings and recommendations from the 2021 Dialogue Report. As indicated throughout this analysis, a number of recommendations from the first dialogue have already been acted upon or have been incorporated in the above discussion; a few have been overtaken by events. Others are consistent with the conclusions reported in the 2021 Dialogue Report and are repeated at the end of the final section of this report outlining other key findings and recommendations.

As previously noted, there was a great coincidence of views among American and Taiwanese participants as to the urgency of the challenge and the immediate need for effective countermeasures to deter further PRC aggression and assist Taiwan in resisting current coercion tactics, even as both prepare for the worst-case scenario of direct conflict with the PRC. The emphasis is on being more proactive in combatting the PLA’s current gray zone activities and coercive measures and strengthening deterrence and the ability to respond should deterrence fail. This includes testing old assumptions to see if they still apply. Both sides need to better identify and assess PRC strengths and weaknesses with an eye toward countering the strengths and exploiting the weaknesses. An information campaign aimed at attacking the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is a good place to start. Beijing must believe that an invasion of Taiwan will be the beginning of a long struggle that it ultimately cannot win.

The US government should coordinate closely with allies and other like-minded states in responding to the global challenge posed by Chinese economic as well as military and political coercion and Chinese efforts to further isolate and marginalize Taiwan. Many argued that the time has come for Taiwan to participate in multilateral initiatives including military exercises. Taipei has applied for membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP); Washington should support this effort. The US administration also needs to better develop and articulate its own Indo-Pacific economic strategy and explain Taiwan’s role in it. Noting that Taiwan reporters are already invited to observe the Hawaii-based Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) multinational naval exercise—the world’s largest international maritime training event, this year involving 26 nations—one Taiwan scholar asked why Taiwan military officers or civilian defense officials cannot also be invited as observers.

While US and Taiwan participants agreed that continued strong support for Ukraine is important to demonstrate Western resolve and prevent more Russian territorial gains, both sides agreed that the PRC remains the “pacing threat” and should

therefore remain the primary focus of US national security policy and drive DoD’s acquisition strategy.

As frequently noted in this report, the United States and Taiwan response must be multidimensional. Hard power matters most—capabilities matter more than words. However, the United States must integrate military hard power with political, economic, and other dimensions of national power to be most effective. This requires a whole of government approach. In addition, asymmetry must be about operational concepts, not just weapons. Today, the United States and Taiwan do not know one another’s plans. The United States and Taiwan need a common defense plan. As a senior Taiwan former official asked, “How can we work together if we don’t plan and train together?”

“Both sides need to better identify and assess PRC strengths and weaknesses with an eye toward countering the strengths and exploiting the weaknesses.”

At the end of the day, Taiwan needs to assure the United States that it has the will and ability to defend itself and the United States must assure Taiwan of its “rock solid” support. Both countries must develop effective measures to increase the risks to future PRC actions against Taiwan to fortify our integrated deterrence.

Key Findings and Recommendations

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 decide to invade.

- **Recommendation:** The United States (along with its allies and the broader international community) should reject the “new normal” characterization and brand PRC actions for what they are: unilateral, unacceptable, destabilizing, and, in some instances, illegal changes to the status quo. Beijing should be called upon to honor previous cross-Strait arrangements, including center line delineations, that have preserved stability and helped prevent naval and air accidents in the past.
- **Recommendation:** The United States Navy and the navies of like-minded states like Japan, Australia, etc., along with commercial carriers, should continue to transit the Taiwan Strait to invalidate Chinese claims that this broadly recognized international body of water is Chinese internal waters or its territorial sea.

Finding: PLA activities appear aimed, in part, at developing the capability to quarantine or blockade Taiwan. Xi Jinping and the PLA have demonstrated increased willingness to take risks while both stirring up and responding to increased Chinese nationalism.

- **Recommendation:** The United States should make clear that attempts to blockade, quarantine, or otherwise boycott or embargo Taiwan are not “gray zone” actions but acts of war that are likely to force a US response. US Navy ship visits to Taiwan would be a logical first reaction to any announced blockade or embargo of Taiwan ports.
- **Recommendation:** The United States should assist Taiwan in making its ports and airfields more survivable.
- **Recommendation:** DoD and the Taiwan Ministry of Defense (MoD), if they haven’t already done so, should develop plans, both individually and collectively, for how they would combat a Chinese embargo or blockade and how to respond to missile and air assaults or mining operations against Taiwan ports and airfields. Conducting visible training and exercises could help strengthen deterrence.

Finding: Beijing’s military (as well as economic and political) pressure against Taiwan will steadily increase. A failure by Taiwan and the United States to demonstrate their preparedness and willingness to respond will send the wrong signal to Beijing.

- **Recommendation:** DoD and Taiwan's MoD, if they haven't already done so, should develop plans, both individually and collectively, for how to better respond to PLA gray zone activities.

Helping Taiwan Defend Itself

Finding: Participants from both sides agreed that Taiwan cannot overcome an all-out PLA assault without outside assistance. A lack of clarity regarding the nature and extent of outside support complicates Taiwan defense planning and acquisitions. So does the lack of a common view of the battlefield within the Taiwan military and a lack of awareness in Washington and Taipei of one another's plans for the defense of Taiwan.

- **Recommendation:** 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 Chinese attack. Such action, while not providing a guarantee of US assistance, would still assist Taiwan defense planners in developing their own roles and missions and defense acquisition plans.
- **Recommendation:** DoD and Taiwan's MoD should develop a common defense plan or, at a minimum, share one another's plans for the defense of Taiwan. To the extent politically possible, they should train and exercise together in order to more effectively implement these plans.
- **Recommendation:** US defense planners should assist Taiwan in developing a common operational picture of the battlefield, given admitted Taiwan shortcomings in developing and employing joint operations. As noted last year, the United States should also encourage Taiwan to produce its own National Security Strategy to better inform its public and to put its own defense strategy in broader perspective.

Finding: The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a sobering "wake-up" effect on Taiwan and its international supporters. As a result, Taiwan is placing increased emphasis on asymmetrical warfare and the development of homeland/territorial defense

capabilities (as recommended in last year's dialogue report).

- **Recommendation:** The United States should assist Taiwan in the development of its homeland and territorial defense capabilities and, where they fit in the national defense structure, should assist Taiwan's interaction with other nations that have extensive experience in this area. It should encourage Taipei to increase the length of compulsory military service and assist in making such training more realistic and relevant.
- **Recommendation:** While recognizing that the war is still on-going and final lessons and outcomes have yet to be learned, the United States and Taiwan should more comprehensively review, both together and individually, the immediate lessons. They should focus on the manner in which Ukraine has thus far successfully held its own against the Russian military. Identifying what has not worked or what could be improved would be useful as well; this could be the subject of supporting academic research.

Finding: US 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 of the assembled US and Taiwan military experts worried that some PRC experts are underestimating PLA capabilities. These experts fear that PLA risk-taking tendencies could lead to an inadvertent or accidental incident that could escalate, or that other events could prompt an earlier invasion.

- **Recommendation:** The United States should "fast track" arms sales to Taiwan and examine coproduction and prepositioning alternatives either on Taiwan or nearby to be prepared to respond should Beijing attack plans be accelerated or other events lead to a military confrontation. Participants repeated last year's recommendations that the United States consider giving selected weapons systems to Taiwan without charge and that Taiwan focus on "large numbers of small things."

Clarifying US Defense Policy

Finding: Taiwan participants from both government and academia sought clarity as to the details of the otherwise well-received US concept of “integrated deterrence” and its application to Taiwan; few have been provided so far. The absence of unclassified versions of the US National Defense Strategy, the Nuclear Posture Review, and Missile Posture Review at the time of the 2022 Dialogue added to the uncertainty regarding US defense policies and priorities expressed by Taiwan participants.¹⁵

- **Recommendation:** As recommended last year, the US Department of Defense and/or State Department should consider sending a team to Taiwan, or at a minimum work closely with the AIT team in Taipei, to explain the concept of integrated deterrence and its implications for Taiwan.

Finding: Senior US officials have become increasingly clear in expressing America’s commitment to help Taiwan defend itself while still maintaining strategic ambiguity as to whether and how the US would come to the defense of Taiwan if the PRC attacks it. While voices calling for strategic clarity have grown louder, a more nuanced view seems to have emerged, calling for strategic ambiguity at the policy level but strategic clarity at the operational level. Some experts, domestically and especially among US allies, remain concerned about Chinese reaction to an announced US policy change in this regard.

- **Recommendation:** The United States should focus on how (and how much and how fast) to bring strategic clarity at the operational level, even as the academic community continues the debate regarding the benefits, costs, and risks associated with embracing strategic clarity as a matter of policy.
- **Recommendation:** The United States should consult closely with allies and partners like Taiwan, Japan, and Australia, among others, before making any policy pronouncements. The United States should also understand their concerns and to give them advance warning to prepare in the event of official policy changes. Finally, the United States should also keep its

allies apprised of the White House’s evolving operational approach to this issue.

Enhancing Deterrence

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

- **Recommendation:** The deterrence discussion in Washington and Taipei should focus not on “if the United States will assist” but on how both, individually and collectively, can increase the costs associated with a PLA invasion. The capability to respond is at least as important as the perceived willingness to do so. Strategic clarity without capability has limited deterrent value.
- **Recommendation:** US Taiwan-related defense preparations should be more visible; as one Taiwan expert opined, “for real deterrence value, Beijing must be aware of what we are doing.”
- **Recommendation:** The United States should carefully assess, preferably through consultations with Taiwan officials, the impact of Taiwan-related actions and policy decisions on Taiwan security interests. They should understand that Taiwan scholars, like their US counterparts, have mixed views regarding the advisability of greater strategic clarity since (as the aftermath of Rep. Pelosi’s visit demonstrated) the PRC’s response to what they perceive as “hostile” US actions is often to Taiwan’s detriment.

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

- **Recommendation:** The United States should more carefully explain the role of nuclear weapons within the broader, more inclusive concept of extended deterrence. The development of the nuclear employment strategy may provide such an opportunity.

¹⁵ As noted in this report, the US Government did release unclassified versions of these key national security documents in October 2022. The unclassified *National Defense Strategy* still contains little or no explanation of Taiwan’s integrated deterrence role.

- **Recommendation:** The United States should explain precisely how nuclear weapons fit in the new integrated deterrence concept. It should dispel the idea increasingly in vogue in Taiwan and some allied capitals that efforts to integrate deterrence may reduce the importance of extended deterrence, especially extended nuclear deterrence.

Finding: The greatest concern associated with Chinese nuclear build-up is not the threat of nuclear war (given US preponderance of nuclear weapons) but rather nuclear blackmail by the PRC aimed at discouraging Washington from getting involved in a Taiwan confrontation. Taiwanese are concerned about crisis escalation (especially to the nuclear level) but worry more about the PRC deterring the United States.

- **Recommendation:** The United States should conduct joint intelligence assessments with Taiwan government officials (and US allies) about the implications of the PRC's nuclear build-up. Such assessments should focus on the implications now as well as in the future, based on possible and most likely developments.
- **Recommendation:** The United States and Taiwan (as well as US regional allies) should identify ways to respond to the PRC's unprecedented build-up by looking at options at the conventional level as well as possibly through nuclear-sharing arrangements in the Indo-Pacific. Both should encourage, if not financially support, security-oriented think tanks to conduct research on the desirability and feasibility of such arrangements in the Indo-Pacific (and what can be learned from existing nuclear-sharing arrangements in the NATO context). Such arrangements could help strengthen strategic deterrence. An important potential benefit from a US perspective would be that they could help reduce proliferation incentives, which are rising to unprecedented levels in several allied capitals.

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:** While recognizing that the Ukraine war is far from over and its outcome still unclear, US Government officials, researchers, and independent scholars should carefully assess emerging lessons learned not just for Taiwan but for US defense strategy and preparedness.
- **Recommendation:** DoD should more deeply examine the prospects of, and the necessity of being prepared for, two simultaneous major conflicts, given both Russian and Chinese territorial ambitions. Since the PRC remains the "pacing challenge," US defense acquisitions and border procurement strategy should focus on responding to Chinese contingencies.
- **Recommendation:** US government officials, researchers, and independent scholars should also carefully assess the lessons that the PRC appears to be learning from the Western response to the Russian invasion and any corrective actions Beijing is taking or preparing to take in response to those lessons.
- **Recommendation:** With the DoD in the lead, the US Government and think tanks should assess PLA strengths and weaknesses with an eye toward countering the strengths and exploiting the weaknesses in any Taiwan-related scenario. To be most effective, this data should be shared with Taiwan defense planners.

Increasing Public/Allied Awareness

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:** Officials in Washington and Taipei should put greater emphasis on articulating the differences between Ukraine and Taiwan in the eyes of their respective publics. Both should publicize public opinion polling in the United States that reinforces both growing awareness of the Chinese threat and the need to respond to this challenge specifically but not exclusively in defense of Taiwan. Greater public awareness of the domestic, regional, and global implications and consequences should the PLA invade and occupy Taiwan could further

strengthen the resolve among the United States and its regional and global allies and partners to deter such Chinese actions.

- **Recommendation:** Washington and Taipei should better assess and understand the impact of Chinese disinformation campaigns on public opinion and both individually and jointly develop information plans to counter these ongoing disinformation attacks.

Finding: US allies and partners have an important role to play in deterring a PRC invasion of Taiwan. Japanese and Australian officials in particular have become more outspoken in warning of the threats posed to regional stability (and more specifically to Japan’s national security interests) due to increased Chinese assertiveness and both the prospects and implications of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

- **Recommendation:** The United States and its allies and partners should continue stressing the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait in official joint and multilateral statements such as the various “two plus two” and broader joint statements.
- **Recommendation:** The United States needs to develop and/or sponsor public information campaigns that better articulate the implications and/or consequences of a successful Chinese invasion (including broad distribution and US Embassy-sponsored public information sessions for key allies and partners explaining the results of studies such as the soon-to-be-completed Pacific Forum assessment of the consequences should Taiwan fall).
- **Recommendation:** DoD should develop joint contingency plans with affected allies such as Japan and Australia on how to best counter Chinese military action, specifically including a blockade or boycott of Taiwan, to be better prepared to respond if the political decision in their respective capitals is made to provide such assistance.

Finding: Taiwan is already under attack politically, economically, psychologically, and through more aggressive gray zone operations. This multidimensional threat requires a multidimensional response in ways that complement and enhance military deterrence. Chinese behavior represents a

global problem, which demands a global response by the United States, Taiwan, and like-minded states.

Recommendation: The United States should be more proactive and less reactive in responding to Chinese aggressive behavior toward Taiwan, including through increased political and diplomatic efforts with allies and partners to clearly articulate the PRC threat and the implications for regional security should Taiwan be attacked by the PRC.

- **Recommendation:** The United States should implement an aggressive information campaign not only to counter Chinese disinformation efforts but also to exploit the double-edged sword of increased Chinese nationalism. US/Taiwan information campaigns should also focus on what the Chinese people stand to lose if war breaks out across the Straits, since Chinese “internet nationalism,” in part, reflects Chinese peoples’ frustration with their own government, which should be exploited. An information campaign aimed at attacking the CCP’s legitimacy is a good place to start.
- **Recommendation:** The US Government should coordinate closely with allies and other like-minded states in responding to the global challenge posed by Chinese economic as well as military and political coercion both vis-à-vis Taiwan and more generally. While continued strong support for Ukraine is important to demonstrate Western resolve and prevent more Russian territorial gains, the PRC remains the “pacing threat” and Taiwan is the greatest flashpoint. The PRC in general and the defense of Taiwan in particular should remain the focus of US national security policy and DoD’s acquisition planning.
- **Recommendation:** Recognizing that Taiwan has “comprehensive vulnerabilities,” the US Government should sponsor research aimed at assisting Taiwan in identifying non-military security-related vulnerabilities, such as its reliance on outside energy sources, to reduce Taiwan’s susceptibility to economic coercion in peacetime and especially during times of conflict.

Other Recommendations

Finding: Washington and Taipei have already acted upon or incorporated many of the recommendations outlined in the 2021 Dialogue Report; a few others have been overtaken by events. Other

recommendations are consistent with the findings and recommendations outlined in this report and are worth repeating:

- **Recommendation:** The US and Taiwan governments and militaries must prepare for the worst-case all-out invasion scenario, even while identifying measures to combat Chinese gray zone activities. Both need to improve strategic communication. The United States should more clearly articulate not just the military but also the political and economic costs associated with any Chinese kinetic action against Taiwan.
- **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.
- **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 and other trade and economic entities, and carefully explore the prospects for Taiwan involvement in bilateral and multilateral military training and exercises. More pushback is needed against Chinese efforts to limit Taiwan’s international space.
- **Recommendation:** Taiwan needs to reassure the United States that it retains the will and ability to defend itself and the United States should continually reaffirm that its support of the Taiwanese is “rock solid.” Both must develop effective measures to fortify integrated deterrence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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