



CSBA

Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

REFRAMING U.S. DEFENSE STRATEGY
TOWARD TAIWAN

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Cover: A map of Taiwan and its surrounding area. Map data courtesy of Google Earth Pro V 7.3.6.9796. (December 31, 2020). Western Pacific and Northeast Asia, 25° 11' 42.95"N, 120° 46' 33.81"E, eye alt 2464.53 mi. SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO, Landsat, Copernicus. <http://www.earth.google.com>.

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Executive Summary

Washington's strategic approach to Taiwan is ripe for reevaluation. In recent years, America's sensitivity to Taiwan's security dilemma has increased markedly, yet that anxiety and energy has been narrowly channeled into U.S. defense sales to Taipei. Because Taiwan's defense is a delicate political issue in Washington, Taipei, and Beijing, U.S. policymakers are hesitant to publicly articulate a broader strategic vision. As a result, Washington's thinking on Taiwan strategy has remained ensnared in a series of outdated historical understandings and is now running on inertia.

America's strategic approach to Taiwan is based on a series of geopolitical conditions from the 1970s, when U.S. policymakers believed they could preserve peace around Taiwan as part of a larger Sino-American arrangement to deter Soviet expansionism. Several other factors buttressed the strategy U.S. policymakers developed, including Washington's prioritization of Europe over Asia, U.S. policymaker expectations that China would moderate its regional behavior, Beijing's good faith outreach to Taipei, the PLA's inability to conquer Taiwan, and America's aversion to Taiwan's authoritarian political system.

None of these conditions still exist today. Worse, Washington's outdated strategic approach inhibits the U.S. military from making the operational-level changes necessary to meet the increasing challenge of Taiwan's defense. U.S. and Taiwanese military relations were hamstrung after 1979, when the U.S. government derecognized the Republic of China (ROC), abrogated the U.S.–ROC mutual defense treaty, and withdrew U.S. forces from Taiwan. U.S.–Taiwan military interaction improved somewhat after the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis and has reportedly expanded in the last several years; however, the 1970s-era strategic approach still inhibits operational-level U.S.–Taiwan military interaction, particularly for any activities likely to be publicly observed or reported. After addressing the low-hanging fruit of reinvigorated U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, the U.S. national security community risks succumbing to action-halting debates over the merits of new actions such as U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined military exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence in Taiwan. These actions are unavoidably public, but they probably are necessary to maintain credible deterrence and warfighting strategies for Taiwan's defense.

The United States has maintained an interest in peace in the Taiwan Strait since the early 1950s, and this interest should remain the basis of U.S. policy toward Taiwan. American policymakers must now clearly and explicitly reframe U.S. policy toward Taiwan to ensure continuity with enduring American interests and to catalyze the new operational-level military efforts necessary to maintain stability.

Strategic Ambiguity and the Standalone Defense Construct Obstruct Critical U.S.–Taiwan Operational-Level Coordination

Since the early 1950s, the U.S. government has pursued a stable balance of power around Taiwan. To maintain peace, the United States has undertaken actions that de facto undermine Beijing's sovereignty claim over Taiwan, though Washington's willingness to do so has varied over time based on changing geostrategic conditions. Put another way, the U.S. government's approach to Taiwan has varied in accordance with, and been subordinate to, larger regional and global geopolitical considerations.

In a 1970s-era two-way bargain between Beijing and Washington, U.S. policymakers forged a compromise between America's interest in peace and Beijing's sovereignty claim. This approach largely persists to this day (for simplicity, this report refers to America's existing Taiwan policy as the "1970s-era approach"). So-called "strategic ambiguity"—a term describing Washington's opacity over whether it would intervene in a China–Taiwan conflict—is the manifestation of America's 1970s-era attempt to uphold peace while avoiding contradicting China's sovereignty claim. Strategic ambiguity is an informal shorthand—the term is not an official policy and never appears in the U.S.–People's Republic of China (PRC) joint communiques or the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA)—but it accurately describes America's post-1979 de facto defense strategy toward Taiwan, captures the tension between peace and sovereignty, and underscores related constraints on U.S. defense policy.

After 1979, absent official U.S.–Taiwan military interaction and a U.S. posture on Taiwan, Taiwan and America were relegated to independently preparing to defeat a People's Liberation Army (PLA) invasion of Taiwan. America has essentially maintained a "standalone defense construct" in which American and Taiwanese forces would function independently of each other, without substantial operational-level coordination, in peacetime and wartime. The standalone construct includes two independent prongs: (a) standalone Taiwanese forces—benefiting from the qualitative edge provided by U.S. arms sales—could maintain a credible deterrent against a PRC invasion; and (b) standalone U.S. forces, if necessary and so directed, could intervene to defend Taiwan from a PLA assault. Although U.S.–Taiwan military interaction quietly resumed after the third Taiwan Strait Crisis, and apparently expanded during the early to mid-2020s, the standalone defense construct persists today.

America's 1970s-era strategy and defense construct for Taiwan now exert deleterious effects on deterrence in the Taiwan Strait and hinder U.S. military efforts to implement the new

concepts, forces, and posture necessary for warfighting. The U.S. government's reliance on arms sales and defense services to furnish Taiwan with a "sufficient self-defense capability," as specified in the TRA, is no longer achievable. Given the PLA's current capability and capacity, combined with the PRC's latent defense industrial potential, Beijing could isolate, exhaust, and eventually overwhelm Taiwanese forces if they were fighting on their own.

Taiwan's successful defense in a future cross-strait war—the scenario on which this report focuses—is thus likely contingent on American military intervention. Yet, were war to break out today, the American and Taiwanese militaries would be engaging in the military equivalent of parallel play. U.S. and Taiwanese units would attempt to strike Chinese forces largely on independent terms, enacting their separate plans and operations. Operational decentralization in a complex and cluttered theater without adequate deconfliction and coordination is a recipe for failure. Defending Taiwan from a PLA assault would inherently involve American and Taiwanese forces operating simultaneously in the same battlespace. The lack of U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination would exacerbate likely operational challenges, instill strategic and operational hesitancy, endanger the safety of American and Taiwanese personnel, and be a lost opportunity to maximize U.S. and Taiwanese capabilities. Enhancing U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination also would offer a means of overcoming the deficiencies of the standalone defense construct. Through closer coordination with the U.S. military, Taiwan could buttress its local military capacity and mitigate its sustainment weaknesses. Meanwhile, American forces could better leverage Taiwan's location as a frontline state in order to alleviate the U.S. military's limitations in posture, maneuver, sustainment and coordination, and standoff power projection.

Reframing America's Strategic Approach to Taiwan: Explicitly Prioritize Peace

The United States can no longer maintain a stable balance of power around Taiwan through the standalone defense construct. New operational-level U.S. military activities—such as U.S.–Taiwan interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence on Taiwan—are required to maintain a credible deterrent and warfighting posture. The U.S. government should thus reframe its defense strategy toward Taiwan under a strategic approach this report calls *peaceful resolution*. This approach would catalyze implementation of new operational-level efforts critical to maintaining stability until Beijing and Taipei can peacefully resolve Taiwan's status.

To enable proactive, credible, and sufficient maintenance of the military balance while signaling America's limited security aims to Beijing, the strategy of *peaceful resolution* entails three core components:

- A strategic aim of America's defense policy is preserving a stable regional order in the Western Pacific, including the maintenance of peace and stability around Taiwan until Taiwan's status can be peacefully resolved by Beijing and Taipei.

- Given that Taiwan's self-defense capabilities are no longer sufficient to maintain a stable cross-strait balance of power, the U.S. government will undertake the ways, with sufficient means, required to maintain regional order and balance the PRC's military threat to Taiwan until the territory's future can be peacefully resolved. Washington will implement militarily necessary actions even if PRC policymakers could interpret them as violating the PRC's sovereignty claim over Taiwan.
- The United States does not support unilateral changes by either Beijing or Taipei to resolve Taiwan's status. Taiwan's status is undetermined, and Washington continues to encourage Beijing and Taipei to peacefully resolve that question themselves.

Unlike strategic ambiguity, *peaceful resolution* directly and accurately reflects America's enduring policy that it will maintain stability until Taiwan's status is peacefully resolved. *Peaceful resolution* thus is not an abandonment of past policy. Rather, within the ambiguous and contradictory history of U.S. policy toward Taiwan, the strategy of peaceful resolution is a modest yet essential shift in emphasis that would facilitate the new U.S. and allied actions necessary to credibly deter Beijing and sustain a favorable balance of power until Taipei and Beijing can peacefully settle Taiwan's future.

Peaceful resolution sets a clear strategic goal—a stable regional order and military balance—for the U.S., Taiwanese, and allied national security bureaucracies to strive toward as they develop deterrence and warfighting strategies for Taiwan. Actionable, top-level guidance from the president and senior policymakers would reduce embedded bureaucratic hesitancy and concern about contradicting historical documents and statements that have in fact already been invalidated by Beijing's increasingly aggressive behavior and military modernization. In U.S. government discussions, potential policy options—including U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. posture in Taiwan—can be evaluated on whether they are necessary to credibly implement America's deterrence and warfighting strategies.

Peaceful resolution and a stronger U.S.–Taiwan defense relationship should work hand in hand with Washington's broader goal of building a stable Indo-Pacific balance of power that unites U.S. allies and partners in the region and beyond. A clearly stated U.S. strategic approach—*peaceful resolution*—is necessary to motivate hesitant allies to join the American and Taiwanese governments in preparing for Taiwan's combined defense.

Developing U.S.–Taiwan Operational-Level Coordination

For the United States and Taiwan, effectively conducting combined operations in wartime would require a substantial peacetime effort to develop interoperability. In a multinational response to a Taiwan contingency, the traditional challenges of coalition warfare would be exacerbated by two ongoing changes in the character of war: the maturation of reconnaissance–strike networks and the rapidly expanding role of unmanned systems. Taken together, these two developments are increasing the requirements for operational-level coordination across domains at ever greater distances.

For simplicity, this report uses “interoperability” as shorthand for efforts aimed at ensuring unity of effort between multinational forces. Interoperability is a nebulous term lacking a standard technical definition. For the purposes of this report, *interoperability* is defined as the ability for the militaries of two or more countries to plan, command, and sustain combined military operations in peacetime and wartime at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare.

U.S.–Taiwan Combined Missions Critical for Taiwan's Defense

U.S.–Taiwan interoperability should be directly tailored to the missions required for Taiwan's defense, and interoperability should be pursued only to the extent required by the combined operations that American and Taiwanese forces envision conducting. Military interactions and exchanges involving American and Taiwanese forces should therefore be structured in ways that support consensus building on PLA threat assessments, necessary U.S. and Taiwanese roles and missions, and the type and level of U.S.–Taiwan interoperability required. Combined operational, contingency, and force planning dialogues and exercises would support U.S., Taiwanese, and allied forces in identifying areas to build interoperability and in developing complementary strategies, concepts, and forces.

Pending outputs from these consensus-building efforts, the operational challenges of Taiwan's defense and the requirements of coalition warfare in a constrained, dense, littoral environment indicate American and Taiwanese forces would benefit from developing coordination in the following areas:

- Command and control of combined forces on and around Taiwan.
- Deconfliction and coordination of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations and multidomain fires on and around Taiwan.
- Deconfliction and coordination of sustainment operations for Taiwanese and U.S. forces on Taiwan.

Establishing a command structure for combined operations is essential to building trust, ensuring unity of effort, and coordinating peacetime and wartime operations. For U.S. and Taiwanese forces, a decentralized structure is initially more appropriate given the sovereignty issues involved and the current low level of U.S.–Taiwan interoperability. Investing in initial efforts now is critical to moving on to more centralized arrangements later. In peacetime, a combined command structure can work toward standardizing and certifying doctrine; operations; technologies; and the tactics, techniques, and procedures necessary for the envisioned combined operations. A combined command unit can establish and oversee liaison teams and coordination centers at various levels to manage functional issues such as information operations, air and missile defense, maritime domain awareness, fires deconfliction and coordination, electromagnetic spectrum operations deconfliction and coordination, sustainment, civil–military coordination, and foreign citizen/refugee evacuation.

American and Taiwanese forces could move toward developing shared domain awareness by establishing a combined command element, building consensus on key planning considerations, and deconflicting and coordinating ISR operations. With a common picture of the area of operations, the combined command element would be in position to deconflict and coordinate U.S. and Taiwanese air, sea, and ground forces on and around Taiwan. Coordinating multidomain fires—including in areas such as air and missile defense, sea denial, and land-attack operations—would be particularly valuable for enabling rapid and efficient counterstrikes against Chinese military forces.

With respect to sustainment, a U.S.–Taiwan military logistics coordination center or planning cell would be beneficial for managing theater setup and planning reception, staging, onward movement, and integration operations at Taiwanese airports and ports. A combined logistics team could assess Taiwan’s logistics infrastructure; coordinate logistics standards with Taiwanese military and commercial logistics units; and determine wartime requirements for Taiwan’s logistics infrastructure, including ports, airports, transportation equipment, and storage and distribution centers.

To ensure U.S.–Taiwan bureaucratic and technological integration remains feasible over a protracted conflict, the Taiwanese military would need to locally sustain the U.S.-manufactured equipment necessary for envisioned U.S.–Taiwan combined operations. New efforts should be aimed at enabling dispersed field maintenance for U.S.-manufactured equipment in Taiwan. For instance, in wartime, Taiwan would likely require the capability to locally repair its U.S.-manufactured M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), MQ-9B unmanned aerial vehicles, Javelin and Stinger missile launchers, and various U.S.-manufactured communications and sensing systems. Given the extent to which American defense contractors are involved in equipment maintenance, Taiwan’s military would probably need to coordinate with U.S. firms in peacetime regarding prepositioning spare parts, conducting maintenance in Taiwan, and connecting virtually for U.S.-based remote support in wartime.

Practicing Combined Operations for Wartime through Peacetime Training and Exercises

Realistic U.S.–Taiwan joint training and exercises would be valuable for building interoperability and preparing for the high-intensity conflict American and Taiwanese forces would face against the PLA. Training efforts could be organized with two objectives: (a) enhancing the tactical skills of Taiwan’s military and territorial defense forces and (b) improving U.S.–Taiwan operational planning and coordination in peacetime and wartime. Combined training would provide opportunities to plan and simulate combat-realistic combined U.S.–Taiwan operations in areas such as intelligence sharing, airspace deconfliction and coordination, maritime domain awareness, air and missile defense, maritime strike, counter-amphibious landing, and intratheater sustainment.

New remote and virtual reality training systems—such as U.S. Indo-Pacific Command’s Pacific Multi-Domain Training and Experimentation Capability—may offer opportunities for U.S., Taiwanese, and allied forces to regularly train together despite physical separation. American and Taiwanese forces could also train at various American facilities in the Pacific and in the continental United States, but the inherent demands of distant training could create major logistical and fiscal difficulties for Taiwan. Despite some opportunities to use remote systems or overseas facilities, training would ideally occur on, around, and near Taiwan so large numbers of Taiwanese personnel could more easily be involved in combined exercises.

Enabling Combined Operations through an Operationally Relevant U.S. Military Presence in Taiwan

Achieving wartime unity of effort at the strategic and operational levels is difficult to imagine without a permanent operationally relevant U.S. presence on Taiwan. Conducting combined missions in wartime and building a sufficient level of interoperability in peacetime—through command structures, dialogues, planning, technological integration, and training—would be extremely challenging without U.S. military personnel regularly working side by side with their Taiwanese counterparts.

The peacetime operational-level efforts and wartime missions addressed above point to a U.S. posture consisting of (a) a permanent forward stationed headquarters, advisory, and combat enabler element; and (b) rotating combat and advisory units that participate in discrete training events, exercises, dialogues, or planning meetings. The headquarters could include the coordination centers, liaison teams, and communications personnel necessary for peacetime coordination of U.S. forces on Taiwan that are involved in exchanges, training, and other interoperability-related efforts. Some of these personnel could also embed in Taiwanese military headquarters to ease coordination. Additional personnel could be assigned to the forward headquarters to provide key enabling capabilities for combined joint military operations among U.S., Taiwanese, and allied forces, particularly for command and control, ISR, electronic warfare, air defense, long-range fires, and sustainment. In wartime,

an existing forward command element on Taiwan, along with an embedded presence within Taiwan's military headquarters, would substantially reduce the friction in deconflicting and coordinating a broad array of U.S., Taiwanese, and allied operations against PLA forces. To ensure U.S. military efforts are achieving consistent progress and to build strong rapport with Taiwanese personnel, deployments of U.S. personnel to the forward element would need to be measured in years, rather than months.

The U.S. military could consider placing combat forces in Taiwan—on either on a permanent or rotational basis—that reflect the littoral forces the U.S. military is posturing elsewhere along the First and Second Island Chains. For instance, U.S. special forces units or a U.S. Marine Corps marine littoral regiment (or even a U.S. Army multidomain task force) may play important roles in sensing and targeting PLA forces near Taiwan or conducting operationally impactful offensive missions against nearby PLA forces. Small U.S. reconnaissance units operating unmanned air and sea systems from Taiwan could conduct persistent surveillance operations and transmit targeting data rearward to U.S. long-range strike platforms and to incoming salvos of munitions equipped to receive in-flight updates. Regardless of the specific unit composition, U.S. combat forces on Taiwan should be sized and configured primarily to deliver capabilities and effects that the Taiwanese cannot produce themselves and that the U.S. military would find difficult to independently generate from bases further afield.

Permanent or rotating combat and advisory elements could support the training requirements of Taiwanese, American, and potential allied forces. Combined exercises in Taiwan would enable American forces to become intimately familiar with the terrain where conflict would occur. U.S. and Taiwanese forces could practice operating concurrently in the same geographic area without accidentally interfering with each other's operations or engaging in friendly fire.

Engage U.S. Allies in Preserving Peace around Taiwan

In a potential Taiwan contingency, clarity about allied—and even American—responses is elusive, yet U.S., Taiwanese, and allied forces can still work together at the operational level to improve deterrence around Taiwan. Similar to the proposed U.S. efforts above, Washington should look to its allies and partners for complementary Taiwan-related actions on strategy, interoperability, and posture. American and allied forces could engage in a broad range of multilateral Taiwan-focused exercises, training, dialogues, and planning sessions. Where necessary, creative avenues could be explored to facilitate such engagement and overcome initial political obstacles.

The allies could begin to discuss informal and formal multilateral military groupings designed to uphold peace and stability in the Western Pacific. Such coordinating bodies or task forces could focus on operational and technical military coordination and/or strategy and policy issues. For instance, a security grouping could initially focus on communications

and technology standards to facilitate information sharing, improve domain awareness, and coordinate air defense systems. The participants could eventually consider establishing a permanent organization for command and control and planning in the Western Pacific. The group would not need to be an alliance nor state a position on Taiwan's legal status. More expansively, regardless of its position on Taiwan's status, this multilateral group could issue a statement or treaty in which the participants proclaim the need to resolve regional disputes peacefully and reserve the right to intervene in armed conflicts that threaten regional stability and international commerce.

Irrespective of the group's specific form and focus, multilateral security activities and structures involving Taiwan would pay dividends for regional security. Improving allied interoperability is necessary for handling a wide range of Indo-Pacific contingencies. Perhaps counterintuitively, placing Taiwan in a larger Indo-Pacific interoperability framework and routinizing military coordination with Taiwanese forces could help the allies avoid overplanning for a Taiwan conflict. Removing obstructions and simplifying complexities in allied planning for Taiwan would free up time and resources that the allies could dedicate to other security concerns.

Managing Competing Risks

In crafting a defense strategy toward Taiwan, U.S. policymakers must assess and balance three unavoidable risks: (a) suffering deterrence failure and military defeat, (b) provoking Beijing into initiating conflict, and (c) creating a moral hazard in Taipei that encourages Taiwanese politicians to push toward a unilateral declaration of independence and/or avoid necessary increases in defense spending. In implementing *peaceful resolution*, American policymakers would be managing the severity of these existing risks, not taking on new types of risks. Adopting *peaceful resolution* would decrease the risk of deterrence failure, but it may raise the severity of the other two risks. Concerns about this shift in risk acceptance should not be dismissed, yet the provocation and moral hazard risks are not as automatic or extensive as some may believe. Greater tolerance of these two risks is manageable and preferable to passively allowing the military balance to further tip in Beijing's favor, which actively courts the risk of instability and defeat.

Some American observers may be concerned that *peaceful resolution* would incentivize Chinese policymakers to initiate conflict in the short term, before new U.S.–Taiwan operational-level efforts bear fruit and the U.S. military's Indo-Pacific forces are fully prepared. Although legitimate, concern over conflict in the short-term does not undermine the rationale for *peaceful resolution*. First, the United States and the PRC are in a rational competition in risk taking. Maintaining deterrence around Taiwan requires a greater American willingness to endure risk, given the PRC's increasingly aggressive behavior and growing military power. Second, the probability that the PRC would hasten a Taiwan conflict in response to *peaceful resolution* is lessened by the Chinese Communist Party's limitations in accelerating PLA modernization and Xi Jinping's reading of global geopolitical trends.

Third, U.S. policymakers could mitigate the PRC's reaction to *peaceful resolution* through careful policy statements, ad hoc implementation, and transparency about ultimate U.S. objectives. In short, *peaceful resolution* is a calculated risk that repairs deterrence to the extent necessary to prevent conflict without provoking the PRC into initiating conflict.

Some may argue this report's proposals could create a moral hazard whereby certain Taiwanese politicians, emboldened by U.S. support, more forcefully antagonize Beijing or even launch a formal campaign for de jure independence. Yet historical U.S. fears about Taiwanese entanglement are less relevant now than they were decades ago. Taiwan's electorate has proven itself pragmatic, seeking to preserve the status quo rather than pursue destabilizing actions or de jure independence. China's military power also strongly incentivizes the Taiwanese public to be more risk averse than in previous decades. Further, the United States is not required to defend Taiwan if Taiwan unilaterally pursues de jure independence.

Analysts may also believe a greater American commitment to Taiwan could dissuade Taiwanese leaders from making necessary increases in defense spending. Although progress has been uneven in recent years, Taiwan's national security establishment appears to be reorienting to meet the PLA threat. Taiwan's defense budget has been increasing as a percentage of gross domestic product, mandatory conscription has been extended from four months to one year, and civil defense groups are organically organizing and expanding. Treating Taiwan as a genuine U.S. military partner and building U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination should give Taiwan increased confidence about rebalancing its military modernization toward asymmetric weapons and away from large conventional platforms that are redundant with U.S. capabilities. The proposed U.S. actions also would not preclude and may even enable other U.S. incentives to facilitate Taiwan's defense reforms.

Preserving Peace and the Prospect of Peaceful Resolution

Peaceful resolution is a strategy that buys time for peace. Military means cannot solve Taiwan's status, they can only preserve the prospect of a peaceful resolution between Beijing and Taipei. The ambiguity of past American positions and the two-way nature of the communiques should enable, rather than constrain, policy flexibility in Washington. While continuing to assure the people of China and Taiwan that the United States does not support unilateral changes to the status quo, Washington must adjust to the discomforting fact that China's growing military power and the expanding operational-level requirements of Taiwan's defense now demand a more overt, risk-tolerant strategic approach. A strategy of *peaceful resolution* consisting of U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence in Taiwan is necessary to repair cross-strait deterrence and right the balance of power around Taiwan.

CHAPTER 1

U.S. Policy is the Main Impediment to Taiwan's Defense

Robert Jervis argued persuasively that human expectations and emotions bias policy-makers and bureaucracies toward status quo strategies. This preference for the status quo may be helpful when one's preexisting beliefs match the structure of the strategic environment. Within a bureaucracy, such biases may even generate confidence and unity, which are beneficial for policy implementation.¹ Yet bias toward status quo policies carries risks. Under new strategic circumstances, previously established policy may become outdated or counterproductive. A changing environment thus should compel policymakers to reexamine the original assumptions underpinning their strategy and reaffirm that the strategy's ends—ways—means chain remains unbroken.²

Given China's increasingly aggressive behavior toward Taiwan and the rapid military modernization program of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Washington's strategic approach to Taiwan is ripe for reevaluation. In recent years, America's sensitivity to Taiwan's security dilemma has increased markedly, yet that anxiety and energy has been narrowly channeled into U.S. defense sales to Taipei. Because Taiwan's defense is a delicate political issue in Washington, Taipei, and Beijing, American policymakers are hesitant to publicly articulate a broader strategic vision. Without a guiding strategy, America's thinking on Taiwan strategy has become ensnared in a series of outdated historical understandings. As a result, America's approach to Taiwan's defense is running on inertia.

1 Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. lxxxvii-lxxxviii.

2 Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, pp. 410–13.

America's strategic approach to Taiwan is based on a series of geopolitical conditions from the 1970s. U.S. policymakers believed they could preserve peace around Taiwan as part of a larger Sino-American arrangement to deter Soviet expansionism. Several supporting factors—including Washington's prioritization of Europe over Asia, U.S. policymaker expectations that China would moderate its regional behavior, Beijing's good faith outreach to Taipei, the PLA's inability to conquer Taiwan, and America's aversion to Taiwan's authoritarian political system—buttressed the strategy U.S. policymakers developed.

None of these conditions still exist today. Worse, Washington's outdated strategic approach inhibits the U.S. military from making the operational-level changes necessary to meet the increasing challenge of Taiwan's defense. U.S. and Taiwanese military relations were hamstrung after 1979, when the U.S. government derecognized the Republic of China (ROC), abrogated the U.S.–ROC mutual defense treaty, and withdrew U.S. forces from Taiwan. U.S.–Taiwan military interaction improved somewhat after the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis and has reportedly expanded in the last several years; however, the 1970s-era strategic approach still inhibits operational-level U.S.–Taiwan military interaction, particularly for any activities likely to be publicly observed or reported. After addressing the low-hanging fruit of reinvigorated U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, the U.S. national security community risks succumbing to action-halting debates over the merits of new actions such as U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined military exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence in Taiwan. These actions are unavoidably public, but they are probably necessary to maintain credible deterrence and warfighting strategies for Taiwan's defense.

The United States has maintained an interest in peace in the Taiwan Strait since the early 1950s, and this interest should remain the basis of U.S. policy toward Taiwan. American policymakers must now clearly and explicitly reframe U.S. policy toward Taiwan to ensure continuity with enduring American interests and to catalyze the new operational-level military efforts necessary to maintain stability.

U.S. Interests in the Indo-Pacific Region

America's national interest in peace around Taiwan stems from America's enduring objectives in the Indo-Pacific region and toward China. America has long maintained three main objectives in the Indo-Pacific. First, the United States seeks to protect the homeland and prevent the emergence of a regional hegemon that could threaten U.S. territory or American interests. Second, Washington supports and promotes American trade and investment with countries in the Indo-Pacific. America benefits from gaining and maintaining access to foreign markets for U.S. goods and services and from preserving use of the global commons for commerce. Finally, the United States promotes the spread of its liberal, democratic values. The diffusion of America's liberal ideology, a moral good in itself, is meant to directly

advance U.S. security and economic goals, reflecting a deep-seated belief that likeminded democracies are more likely to resolve disputes peacefully and serve as trading partners.³

America's objectives toward the People's Republic of China (PRC) today flow directly from these regional goals. First, the United States aims to prevent a revisionist Beijing from gaining regional hegemony and destabilizing the post-1945 status quo. Washington thus strives to defend its Indo-Pacific allies and territory from any attempts by the PRC to use its growing military power to realize expansionist aims.⁴ Second, America seeks to prevent China from interfering with free commerce in the Indo-Pacific region. The United States opposes Beijing's attempts to restrict domestic market access for foreign firms, weaponize trade dependence, and obstruct transit through the global commons. Finally, the United States aims to prevent China from eroding liberal democratic values and norms in the Indo-Pacific and globally. The overriding desire of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is to accumulate power to ensure its survival.⁵ The CCP sees universal liberal values as a direct threat to its existence and, as such, is compelled to suppress civil society at home and undermine free societies abroad.⁶

Beijing's use of coercion or force to unify with Taiwan would directly counter American interests. First, Taiwan occupies a critical geostrategic location in the center of the First Island Chain along major sea lines of communication. PRC control of Taiwan would improve Beijing's strategic ability to coerce its neighbors, choke off global commerce, undermine America's Indo-Pacific defense commitments, and weaken America's overall position in the region. A PRC military campaign to take Taiwan would herald the CCP's shift toward blatant militarist expansionism; a successful conquest of Taiwan would likely embolden Beijing to further undermine global peace and stability. Second, Taiwan has a technologically advanced economy and is a critical U.S. trading partner. The 2020–2022 global semiconductor shortage highlighted Taiwan's world-leading role in semiconductor fabrication and its centrality to the production of goods for U.S. companies and consumers. Finally, the loss of Taiwan's vibrant democracy would be damaging to the U.S. regional and global goal of defending liberal ideals. The island's fall would call into question U.S. resolve to defend other likeminded countries. Moreover, Taiwan is a lasting example that Chinese people can

3 Michael Green, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 1–12. U.S. presidential administrations have weighted America's regional and China-focused objectives differently, though they nonetheless remain enduring in U.S. policy.

4 The 2022 National Defense Strategy explicitly prioritized the PRC as the Defense Department's sole "pacing challenge" and charged that "the PRC presents the most consequential and systemic challenge...to vital U.S. national interests abroad and to the homeland." U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Arlington, VA: DoD, 2022), pp. 1, 7.

5 Toshi Yoshihara and Jack Bianchi, *Uncovering China's Influence in Europe: How Friendship Groups Coopt European Elites* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2020), pp. 6–9. See also Richard McGregor, *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012), pp. 1–33.

6 Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Office, *Communique on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere*, trans. ChinaFile (Beijing: CCP General Office, April 22, 2013), <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

transition to and maintain a liberal democracy, in direct contradiction of Beijing's claim that Western-style democracy does not suit Asian cultures.⁷

Tracing America's Strategic Approach Toward Taiwan's Defense

Since the early 1950s, Washington has used ambiguity to delay a resolution of Taiwan's legal status and maintain policy flexibility while preserving regional peace.⁸ This ambiguity has also blurred the line between actual U.S. policy and the façade Washington constructed to disguise that policy. As a result, U.S.–PRC–Taiwan relations rest on an unusual and overly nuanced set of documents and statements of varying authoritativeness. This convoluted framework makes it difficult for U.S. policymakers to form consensus on policy toward Taiwan, develop new policies based on changing geostrategic requirements, and guide the bureaucracy's implementation of policy.⁹

In practice, since the early 1950s, the U.S. government has pursued a stable balance of power around Taiwan.¹⁰ To maintain peace, the United States has undertaken actions that de facto undermine the PRC's sovereignty claim over Taiwan, though Washington's willingness to do so has varied over time based on changing geostrategic conditions. Put another way, the U.S. government's approach to Taiwan has varied in accordance with, and been subordinate to, regional and global geopolitical considerations.

7 For additional insight on the dangers of PRC unification with Taiwan, see Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, and Matt Pottinger, "Taiwan: The Stakes," in Matt Pottinger, ed., *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2024), pp. 23–42; and Brendan Rittenhouse Green and Caitlin Talmadge, "The Consequences of Conquest: Why Indo-Pacific Power Hinges on Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2022, pp. 97–106.

8 *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, East Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, Neal H. Petersen et al., eds. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1976), Document 343, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v06/d343>; *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1951, Korea and China, Volume VII, Part 2, John P. Glennon, Harriet D. Schwar, and Paul Claussen, eds. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1983), Document 235, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v07p2/d235>; *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy, Volume I, Neal H. Petersen et al., eds. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1977), Document 94, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v01/d94>; *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, East Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, Petersen et al., eds., Document 256, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v06/d256>; and Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (1969; repr. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), pp. 533–34, 540–41.

9 As one example of disagreement on existing U.S. policy toward Taiwan, see contrasting statements by Presidents Biden and Trump on whether the United States would defend Taiwan if attacked by the PRC. "What Is America's Policy of 'Strategic Ambiguity' over Taiwan?" *The Economist*, May 23, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/05/23/what-is-americas-policy-of-strategic-ambiguity-over-taiwan>; John Bolton, *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p. 313; and Josh Rogin, *Chaos under Heaven: America, China, and the Battle for the 21st Century* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2021), p. 44.

10 *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1951, Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, Part 1, Paul Claussen et al., eds., (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1977), Document 12, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d12>; and *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, East Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, Petersen et al., eds. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1976), Document 343.

In overarching terms, since the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, the U.S. government's strategic approach to Taiwan has proceeded through two stages. In the first period, America's approach was rooted in the hardening democratic versus communist blocs of the early Cold War. U.S. policy in the latter stage was characterized by America's 1970s-era attempt to isolate the Soviet Union through closer U.S.–PRC relations.

Washington's Former 1950s-era Approach: Taiwan's Undetermined Legal Status and the U.S.–ROC Alliance

In the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. policy did not evade the contradiction between America's interest in peace and the PRC's sovereignty claim over Taiwan. In negotiating the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco, which formally ended World War II in the Pacific, the U.S. government adopted the position that Taiwan's sovereignty was undetermined and needed to be settled through multilateral negotiation among the allies. Japan, which had governed the island since 1895, relinquished its claim to the island in the treaty, but neither the treaty nor the U.S. government specified whether Taiwan is part of China.¹¹ The ambiguity of the treaty reflected two major geopolitical events of the prior two years. First, the CCP emerged victorious in the Chinese Civil War and declared the founding of the PRC in Beijing in 1949 while the Kuomintang (KMT)-led ROC retreated to Taiwan. Second, with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the U.S. government moved to contain the expansion of communist powers and President Harry Truman ordered the U.S. Seventh Fleet to patrol the Taiwan Strait to prevent a regional conflict.

In the war's aftermath, despite Taiwan's unsettled legal status, Washington signed a mutual defense treaty with the ROC in 1954 and stationed U.S. forces in Taiwan. The treaty marked the U.S. government's transition from a temporary military intervention to an enduring commitment to preventing Taiwan's capture by a power hostile to the United States.¹² More broadly, Washington sought to prevent a major conflict that could pull in the United States. In a dynamic sometimes called “dual deterrence,” Washington aimed to deter Beijing from attacking Taiwan and to deter a recalcitrant Chiang Kai-shek from attacking the mainland in an unrealistic attempt to retake China.¹³ Regionally, the treaty was part of the U.S. government's effort to deter communist aggression in Asia through a security framework composed of bilateral U.S. alliance agreements with Japan (1951), the Philippines (1951), Australia (1951), New Zealand (1951), the Republic of Korea (1953), and Thailand (1954).

11 “Treaty of Peace with Japan,” in *United Nations Treaty Series* vol. 136, p. 48, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20136/volume-136-i-1832-english.pdf>.

12 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, China, Volume II*, Harriet D. Schwar, ed. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1986), Document 12, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v02/d12>.

13 Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States–Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 13–26. See also Victor Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 65–93.

Washington's Current 1970s-Era Approach: Strategic Ambiguity and the Standalone Defense Construct

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, U.S. and PRC leaders sought to improve the Sino-American relationship in order to address their shared concern over Soviet expansionism. In a two-way bargain between Beijing and Washington, U.S. policymakers forged a compromise between America's interest in peace and Beijing's sovereignty claim. This strategic approach largely persists to this day (for simplicity, this report refers to America's existing Taiwan policy as the "1970s-era approach").¹⁴

Through three nonbinding joint statements—informally referred to as the "Three Communiques"—Washington made concessions that constrained its commitment to cross-strait peace and diminished the Sino-American clash over Taiwan's sovereignty.¹⁵ Specifically, Washington adopted vague policy language that did not directly contradict Beijing's sovereignty claim over Taiwan (e.g., by referencing an undefined "one China" rather than Taiwan's "undetermined" or "unsettled" legal status); derecognized the ROC; abrogated the U.S.–ROC mutual defense treaty; removed U.S. forces from Taiwan; and (in 1982) conditionally agreed to reductions in U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

Washington's concessions were predicated on Beijing countering Moscow, stabilizing the region, and pursuing a peaceful resolution of its dispute with Taiwan. Further, through the communiques and the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), America reserved the right to sell arms to Taipei and maintained a stated interest in the peaceful settlement of Taiwan's status, implying that U.S. military intervention to defend the island remained a plausible threat. The TRA stipulates that the U.S. government "make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain

14 The 1970s-era approach was formed over decades and rests on an assorted collection of major documents and statements, including the Treaty of San Francisco, the Three Communiques, the U.S. Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), and the Six Assurances. For simplicity, this report uses the term "1970s era" to describe the period during which the Three Communiques, the Taiwan Relations Act, and the Six Assurances were formed, even though the Third Communique and the Six Assurances were issued in 1982. A detailed historical review is beyond the scope of this report. For more, see Alan D. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy Toward Taiwan and U.S.–PRC Relations* (Washington, DC: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003).

15 Lacking a formal diplomatic relationship since the PRC's founding in 1949, the countries established a basis for their relations in 1972 by issuing a nonbinding joint statement known as the Shanghai Communique. This communique, and the two that followed, differ from binding treaties, which require two thirds approval by the Senate. Some experts have argued these joint statements could be binding, but the point is moot given the lack of any enforcement mechanism. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, pp. 228–29.

a sufficient self-defense capacity.”¹⁶ The TRA also states it is U.S. policy “to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan.”¹⁷ Put differently, the peacetime U.S. military must be capable of defeating China’s military forces in a potential crisis or conflict around Taiwan.¹⁸

The issue of Taiwan’s sovereignty was never resolved. American officials informally frame the U.S. government’s position on Taiwan’s sovereignty as a “one China policy,” loosely based on the First Communique’s language.¹⁹ Yet the U.S. government refrains from stating whether Taiwan is part of China or which, if any, government has sovereignty over Taiwan. One China is thus hardly a policy; rather, it is a shrewdly worded fig leaf for Washington and Beijing’s unresolved fundamental disagreement.²⁰ Over time, repetition of the one China mantra has confused even American and foreign policymakers about the U.S. government’s

16 Taiwan Relations Act, Publ. L. No. 96-8, 93 Stat. 14 (1979), <https://www.congress.gov/96/statute/STATUTE-93/STATUTE-93-Pg14.pdf>. The Six Assurances—a set of six statements on U.S. policy toward Taiwan that Washington provided Taipei in July 1982—state that U.S. arms sales to Taiwan have no end date and that future sales are not conditioned on American consultation with Beijing. Lawrence Eagleburger “Cable to James Lilley: Taiwan Arms Sales, July 10, 1982,” *American Institute in Taiwan*, <https://www.ait.org.tw/declassified-cables-taiwan-arms-sales-six-assurances-1982/>. The exact wording of the Six Assurances has been formulated differently over time; see Susan V. Lawrence, *President Reagan’s Six Assurances to Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service (CRS), March 28, 2024), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11665>. For historical background on the creation of the assurances, see Tucker, *Strait Talk*, pp. 148–52.

17 Taiwan Relations Act.

18 The TRA stresses America’s interest in stability and the peaceful resolution of Taiwan’s status. It was intentionally structured to be similar in many ways to the earlier U.S.–ROC mutual defense treaty. The TRA specifies that “peace and stability in the [Western Pacific] area are in the political, security, and economic interests of the United States.” Further, the TRA states that U.S.–PRC normalization is based on “the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means.” The United States would “consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States.” In contrast with the prior defense treaty, the TRA stops short of explicitly stating that an armed attack against Taiwan would endanger America’s own peace and security and be met by a common response. The 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of China stated that “each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the West Pacific Area directed against the territories of either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.” “Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of China; December 2, 1954,” *The Avalon Project*, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/chin001.asp.

19 The communique reads: “The United States *acknowledges* that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position.” (emphasis added) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Steven E. Phillips, ed. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2006), Document 203, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d203>.

20 In contrast, the PRC has a “one China principle,” which holds there is only one China and Taiwan is a sovereign part of China. Despite Washington and Beijing’s different interpretations of “one China,” PRC policymakers could ostensibly interpret the U.S. government’s use of the term “one China” as validating Beijing’s position that China is one country, of which Taiwan province is a part.

true position.²¹ In reality, America’s formal policy prior to the communique—that Taiwan’s sovereignty is undetermined—remains U.S. policy.²²

So-called “strategic ambiguity”—Washington’s opacity about whether it would intervene in a PRC–Taiwan conflict—is the manifestation of America’s attempt to uphold peace while avoiding contradicting China’s sovereignty claim. Strategic ambiguity is an informal short-hand: The term is not an official policy and never appears in the communiqués or the TRA. Yet strategic ambiguity is an accurate descriptor of America’s post-1979 de facto defense strategy toward Taiwan, capturing the peace versus sovereignty tension and underscoring related constraints on U.S. defense policy.

After 1979, lacking official U.S.–Taiwan military interaction and a U.S. posture on Taiwan, Taiwan and America were relegated to independently preparing to defeat a PLA invasion of Taiwan.²³ America has essentially maintained a “standalone defense construct,” meaning American and Taiwanese forces would function independently of each other, without substantial operational-level coordination, in peacetime and in wartime.²⁴ The standalone construct includes two independent prongs: (a) standalone Taiwanese forces—benefiting from the qualitative edge provided by U.S. arms sales—could maintain a credible deterrent against a PRC invasion; and (b) standalone U.S. forces, if necessary and so directed, could intervene to defend Taiwan from a PLA assault.²⁵ Although U.S.–Taiwan military interaction

21 *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the “One China” Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei* (Washington, DC: CRS, 2015), pp. 9–11, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20150105_RL30341_6a250771f574e01575c1cc9fa15c71f92858ef44.pdf.

22 Since 1972, U.S. diplomats have refrained from using the word “undetermined” publicly due to Beijing’s objection that the term challenges the PRC’s sovereignty claim over Taiwan. American officials now semantically mask the underlying U.S. position, such as by using the above-quoted ambiguous language (“acknowledges” or “does not challenge”) from the First Communique or by obliquely stating that the U.S. government “has not altered its position regarding sovereignty over Taiwan” or “takes no position on Taiwan’s sovereignty.” Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, 34–35. See also Susan V. Lawrence, *Taiwan: The Origins of the U.S. One-China Policy* (Washington, DC: CRS, September 27, 2023), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12503/1>. The supposed lack of a U.S. government position on Taiwan’s sovereignty is betrayed by the U.S. government’s active opposition to PRC attempts to claim that Taiwan’s status is settled. Nike Ching, “U.S. Refutes China’s Characterization of UN Resolution 2758,” *Voice of America*, May 28, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/7630543.html>. U.S. diplomats also stopped referring to the Treaty of San Francisco as a component of America’s Taiwan policy—a practice which continues today—even though the U.S. position on Taiwan’s sovereignty still legally rests on the treaty.

23 The U.S.–China two-way bargain was slowly formed during the early 1970s and early 1980s, with 1979 the key year for the emergence of a new defense framework. The Second Communique in 1979 dramatically altered U.S. planning for Taiwan’s defense given the abrogation of the mutual defense treaty, the withdrawal of American forces from Taiwan, and derecognition of the Republic of China.

24 Merriam-Webster defines *standalone* as an adjective meaning “complete in itself” or “self-contained.” Its definition continues: “intended, designed, or able to be used or to function...separately: not connected to or requiring connection to something else in order to be used or to function.” *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “stand-alone,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stand-alone>.

25 Taiwan Relations Act; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, Volume XIII, China, David P. Nickles, ed. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2013), Document 38, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v13/d38>, Document 78, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v13/d78>, and Document 31, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v13/d31>.

quietly resumed after the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, and has apparently expanded during the early to mid-2020s, the standalone defense construct persists today.

Strategic Ambiguity and the Standalone Defense Construct Obstruct Critical U.S.–Taiwan Operational-Level Coordination

America's fundamental interest in a stable Western Pacific and the TRA's mandate that the U.S. military be prepared to defend Taiwan require U.S. policymakers to maintain feasible deterrence and warfighting strategies for Taiwan's defense.²⁶ The 1970s-era strategy reflected these requirements, and this approach succeeded for decades because the PLA was a qualitatively inferior land-bound force. From the 1970s into the early 2000s, U.S. arms sales to Taipei provided Taiwanese forces with a feasible, credible means of deterring and defeating a PLA assault. And, until recently, U.S. military superiority in the Western Pacific and the prospect of U.S. intervention were sufficient to deter Beijing.

But America's 1970s-era strategy and defense construct for Taiwan now damage deterrence in the Taiwan Strait and hinder U.S. military efforts to implement the new concepts, forces, and posture necessary for warfighting.²⁷ The U.S. government's reliance on arms sales and defense services to furnish Taiwan with a "sufficient self-defense capability," as specified in the TRA, is no longer achievable. Given the PLA's current capability and capacity and the PRC's latent defense industrial potential, Beijing could isolate, exhaust, and eventually overwhelm Taiwanese forces fighting on their own.

Taiwan's successful defense in a future cross-strait war—the scenario on which this report focuses—is thus likely contingent on American military intervention.²⁸ Yet, were war to break out today, the American and Taiwanese militaries would be engaging in the military equivalent of parallel play. U.S. and Taiwanese units would attempt to strike Chinese forces

26 A warfighting strategy provides a theory of victory as to how a state can militarily defend its interests in case an adversary initiates conflict. Deterrence strategies generally require less power than warfighting strategies. In his classic *Strategy in the Missile Age*, Bernard Brodie writes, "The capacity to deter is usually confused with the capacity to win a war." He elaborates that "Deterrent capability must be distinguished from war-winning capability in certain important respects. The maximum possible deterrence may require a war-winning capability, but much less force may nevertheless possess considerable deterrent value." The problem is that, among national security professionals, "the automaticity of retaliation is taken too much for granted." Decision makers must "bear in mind that deterrence can fail" and ensure that their military possesses the means to win in case of conflict. Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1959), pp. viii–x, 274.

27 To deter an adversary from attacking, a state must be willing to use force to defend itself, have the capability to defend itself, and credibly communicate to its adversary that the state is willing and capable of using force to defend itself. Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966; repr. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 35–91.

28 The PRC could attempt to coerce Taiwan into accepting unification through methods short of full-scale cross-strait conflict. Potential coercive options include air and maritime incursions, interference with and/or detention of Taiwanese fishermen, an outer-island seizure, and blockade. These options may fail to achieve the PRC's ultimate objective. For instance, in a scenario in which Taiwan's people endure a prolonged blockade, Beijing may be forced to either back down or escalate to war. War thus remains Beijing's most direct potential means of forcing unification. For additional discussion on why the invasion scenario is of greatest concern to Taiwan and the United States, see Ivan Kanapathy, "Countering China's Use of Force," in Matt Pottinger ed., *The Boiling Moat*, pp. 83–89.

on largely independent terms, enacting their own separate plans and operations. Operational decentralization in a complex, cluttered theater without adequate deconfliction and coordination is a recipe for failure. Defending Taiwan from a PLA assault would inherently involve American and Taiwanese forces operating simultaneously in the same battlespace. The lack of U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination exacerbates likely operational challenges, instills strategic and operational hesitancy, endangers the safety of American and Taiwanese personnel, and constitutes a lost opportunity to maximize U.S. and Taiwanese capabilities.

Washington’s decades-old policy approach neglects the intensifying operational-level requirements of Taiwan’s defense, undermines America’s strategic interest in preparing for deterrence and warfighting, and increasingly risks the outbreak of conflict. U.S. policymakers must now consider a revised strategic approach for deterrence and warfighting around Taiwan, one backed by credible and observable peacetime improvements in U.S. and Taiwanese military capabilities and posture, including U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined military exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence in Taiwan.

The Limits of Behind-the-Scenes U.S.–Taiwan Military Coordination

After 1979, the U.S. government sought to limit, downplay, and obscure interactions with Taiwan’s military to avoid upsetting U.S.–PRC relations in a way that might jeopardize other U.S. interests. Because this report is based solely on publicly available information, data limitations are inherent in its analysis. The U.S. government may be enacting changes in Taiwan policy in ways unknown to the public and, to a certain degree, could already be implementing some of this report’s recommendations.

Even if that is the case, U.S. policymakers should be clear eyed about the limits of behind-the-scenes military coordination and should not assume the level of U.S.–Taiwan operational coordination required to defeat a PLA invasion could be achieved in private. First, strategic guidance and bureaucratic action cannot be artificially separated, and ambiguity in strategy naturally breeds hesitancy in implementation. America’s sprawling national security bureaucracy requires senior-level guidance to spur and coordinate action, and the interagency process can become gridlocked by contentious policy options. A necessary precondition of U.S. defense policy toward Taiwan is interagency agreement, particularly between the Department of Defense and the Department of State, given that the TRA’s authorities were delegated to the latter under Executive Order 13014.²⁹ Although the details of U.S.–Taiwan military interaction do not need to be publicly released, the president would need to provide a public, strategic-level demand signal that could be broadly disseminated throughout the bureaucracy to stimulate action and break impasses. Internal, nonpublic messaging would be insufficient.

29 “Executive Order 13014 of August 15, 1996: Maintaining Unofficial Relations with the People on Taiwan,” *Federal Register* 61, no. 161, pp. 42963–64, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1996-08-19/pdf/96-13014.pdf>.

Second, U.S. military actions required to preserve credible deterrence in the strait involve a degree of public activity that cannot be obscured. After 1979, given China's military weakness, maintaining cross-strait peace did not require an overt U.S. military relationship with Taiwan. But Taiwanese and American forces must now develop the ability to deconflict and coordinate their actions in wartime, which means peacetime activities such as large-scale U.S.–Taiwan combined training and exercises and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence on Taiwan. The historical record indicates that U.S. government military aid and training efforts approaching this scale, even if officially covert or undisclosed, become public in short order.³⁰ In Taiwan's case, absence of such news does not prove activities of this scale are not occurring, but it implies as much. Due to the formidable inertia of America's 1970s-era strategic approach to Taiwan, presidential direction and involvement are required to provide legitimacy and bureaucratic cover to those who seek to engage in observable U.S.–Taiwan military activities.

Report Structure

Chapter 2 examines the fundamental 1970s-era drivers and assumptions of America's existing approach toward Taiwan and explains how changes in the strategic environment have negated these factors.

Chapter 3 details how America's post-1979 operational-level framework for Taiwan's defense—the standalone defense construct—has been overturned by China's military modernization and argues U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination is now necessary for credible deterrence and warfighting strategies.

Chapter 4 proposes reframing Washington's defense policy toward Taiwan under a new strategic approach this report calls *peaceful resolution*, which would emphasize America's interest in regional peace and stability and enable operational-level coordination among the United States, Taiwan, and U.S. allies.

30 Public reporting on then-undisclosed U.S. aid and training efforts with forces in Laos, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua offer just a few examples. Henry Kamm, "U.S. Runs a Secret Laotian Army," *New York Times*, October 26, 1969 <https://www.nytimes.com/1969/10/26/archives/us-runs-a-secret-laotian-army-us-runs-a-secret-laotian-army.html>; Bob Woodward and Charles R. Babcock, "U.S. Covert Aid to Afghans on the Rise," *Washington Post*, January 12, 1985, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/01/13/us-covert-aid-to-afghans-on-the-rise/cfoe7891-d900-4421-b72f-7760af19256d/>; and Richard A. Best, Jr., *Covert Action: An Effective Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy?* (Washington, DC: CRS, October 21, 1996), pp. 41–44, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/19961021_96-844_a3fe515109001b58e7be8b2af3841f9e91066400.pdf.

Chapter 5 explains how changes in the character of warfare are intensifying U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination requirements. The chapter identifies potentially valuable U.S.–Taiwan combined missions for peacetime and wartime. It recommends various ways to build operational-level coordination in peacetime, including through interoperability, combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence on Taiwan.

Chapter 6 refutes two likely counterarguments to *peaceful resolution* and offers guidance to U.S. policymakers about how to weigh and manage risk in U.S. policy toward China and Taiwan.

Chapter 7 explains that, from the American perspective, military instruments alone will not resolve Taiwan's status. At best, they can only maintain the prospect of an eventual peaceful political resolution between Beijing and Taipei.

CHAPTER 2

A Growing Disconnect: America's 1970s-era Taiwan Strategy and Today's Strategic Environment

America's enduring 1970s-era approach toward Taiwan is, unsurprisingly, rooted in the geostrategic conditions and policymaker priorities of that period. That context has faded from memory. Reappraising America's strategy requires examining whether its foundational assumptions still hold.

Entering the 1970s, America's interest in regional peace and the PRC's sovereignty claim were at odds, but U.S. and PRC policymakers forged a two-way compromise during the next decade. U.S. leaders believed they could preserve peace around Taiwan as part of a larger Sino-American arrangement to deter Soviet expansionism. For American decision makers, this belief was reinforced by several other factors, including America's prioritization of Europe over Asia, China's moderating international behavior, Beijing's adherence to peace in the strait and peaceful unification with Taiwan, the infeasibility of a PRC conquest of Taiwan, and the dissonance between America's values and Taiwan's authoritarian government.

Today, the 1970s-era conditions and assumptions that underpinned America's approach to Taiwan have disappeared. Sino-American alignment on global order has long vanished, and Beijing now supports and enables Moscow's aggression. Chinese leaders promote an expansionist foreign policy and have funded a decades-long military modernization program to achieve their revisionist aims. Further, the PRC's increasingly coercive behavior toward Taiwan and in the Indo-Pacific has invalidated the understanding recorded in the three joint

communiques, which were predicated on the PRC countering Soviet expansionism, maintaining regional peace, and pursuing a peaceful resolution with Taiwan.

The Foundational Geopolitical Conditions and Assumptions Underpinning America's 1970s-era Approach toward Taiwan

U.S. and PRC Focus on Deterring Soviet Expansionism

Beginning with President Richard Nixon, successive U.S. administrations believed America's long-term strategy required closer relations with China to maintain a stable Eurasian balance of power.³¹ U.S. policymakers sought to play China and the Soviet Union off each other, an approach known as "triangular diplomacy."³² At the time, Washington's strategic orientation was sensible given the Warsaw Pact's conventional superiority in Europe and ongoing Soviet military intervention around the globe.

The communiques were an effort by Washington and Beijing to overcome a major diplomatic obstacle—Taiwan's sovereignty—so they could normalize relations and form a partnership to counter their common adversary, the Soviet Union. U.S. policymakers believed stability around Taiwan could be maintained via this larger Sino-American understanding of global order.³³ In this Cold War context, many U.S. officials also tended to view Taiwan as small and strategically unimportant.³⁴ Some senior U.S. policymakers, including Henry Kissinger, appeared to hope Taiwan would have no choice but to unify peacefully with China once U.S. recognition and America's military presence on Taiwan were withdrawn.³⁵ Essentially, some in Washington wished that a distracting issue would resolve itself without a need for U.S. involvement so America could focus on its top security concerns.

31 Richard Nixon, "Asia after Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1967, pp. 111–25. See also *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 105*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d105>.

32 Beijing likewise wanted to play the Soviets and Americans against each other. My thanks to Ivan Kanapathy for this point. See also Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1074–78, 1086–93.

33 In characterizing the First Communique, Henry Kissinger bluntly states, "The communique was not about Taiwan or bilateral exchanges, but about international order." The communique, he continues, "put the Taiwan issue in abeyance, with each side maintaining its basic principles." Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1074–93. See also Green, *By More than Providence*, pp. 368–76.

34 Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, p. 82. See also Tucker, *Strait Talk*, pp. 29–30; and Green, *By More than Providence*, pp. 371–73.

35 Echoing U.S. objectives for the Paris Peace Accords, which ended America's involvement in the Vietnam War, National Security Advisor Kissinger told Chinese policymakers in November 1974 that, regarding Taiwan, Washington "want[s] to avoid a situation where the United States signs a document which leads to a military solution shortly after normalization." *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVIII, China, 1973–1976*, David P. Nickles, ed. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2007), Document 94, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v18/d94>. Similarly, in his memoirs, Kissinger states, "We recognized that on some issues the only thing negotiators can achieve is to gain time with dignity." Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1076. See also Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, pp. 33–34; and Tucker, *Strait Talk*, pp. 43–44.

U.S. Prioritization of Europe over Asia

Washington's focus on the Soviet threat reflected a prioritization of U.S. interests in Europe over those in Asia. This American strategic approach dated to at least the eve of the Second World War and was exacerbated by the experience of the Vietnam War.³⁶ The Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter administrations generally sought to extricate the United States from commitments in Asia that they believed were not essential for America's security. Nixon viewed the drawdown and eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Taiwan as tied to the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam; peaceful conditions in the Taiwan Strait; and, more broadly, the Nixon Doctrine, which assigned greater responsibility to America's Asian allies and partners for their own defense.³⁷ The Carter administration placed an even lower priority on America's Western Pacific allies, exemplified by its unsuccessful effort to withdraw all U.S. forces from Korea.³⁸

The Moderation of China's International Behavior

U.S. policymakers believed that, once Sino-American rapprochement began, Beijing would seek to maintain positive relations with the United States and its allies to counter the threat of Soviet aggression and expansionism.³⁹ Kissinger optimistically told Zhou Enlai in 1971 that "after the solution of the Taiwan issue, which will be in the relatively near future, we have no conflicting interests at all."⁴⁰ Many U.S. policymakers believed better relations with China would inherently lead to Beijing exerting a stabilizing regional presence.⁴¹

36 Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in Kent Roberts Greenfield, ed., *Command Decisions* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1987), pp. 11–47. See also Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1078.

37 Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, pp. 43–44. The Nixon Doctrine is also referred to as the Guam Doctrine. Nixon laid out his views on the security-related roles and responsibilities of the United States and its allies during a press conference held on Guam. Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 222–25.

38 Green, *By More than Providence*, pp. 376–79.

39 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, Volume XIII, China, Document 78; Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 730; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, Volume XIII, China, Document 14, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v13/d14>; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, Volume I, Foundations of Foreign Policy, Kristin L. Ahlberg, ed. (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2014), Document 104, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v01/d104>.

40 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 140, as originally cited in Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, p. 33.

41 Green, *By More than Providence*, p. 377. With the Soviet Union's fall in 1991, Washington replaced the primary justification for its policy, arguing China's integration into the global economy would make it a vested stakeholder in the existing international architecture and entice it to uphold stability. Aaron Friedberg, *Getting China Wrong* (Medford: Polity, 2022), pp. 7–47.

Beijing's Adherence to Peace in the Strait and Peaceful Unification with Taiwan

The U.S. government's agreement to the communiques was predicated upon the PRC's role in maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait and peacefully resolving Taiwan's status.⁴² In the First Communique, the U.S. government emphasizes an "interest in peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question," adding: "With this prospect in mind, [the U.S. government] affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and military installations on Taiwan *as the tension in the area diminishes*." (emphasis added)⁴³ Later, when signing the Third Communique, which addresses potential reductions in U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, President Ronald Reagan specified America's conditions in plain terms: "The talks leading up to the signing of the communique were premised on the clear understanding that any reduction of such arms sales depends upon peace in the Taiwan Straits and the continuity of China's declared 'fundamental policy' of seeking a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue."⁴⁴ In short, in negotiating the communiques, U.S. policymakers directly tied Beijing's behavior to specific U.S. actions, including changes in U.S. posture in Taiwan and U.S.–Taiwan arms sales.

Alongside these conditions, U.S. policymakers assumed a peaceful cross-strait political resolution between the CCP and Taiwan's people was feasible, given the PRC's and ROC's common claim at the time that Taiwan was part of China.⁴⁵ Although Beijing never formally renounced the use of force during the negotiation of the communiques, PRC policymakers repeatedly indicated patience with reaching a resolution with Taipei, stated a preference to resolve the dispute peacefully, and demonstrated good faith outreach to the Taiwanese people.⁴⁶ In 1979, Beijing issued a conciliatory "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan," declaring it would "take present realities into account" and "respect the status quo on Taiwan and the opinions of people in all walks of life there and adopt reasonable policies and measures in settling the question of reunification so as not to cause the people of Taiwan

42 Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1075–80.

43 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 203.

44 Ronald Reagan, "Memorandum to George P. Schultz and Caspar W. Weinberger: Arms Sales to Taiwan," August 17, 1982, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220305212203/https://www.ait.org.tw/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/08171982-Reagan-Memo-DECLASSIFIED.pdf>.

45 The KMT held that Taiwan was part of China, with the ROC as the official government of all of China. The KMT's view stemmed naturally from its Chinese mainland origins and post-1949 aspiration of recovering the mainland from the CCP. Despite a common official position on Taiwan's sovereignty at the time, Chiang Kai-shek and his son and successor, Chiang Ching-kuo, were deeply suspicious of the CCP.

46 Across many years of U.S.–China negotiations, PRC policymakers made statements that ranged from pledges of near-endless patience to threats of near-term conflict. For instance, in a 1971 conversation with Kissinger, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai threatened to take Taiwan using nonpeaceful means after six years. In contrast, Mao remarked to Kissinger in 1973 that China could wait one hundred years to unify with Taiwan. Given that negotiating context and tactics probably shaped verbal statements, this section relies on official PRC statements and proposals to demonstrate that Chinese leaders emphasized peace over coercion. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, pp. 39–40, 54.

any losses.⁴⁷ In 1981, Beijing released its Nine-Point Proposal, which stated a desire to open various cross-strait links and floated several concessions in a prospective unification agreement.⁴⁸ Two of the most far-reaching offers were that Taiwan could retain its armed forces and that the island's "current socio-economic system will remain unchanged."⁴⁹ Two years later, Deng Xiaoping proposed a "one country, two systems" political framework in which Taiwan would govern itself autonomously except for defense and foreign affairs, which would be handled by Beijing.⁵⁰

The Infeasibility of a PRC Conquest of Taiwan

In the 1970s and early 1980s, U.S. policymakers judged that China lacked the capability to forcibly unify with Taiwan in the near term and that Beijing's talk of doing so was an empty threat.⁵¹ American policymakers believed standalone Taiwanese military forces could deter Beijing from attacking, especially if U.S. weapons sales to the island continued.⁵² The Carter administration thus did not view its decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Taiwan as fundamentally endangering the island's security. Reagan's signing statement attached to the 1982 communique exemplifies the American belief at the time that the cross-strait military balance could be sufficiently maintained through U.S. arms sales: "It is essential that the quality and quantity of the arms provided Taiwan be conditioned entirely on the threat posed by the PRC. Both in quantitative and qualitative terms, *Taiwan's defense capability*

47 "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan, Standing Committee of the Fifth National People's Congress, Fifth Plenary Session, December 26, 1978," *China Internet Information Center*, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/taiwan/7943.htm>. In that message, Beijing also stated it would end the shelling of the Taiwanese-held Kinmen Islands. The PRC had regularly shelled Kinmen since the 1958 Second Taiwan Strait Crisis to symbolically demonstrate a continuing state of hostilities as part of the Chinese Civil War.

48 This 1981 proposal facilitated Washington's agreement to the Third Communique. That communique states, "The United States Government understands and appreciates the Chinese policy of striving for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question as indicated in China's Message to Compatriots in Taiwan issued on January 1, 1979 and the Nine-Point Proposal put forward by China on September 30, 1981. The new situation which has emerged with regard to the Taiwan question also provides favorable conditions for the settlement of United States – China differences over United States arms sales to Taiwan." "U.S.–PRC Joint Communique, August 17, 1982," *American Institute in Taiwan*, <https://www.ait.org.tw/u-s-prc-joint-communique-1982/>. See also Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, pp. 124–34.

49 The relevant portion of the text reads: "Taiwan can enjoy a high degree of autonomy as a special administration region, and it can retain its armed forces. The central government will not interfere with local affairs in Taiwan" and "Taiwan's current socio-economic system will remain unchanged, so will its way of life and its economic and cultural relations with foreign countries. There will be no encroachment on the proprietary rights and lawful right of inheritance over private property, houses, land and enterprises, or on foreign investments." Ye Jianying, "Ye Jianying on Taiwan's Return to Motherland and Peaceful Reunification, September 30, 1981," *China Internet Information Center*, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/7945.htm>.

50 Tucker, *Strait Talk*, p. 166.

51 Acknowledging the PLA's relative weaknesses, a 1980 U.S. national intelligence estimate bluntly concluded, "China is not capable at present of a successful amphibious invasion of Taiwan" and that acquiring the necessary capabilities "would probably take at least 10 years." "NIE 13-4-80: China's Defense Policy and Armed Forces," *Central Intelligence Agency*, pp. I-4, I-18, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP82M00786R000104590001-0.pdf>.

52 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, Volume XIII, China, Documents 38, 78, and 31. See also Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink*, pp. 25, 82–83; and Green, *By More than Providence*, p. 372.

relative to that of the PRC will be maintained.” (emphasis added)⁵³ Moreover, given the U.S. military’s Western Pacific posture and its substantial qualitative advantages over PLA forces, U.S. policymakers continued to hold the option of American military intervention to defeat a PLA assault on Taiwan. In this favorable security context, U.S. leaders perceived the abrogation of the U.S.–ROC mutual defense treaty and the removal of U.S. forces from Taiwan as a relatively manageable trade in return for enlisting Beijing’s support in stabilizing the regional and global balance of power.⁵⁴

An Authoritarian Taiwan Clashes with American Values

Finally, when the communiqués were negotiated, Taiwan was a one-party authoritarian state that effectively ruled through permanent martial law. Many within Washington, particularly in the Carter administration, held disdainful views of America’s autocratic allies and partners in the Western Pacific, including South Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan.⁵⁵ Americans did not wish for Taiwan to be conquered by a communist Beijing, yet Taiwan’s governance did not appeal to the liberal ideals of American society.

The Strategic Environment Has Upended America’s 1970s-era Assumptions

Today, the geopolitical conditions and assumptions underpinning America’s 1970s-era Taiwan strategy have eroded. Changes in the strategic environment—most notably Beijing’s revisionist geopolitical strategy, the diverging domestic political trajectories of China and Taiwan, China’s increasingly coercive approach toward Taiwan, and the Chinese military’s rapid modernization—have overturned America’s 1970s-era approach to Taiwan’s defense.

Beijing’s Revisionist Intent and Maritime Orientation

The 1970s-era Sino-American grand bargain to counter Moscow and maintain a favorable global geopolitical order has been dead for over 30 years. The PRC has become an active revisionist power with growing means to acquire territory along its maritime periphery, push the United States out of the Western Pacific, and shape a regional and global environment hospitable to the CCP and its illiberal, autocratic interests.⁵⁶ CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream espouses the ambition of unifying with Taiwan and supplanting the U.S.-led security and economic architecture in the Indo-Pacific region and around the

53 Reagan, “Arms Sales to Taiwan.”

54 *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, Volume XIII, China, Document 14.

55 Green, *By More than Providence*, pp. 376–79.

56 Matt Pottinger, Matthew Johnson, and David Feith, “Xi Jinping in His Own Words,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 30, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/xi-jinping-his-own-words>.

globe.⁵⁷ With their fears of a Soviet ground invasion having long vanished, Chinese leaders view a strong Sino-Russian relationship as the foundation of a Eurasian bloc that can counter the United States and its allies, as evidenced by their February 2022 “no limits” partnership.⁵⁸ The upshot for American strategy is that, instead of an isolated obstacle in the U.S.–China relationship, Taiwan’s future is now directly tied into Beijing’s strategy to reshape the regional security order and project power globally.

Diverging Political Developments in China and Taiwan

Since the 1970s, significant domestic political changes have occurred in Taiwan and China. The absolute power of the KMT declined by the 1990s as Taiwan evolved into a multiparty democracy. The founding of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 1986 and subsequent multiparty elections gave rise to local Taiwanese voices, which had been suppressed after the mainlander-dominated KMT retreated to Taiwan. The democratization process dramatically changed the island’s political landscape, with Taiwan’s status and identity becoming the central political issue and cross-strait political relations turning much more fraught.⁵⁹ Despite a boom in China–Taiwan trade, investment, and tourism over much of the 2000s and 2010s, Taiwanese today are increasingly skeptical of closer cross-strait ties. Taiwan’s pragmatic electorate still overwhelmingly favors a continuation of the status quo, but the popularity of eventual formal autonomy or independence from Beijing has increased over the last decade.⁶⁰

Across the strait, the prospect of genuine political liberalization within the CCP withered after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, and the party has strengthened its domestic political monopoly since then.⁶¹ Due to its repressiveness at home, the CCP’s past assurances to “respect the status quo on Taiwan” and allow Taipei to field its own military now seem wildly unrealistic.⁶² More fundamentally, due to its anti-imperialist and anticapi-

57 Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 261–96; and Pottinger, Johnson, and Feith, “Xi Jinping in His Own Words.”

58 Xi more explicitly revealed his revisionist global agenda in a public exchange with Russian President Vladimir Putin in March 2023, when Xi told Putin, “We are now witnessing changes the likes of which we haven’t seen for 100 years. And we are the ones driving these changes together.” “Watch: Xi Tells Putin They Are Making Historic Changes after Kremlin Meeting,” *NBC News*, March 23, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aebFssopWVg>. See also Doshi, *The Long Game*, pp. 230–31; and Chao Deng, Ann M. Simmons, Evan Gershkovich, and William Mauldin, “Putin, Xi Aim Russia–China Partnership Against U.S.” *Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-vladimir-putin-meets-with-chinese-leader-xi-jinping-in-beijing-11643966743>.

59 Shelly Rigger, *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 103–77.

60 Beijing’s abolishment of Hong Kong’s legal autonomy in 2020 further worsened Taiwanese perceptions of Beijing and represents the last nail in the coffin for a prospective “one country, two systems”-style unification agreement between the CCP and Taiwan. “Taiwan Independence Vs. Unification with the Mainland (1994/12~2023/12),” *National Chengchi University Election Study Center*, February 22, 2024, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>. See also William H. Overholt, *Hong Kong: The Rise and Fall of “One Country, Two Systems”* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, 2019), pp. 1–3, https://ash.harvard.edu/files/ash/files/overholt_hong_kong_paper_final.pdf.

61 Friedberg, *Getting China Wrong*, pp. 48–83.

62 “Message to Compatriots in Taiwan.”

talist Marxist roots and an inherent Leninist drive to eliminate political rivals, the CCP by its nature appears incapable of persuading Taiwan's democratic, capitalist, and Western-aligned society to willingly enter any form of political union, but neither can it allow an independent Taiwan.⁶³ Given this inherent ideological conflict, a peacefully negotiated settlement of Taiwan's status between Beijing and Taipei is distant, and it may even be contingent on the end of the CCP's political monopoly, if not Beijing's political liberalization.⁶⁴

Beijing's Taiwan Policy: From Enticing Unification to Coercing Unification

Starting in the late 1970s, CCP policy was to facilitate peaceful political unification through increasing Taiwan's economic dependence on the mainland.⁶⁵ In 1995, building on the "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" and the Nine-Point Proposal, CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin presented his Eight Points, a strategy to achieve political unification through increasing cross-strait economic engagement and people-to-people contact.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, in response to Taiwanese movement toward independence over the 1990s and 2000s, Jiang and his successor, Hu Jintao, sought to deter Taiwanese independence rather than coerce unification, buying time for Beijing's economic inducements to achieve political results.

CCP leaders today probably recognize that this economic-focused strategy has failed. Taiwan has grown increasingly distant from mainland China since the 2014 Sunflower Student Movement, staged in protest of the Ma Ying-jeou administration's proposed cross-strait trade liberalization agreement. The failure of Ma, a KMT politician, to achieve this trade agreement revealed the limits of the KMT's power to tighten cross-strait ties and, more fundamentally, demonstrated that a cross-strait political resolution likely cannot be achieved by the KMT or any other Taiwanese political party.

63 In the early 1970s, in order to make Sino-American relations more politically palatable, U.S. officials changed a number of the terms they used to describe China's political system and leadership. References to "communism" were avoided; in subsequent decades, the U.S. government referred to China's leaders by their state title of "president" rather than their higher-ranking party title of "general secretary." These changes are an example of intentional self-deception to avoid admitting China is fundamentally an illiberal, Leninist party-state. To dispassionately analyze the prospects for a PRC–Taiwan political resolution, policymakers must understand the actors as they truly are. Richard McGregor, *The Party*, pp. 1–33. See also Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 17–45; 105–28.

64 Shelley Rigger, Lev Nachman, Chit Wai John Mok, and Nathan Kar Ming Chan, "Why Is Unification So Unpopular in Taiwan? It's the PRC Political System, Not Just Culture," *Brookings Institution*, February 7, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/07/why-is-unification-so-unpopular-in-taiwan-its-the-prc-political-system-not-just-culture/>.

65 Tanner Greer, "We Can Only Kick Taiwan Down the Road for So Long," *The Scholar's Stage*, December 29, 2022, <https://scholars-stage.org/we-can-only-kick-taiwan-down-the-road-so-far/>.

66 Jiang Zemin, "Continue to Promote the Reunification of the Motherland," *Embassy of the PRC in the U.S.*, January 30, 1995, http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zt/twwt/200310/t20031023_4912132.htm. For more background on China's attempt to achieve unification through economic engagement, see Tucker, *Strait Talk*, pp. 208–09.

With cross-strait economic momentum gone, Xi appears unsatisfied with patiently deterring independence and instead now actively seeks to coerce unification.⁶⁷ He has directed the PLA to be prepared to force unification by 2027, according to the director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.⁶⁸ The PLA routinely conducts coercive activities against Taiwan, including holding military exercises around Taiwan, circumnavigating the island with bomber patrols, and crossing the median line in the strait with military aircraft and naval vessels.⁶⁹ Over the last several years, the PRC has gradually increased the frequency and severity of these activities to slowly change the status quo of the security environment around Taiwan.

Beijing's blatant hostility toward Taiwan has violated the spirit of the communiques and the conditions that facilitated their negotiation. These acts directly contradict Washington's condition, clearly stated in the First Communique, that the reduction and eventual removal of U.S. forces from Taiwan was predicated on a reduction in cross-strait tensions.

A Real and Growing Military Threat

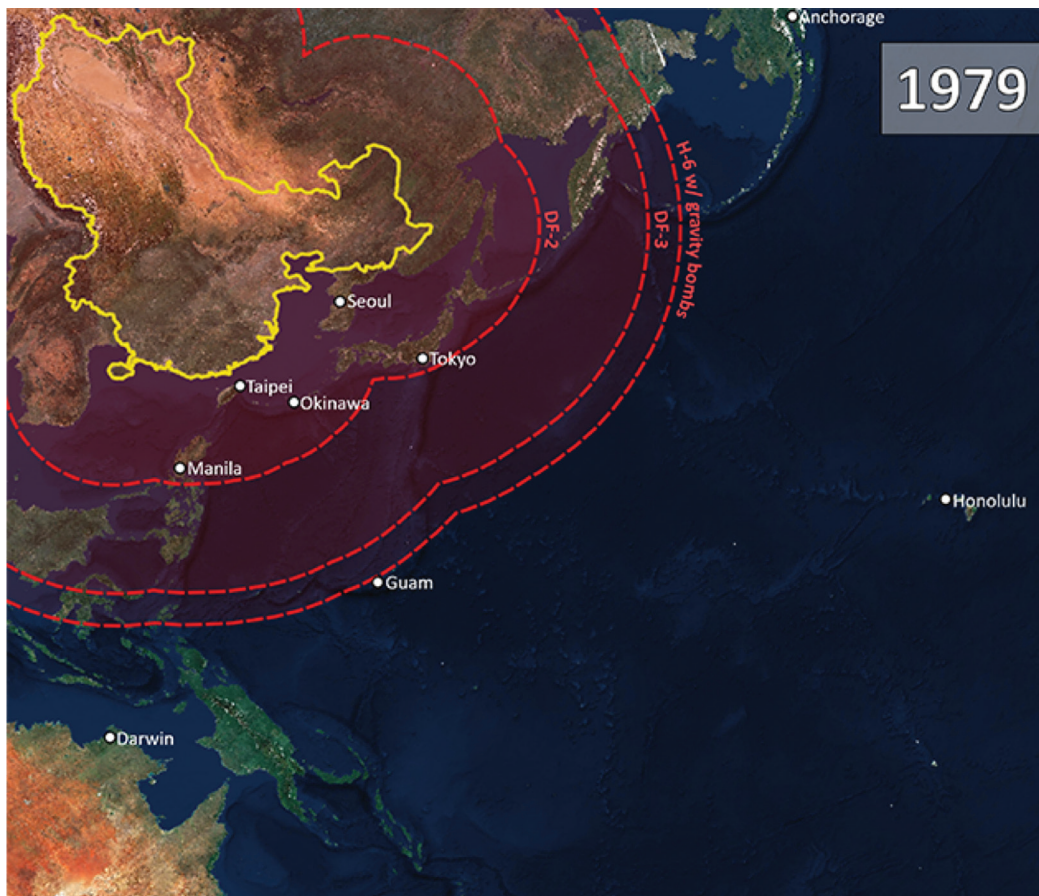
In contrast with the ever-remote prospect of a peaceful Beijing–Taipei political resolution, unification by force is an increasingly feasible option for PRC policymakers. China's military modernization will continue over the 2020s, and the PLA appears poised to have a formidable set of military capabilities by the early 2030s for regional contingencies and global power projection.⁷⁰ The difference in the PLA's power projection capabilities between 1979 (Figure 1) and 2030 (Figure 2) is stark. These forces could shift the Western Pacific military balance in Beijing's favor and enable it to contest the U.S. military's longstanding dominance of the high seas. In a Taiwan contingency, the PLA could use its theater-range reconnaissance–strike complex; growing power projection capabilities; and advantages in military capacity, theater nuclear forces, and geographic proximity to outlast isolated Taiwanese

67 John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, "Xi Jinping Says He Is Preparing China for War," *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2023, foreignaffairs.com/united-states/xi-jinping-says-he-preparing-china-war.

68 CIA Director William Burns stated: "We do know, as has been made public, that President Xi has instructed the PLA, the Chinese military leadership, to be ready by 2027 to invade Taiwan, but that doesn't mean that he's decided to invade in 2027 or any other year as well." Margaret Brennan, "Transcript: CIA director William Burns on 'Face the Nation,' Feb. 26, 2023," *CBS News*, February 26, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/william-burns-cia-director-face-the-nation-transcript-02-26-2023/>.

69 Wenxin Fan, Chun Han Wong, and Joyu Wang, "China Launches Live-Fire Drills, Missiles around Taiwan after Pelosi Visit," *Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-military-launches-live-fire-exercises-around-taiwan-11659600560>; Joyu Wang, "China Concludes Military Exercises Encircling Taiwan," *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2023; <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-concludes-military-exercises-encircling-taiwan-e4cd859a>; and Derek Grossman, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Logan Ma, and Michael S. Chase, *China's Long-Range Bomber Flights: Drivers and Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2018), pp. 20–25, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2567.html.

70 Although its economic growth rate has slowed considerably over the last decade, China is still the world's second largest economy. Beijing's wealth will permit it to further expand its various forms of power regionally and globally. "China V. America: How Xi Jinping Plans to Narrow the Military Gap," *The Economist*, May 8, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/china/2023/05/08/china-v-america-how-xi-jinping-plans-to-narrow-the-military-gap>.

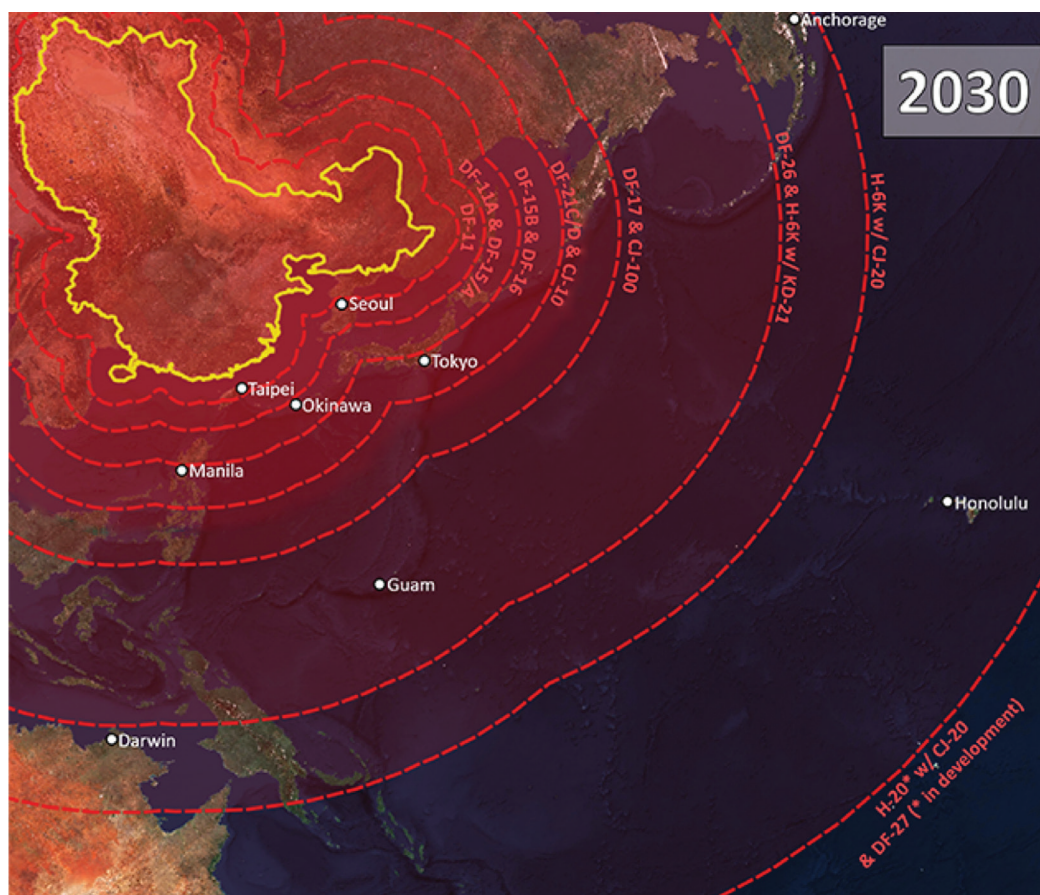
FIGURE 1: PLA LAND-BASED POWER PROJECTION, 1979

Although the range of these missiles and aircraft notionally extends out over the First Island Chain, these systems were inaccurate and had limited survivability in a potential conflict with the United States. Source: Created by Casey Nicastro using map data courtesy of [naturalearthdata.com](https://www.naturalearthdata.com) and Copernicus Sentinel-2; DF-2 and DF-3 ranges sourced from *Janes* database; H-6 combat radius sourced from Director of Central Intelligence, *China's Defense Policy and Armed Forces*, National Intelligence Estimate 13-4-80, September 9, 1980, p. II-11, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP82M00786R000104590001-0.pdf>.

forces and obstruct U.S. reinforcements and supplies from flowing into the region.⁷¹ The mere threat of U.S. military intervention to defend Taiwan may no longer be sufficient to deter Beijing.

71 Michael A. Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time: Enhancing Taiwan's Conventional Deterrence Posture* (Arlington, VA: Center for Security Policy Studies, 2018), pp. 49–61, <https://csps.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/A-Question-of-Time.pdf>; Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.–China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR392.html.

FIGURE 2: PLA LAND-BASED POWER PROJECTION, 2030



Ranges are approximate based on publicly available information. For readability, systems with similar ranges were combined on a single range ring. Source: Created by Casey Nicastro using map data courtesy of [naturalearthdata.com](https://www.naturalearthdata.com) and Copernicus Sentinel-2; ranges for CJ-100, DF-11A, DF-15A, DF-16, DF-21C/D, DF-17, and DF-26 sourced from *Janes* database; range for CJ-20 sourced from range for DF-27 sourced from *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2023), p.67, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>; range for KD-21 sourced from Thomas Nedwick, "China's H-6K Bomber Seen Firing Air-Launched Ballistic Missile For First Time," *The Warzone*, May 1, 2024, <https://www.twz.com/air/chinas-h-6k-bomber-seen-firing-air-launched-ballistic-missile-for-first-time>; H-6K combat radius sourced from Rick Joe, "How the Descendants of a 1950s Bomber Transformed China's Strike Reach," *The Diplomat*, November 18, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/how-the-descendants-of-a-1950s-bomber-transformed-chinas-strike-reach/>. The H-20 combat radius is estimated as half the range of a B-2A at maximum take-off weight. *Janes*, "China's H-20 Stealth Bomber Close to First Flight," July 13, 2022, <https://www.janes.com/osint-insights/defence-news/defence/chinas-h-20-stealth-bomber-close-to-first-flight>.

Looking forward, Chinese policymakers, bolstered by the PLA's increasing strength, may search for hints that Washington may seek a face-saving solution to a Taiwan conflict rather than endure the bloodshed of a prolonged great power war. PRC leaders could reasonably perceive Washington's strategic ambiguity approach as evidence of hesitance to defend Taiwan and an indication that a sufficiently severe PRC military threat could deter U.S.

military intervention.⁷² More startlingly, some U.S. policymakers and experts have made explicit statements that the United States is powerless to defend Taiwan.⁷³ Even if CCP leaders do believe U.S. policymakers are committed to intervening on Taiwan's behalf, Beijing may misperceive the extent of American will or believe it can reshape U.S. intentions before and during a conflict, especially after a certain level of U.S. attrition.

PRC leaders thus would not be delusional to think they can wait for U.S. leaders and public sentiment to become opposed to military intervention in the Taiwan Strait—or that they can create conditions that would give rise to that sentiment. Chinese leaders may even be motivated to perceive American half-heartedness and downplay a Taiwan conflict's negative consequences in order to rationalize a desire to use force against Taiwan.⁷⁴ Even a determined American effort to deter Beijing might thus fail to prevent conflict. At some point, Beijing may refuse to be deterred and instead initiate a conflict.⁷⁵

In sum, Washington's Taiwan policy remains based on a set of outdated geostrategic conditions and assumptions stemming from the 1970s. The new strategic environment—characterized by Beijing's revisionist behavior, China's strategic reversal on Russia policy, a flourishing democracy in Taiwan, the implausibility of a CCP–Taiwan political agreement, Beijing's increasingly coercive behavior toward Taiwan, and the real prospect of the PLA achieving unification by force—should prompt U.S. policymakers to shift America's strategic approach toward Taiwan.

72 PRC leaders have erroneously doubted American willingness to defend Taiwan in the past. For instance, during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, PRC leaders escalated their coercive military exercises near Taiwan, miscalculating that America would respond ambivalently. Instead, the Clinton administration responded by sending two aircraft carriers to the area around Taiwan. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "Strategic Ambiguity or Strategic Clarity?," in Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, ed., *Dangerous Strait: The U.S.–Taiwan-China Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 195–98.

73 For instance, in describing his experience in the Trump administration, former National Security Advisor John Bolton writes: "Trump was particularly dyspeptic about Taiwan, having listened to Wall Street financiers who had gotten rich off mainland China investments. One of Trump's favorite comparisons was to point to the tip of one of his Sharpies and say, 'This is Taiwan,' then point to the historic Resolute Desk in the Oval Office and say, 'This is China.' So much for American commitments and obligations to another democratic ally." Bolton, *The Room Where It Happened*, p. 313. Other sources close to Trump have presented similar accounts of his unwillingness to defend Taiwan. See Rogin, *Chaos Under Heaven*, p. 44. For an example of expert views, see Michael E. O'Hanlon, Ivan Kanapathy, Rorry Daniels, and Thomas Hanson, "Should the United States Change Its Policies toward Taiwan?" *Brookings Institution*, April 16, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/should-the-united-states-change-its-policies-toward-taiwan/>.

74 Human emotions and psychological needs motivate people to view the world in convenient and pleasing ways. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, pp. xxx–xc.

75 For instance, Chinese leaders could rationally assess that America's commitment to Taiwan's defense is not credible or that the military balance favors China, even if U.S. experts disagree. Alternatively, Beijing may believe it has no choice but to launch a conflict, perhaps due to impending unfavorable changes in the U.S.–China military balance, a lack of progress with Taiwan on political unification, or domestic Chinese political pressures. Yet another possibility is that China's authoritarian political system could produce a ruler who, out of personal conviction, egotism, or a zealotry for reclaiming China's rightful place in the world, is unyieldingly determined to conquer Taiwan.

CHAPTER 3

The End of the Standalone Era: An Obsolete 1970s-era U.S. Defense Construct

In line with its 1970s-era strategy, Washington withdrew its forces from Taiwan in 1979 and substantially curtailed U.S.–Taiwan military interaction. By default, after 1979, America implemented a standalone defense construct for Taiwan that embodied two major assumptions: either Taiwanese forces could deter a PLA invasion on their own, or, if necessary and so directed, American forces could intervene to defeat PLA forces. At the time, continued U.S. arms sales to Taiwan provided Taiwanese forces with a qualitative edge over the PLA and deterred a PRC attack. American military intervention to defend Taiwan remained a realistic option due to the U.S. military’s forward presence throughout the Western Pacific and its substantial qualitative advantages over China’s military.

Today, China’s decades-long military modernization program has overturned the cross-strait military balance and threatens the regional security equilibrium. China’s military has constructed a formidable long-range reconnaissance–strike network designed to deny U.S. forces the ability to enter and maneuver through the Western Pacific.⁷⁶ The PLA is rapidly increasing its ability to control the air and seas around China by reforming its command structure, developing integrated theater battle networks, and procuring modern air and naval platforms at a remarkable pace.⁷⁷ Over the next decade, even though China’s slower economic growth could hamper annual defense budget increases, the PLA will still enjoy

⁷⁶ Barry Watts, *The Evolution of Precision Strike* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2013), pp. 24–28. See also Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.–China Military Scorecard*, pp. 23–35.

⁷⁷ Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2021 (Arlington, VA: OSD, 2021), pp. 43–96, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/1/o/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>.

considerable advantages in capacity in the Western Pacific and dramatically erode other remaining U.S. and allied qualitative advantages.⁷⁸

In confronting the growing PLA threat to Taiwan, the U.S. national security community's predominant response has centered on two lines of effort regarding needed changes in American and Taiwanese military capabilities. First, Taiwan should pursue asymmetric defense using small, cheap, dispersed, and relatively survivable platforms and units to deny China military access to the seas and air around Taiwan.⁷⁹ With these capabilities, combined with the island's constraining geography, Taiwanese forces could severely hinder an attempt by Beijing to force unification. Second, the United States similarly needs to field small, dispersed, and survivable units along the First and Second Island Chains, as well as procure power projection platforms and standoff munitions that can strike targets from long ranges.⁸⁰

Despite Washington's rapidly growing anxiety over Taiwan, somehow unacknowledged is that this expert consensus still conforms to America's post-1979 standalone construct. It has been relatively easy for American policymakers to focus narrowly on how Taiwan's military can improve its own capabilities rather than on how U.S. and Taiwanese forces can increase peacetime operational-level coordination to prepare for combined wartime operations. Given the U.S. government's longstanding foreign military sales to Taiwan, recent U.S. efforts are largely changes of degree rather than of kind, and they thus carry minimal geopolitical and bureaucratic costs.

Worse, PLA modernization challenges the twin assumptions of Washington's post-1979 standalone defense construct, which is therefore becoming dangerously unviable. The U.S. objective to provide Taiwan with "a sufficient self-defense capability" through arms sales and defense services, as specified in the TRA, now appears unachievable. An exclusive focus on improving the standalone capabilities of American and Taiwanese forces, without greater U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination, is creating illogical gaps and contradictions in

78 Jack Bianchi, Madison Creery, Harrison Schramm, and Toshi Yoshihara, *China's Choices: A New Tool for Assessing the PLA's Modernization* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2022), pp. 71–75. <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/chinas-choices-a-new-tool-for-assessing-the-plas-modernization/publication/1>; and Eric Heginbotham et al., *U.S.–China Military Scorecard*, pp. 321–42.

79 DoD, *2022 National Defense Strategy*, p. 15, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>; Edward Wong and John Ismay, "U.S. Aims to Turn Taiwan into Giant Weapons Depot," *New York Times*, October 5, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/05/us/politics/taiwan-biden-weapons-china.html>; Jim Thomas, Iskander Rehman, John Stillion, *Hard ROC 2.0: Taiwan and Deterrence through Protraction* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2014), <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/hard-roc-2-0-taiwan-and-deterrence-through-protraction/publication/1>; and Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time*.

80 The 2018 National Defense Strategy proposed a "global operating model" composed of "contact, blunt, surge, and homeland" layers. DoD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2018), p. 7, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. See also U.S. Marine Corps, *A Concept for Stand-In Forces* (Arlington, VA: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, December 2021), https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Users/183/35/4535/211201_A%20Concept%20for%20Stand-In%20Forces.pdf.

the approaches of the two sides. Washington thus lacks a durable operational-level construct to defend Taiwan. This contradiction will only get worse as the PLA further modernizes.

Taiwan's Bygone Sufficient Self-Defense Capability

Taiwan's ability to independently defend itself from a PLA invasion was feasible from the 1950s into at least the 1990s, due to the Taiwanese military's technological superiority over the PLA.⁸¹ For instance, in one of several lopsided air battles during the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis, Taiwanese fighter pilots equipped with the latest in U.S. munitions technology—heat-seeking AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles—shot down ten Chinese fighter aircraft without suffering a single loss.⁸²

Today, due to the PLA's modernization, Taiwan's qualitative edge has seriously faded. American weapons sales have furnished Taiwan with some advanced capabilities, but Taipei lacks sufficient resources to match PLA capacity or to purchase, sustain, and protect the most advanced conventional platforms—such as fifth-generation fighter aircraft—in operationally relevant numbers.⁸³ Despite Washington's focus on supporting Taiwan's military modernization through U.S. arms sales and military aid, these efforts are already bumping up against various limitations, including U.S. defense industrial base constraints and years-long delivery wait times.⁸⁴

Taiwanese forces still possess many advantages in a potential conflict. Meteorological and oceanographic conditions in the Taiwan Strait are unfavorable to amphibious landings for much of the year, and there are a limited number of beaches where PLA forces could conceivably proceed ashore.⁸⁵ Forcible-entry operations with amphibious forces are one of the most complex and risky types of large-scale conventional military operations. Taiwan's dense urban and mountainous territory would restrict and canalize the movement of any PLA units that successfully land, providing ample opportunity for Taiwanese defenders to impede and counterattack Chinese forces.⁸⁶

81 Richard A. Bitzinger and Bates Gill, *Gearing Up for High-Tech Warfare? Chinese and Taiwanese Defense Modernization and Implications for Military Confrontation across the Taiwan Strait, 1995–2005* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 1996), pp. 43–47.

82 M. H. Halperin, *The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis: A Documented History* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1966), pp. 306–07, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2006/RM4900.pdf.

83 Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time*, pp. 49–61; Michael J. Lostumbo, David R. Frelinger, James Williams, and Barry Wilson, *Air Defense Options for Taiwan: An Assessment of Relative Costs and Operational Benefits* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), pp. 1–21, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1051.html; and Thomas, Rehman, and Stillion, *Hard ROC 2.0*, pp. 6–10, 29–32.

84 Alastair Gale, “Delayed U.S. Weapons Raise Taiwan's Vulnerability to Invasion,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/delayed-u-s-weapons-raise-taiwans-vulnerability-to-invasion-d98c6635>.

85 Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia* (Manchester, UK: Eastbridge Books, 2017), pp. 143–64.

86 Thomas, Rehman, and Stillion, *Hard ROC 2.0*, pp. 56–63.

Taiwan's military can leverage advances in precision-guided weaponry to pursue cost-effective asymmetric approaches against Chinese military operations. Individuals and small platforms can now carry and launch large numbers of relatively cheap short-range precision-guided munitions. Precision weapons and artillery launched from mobile land-based platforms and systems can contest China's access to the surrounding air and seas and thereby limit the PLA's ability to gain air and sea control and establish a lodgment in Taiwan. Similarly, shoulder-fired anti-tank and anti-air guided missiles could destroy or damage conventional PLA platforms, such as fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, landing craft, and armored vehicles, denying the PLA the ability to land, maneuver, and sustain substantial forces on Taiwan.⁸⁷ Overall, with favorable terrain and modern weaponry, Taiwan's military could conceivably force a standoff for a period of time.

Yet CCP legitimacy and Xi's own Chinese Dream are based in large part on Chinese nationalism, including eventual unification with Taiwan.⁸⁸ Even if the PLA experiences early setbacks, Beijing would find it nearly impossible to concede defeat lest it face domestic upheaval and potential regime collapse at home. China's massive resource advantages and vast defense industrial base would likely permit the PLA to backfill losses while it maintains a suffocating blockade around Taiwan, wears down Taipei's forces and finite stockpiles, and eventually overcomes operational obstacles to conquering the island.⁸⁹

Foreign countries would face severe operational challenges in attempting to sustain Taiwanese forces. Taiwan's geography and lack of strategic depth are not conducive to large-scale logistics operations to supply Taiwanese forces from abroad nor to shipping damaged equipment to allied countries for maintenance and repair. Taiwan's major ports along the north, west, and south would be in proximity to PLA land, air, and naval forces positioned along the Chinese coastline and in the Taiwan Strait. On the other side of Taiwan, a mountain range runs along the entire east coast. The few ports in the east are connected to the rest of Taiwan by a narrow, limited network of roads and railroads. PLA missile strikes against Taiwan's ports and other transportation infrastructure, combined with the island's mountainous terrain, would make cross-island movement challenging. Moreover, the PLA fields a large capacity of land, air, and sea-based PLA weapons platforms with enough range and endurance to patrol the entire periphery of Taiwan, threatening any U.S. or allied attempt to land supplies on the island. With the largest navy in the world, supplemented by its coast guard and maritime militia forces, Beijing could blockade the island and conduct offensive mining of Taiwanese harbors.

87 Thomas, Rehman, and Stillion, *Hard ROC 2.0*, pp. 33–63; Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time*, pp. 79–102; and Kanapathy, "Countering China's Use of Force," pp. 83–103.

88 Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," *China Daily*, October 18, 2017, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.

89 Michael A. Hunzeker, Enoch Wu, and Kobi Marom, "A New Military Culture for Taiwan," in Matt Pottinger, ed., *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2024), pp. 61–82. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1658-1.html

Potential allied operations to sustain Taiwanese forces starkly contrast with ongoing efforts to supply Ukraine. Ukraine enjoys strategic depth, long land borders, and numerous border crossings with several North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member countries. Poland, in particular, has become a vital sanctuary area for allied logistics and maintenance. After the full-scale war's outbreak, the Polish town of Rzeszów rapidly transformed into a major logistics hub through which various allied countries funnel supplies to Ukraine.⁹⁰ Similarly, a maintenance facility in Poland has been critical to the repair of heavy Ukrainian ground equipment, such as armored vehicles and artillery.⁹¹ Ukraine thus indirectly benefits from decades-long NATO efforts to build logistics interoperability and develop access, basing, and overflight arrangements among its member states. Taiwan's isolated geographic position and deficient multinational interoperability in the Western Pacific mean Ukraine-like allied sustainment operations for Taiwan would be much more challenging. Without robust allied support, Taiwan's finite quantities of weapons platforms and munitions—along with other critical military and civilian supplies, such as spare parts, fuel, and food—would eventually be whittled down.

In short, due to the limited capacity of Taiwanese forces and the difficulty of overseas wartime sustainment, Taiwan's prospects for survival are dim if it is fighting alone without foreign military intervention.⁹² Although still important, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan are no longer sufficient for Taiwanese forces to independently deter conflict and defeat a PLA invasion.

America's Bygone Ability to Defend Taiwan through Standalone Intervention

The second traditional American assumption is that standalone U.S. forces can arrive around and on Taiwan to prevent the PLA from taking the island. Recently, American defense experts have focused on the question of how Taiwanese forces can deny the PLA a quick victory and extend the conflict to allow time for U.S. intervention.⁹³ Yet America's standalone ability to defend Taiwan is now in serious doubt, even with ongoing U.S. military efforts to revise its Indo-Pacific forces, posture, and operational concepts.⁹⁴ Of the U.S. military's many operational challenges in the Western Pacific, this section focuses on four key problems: posture, maneuver, sustainment and coordination of dispersed forces, and standoff power projection (Figure 3).

90 Sharon Weinberger, "In Poland's 'J-Town,' Soldiers Move Arms to Ukraine as Russian Spies Try to Stop Them," *Wall Street Journal*, September 30, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/europe/in-polands-j-town-soldiers-move-arms-to-ukraine-as-russian-spies-try-to-stop-them-1ec71497>.

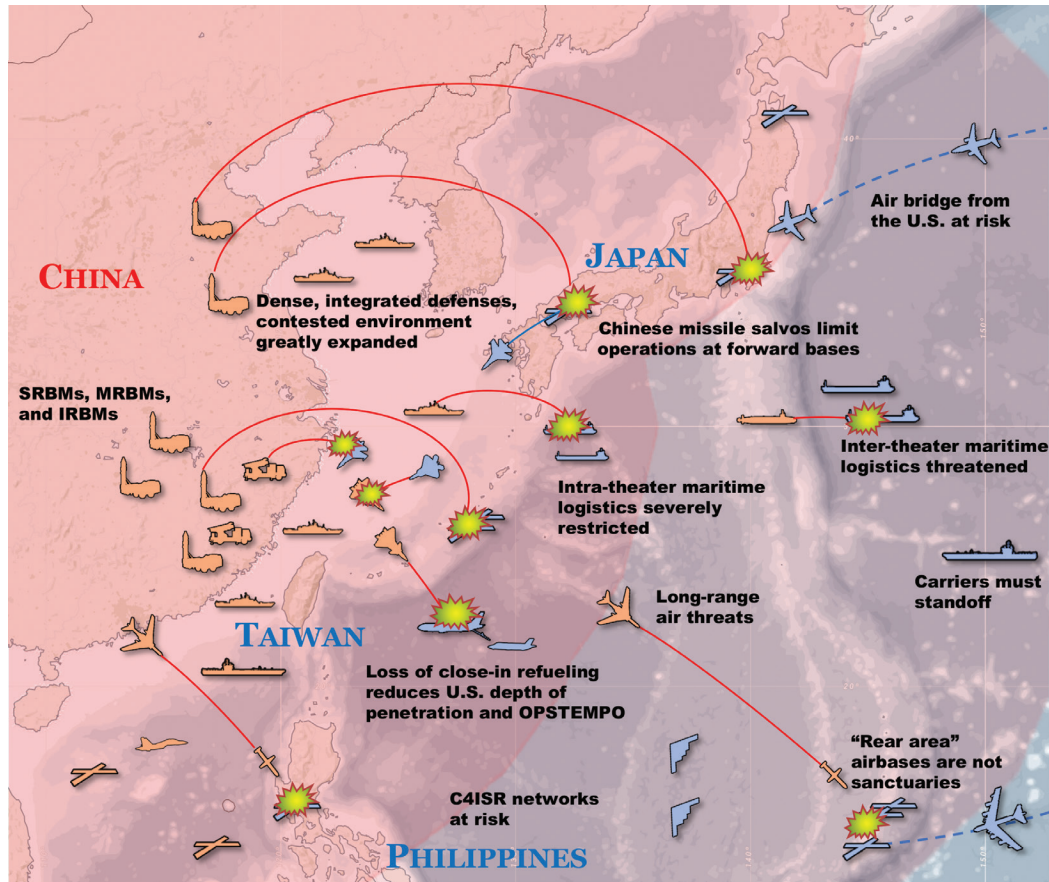
91 Karolina Jeznach and Joe Parkinson, "The Covert Polish Repair Shop Patching Up Ukrainian Arms," *Wall Street Journal*, January 28, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-covert-polish-repair-shop-patching-up-ukrainian-arms-11674920742>.

92 Thomas, Rehman, and Stillion, *Hard ROC 2.0*, p. 33.

93 For examples, see Thomas, Rehman, and Stillion, *Hard ROC 2.0*; and Hunzeker et al., *A Question of Time*.

94 Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.–China Military Scorecard*, pp. 321–338.

FIGURE 3: PRC CHALLENGE TO U.S. POWER PROJECTION OPERATIONS IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC



Created by CSBA.

An Overconcentrated, Fragile U.S. Posture

U.S. posture in the Western Pacific remains overconcentrated and fragile. U.S. forces are primarily based at a few critical nodes—Guam, Okinawa, southern Japan, the Greater Tokyo Area, South Korea, and other locations along the First and Second Island chains. Recently announced U.S. posture adjustments—such as basing and access agreements in Australia, the Philippines, Manus Island, and Palau—should improve force dispersal and survivability; yet these moves do not appear to dramatically reduce the U.S. military’s dependence on a few large nodes for sustaining protracted Indo-Pacific power projection operations.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Concerningly, U.S. military personnel levels in Japan’s Southwest Islands will continue to decrease over the next several years. “U.S. Marines’ Transfer to Guam from Okinawa to Start in December,” *Kyodo News*, June 16, 2024, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2024/06/15e08fbc36f7-us-marines-transfer-to-guam-from-okinawa-to-start-in-dec.html>.

In conflict, the PLA's large arsenal of ground-based ballistic and cruise missile forces, together with land-attack operations by air and sea forces, could conduct crippling strikes against these major regional U.S. bases.⁹⁶ Further, depending on the war's context, regional allies—including Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Australia—may not allow the U.S. military to use their territory to conduct offensive operations against PLA forces (either entirely or in part, such as against PLA forces in mainland China) or to facilitate the transit of Taiwan-bound U.S. forces.

The Department of Defense's recent emphasis on latent dispersion—expanding access and rotational agreements rather than establishing new permanent military bases—also appears to implicitly downplay the possibility of Chinese strategic surprise in an attack on Taiwan (or elsewhere in the Western Pacific). To make use of these new access agreements, Washington would require ample indicators and warnings of an impending PLA attack on Taiwan so U.S. forces have enough time to disperse from large bases. American policymakers may need persuasive evidence of China's intentions and military mobilization to convince allies and partners that U.S. combat units require immediate ad hoc access to rotational sites and other locations throughout their countries. Washington would also need sufficient warning to dispatch high-priority U.S. forces to Taiwan, deep within the reach of the PLA's reconnaissance-strike network, before the first shots are fired. Once U.S. forces are dispersed throughout the theater, they would need time to set up air and missile defenses, increase stockpiles of munitions and supplies, and prepare for counterstrikes against PLA forces. Unfortunately, the historical record indicates strategic surprise is a persistent risk.⁹⁷

Constraints on Intra- and Intertheater Maneuver of Combat Forces

Given the PLA's robust ability to strike fixed and mobile military targets throughout the Western Pacific, the U.S. military would be limited in its ability to move forces into and around the region, especially early in a Taiwan conflict. Taiwan's great distance from U.S. Indo-Pacific bases and the continental United States would complicate wartime transport, reinforcement, and sustainment of any U.S. forces in and around Taiwan. American

96 In the public domain, Chinese strategists refrain from advocating a first strike against U.S. forces, but they are increasingly comfortable and confident when discussing how the PLA could use its capabilities to destroy the U.S. military's Western Pacific basing network. Toshi Yoshihara, *Dragon against the Sun: Chinese Views of Japanese Seapower* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2020), p. 64.

97 Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), pp. 1–84. The threat of surprise attack and limited warning time may even be increasing. Chinese strategists believe technological advances are increasing the perceived importance of modern war's first mover advantages—the benefit gained by the side that attacks first in conflict. Chinese military writings argue seizing and maintaining information superiority—inhibiting the adversary's use of information and information systems while preserving one's own ability to do so—will be a decisive factor in future conflict. Seizing information superiority early would create favorable cascading effects that enhance one's own operations while degrading adversary operations. 肖天亮 [Xiao Tianliang], ed., *战略学 [Science of Military Strategy]* (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2020), pp. 279–80. For a Western perspective on how ongoing changes in the character of warfare maintain, if not increase, the possibility of strategic surprise, see Wayne P. Hughes, Jr., and Robert Girrier, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations*, 3rd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), pp. 189–91.

personnel and equipment conducting trans-Pacific journeys to Taiwan would be susceptible to PLA raids at sea and would face a dense threat environment within the Second Island Chain.⁹⁸

To solve this challenge, the U.S. military appears focused on creating temporary windows in which its forces could maneuver in theater and undertake operations to support Taiwan's defense.⁹⁹ But the PLA's local advantages and formidable military capabilities—including layered air defense systems, large number of advanced land-based theater missiles, deep inventory of modern and legacy fighter and bomber aircraft, redundant network of air and naval bases, and vast naval fleet designed for conflict in littoral East Asia—would encumber the U.S. military's ability to readily access and transit the Western Pacific in large numbers during a Taiwan conflict, even given highly favorable assumptions about American qualitative advantages.¹⁰⁰ Complementary nonkinetic and kinetic attacks against U.S. logistical and communications networks in Hawaii, the continental United States, and space could extend China's operational reach and slow the flow of U.S. reinforcements and supplies to the region.

Challenges of Sustaining and Coordinating Dispersed Forces in a Vast Theater

Recognizing these shortcomings in posture and maneuver, the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy argued for a peacetime blunt layer composed of dispersed forces that can survive and fight from a conflict's outset until reinforcements can eventually arrive in theater.¹⁰¹ The U.S. military is slowly transitioning its Indo-Pacific posture from a small number of highly vulnerable concentrated hubs to a more distributed and survivable footprint. Similarly, America's military services are developing new operational concepts featuring dispersed units that are integrated through information networks and concentrate force using medium- and long-range cross-domain fires.¹⁰² Efforts to improve survivability are rational

98 One press report indicates U.S. forces are training to land on Taiwan during a potential conflict. Drew F. Lawrence, "Defending a Mock Invasion of Taiwan Signals Shift for Army Special Operations after Years of Counterinsurgency," *Military.com*, April 29, 2023, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/04/29/defending-mock-invasion-of-taiwan-signals-shift-army-special-operations-after-years-of.html>.

99 Philip S. Davidson, "Statement of Admiral Philip S. Davidson, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture," p. 9, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_03-09-21.pdf.

100 Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.–China Military Scorecard*, pp. 321–42.

101 DoD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, p. 7.

102 Each U.S. military service is pursuing its own military concepts, each of which generally features dispersed yet integrated units that can concentrate force and conduct cross-domain fires. These concepts include the U. S. Army's Multi-Domain Operations, U.S. Air Force's Agile Combat Employment, the U.S. Navy's Distributed Maritime Operations, the U.S. Marine Corps' Littoral Operations in Contested Environments and Expeditionary Advanced Basing Operations, and the Space Force's nascent space power concepts. Attempting to stitch these respective service concepts together is the Joint Warfighting Concept and the Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) concept, which are being led by the OSD, the Joint Staff, and other DoD offices. For a detailed summary of ongoing service and joint concept development, see Thomas G. Mahnken, Evan Braden Montgomery, and Tyler Hacker, *Innovating for Great Power Competition: An Examination of Service and Joint Innovation Efforts* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2023), pp. 39–50, 61–69.

and necessary, yet dispersing combat forces comes at a great cost in operational effectiveness, especially in force sustainment and coordination.

Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. military has been accustomed to operating in permissive environments—such as the Middle East, the Balkans, and Central Asia—with largely uncontested supply lines stretching back to the United States. In contrast, supplying isolated and distributed units in wartime across a vast theater (Figure 4) in a conflict against the world’s largest navy would be taxing for a capacity-constrained U.S. logistics fleet designed for peacetime efficiency.¹⁰³ To some extent, the U.S. military is attempting to address contested wartime logistics. For instance, U.S. Marine Corps logisticians now argue frontline units in future conflicts would need to sustain themselves through “21st-century foraging,” a process in which units obtain supplies from local markets, rather than through supply lines stretching back to the United States. This is likely a necessary and valuable effort, and it reflects a millennia-old approach of expeditionary armies that seek to live off the land. But this concept is a highly concerning sign of the strategic risks and uncertainties of dispersion and the extent to which frontline units would be cut off from steady resupply of critical items—such as munitions, military fuels, and spare parts—that cannot be sourced from local markets.

FIGURE 4: DISTANCES ACROSS THE PACIFIC



Created by CSBA.

103 Timothy A. Walton, Harrison Schramm, and Ryan Boone, *Sustaining the Fight: Resilient Maritime Logistics for a New Era* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019), <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/sustaining-the-fight-resilient-maritime-logistics-for-a-new-era>.

Dispersed, isolated forces across a broad theater would also face coordination challenges in attempting to concentrate firepower against the PLA's large capacity of platforms and units. To connect widely distributed forces conducting complex operational concepts, the U.S. military services are ambitiously pursuing the development of multidomain theater battle networks under the umbrella term of Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2). Yet the U.S. military's primary JADC2 programs—including the Air Force's Advanced Battle Management System, the Navy's Project Overmatch, and the Army's Project Convergence—are long-term efforts that are still early in their development. Experts have noted several problems with JADC2 programs, including incomplete requirements, dependence on immature technologies, innovation-stifling overcentralization, short-term underfunding, and uncertain long-term costs and affordability.¹⁰⁴ Further, the PLA's emphasis on seizing information dominance through cyber, space, and electromagnetic operations at a conflict's outset signals that U.S. theater battle networks—the means of coordinating dispersed forces over vast distances—would probably be a high-value target subject to intense, persistent assault. There is still reason to be optimistic that service-level JADC2 efforts will eventually deliver results;¹⁰⁵ nonetheless, command and control problems, combined with the logistics challenges above, risk reducing U.S. operational effectiveness even if survivability is addressed. Chinese military experts explicitly recognize the logistical and battle network weaknesses of emerging U.S. operational concepts and are proactively developing ways to exploit them.¹⁰⁶

Limitations of Standoff Power Projection

Some defense analysts view power projection forces based outside the theater as the U.S. military's primary means of overcoming China's anti-access/area denial threat and the sustainment and coordination problems of in-theater forces.¹⁰⁷ Yet a protracted conflict with China cannot be fought primarily by stand-off forces conducting long-range strikes. Production of long-range munitions is costly and time intensive, existing inventories are

104 Travis Sharp and Tyler Hacker, *Big Centralization, Small Bets, and the Warfighting Implications of Middling Progress: Three Concerns about JADC2's Trajectory* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2023), <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/big-centralization-small-bets-and-the-warfighting-implications-of-middling-progress-three-concerns-about-jadc2s-trajectory/publication/1>; U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Battle Management: DoD and Air Force Continue to Define Joint Command and Control Efforts* (Washington, DC: GAO, 2023), pp. 9–14, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-105495.pdf>; and Bryan Clark and Dan Patt, *One-Size-Fits-None: Overhauling JADC2 to Prioritize the Warfighter and Exploit Adversaries' Weaknesses* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2022), pp. 9–14, https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Clark%20Patt_One%20Size%20Fits%20None.pdf.

105 One report notes that these programs remain promising because they are generally focused on the Western Pacific threat environment, feature proactive leadership involvement, and display evidence of successful experimentation efforts. Mahnken, Montgomery, and Hacker, *Innovating for Great Power Competition*, pp. 50–59.

106 Mark Cozad, Jeffrey Engstrom, Scott W. Harold, Timothy R. Heath, Sale Lilly et al., *Gaining Victory in Systems Warfare: China's Perspective on the U.S.–China Military Balance* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023), pp. 153–60.

107 Jack Detsch, "Pentagon Faces Tense Fight over Pacific Pivot," *Foreign Policy*, June 7, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/07/biden-pivot-china-pentagon/>.

woefully insufficient for a protracted high-intensity conflict, and the shrunken post-Cold War U.S. defense industrial base is unprepared for wartime mass production.¹⁰⁸ Further, given the substantial rocket propellant requirements for long-distance flight, long-range munitions are large and heavy. This strains the payload capacity limits of ships, aircraft, and other weapons platforms. In general, a platform's maximum strike capacity, as measured by warhead weight, is much smaller when configured for long-range strikes rather than short- or medium-range ones.¹⁰⁹

Platform capacity constraints are compounded by distance and logistical challenges. U.S. platforms would require long intervals to return to faraway ports and bases, reload, and reenter the fight. The PLA's dense anti-access/area-denial network would push out the aerial refueling operations of vulnerable large-signature tanker aircraft, further exacerbating range, payload capacity, and operational tempo issues. Even stealthy long-range strike platforms that can penetrate contested airspace to deliver short-range or direct-attack munitions, such as the forthcoming B-21 bomber, would be limited by their small numbers and the slow operational tempo imposed by operating from distant sanctuary-like bases (e.g. Hawaii, Alaska, the continental United States, and perhaps Australia). Although standoff capabilities have valuable roles to play, a U.S. military optimized for long-range strike by stand-off forces may not have enough strike capacity to defeat a numerically superior PLA force with short supply lines in a protracted conflict over Taiwan.¹¹⁰

U.S.–Taiwan Operational-Level Coordination Is Necessary for Deterrence and Warfighting

The standalone defense construct's persistence has led American strategists and policy-makers to focus on improving the respective concepts and capabilities of U.S. and Taiwanese

108 Tyler Hacker, *Beyond Precision: Maintaining America's Strike Advantage in Great Power Conflict* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2023), pp. 10–12, 42–45, 51–53, 65–66; and Alistair MacDonald, Doug Cameron, and Dasl Yoon, "The West Badly Needs More Missiles—But the Wait to Buy Them Is Years Long," *Wall Street Journal*, January 3, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/missiles-demand-threats-wait-to-buy-them-is-years-long-3332c151>. For instance, in a set of 25 Taiwan wargames conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the U.S. military "expended its global LRASM inventory within the first few days in all scenarios." Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, *The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023), p. 136, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/230109_Cancian_FirstBattle_NextWar.pdf?VersionId=WdEUwJYWlySMPIr3ivhFolxC_gZQuSOQ.

109 Hacker, *Beyond Precision*, pp. 47–50, 53–56.

110 Despite the substantial problems above, the development of modular munitions and revised operational concepts that reduce munitions expenditure rates may offer ways of ameliorating these challenges. See Gordon Lubold, "The U.S. Military Relies on One Louisiana Factory. It Blew Up," *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-u-s-military-has-an-explosive-problem-6e1a1049>; Tyler Hacker, "Money Isn't Enough: Getting Serious about Precision Munitions," *War on the Rocks*, April 24, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/04/money-isnt-enough-getting-serious-about-precision-munitions/>.

forces.¹¹¹ Western analysis is now reaching a point of exasperation with little marginal benefit. American experts have debated potential Taiwanese asymmetric denial (“porcupine”) capabilities for over a decade. Analysts frequently address unresolved (and perhaps irresolvable) U.S. and Taiwanese disagreements over which Taiwanese capabilities should be considered asymmetric and the appropriate balance between symmetric and asymmetric capabilities for Taiwan. Moreover, given that a military’s force structure evolves slowly—with platform life cycles measured in decades, not years—American and Taiwanese platforms and equipment can change only so quickly.

Woefully little American and Taiwanese expert attention has been paid to how existing and prospective American and Taiwanese capabilities would be effectively employed together in likely operational scenarios. This is creating illogical gaps and contradictions in the approaches of the two sides. Defending Taiwan from a PLA assault would inherently involve American and Taiwanese forces operating simultaneously in the same battlespace. A lack of U.S.–Taiwan combined planning, command and control, and operational standardization would exacerbate wartime operational challenges, instill strategic and operational hesitancy, endanger the safety of American and Taiwanese personnel, and constitute a lost opportunity to maximize U.S. and Taiwanese capabilities.

Enhancing U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination—as detailed in Chapter 5—offers a means of overcoming these deficiencies of the standalone defense construct. Through closer coordination with the U.S. military, Taiwan could buttress its local military capacity and mitigate its sustainment limitations. Meanwhile, American forces could better leverage Taiwan’s location as a frontline state in order to alleviate the U.S. military’s shortcomings in posture, maneuver, sustainment and coordination, and standoff power projection.

In sum, standalone U.S. and Taiwanese force modernization and preparedness efforts are now insufficient for credible U.S. deterrence and warfighting strategies for Taiwan’s defense. America’s interest in preserving cross-strait peace calls for a new U.S. defense strategy and operational-level construct grounded in the current security environment and the requirements for deterrence and warfighting against China’s modern military.

111 Improvements to standalone U.S. and Taiwanese forces have already received extensive attention from other experts and thus are not the main focus of this report. See Thomas, Rehman, and Stillion, *Hard ROC 2.0*; Hunzeker et al., *Question of Time*; Frelinger, Williams, and Wilson, *Air Defense Options for Taiwan*; Ian Easton, Mark Stokes, Cortez A. Cooper, III, and Arthur Chan, *Transformation of Taiwan’s Reserve Force* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1757.html; Russell Hsiao, “Taiwan’s Bottom-Up Approach to Civil Defense Preparedness,” *Global Taiwan Brief* 7, no. 19, pp. 1–3 <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/09/taiwans-bottom-up-approach-to-civil-defense-preparedness/>; and Gabriel Dominguez, “Taiwan Civil Defense Groups Push for More Resilience as China Threat Grows,” *Japan Times*, January 12, 2024, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/01/12/asia-pacific/social-issues/taiwan-civil-defense-groups/>.

CHAPTER 4

Reframing America's Strategic Approach to Taiwan

The history of U.S.–PRC–Taiwan relations is complicated, but the enduring core of Washington's approach toward Taiwan since at least 1954 can be simplified into one solitary principle: the United States will maintain a stable cross-strait military balance until Taiwan's status can be peacefully resolved. This short phrase contains the essential elements of U.S. policy: Taiwan's status is undetermined, Taiwan's status should be resolved through peaceful means instead of coercion or war, and the United States will take the necessary actions to stabilize the cross-strait military balance until peaceful resolution occurs.

Today's U.S. policymakers have publicly reaffirmed that America values regional peace. Yet the United States can no longer maintain a stable balance of power around Taiwan simply through the standalone defense construct. New operational-level U.S. military activities—such as U.S.–Taiwan interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence on Taiwan—are required to maintain a credible deterrent and warfighting posture. The U.S. government should thus reframe its defense strategy toward Taiwan—under a strategic approach this report calls *peaceful resolution*—to catalyze implementation of new operational-level efforts critical to maintaining stability until Beijing and Taipei can peacefully resolve Taiwan's status.

Peaceful Resolution: Explicitly Prioritize Peace

To enable proactive, credible, and sufficient maintenance of the military balance while signaling America's limited security aims to Beijing, the defense strategy of *peaceful resolution* entails three core components:

- A strategic aim of America's defense policy is preserving a stable regional order in the Western Pacific, including the maintenance of peace and stability around Taiwan until Taiwan's status can be peacefully resolved by Beijing and Taipei.

- Given that Taiwan’s self-defense capabilities are no longer sufficient to maintain a stable cross-strait balance of power, the U.S. government will undertake the ways, with sufficient means, required to maintain regional order and balance the PRC’s military threat to Taiwan until the territory’s future can be peacefully resolved. Washington will implement militarily necessary actions even if PRC policymakers could interpret them as violating the PRC’s sovereignty claim over Taiwan.
- The United States does not support unilateral changes by either Beijing or Taipei to resolve Taiwan’s status. Taiwan’s status is undetermined, and Washington continues to encourage Beijing and Taipei to peacefully resolve that question themselves.

Catalyze U.S.–Taiwan–Allied Operational-Level Coordination

Unlike strategic ambiguity, *peaceful resolution* directly and accurately reflects America’s enduring policy that it will maintain stability until Taiwan’s status is peacefully resolved. *Peaceful resolution* thus is not an abandonment of past policy. Rather, within the ambiguous and contradictory history of U.S. policy toward Taiwan, *peaceful resolution* is a modest yet essential shift in emphasis that would facilitate new U.S. and allied actions necessary to credibly deter Beijing and sustain a favorable balance of power until Taipei and Beijing can peacefully settle Taiwan’s future.¹¹²

Peaceful resolution sets a clear strategic goal—a stable regional order and military balance—for the American, Taiwanese, and allied national security bureaucracies to strive toward as they develop deterrence and warfighting strategies for Taiwan. Actionable, top-level guidance from the president and senior policymakers would reduce embedded bureaucratic hesitancy and concern about contradicting historical documents and statements that have in fact already been invalidated by Beijing’s increasingly aggressive behavior and military modernization. In U.S. government discussions, potential policy options—including U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. posture in Taiwan—can be evaluated on whether they are necessary to credibly implement America’s deterrence and warfighting strategies.

Focus on Upholding Peace, Not on Settling Taiwan’s Political Status

Peaceful resolution is not an attempt to settle Taiwan’s political status or instigate unilateral Taiwanese changes to the status quo. The U.S. government should maintain its existing diplomatic stance that Beijing and Taipei should peacefully resolve the issue of Taiwan’s status and avoid unilateral actions (e.g., a PRC invasion of Taiwan or a Taiwanese declaration

¹¹² As Nancy Bernkopf Tucker explains, strategic ambiguity’s “parameters had been expanded and contracted on various occasions.” Tucker, “Strategic Ambiguity or Strategic Clarity?,” p. 195. As Tucker further details, after the Second Communique, many American “restrictions built into the new U.S.–Taiwan relationship were *self-imposed* and incremental, designed on the U.S. side to convert normalization understandings into reality” (emphasis added). Tucker, *Strait Talk*, p. 126.

of independence) to change the status quo. For now, this position satisfies Beijing and Taipei's minimum requirements for continued peace. Although Chinese policymakers would be irritated by *peaceful resolution*, U.S. military capabilities would incentivize Beijing to forestall military action in hopes that more favorable circumstances would develop in the future. Meanwhile, Taiwan's people are generally satisfied with the political status quo and prioritize the avoidance of conflict over *de jure* independence.

American military efforts that undermine the PRC's sovereignty claim over Taiwan should only be taken if they are critical to maintaining a stable military balance. Any action beyond this threshold is militarily unnecessary and would be needlessly provocative toward Beijing. For Washington, this is simply an extension of current policy. For instance, since 1979, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan demonstrate the willingness of U.S. policymakers to implicitly undermine the PRC's sovereignty claim when deemed necessary to preserve peace.

Bypass the Clarity Versus Ambiguity Debate

In recent years, Washington has been trapped in debate between maintaining the *de facto* policy of strategic ambiguity and declaring so-called "strategic clarity," a proposed U.S. policy statement that "makes explicit that the United States would respond to any Chinese use of force against Taiwan."¹¹³

On the one hand, several American commentators have argued the U.S. government should avoid a new strategic-level commitment to Taiwan's defense and instead discreetly pursue operational-level options to improve Taiwan's defenses.¹¹⁴ Such arguments pretend policy guidance and bureaucratic action can be artificially separated. A sprawling bureaucracy like the Pentagon—let alone the broader U.S. government—is uncoordinated and gridlocked without guidance from the president and senior policymakers.

On the other hand, clarity is an illusion.¹¹⁵ Even in America's treaty alliances, clarity is not feasible because it is impossible to commit future political leaders to act (or not act) under

113 Recent debate on strategic clarity started with Richard Haass and David Sacks, "American Support for Taiwan Must Be Unambiguous," *Foreign Affairs*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/american-support-taiwan-must-be-unambiguous>, but the concept of strategic clarity has been discussed by U.S. experts for decades. Tucker, "Strategic Ambiguity or Strategic Clarity?," pp. 186–211.

114 Jude Blanchette and Ryan Hass, "The Taiwan Long Game: Why the Best Solution Is No Solution," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-long-game-best-solution-jude-blanchette-ryan-hass>.

115 As Thomas Schelling writes, "most commitments are ultimately ambiguous in detail." Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 67. Further, it is simply impossible to predict one's future behavior. See Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, pp. 273–74. In the case of Taiwan, an attempt to communicate a policy of "strategic clarity" may be undone by ambiguity in the policy's details, such as whether and how the United States plans to respond to PRC gray zone actions against Taiwan and/or seizure of an offshore island.

hypothetical situations.¹¹⁶ Moreover, simply declaring an American willingness to defend Taiwan is not sufficient to deter a PLA attempt to force unification. PRC leaders must also believe American and Taiwanese military capabilities realistically meet the operational-level requirements of Taiwan's defense.¹¹⁷

Peaceful resolution sidesteps the misleading black-and-white debate between clarity and ambiguity, focusing instead on strengthening American resolve and capabilities. A renewed American strategic focus on stabilizing the cross-strait balance of power, coupled with new operational-level initiatives to improve deterrence and warfighting, would publicly signal Washington's resolve to defend Taiwan in ways on par with U.S. alliance commitments. *Peaceful resolution* would thus counter the idea that a declining America will shrink from the defense of Taiwan and be appeased by a mere face-saving exit in a prospective conflict.

Meanwhile, strategic ambiguity—both as a phrase and a mindset—should fade into the historical background. This unofficial concept reflects a bygone era in which Washington needed to restrain unilateral action by Taipei as much as by Beijing. Responsibility for abandoning this phrase lies with U.S. officials, the media, and the U.S. expert community. Although U.S. executive branch officials have largely avoided this informal term in official contexts, it is commonly used in the U.S. national security bureaucracy. Policymakers bear direct responsibility for shedding the hesitant mindset of strategic ambiguity and publicly communicating a tightly linked ends—ways—means chain that embodies a proactive approach to maintaining a peaceful region and defending Taiwan.

Engage U.S. Allies in Preserving Peace around Taiwan

Peaceful resolution and a stronger U.S.–Taiwan defense relationship should work hand in hand with Washington's broader goal of building a stable Indo-Pacific balance of power that unites U.S. allies and partners in the region and beyond.

To date, America's restraint toward Taiwan and Taipei's international isolation have weakened allied resolve and clarity about Taiwan's security. Without a simpler and more practical strategic approach, America and its allies would be ceding valuable peacetime and wartime initiative to Beijing. Coordinating, transporting, commanding, and sustaining

116 For instance, Article 5 of the founding NATO treaty declares: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all." Although that statement appears straightforward, Article 5 then states that each NATO member "will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking...such action as it deems necessary." In other words, each state will decide whether and to what extent it will intervene. America's other defense treaties contain similar or even weaker language, merely requiring that Washington and the treaty ally consult in the event of an attack. "The North Atlantic Treaty, Signed April 4, 1949," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

117 Even if a declaration of clarity were feasible, clarity would be dangerous to U.S. credibility and freedom of action. A declaration of clarity would invite Beijing to use coercive actions short of armed conflict to probe and discredit American will. Perhaps counterintuitively, a degree of uncertainty about America's red lines and counterresponses may dissuade Beijing from initiating certain coercive actions.

a multinational force across an expansive maritime theater would be complicated and slow. Compared to NATO in Europe, there is no standing multilateral security organization in the Indo-Pacific that could coordinate a coalition among the United States and its regional allies and partners in a Taiwan contingency. U.S. and allied operations may encounter delays while resolving major questions such as U.S. wartime access to bases in Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Australia. An ad hoc multinational coalition would need to establish basic organizational and communications processes and to plan and command complicated combat and logistical operations, all while the PLA executes its preplanned operations to take Taiwan.¹¹⁸ Although these delays could be partially ameliorated through peacetime diplomatic mechanisms, Taiwan's international diplomatic and military isolation, if unchanged, would severely hamper ally and partner response times and operational-level coordination.

A clearly stated U.S. strategic approach—*peaceful resolution*—is necessary to motivate hesitant allies to join the American and Taiwanese governments in preparing for Taiwan's combined defense. *Peaceful resolution*'s emphasis on stability and deterrence should resonate with frontline allies—including South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Australia—that seek to preserve peace and avoid a potentially devastating conflict. President Joe Biden's repeated statements that the United States would come to Taiwan's aid if attacked by the PRC offer evidence of how straightforward declarations of American willingness—aided by Beijing's belligerence—can drive major changes in allied behavior. Recently, senior Japanese, Australian, and Filipino civilian leaders have stated that their own security depends on peace in the Taiwan Strait, signaling that political limits on allied involvement in Taiwan's defense are easing.¹¹⁹ Given this shift in attitudes, Washington and its allies should work individually and collectively to codify shared sentiment into allied strategy and planning.

118 For instance, the United States ran into several difficulties with providing military support to Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion, including bureaucratic challenges in sending real-time targeting information to Ukrainian forces. See Warren P. Strobel and Michael R. Gordon, "Biden Administration Altered Rules for Sharing Intelligence with Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-administration-altered-rules-for-sharing-intelligence-with-ukraine-11646744400>.

119 "U.S.–Japan Joint Leaders' Statement: U.S.–Japan Global Partnership for a New Era," *The White House*, April 16, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/16/u-s-japan-joint-leaders-statement-u-s-japan-global-partnership-for-a-new-era/>; Ben Blanchard, "Former PM Abe Says Japan, U.S. Could Not Stand by if China Attacked Taiwan," *Reuters*, December 1, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/former-pm-abe-says-japan-us-could-not-stand-by-if-china-attacked-taiwan-2021-12-01/>; Demetri Sevastopulo, "Australia Vows to Help U.S. Defend Taiwan from Chinese Attacks," *Financial Times*, November 13, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/231df882-6667-4145-bc92-d1a54bcfc333>; and "Marcos says 'hard to imagine' Philippines can avoid Taiwan conflict," *Nikkei Asia*, February 12, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xhXIsimBgI>.

CHAPTER 5

Developing U.S.–Taiwan Operational-level Coordination

Under the standalone defense construct, American and Taiwanese military operations are bifurcated. The U.S. government’s operational-level objectives are to provide Taiwan with the arms and services necessary for a “sufficient self-defense capability” and, in a separate, concurrent line of effort, to develop the U.S. military forces and posture required to defend Taiwan, if necessary. Were war to break out today, the American and Taiwanese militaries would be engaging in the military equivalent of parallel play. U.S. and Taiwanese units would attempt to defeat Chinese forces largely on independent terms, enacting their own separate plans and operations. This is a recipe for failure.

China’s military modernization and the operational-level requirements of deterrence and warfighting around Taiwan now compel greater U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination. The practical goal of this effort is to ensure U.S., Taiwanese, and allied forces can effectively conduct combined operations in peacetime and wartime to deter and, if necessary, defeat a PLA campaign to capture Taiwan. Closer coordination provides a means for U.S. and Taiwanese forces to mitigate respective operational deficiencies, as detailed in Chapter 3, including Taiwan’s capacity and sustainment shortcomings and America’s limitations in posture, maneuver, sustainment and coordination, and standoff power projection. Moreover, through pursuing operational-level unity of effort, the American and Taiwanese militaries could exploit their combined combat power, better prepare for realistic Taiwan-related conflict scenarios, constrain the PLA’s ability to prey on operational disunity between U.S. and Taiwanese forces, and limit the costs of a prospective conflict.

Conducting Effective Combined Wartime Missions Requires Developing Interoperability in Peacetime

For the United States and Taiwan, conducting effective combined operations in wartime would require a substantial peacetime effort to develop interoperability. Despite China's rapid military modernization program and the challenges of modern coalition warfare, U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination and interoperability is sorely lacking. Since 1979, due to the standalone defense construct and Taiwan's international isolation, Washington and Taipei have largely avoided combined planning regarding strategy, operational concepts, force structure, and force posture for wartime contingencies.

American and Taiwanese defense policymakers and planners must determine the most effective means of coordinating their combined forces in prospective operations against the PLA. Various types of bilateral and multilateral interactions (e.g., new bureaucratic structures and processes for command and control, exchanges for consensus building and planning, and training and exercises to practice planned combined operations) would need to be initiated and expanded. Fortunately, the U.S. military routinely acts as a multinational operational coordinator and is capable of collaboratively developing U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability in preparation for U.S.-led coalition operations in wartime.¹²⁰

Defining and Measuring Interoperability

For simplicity, this report uses the term interoperability as shorthand to describe efforts aimed at ensuring unity of effort between multinational forces. Interoperability is traditionally a nebulous term lacking a standard technical definition. In common discussion, the term interoperability is often loosely applied to a range of areas, such as planning (either operational planning or force planning), command and control (peacetime or wartime), combined operations, technological integration, and personal relationships.

In this report, *interoperability* is defined as the ability for the militaries of two or more countries to plan, command, and sustain combined military operations in peacetime and wartime at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare.¹²¹ In practice, the interoperability of two or more militaries is measured on a spectrum rather than as a binary (i.e., yes or no). In the U.S. defense community, interoperability is often measured on a

120 *Multinational Operations*, Joint Publication 3-16, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 1, 2019, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_16.pdf; and *Commander and Staff Guide to Multinational Interoperability*, Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2020, <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2023/01/31/3dadfaa2/20-12.pdf>.

121 For other definitions or frameworks for interoperability, see “Interoperability: Connecting Forces,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, April 11, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84112.htm; *Interoperability*, Army Regulation 34-1, Department of the Army, p. 1, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN19606_AR34-1_FINAL.pdf; and Jeffrey Hormung, *Japan's Potential Contributions in an East China Sea Contingency* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2020) pp. 55–58, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA314-1.html.

three-step scale—deconfliction, coordination, and integration—with increasing levels of interaction, procedural standardization, and technological integration.¹²² Advancing along this scale usually requires a determined political, diplomatic, and military effort sustained by the partner militaries over years. A prolonged and concerted peacetime focus on building interoperability increases the likelihood that the partner militaries can mitigate the inherent difficulties of multinational operations in wartime.¹²³

Fundamental Interoperability Challenges in Multinational Warfare

Ad hoc coalition military operations involve numerous inefficiencies, barriers, and risks. Most prominently, each country within a coalition is typically unwilling to cede control over its sovereign forces, which hampers unity and results in multiple chains of command. Further, coalition partners face barriers posed by differences in language, organization, doctrine, experience, culture, personalities, and equipment.¹²⁴ Coalitions are particularly weak when the partner militaries lack a history of cooperation, have limited training and doctrine for multinational operations, field varied equipment and technology, and possess limited language and area expertise.¹²⁵ Coalition operations involving ground forces are particularly nettlesome. Sea and air forces tend to be more homogenous and experienced in interacting with foreign militaries, but land forces are composed of heterogenous units and equipment.¹²⁶

Put differently, states cannot easily aggregate their forces in wartime without prior operational-level coordination. These barriers can even result in coalition operations being less effective than unilateral ones.¹²⁷ To overcome these challenges, coalition partners usually strive to achieve unity of effort even if they cannot achieve unity of command or undertake complex combined operations. Meeting even this limited threshold can be arduous, especially when a coalition is formed ad hoc after a contingency has already erupted.

122 This scale is not standardized across the U.S. military. For instance, an alternative four-step scale—not integrated, deconflicted, compatible, integrated—is found in *Commander and Staff Guide to Multinational Interoperability*, pp. 77–83.

123 Nora Bensahel, “International Alliances and Military Effectiveness: Fighting alongside Allies and Partners,” in Risa A. Brooks and Elizabeth A. Stanley, eds., *Creating Military Power: The Sources of Military Effectiveness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 186–206; Juan Carlos Neves, “Interoperability in Multinational Coalitions: Lessons from the Persian Gulf War,” *Naval War College Review* 48, no. 1, 1995, pp. 50–62; Kelly A. Grieco, “Fighting and Learning in the Great War: Four Lessons in Coalition Warfare,” *Parameters* 48, no. 3, 2018, pp. 27–36; Kathleen McInnis, “Lessons in Coalition Warfare: Past, Present and Implications for the Future,” *International Politics Reviews* 1, December 2013, pp. 78–90.

124 *Multinational Operations*, p. I-11.

125 Bensahel, “International Alliances and Military Effectiveness,” pp. 199–200.

126 Robert W. Ricassi, “Principles for Coalition Warfare,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 1, Summer 1993, p. 65.

127 Bensahel, “International Alliances and Military Effectiveness,” pp. 187–90. Multinational operational-level military coordination therefore stands in stark contrast with various multilateral political and economic sanctions and other punitive measures that can be instituted somewhat rapidly in crisis, as evident in the immediate aftermath of Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

A Multinational Campaign to Defend Taiwan Faces Increasing Operational-Level Coordination Requirements

In a multinational response to a Taiwan contingency, the traditional challenges of coalition warfare are exacerbated by two ongoing changes in the character of war: the maturation of reconnaissance–strike networks and the rapidly expanding role of unmanned systems. Taken together, these two developments are increasing the requirements for operational-level coordination across domains at ever-greater distances. These changes further undercut Washington’s longstanding implicit assumption that standalone Taiwanese and American forces can defend Taiwan and highlight the increasingly grave risks America incurs by foregoing peacetime development of U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination.

The Increasing Range, Precision, and Speed of Reconnaissance–Strike Networks

First, coalition warfare in a Taiwan contingency would be increasingly risky due to the changing character of warfare and the geographic orientation of Taiwanese, American, and allied forces. Technological advancements in sensors, command and control networks, and precision munitions are facilitating operational integration between dispersed sensors and shooters and enabling precise strikes throughout an adversary’s operational depth.¹²⁸ Although the United States had a monopoly over these capabilities in the late Cold War, the world’s militaries have been catching up.

Over the last several decades, the PLA’s development of a long-range reconnaissance–strike network and related operational concepts has increasingly threatened the survivability of America’s Western Pacific bases and nonstealthy platforms and units. In response, the U.S. military services and, to an extent, Taiwan’s military, are emphasizing the fielding of smaller platforms and the development of concepts in which survivable platforms and units operate in a more dispersed manner while pursuing cross-domain fires.¹²⁹ Although these concepts stand to improve force survivability, they would severely complicate multinational deconfliction and coordination.

128 This is a consequence of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) that began in the 1960s and 1970s. For an in-depth study assessing the enablers of the RMA, see Andrew Krepinevich, *The Military-Technical Revolution: A Preliminary Assessment* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002), pp. 8–38; See also Watts, *Evolution of Precision Strike*, pp. 5–12; and Barry Watts, *Six Decades of Precision-Guided Munitions and Battle Networks* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2007), pp. 26–32.

129 U.S. Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030* (Arlington, VA: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 2020), <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/CMC38%20Force%20Design%202030%20Report%20Phase%20I%20and%20II.pdf>; *Advantage at Sea* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2020) pp. 13–14 <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/16/2002553074/-1/-1/0/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF>; and Drew Thompson, “Hope on the Horizon: Taiwan’s Radical New Defense Concept,” *War on the Rocks*, October 2, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/hope-on-the-horizon-taiwans-radical-new-defense-concept/>.

The challenges of multinational warfare between mature reconnaissance–strike complexes may become even more difficult in dense, geographically complex littoral environments. Coalitions often bypass interoperability issues by carving the battlefield into respective areas of operations, but the increasing range and multidomain capabilities of weapons platforms and munitions imply that future coalition partners in great power conflicts would be unable to concentrate on neatly divided operational areas. Further, the dramatic speed of modern missile warfare is increasing command and control requirements, which are a structural vulnerability of coalition campaigns.

In a Taiwan contingency, coalition coordination difficulties would be exacerbated by Taiwan’s geographic position as a small front-line littoral island surrounded by large air and maritime maneuver spaces. At only 245 miles long and 90 miles wide, Taiwan’s relatively small size and limited maneuverable terrain would complicate attempts to create respective areas of operation for members of a multinational force. Further, American and allied ground, air, and sea-based forces postured nearby to Taiwan’s north, east, and south (e.g., in Japan’s Southwest Islands, the Marianas, and the Philippines) would use platforms and munitions—likely to include thousands of unmanned systems—that cross over or near Taiwan to detect and strike PLA forces and infrastructure to Taiwan’s east. Similarly, PLA platforms and munitions may transit over or near Taiwan on their way to strike U.S. and allied targets, further muddying allied airspace coordination and air and missile defense operations.

The Burgeoning Role of Unmanned Systems in Modern Conflict

Second, unmanned systems, particularly in the air and maritime domains, are claiming an increasingly central role in modern reconnaissance–strike complexes and are developing a synergistic relationship with traditional strike capabilities.

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict provides an exceptional view of the emerging role of unmanned systems in wars between competing reconnaissance–strike complexes. Ukrainian forces field a diverse mix of unmanned aerial systems (UAS), primarily for ISR and strike missions, with platform ranges varying from five to several hundred kilometers. Although Ukrainian forces also benefit from U.S. space-based intelligence, UAS-based ISR is critical for timely, responsive operations by frontline units. UAS can either direct artillery to achieve precision strikes or launch munitions themselves.¹³⁰

To defend against Russian offensives and whittle down Russian combat power, Ukrainian forces have sought to conduct deep strikes against Russian logistics and command and control nodes, which are defended by a web of electronic warfare and air defense systems. To accomplish these missions, Ukrainian forces carefully sequence short- and long-range attacks.

130 Harry Halem, “Ukraine’s Lessons for Future Combat: Unmanned Aerial Systems and Deep Strike,” *Parameters* 53, no. 4, pp. 19–32, offers an exceptional contemporary analysis of evolving Ukrainian and Russian UAS operations.

Operations featuring short-range UAS are used to suppress or destroy Russian electronic warfare and air defense capabilities close to the front line, opening up permissive corridors for vulnerable, more expensive long-range systems, such as fixed-wing UAS, to strike distant high-priority targets.¹³¹ In short, there is an evolving collaborative relationship between short-range unmanned systems, which are relatively cheap and can be acquired at scale, and long-range strike systems, which are more expensive and available in smaller quantities.

To its credit, the U.S. military is seeking to capitalize on the growing importance of short-range attritable unmanned systems. A prominent example is the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Replicator Initiative, announced in 2023, which seeks to affordably achieve mass on the battlefield by acquiring "attritable autonomous systems at scale of multiple thousands, in multiple domains" by August 2025.¹³² The first stage of the Replicator Initiative is reportedly focused on procuring capabilities to defeat a PLA invasion of Taiwan.¹³³ The Department of Defense has not released details on the types of drones being procured under Replicator, but the initiative appears to focus on small expendable unmanned systems rather than the larger unmanned systems already being operated and developed by the services, such as Class 3 UAS, collaborative combat aircraft, large unmanned surface vessels, and extra-large unmanned underwater vehicles.¹³⁴ Likewise, Taiwan's government has accelerated investment in indigenous UAS production through its Drone National Team program, which seeks to produce thousands of military UAS of various sizes (Figure 5).¹³⁵ Taiwan is also procuring U.S.-manufactured UAS, including the MQ-9B and Switchblade

131 Halem, "Ukraine's Lessons for Future Combat," pp. 19–32.

132 Kathleen Hicks, "Emerging Technologies for Defense Conference & Exhibition," August 28, 2023, C-SPAN, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?530090-2/deputy-defense-secretary-emerging-technologies>; and Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, *Defense Budget Overview* (Washington, DC: DoD, April 4, 2024), pp. 4-20–4-21, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2025/FY2025_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf.

133 Sam LaGrone, "Pentagon Will Spend \$1B on First Round of Replicator Drones," *USNI News*, March 11, 2024, <https://news.usni.org/2024/03/11/pentagon-will-spend-1b-on-first-round-of-replicator-drones>. The hellscape concept advocated by Admiral Samuel Paparo, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, envisions using thousands of unmanned systems around Taiwan to counter a PLA assault. Josh Rogin, "The U.S. Military Plans a 'Hellscape' to Deter China from Attacking Taiwan," *Washington Post*, June 10, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/06/10/taiwan-china-hellscape-military-plan/>.

134 Stacie Pettyjohn, "Virtual Fireside: U.S. Air Force amidst Fiscal and Budgetary Uncertainty with the Hon. Frank Kendall III, Secretary of the Air Force," *Center for a New American Security*, November 13, 2023, <https://www.cnas.org/events/virtual-fireside-chat-the-hon-frank-kendall-iii-secretary-of-the-air-force-2>; Noah Robertson, "Replicator: An Inside Look at the Pentagon's Ambitious Drone Program," *Defense News*, December 19, 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2023/12/19/replicator-an-inside-look-at-the-pentagons-ambitious-drone-program/>; and Ronald O'Rourke, *Large Unmanned Surface and Undersea Vehicles: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 6, 2024), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45757/75>.

135 Yimou Lee, James Pomfret, and David Lague, "Inspired by Ukraine War, Taiwan Launches Drone Blitz to Counter China," *Reuters*, July 21, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/us-china-tech-taiwan/>.

300 (Figure 6).¹³⁶ Beyond aerial systems, Taiwan's military reportedly seeks to procure hundreds of unmanned maritime systems for ISR and strike missions.¹³⁷

FIGURE 5: TAIWAN'S MILITARY IS INTEGRATING UAS INTO KINETIC OPERATIONS



Taiwanese Army personnel from 1st CAB, 234th Mechanized Infantry Brigade practice integrating ISR from UAS with kinetic operations during a 2023 exercise. "The 1st CAB, 234th Mechanized Infantry Brigade, Conducted the 'Mechanized Infantry Task Force Combat Shooting' Examination," Republic of China Army Command Headquarters, November 24, 2023, <https://army.mnd.gov.tw/Article/Index/7334>.

Despite these capability improvements, the tight operational security surrounding the Replicator program and other U.S. military unmanned systems experimentation and the already limited U.S.–Taiwan operational-level integration suggest these U.S. and Taiwanese unmanned capabilities are not being developed with U.S.–Taiwan interoperability in mind.¹³⁸ Underscoring this gap in American thinking, one prominent U.S. think tank report advocates the deployment of hundreds of U.S. military unmanned vehicles around Taiwan to defeat a PLA invasion, yet its authors do not even raise the issue of deconfliction and

136 "Contracts for March 12, 2024," DoD, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Contracts/Contract/Article/3704846/>; and "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States: Switchblade 300 Anti-Personnel and Anti-Armor Loitering Missile System," *Defense Security Cooperation Agency*, <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/taipei-economic-and-cultural-representative-office-united-states-33>.

137 Lo Tien-pin, Hung Ting-hung, and Jonathan Chin, "Army Mulls Buying Sea Drones: Source," *Taipei Times*, March 10, 2024, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2024/03/10/2003814697>.

138 Rogin, "U.S. Military Plans a 'Hellscape';" Mallory Shellbourne and Sam LaGrone, "Navy Will Stand Up Lethal Drone Unit Later This Year, First Replicator USVs Picked," *USNI News*, February 14, 2024, <https://news.usni.org/2024/02/14/navy-will-stand-up-lethal-drone-unit-later-this-year-first-replicator-usvs-picked>; and Samuel Paparo, "WEST Conference," *YouTube*, February 14, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJOb6SLT9rQ&t=179s>.

coordination with Taiwanese forces that would almost certainly be operating within those same spaces.¹³⁹

FIGURE 6: TAIWAN IS PROCURING U.S.-MANUFACTURED UNMANNED SYSTEMS



Left: MQ-9B; Right: Switchblade 300. Sources: U.S. Air Force, <https://www.af.mil/News/Photos.aspx?igphoto=2000398487>; and Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6367999/1st-anglico-trains-with-uas>.

Developments in Reconnaissance–Strike Complexes and Unmanned Systems Increase U.S.–Taiwan Operational-Level Coordination Requirements

In a multinational campaign to defend Taiwan, operational decentralization across an expansive theater without adequate deconfliction and coordination risks strategic failure. A battlefield comprised of thousands of manned and unmanned systems conducting short- and long-range cross-domain fires would strain allied combined command and control and place allied forces at a disadvantage relative to the PLA.¹⁴⁰ For instance, Taiwan’s air defense and anti-ship systems would attempt to deny the PLA access to Taiwan’s surrounding areas at the same time that U.S. air and naval systems and various munitions would be transiting those same spaces. Further, the deployment of thousands of Taiwanese, American, and, likely, Chinese unmanned systems—along with various other manned platforms and units—on and around Taiwan would produce a complex and cluttered operational environment.¹⁴¹ Friendly fire could easily occur, hampering and slowing American and Taiwanese operations and potentially yielding initiative to the PLA.

139 Bryan Clark and Dan Patt, *Hedging Bets: Rethinking Force Dominance for a Post-Dominance Era* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2024), pp. 26–45.

140 Conrad Crane, “Mission Command and Multidomain Battle Don’t Mix,” *War on the Rocks*, August 23, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/mission-command-and-multi-domain-battle-dont-mix/>.

141 Lyle Goldstein and Nathan Waechter, “What Chinese Navy Planners Are Learning from Ukraine’s Use of Unmanned Surface Vessels,” *The Diplomat*, April 4, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/what-chinese-navy-planners-are-learning-from-ukraines-use-of-unmanned-surface-vessels/>; and Elsa Kania, *The PLA’s Unmanned Aerial Systems New Capabilities for a “New Era” of Chinese Military Power* (Montgomery, AL: China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2018), https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/PLAAF/2018-08-29%20PLAs_Unmanned_Aerial_Systems.pdf.

The January 2024 attack by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI) at Tower 22, a U.S. military base in Jordan, underscores this reality. U.S. personnel at the base reportedly confused an approaching IRI drone for a U.S. drone and permitted it to reach the base, where it struck container housing units, resulting in the deaths of three U.S. soldiers and injuries to more than 40 others.¹⁴² A mix-up over a single drone operated by a nonstate actor in a small-scale attack should cause great concern over the ability of U.S., Taiwanese, and allied forces to defend themselves, operate effectively, and maintain the initiative in a complex battlefield featuring thousands of drones, manned platforms, and units from multiple militaries.¹⁴³

Beijing probably anticipates coalition command and control problems among U.S., Taiwanese, and allied forces. For decades, PLA analysts have emphasized the need to employ deception, surprise, and asymmetric capabilities to overcome the technological superiority of the PRC's adversaries and exploit allied vulnerabilities. Together with a more recent emphasis on systems destruction warfare, Chinese strategic thinking implies a determined effort to strain the weak capacity and seams of an ad hoc U.S.-led coalition command and control system.

Developing U.S.–Taiwan Consensus on Operational-level Coordination

Given the complexity of multinational operations, the intensity of the PLA threat, and the finite resources of the American and Taiwanese militaries, U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination should be directly tailored to the missions required for Taiwan's defense. Military interactions and exchanges involving American and Taiwanese forces should therefore be structured in ways that support consensus building on PLA threat assessments, necessary U.S. and Taiwanese roles and missions, and the type and level of U.S.–Taiwan interoperability required. A broad range of bilateral dialogues and exercises would be required to generate buy-in from the various constituencies involved and to build momentum behind interoperability-focused efforts.

Currently, several types of U.S.–Taiwan dialogues and exchanges regularly occur, including annual senior leadership discussions and exchanges of military students. Many of these dialogues and exchanges were developed in the wake of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995–1996. For example, starting in 1997, senior U.S. and Taiwanese senior civilian

142 For a similar recent episode in which a Houthi UAS penetrated Israeli air and missile defense systems to conduct a strike on Tel Aviv, see Gabby Sobelman et al., “Houthis Launch Deadly Drone Strike on Tel Aviv, Evading Israel's Defenses,” *New York Times*, July 19, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/19/world/middleeast/houthis-drone-strike-tel-aviv.html>.

143 Ukrainian forces also report severe challenges with distinguishing Russian and Ukrainian UAS on the front lines. Siobhán O'Grady and Kostiantyn Khudov, “Drones Are Crowding Ukraine's skies, Largely Paralyzing Battlefield,” *Washington Post*, April 14, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/04/14/ukraine-drones-russia-war-skies/>.

national security officials and military leaders have met annually for the Monterey Talks.¹⁴⁴ Senior American and Taiwanese civilian and military officials also meet through the annual Defense Review Talks, the annual Political–Military Dialogue, and the General Officer Steering Group, along with other ad hoc meetings and service-level exchanges.¹⁴⁵ Several hundred Taiwanese military officers study annually at U.S. military institutions like National Defense University and the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies.¹⁴⁶

Although U.S.–Taiwan dialogues and exchanges are somewhat numerous, American efforts have at times been uncoordinated, counterproductive, or inconclusive. For instance, over the last decade, U.S. defense officials have pushed Taiwan’s military to move toward procuring small asymmetric weapons systems for denial operations. Yet over the same time, various American defense contractors and consultants, supported by export-oriented offices and programs in the U.S. government, have continued to promote the sale of large, expensive traditional weapons platforms to Taipei.

Further, U.S.–Taiwan interactions have sometimes featured strong disagreement about the scale, scope, and pace of Taiwan’s military modernization. Some in Washington have noted concern with the Taiwanese military’s resistance to organizational reforms, slow procurement of asymmetric military capabilities, and continued acquisition and use of expensive platforms—such as tanks, fighter aircraft, and submarines—that may be of limited operational utility in combat against the PLA.¹⁴⁷ From the Taiwanese perspective, some see Washington as imposing force plans that would deprive Taiwan of capabilities it needs to act independently, if required, or that would relegate Taiwan’s military to a low-tier global status. Less substantively, some Taiwanese may also take offense to what they perceive as American paternalism and interference in Taiwan’s independent decision-making.¹⁴⁸ Finally,

144 Michael S. Chase, “U.S.–Taiwan Security Cooperation: Enhancing an Unofficial Relationship,” in Tucker, ed., *Dangerous Strait*, p. 168; Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, “The United States and Taiwan’s Defense Transformation,” *Brookings Institution*, February 16, 2010, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-united-states-and-taiwans-defense-transformation/>.

145 Susan V. Lawrence and Wayne M. Morrison, *Taiwan: Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: CRS, October 30, 2017), pp. 24–25, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44996>; “Prepared Remarks of David Helvey,” *Global Taiwan Institute*, September 14, 2017, <https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ASD-Prepared-Remarks-for-GTI-Annual-Symposium-FINAL.pdf>; and Lin Chia-nan, “Taiwan Thanks Biden for Reiterating Support,” *Taipei Times*, November 17, 2021, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2021/11/17/2003768015>.

146 Huang, “The United States and Taiwan’s Defense Transformation”; and Lawrence and Morrison, *Taiwan: Issues for Congress*, p. 24.

147 For example, see Hunzeker, Wu, and Marom, “A New Military Culture for Taiwan”; Kanapathy, “Countering China’s Use of Force”; and Ivan Kanapathy, “Countering China’s Gray Zone Activities,” in Matt Pottinger, ed., *The Boiling Moat*, pp. 105–27.

148 Rachel Oswald, “Taiwan, U.S. Struggle Over Differences on Weapons to Counter China,” *Roll Call*, September 13, 2022, <https://rollcall.com/2022/09/13/taiwan-us-struggle-over-differences-on-weapons-to-counter-china/>.

the Taiwanese themselves differ on whether certain types of U.S. military support would improve cross-strait deterrence or increase instability.¹⁴⁹

New dialogues, exchanges, and planning mechanisms at the senior leader and staff levels could be structured in various ways to improve U.S.–Taiwan consensus on PLA threats, U.S.–Taiwan combined missions, and potential efforts to build interoperability.

First, regular dialogues could be used to establish consensus on the types of threats the PLA poses to American, Taiwanese, and allied forces. The American and Taiwanese militaries are natural partners in building a common understanding of the operating environment and in monitoring and assessing PRC military threats. Given Taiwan's historical, cultural, and linguistic connections to China and its geographic proximity to the Chinese mainland, the Taiwanese may be able to detect and interpret certain PRC political, military, and economic developments more easily than American observers. On the other hand, the global focus and unique technical means of the U.S. national security bureaucracy likely yield insights that are unavailable to Taiwan's defense officials and analysts. The Taiwanese and American governments may each be able to contribute valuable resources and information to the other, which could advance the development of a shared U.S.–Taiwan consensus on potential PLA plans and operations in future contingencies.

Second, future dialogues could be used as forums to assess required U.S. and Taiwanese missions against the PLA and to mutually reinforce each side's development of related doctrine and operational concepts. For instance, both the American and Taiwanese militaries are developing novel concepts and forces for operations in littoral environments against the PLA. The U.S. Marine Corps is redesigning its force structure and operations for littoral combat in ways that are similar to Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept.¹⁵⁰ In both cases, there is predictable pushback—from retired officers, bureaucrats, and industry—to these necessary changes.¹⁵¹ Future exchanges structured around littoral combat operations would be an opportunity for both sides to strengthen these nascent reform efforts and promote constructive discussion about potential force and concept options that would be valuable in a conflict against the PLA. Rather than urging Taiwan's military to copy U.S. military structures and processes, American participants could work with their counterparts to shape and support Taiwanese military efforts in ways that correspond with Taipei's

149 Alastair Iain Johnston, Tsai Chia-hung, and George Yin, "When Might U.S. Political Support Be Unwelcome in Taiwan?" *Brookings Institution*, April 5, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2023/04/05/when-might-us-political-support-be-unwelcome-in-taiwan/>.

150 U.S. Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030: Annual Update June 2023* (Arlington, VA: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 2023), https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Docs/Force_Design_2030_Annual_Update_June_2023.pdf; and Thompson, "Hope on the Horizon."

151 Kathrin Hille and Demetri Sevastopulo, "U.S. Accused of Undermining Taiwan Defences by Focusing on 'D-Day' Scenario," *Financial Times*, May 17, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/dd0a987e-d2d3-4f8c-be65-bf897645dbfo>.

geostrategic position, capabilities, and resources.¹⁵² American forces also stand to learn from Taiwan's military in certain operational areas, such as the use of coastal ground-based anti-ship missile systems, which Taiwan has fielded for decades and which the U.S. military has largely disregarded until recently.¹⁵³ The U.S. and Taiwanese militaries could also work toward building common doctrine on multinational operations and counter-amphibious landing operations, areas neglected in Taiwanese and American doctrine, respectively.¹⁵⁴

Third, combined operational, contingency, and force planning dialogues and exercises would support U.S., Taiwanese, and other allied forces in identifying areas where they could build interoperability and in developing complementary strategies, concepts, and forces. American and Taiwanese planners, at both the senior and middle levels, should meet regularly to discuss how U.S. and Taiwanese forces would operate together in a variety of conflict scenarios and unexpected contingencies. Although specific plans would need adjustment if conflict occurred, investing time and effort in a regularized, robust peacetime planning process is essential to building rapport, understanding, and trust and to developing consensus on the best type of interoperability to deconflict and coordinate U.S. and Taiwanese operations. A corresponding, though bureaucratically separate, combined assessment process could also be established so U.S., Taiwanese, and allied defense policymakers and analysts could collectively provide routine constructive feedback on draft plans.

Ideally, these three issues above—threat assessment, doctrine and concept development, and interoperability—would be addressed sequentially, though in practice they would likely be discussed concurrently. Across the three categories, types of events to prioritize include formal government-to-government and semiofficial (Track 1.5/Track 2) sessions focused on threat assessment, concept development, force planning, doctrine, and interoperability.¹⁵⁵ As the type and number of government and military interactions increase, American policymakers may wish to designate a lead coordinator to ensure the portfolio of activities advance U.S. military requirements and achieve progress over time. Short-term contingency planning and senior-level crisis simulations and wargames would help better integrate and prepare U.S., Taiwanese, and allied civilian and military leaders for a range of potential

152 The U.S. military attempted to create the Afghan military in its own image. This exacerbated the latter's dependency and stunted the development of Afghan forces, which contributed to their collapse once U.S. support was withdrawn. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed* (Arlington, VA: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2023), pp. 60–61, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/evaluations/SIGAR-23-16-IP.pdf>.

153 Eric Edelman, Chris Bassler, Toshi Yoshihara, and Tyler Hacker, *Rings of Fire: A Conventional Missile Strategy for a Post-INF Treaty World* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2022), pp. 1–4, [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8325_\(Rings_of_Fire\)_FINAL_web-9-1-22.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8325_(Rings_of_Fire)_FINAL_web-9-1-22.pdf).

154 Dylan Buck and Zach Ota, "Deterrence through Doctrine: The Case for a Joint Counter-Landing Doctrine," *War on the Rocks*, January 19, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/deterrence-through-doctrine-the-case-for-a-joint-counter-landing-doctrine/>.

155 For an example, see Ralph A. Cossa, *U.S.–Taiwan Deterrence and Defense Dialogue: Dealing With Increased Chinese Aggressiveness* (Honolulu, HI: Pacific Forum, 2021), https://pacforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/issuesandinsights_Vol21_CR3.pdf.

PLA actions in the near and long term. Senior policymakers should attempt to establish consensus on major political and strategic questions—such as rules of engagement and access, basing, and overflight—that would impact military operations. Civilian strategic guidance would be essential to establishing realistic assumptions and conditions in operational-level combined planning sessions and wargames. The outputs of these events would then point to operational concepts and capabilities that merit further exploration through combined field exercises.

U.S.–Taiwan Combined Missions Critical for Taiwan’s Defense

Pending the results of such consensus-building efforts, the operational-level analysis in this report highlights several high-priority mission areas for U.S.–Taiwan combined operations. The operational challenges of Taiwan’s defense and the requirements of coalition warfare in a constrained, dense, littoral environment indicate American and Taiwanese forces would benefit from developing operational-level coordination in the following areas:

- Command and control of combined forces on and around Taiwan.
- Deconfliction and coordination of ISR operations and multidomain fires on and around Taiwan.
- Deconfliction and coordination of sustainment operations for Taiwanese and U.S. forces on Taiwan.

These mission areas complement and somewhat overlap with one another.

The following sections are structured around these three mission areas. They offer a preliminary assessment of ways to develop U.S.–Taiwan interoperability in peacetime. In line with broader consensus-building efforts, American, Taiwanese, and allied staff officers would need to conduct a more detailed mission-oriented analysis to determine which operations would need to be conducted in a defense of Taiwan. Such an analysis should provide a diagnostic assessment of each military’s proficiencies and a basic accounting of differences and gaps in areas such as doctrine, organization, training, technological capabilities, platform and munitions capacities, communications standards, sustainment practices, and language and terminology. Based on this objective foundation, the combined staff analysis should provide initial guidance on which military forces are best suited to conduct the necessary combined missions in designated geographic areas. This effort should also point to the standards, protocols, and procedures the militaries need to develop for effective combined command and control, ISR, fires, and sustainment.

The pace at which interoperability is developed will largely depend on the capabilities and proficiencies of Taiwanese forces, particularly given how the standalone defense construct has constrained their operational-level interaction with U.S. forces for decades. At the moment, pursuing tactical-level technological integration between Taiwanese and American

forces would be excessive in most cases and would unnecessarily raise complicated linguistic, bureaucratic, technological, security, and political challenges.

Overall, U.S.–Taiwan interoperability should be pursued not for its own sake but only to the extent required by the combined operations American and Taiwanese forces envision conducting. For instance, close U.S.–Taiwan planning and coordination of air and surface operations around Taiwan appears feasible and beneficial for both parties, whereas the respective militaries’ undersea forces probably would be better off simply deconflicting operations due to formidable technological and security barriers.

Command and Control of Combined Forces on and around Taiwan

In general, multinational command and control structure is challenging and complex, given the likelihood of divergent interests among the states involved and each government’s innate desire to maintain control over its sovereign forces. Military history reveals various types of command arrangements for multinational operations, ranging from decentralized parallel national structures to a centralized structure that places multinational forces under one country’s control.¹⁵⁶

Regarding Taiwan’s defense, establishing a command structure for combined operations is essential to building trust, ensuring unity of effort, and coordinating operations in peacetime and wartime. For U.S. and Taiwanese forces, a decentralized structure is initially more appropriate given the sovereignty issues involved and the low current level of U.S.–Taiwan interoperability. Investing in initial efforts now would be crucial to moving toward more centralized arrangements later. In peacetime, a combined command structure can work toward standardizing and certifying doctrine; operations; technologies; and the tactics, techniques, and procedures necessary for the envisioned combined operations. A combined command unit can establish and oversee liaison teams and coordination centers at various levels to manage functional issues such as information operations, air and missile defense, maritime domain awareness, fires deconfliction and coordination, electromagnetic spectrum operations deconfliction and coordination, sustainment, civil–military coordination, and foreign citizen/refugee evacuation.

Deconfliction and Coordination of ISR Operations and Multidomain Fires

Through building consensus on key planning considerations and establishing a combined command element, American and Taiwanese forces could move toward developing shared domain awareness by deconflicting and coordinating ISR operations. With a common understanding of the area of operations, the command element would then be in position to deconflict and coordinate U.S. and Taiwanese air, sea, and ground forces on and around Taiwan, particularly for multidomain fires.

¹⁵⁶ *Multinational Operations*, pp. II-1–II-19.

In a multinational defense of Taiwan, American and Taiwanese military commanders would at minimum seek the disposition of allied and PLA forces and develop indicators and warnings of potential PLA operations. Taiwanese, American, and allied forces would need to be able to identify each other's forces to prevent friendly fire and avoid operational hesitation that cedes initiative to the PLA. There already appears to be some foundation for the United States and Taiwan to exchange ISR data. For instance, Taiwan, Japan, and the United States are reportedly developing the capability to link Taiwan's forthcoming MQ-9Bs to their own ISR networks.¹⁵⁷ Taiwan's National Security Bureau (NSB) and the Five Eyes intelligence agencies have also established a real-time datalink, according to the NSB's director-general.¹⁵⁸

American, Taiwanese, and allied planners could consider additional bureaucratic and technological mechanisms for sharing operationally relevant intelligence—including real-time American, Taiwanese, allied, and PLA unit location information—and rapidly disseminating it to relevant operational units. Options include establishment of a U.S.–Taiwan military and/or civilian information coordination cell; acquiring and sharing commercial intelligence, such as from commercial space ISR firms or contractor-owned/contractor-operated UAS; expanding and creating information networks to share real-time intelligence between American, Taiwanese, and allied forces, similar to Indo-Pacific Command's Mission Partner Environment and Joint Fires Network; and establishing bureaucratic processes through which American and Taiwanese forces could electronically transmit or physically hand over near-real-time intelligence when it is not feasible to connect battle networks.¹⁵⁹ Although these efforts may involve cutting through some bureaucratic red tape, several of these options bypass challenging classification and systems integration issues. Further, on-the-ground efforts to share intelligence can sometimes be relatively simple and incredibly effective, as evidenced by reported U.S. efforts to provide intelligence about Russian troop locations to Ukrainian forces.¹⁶⁰

A variety of survivable land, sea, and air sensor platforms and equipment operating from Taiwan, particularly passive sensors that work best at shorter ranges, could be used to provide persistent surveillance of PLA movements around Taiwan. Greater fidelity about the disposition of PLA forces would help theater-level coalition commanders assess potential

157 Kathrin Hille and Demetri Sevastopulo, "U.S. to Link Up with Taiwan and Japan Drone Fleets to Share Real-Time Data," *Financial Times*, June 8, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/bde0db76-a7f8-4ecd-b5d5-03de0b5a8659>.

158 Lily LaMattina, "NSB Director Reveals Taiwan Is Sharing Intelligence with Five Eyes Alliance," *Taiwan News*, April 27, 2023, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/4875730>.

159 "U.S. INDOPACOM Joint Mission Accelerator Directorate Reaches Initial Operating Capability," *U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Public Affairs*, December 13, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3615783/us-indopacom-joint-mission-accelerator-directorate-reaches-initial-operating-ca/>.

160 Julian E. Barnes, Helene Cooper, and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Intelligence Is Helping Ukraine Kill Russian Generals, Officials Say," *New York Times*, May 4, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/us/politics/russia-generals-killed-ukraine.html>; and Shane Harris and Dan Lamothe, "Intelligence-Sharing with Ukraine Designed to Prevent Wider War," *Washington Post*, May 11, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/11/ukraine-us-intelligence-sharing-war/>.

threats to forces across the region and effectively coordinate allied forces to maximize scarce resources. Similar to the reported plans to tie Taiwan's military-operated MQ-9Bs to American and Japanese theater information networks, American, Taiwanese, and allied forces should assess additional ways of placing sensors on Taiwan that would provide valuable information to theater-level commanders in peacetime and wartime. Candidate systems may include the short-range, attritable UAS that appear to be the focus of the Replicator Initiative because their limited range may make them useful in a Taiwan contingency only if they are positioned on Taiwan.

Building on the domain awareness efforts above, the United States and Taiwan could move toward deconflicting and coordinating air, sea, and ground forces on and around Taiwan. The two militaries would benefit from coordinating multidomain fires—including in areas such as air and missile defense, sea denial, and land-attack operations—to enable rapid and efficient counterstrikes against Chinese military forces in wartime. Multinational network integration efforts usually face formidable political, command, technological, and classification barriers, yet bureaucratic coordination and technological integration centered around explicit missions and particular kill chains could provide a feasible, valuable way to deliver joint strikes against Chinese forces. Where feasible and desirable for intended combined operations, technological sensor–shooter links could be developed between American and Taiwanese forces. Taiwan's procurement and operation of many types of U.S. platforms and equipment provide a foundation for such technology-centered efforts. For instance, military leaders should explore whether existing U.S. initiatives to link sensors and shooters would enable U.S. and allied airborne sensor platforms to provide targeting data to Taiwanese-operated, U.S.-manufactured strike platforms like the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) rocket artillery system.¹⁶¹ Kill chains could also be constructed in the reverse order. Taiwanese ground forces operating small U.S.-manufactured UAVs with various sensor payloads could transmit targeting information to U.S. strike platforms armed with long-range munitions operating in rear areas.

The United States and Taiwan should seek to capitalize on the emerging synergy between long-range reconnaissance–strike complexes and short-range attritable unmanned systems. The U.S. military fields several exquisite standoff strike platforms and long-range munitions, but only in small quantities. To increase the probability that these finite long-range systems can penetrate areas defended by PLA air and missile defense and electronic warfare systems, Taiwan and the United States would need to coordinate how Taiwan-based short-range unmanned systems can suppress and destroy PLA defenses up to and along the mainland coastline. Such coordination would increase the effectiveness of follow-on U.S. long-range strikes—including against PLA command and control centers, logistics nodes, airbases,

¹⁶¹ The 18th Airborne Corps' program linking the F-35, HIMARS, and commercial satellites, among other platforms, is one such example. Sydney J. Freedburg, "Army AI Gets Live Fire Test Next Week," *Breaking Defense*, February 23, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/02/army-ai-gets-live-fire-test-next-week/>. See also Shawn Snow, "Marines Connect F-35 Jet to HIMARS Rocket Shot for First Time," *Marine Corps Times*, October 5, 2018, <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2018/10/05/marines-connect-f-35-jet-to-himars-rocket-shot-for-first-time/>.

ports, and defense manufacturing centers—and thereby decrease the wartime strain on America’s standoff forces, sustainment capabilities, and defense industrial base.

Deconfliction and Coordination of Sustainment Operations for Taiwanese and U.S. Forces on Taiwan

The United States and Taiwan need to ensure that wartime sustainment of Taiwan-based forces in a protracted conflict remains feasible by focusing on logistics and maintenance. A key tension American and Taiwanese planners would confront while building mission-relevant interoperability is the need to limit the external dependence of Taiwan-based forces while enabling combined U.S.–Taiwan–allied operations via non-Taiwanese equipment and external sustainment.

Even with significant stockpiling on Taiwan, it is unlikely that peacetime stocks of equipment, munitions, fuel, and spare parts would be sufficient in a protracted conflict, given the high expenditure rates of munitions in a high-intensity conflict and likely losses from PLA strikes. Taipei’s international partners would need to supply Taiwanese forces with equipment, munitions, spare parts, and fuel, among other goods, during a conflict. The United States, potentially with other allies, may attempt to send forces to Taiwan to conduct military operations. Lacking operational depth and a bordering sanctuary state, logistically supplying Taiwan and transporting forces to the island in a conflict would be daunting. Large transport ships and aircraft would need to ingress and egress a highly contested conflict area and would be vulnerable while stationary during unloading and loading.

A U.S.–Taiwan military logistics coordination center or planning cell would be valuable for managing theater setup and planning reception, staging, onward movement, and integration operations at Taiwanese airports and ports. A combined logistics team could assess Taiwan’s logistics infrastructure; coordinate logistics standards with Taiwanese military and commercial logistics units; and determine wartime requirements for Taiwan’s logistics infrastructure, including ports, airports, transportation equipment, and storage and distribution centers.

To ensure U.S.–Taiwan bureaucratic and technological integration remains feasible over a protracted conflict, the Taiwanese military would need to locally sustain the U.S.-manufactured equipment it needs for combined operations.¹⁶² The F-16 maintenance, repair, and overhaul center that opened in Taichung in 2020 is an example of local sustainment of American-made platforms, though this large facility is vulnerable to PLA strikes.¹⁶³ New

162 Highlighting the importance of virtual support for foreign-manufactured equipment, one press report notes how the facility’s “technicians...are in regular contact with Ukrainians on the battlefield. They share information about best techniques for repairs over encrypted messages and a HelpDesk app that helps them to troubleshoot problems.” Jeznach and Parkinson, “Covert Polish Repair Shop.”

163 Joyce Huang, “Backed by Lockheed Martin, Taiwan Unveils Asia’s First Repair Hub for F-16 Fighter Jets,” *Voice of America*, August 29, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_voa-news-china_backed-lockheed-martin-taiwan-unveils-asias-first-repair-hub-f-16/6195156.html.

sustainment efforts should be aimed at enabling dispersed field maintenance in Taiwan for U.S.-manufactured equipment. For instance, in wartime, Taiwan would probably require the capability to locally repair its U.S.-manufactured HIMARS rocket artillery systems, MQ-9B UAVs, Javelin and Stinger missile launchers, and various U.S.-manufactured communications and sensing systems.¹⁶⁴

Given the extent to which American defense contractors are involved in equipment maintenance, Taiwan's military would probably need to coordinate with U.S. firms in peacetime regarding prepositioning spare parts, conducting maintenance in Taiwan, and connecting virtually for U.S.-based remote support in wartime.¹⁶⁵ In parallel, Taiwan's military, perhaps in combination with the U.S. military, could inventory Taiwan's military equipment, munitions, and spare parts to assess ways to reduce its foreign dependence, including through adding manufacturing capabilities in Taiwan.

Practicing Combined Operations for Wartime during Peacetime Training and Exercises

Realistic U.S.–Taiwan joint training and exercises would be valuable for building interoperability and preparing for the high-intensity conflict American and Taiwanese forces would face against the PLA. Training efforts could be organized with two objectives: (a) enhancing the tactical skills of Taiwan's military and territorial defense forces and (b) improving U.S.–Taiwan operational planning and coordination in peacetime and wartime.

U.S.–Taiwan combined military training and exercises typically include only small numbers of select specialists and units, sometimes only in observer status. For instance, the U.S. military sends observers to Taiwan's annual large-scale Han Kuang military exercises.¹⁶⁶ The United States conducts some platform-specific training for Taiwanese personnel, such as M1A2 Abrams tank crews and F-16 fighter and Apache attack helicopter pilots.¹⁶⁷ In the last few years, there appears to have been some increase in limited, small-scale combined

164 The need to facilitate field maintenance of U.S. equipment has been demonstrated in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine: Alex Horton, "For Ukrainian Troops, a Need Arises: Javelin Customer Service," *Washington Post*, June 14, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/06/14/ukraine-javelin-assistance/>; and Yaroslav Trofimov, "Ukrainian Forces Get Crash Course on Javelin Missiles from U.S. Volunteers," *Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukrainian-forces-get-crash-course-on-javelin-missiles-from-u-s-volunteers-11651224602>.

165 My thanks to Tyler Hacker on this point.

166 Chase, "U.S.–Taiwan Security Cooperation," pp. 178–79.

167 Lawrence and Morrison, *Taiwan: Issues for Congress*, pp. 25, 75–78, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44996>; Keoni Everington, "American Soldiers Building Tank-Training Grounds in Taiwan's Hsinchu," *Taiwan News*, April 22, 2022, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/4515419>; and J. Michael Cole, "Apache Helicopter Pilots, Crew to Begin Training," *Taipei Times*, October 29, 2012, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2012/10/29/2003546376>.

training in Taiwan and the United States.¹⁶⁸ A February 2023 press report, citing unnamed U.S. officials, stated that 100 to 200 U.S. personnel were set to be deployed to Taiwan later that year to train Taiwanese forces.¹⁶⁹ In March 2024, Taiwan's defense minister acknowledged there is some training of Taiwanese by U.S. special operations forces on Taiwan's outlying islands.¹⁷⁰ Taiwan has also sent some forces to the United States for training. In 2022, Taiwanese forces participated in the National Guard-sponsored Northern Strike exercise in Michigan and, in 2023, reports stated that Taiwan's army planned to send battalion-sized groups to the United States for training.¹⁷¹ Although these latest events are notable, incremental U.S.–Taiwan training efforts risk being woefully insufficient for meeting wartime requirements for combined operations against the PLA.

As demonstrated in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, Western training in peacetime can be instrumental to transforming partner ground forces for modern high-intensity conflict and creating the shared bureaucratic processes necessary for U.S. and allied intelligence and sustainment support in wartime.¹⁷² Since 2015, U.S. and NATO training efforts with Ukraine

168 Gordon Lubold, "U.S. Troops Have Been Deployed in Taiwan for at Least a Year," *Wall Street Journal*, October 7, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-troops-have-been-deployed-in-taiwan-for-at-least-a-year-11633614043>. U.S. personnel training Taiwanese forces on Taiwan is not an entirely new development, as some training has been occurring for decades. See Jerad I. Harper and Michael A. Hunzeker, "Learning to Train: What Washington and Taipei Can Learn from Security Cooperation in Ukraine and the Baltic States," *War on the Rocks*, January 20, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/learning-to-train-what-washington-and-taipei-can-learn-from-security-cooperation-in-ukraine-and-the-baltic-states/>. In 2020, the U.S. Army released a video of Green Berets training with Taiwanese military personnel. Joseph Trevithick, "Army Releases Ultra Rare Video Showing Green Berets Training in Taiwan," *The War Zone*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.twz.com/34474/army-releases-ultra-rare-video-showing-green-berets-training-in-taiwan>.

169 Nancy Youssef, "U.S. to Expand Troop Presence in Taiwan for Training against China Threat," *Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-expand-troop-presence-in-taiwan-for-training-against-china-threat-62198a83>. Official DoD data currently indicate a small U.S. military presence in Taiwan (at least 41 service members and seven DoD civilians, as of December 31, 2023). DMDC, *Military and Civilian Personnel by Service/Agency by State/Country* (Washington, DC: DoD, December 31, 2023), <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/api/downloadZ?fileId=127322&groupName=milRegionCountry>; and "Exclusive: U.S. and Taiwan Navies Quietly Held Pacific Drills in April," *Reuters*, May 14, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-taiwan-navies-quietly-held-pacific-drills-april-sources-say-2024-05-14/>.

170 Austin Ramzay, "Taiwan Acknowledges Presence of U.S. Troops on Outlying Islands," *Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/asia/taiwan-acknowledges-presence-of-u-s-troops-on-outlying-islands-c81c3b6b>.

171 Jillian Smith, "Taiwan Participates in U.S. Military Exercises Following Pelosi Visit," *The National Desk*, August 17, 2022, <https://thenationaldesk.com/news/americas-news-now/taiwan-participates-in-us-military-exercises-following-pelosi-visit-aiwan-invasion-house-speaker-nancy-pelosi-trip-beijing-chinese-military-drills-missiles-taipei-defense-taiwan-strait>; "Taiwan Military to Send Non-Commissioned Officers to U.S.: Source," *Focus Taiwan*, April 13, 2022, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202204130016>; and Yuko Mukai and Masatsugu Sonoda, "U.S. Plans to Expand Scale of Training of Taiwan Military; Defense against Potential Invasion to be Strengthened," *Japan News*, September 17, 2023, <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/politics-government/20230917-137027/>.

172 Daniel Michaels, "The Secret of Ukraine's Military Success: Years of NATO Training," *Wall Street Journal*, April 13, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-military-success-years-of-nato-training-11649861339>. Despite some success in peacetime training, U.S. training of Ukrainian forces since Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion reveals the range of difficult technical, material, bureaucratic, logistical, and cultural challenges that emerge when attempting to expediently train foreign forces in wartime. DoD Inspector General, *Audit of DoD Training of Ukrainian Armed Forces* (Alexandria, VA: DoD, 2023), <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Jun/15/2003242028/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2023-086%20SECURE.PDF>.

have involved tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers. These events, held in Ukraine and in NATO countries, have included realistic combined arms training between Ukrainian and NATO forces, with an explicit goal of increasing NATO–Ukraine interoperability. From 2015 to 2022, the U.S. Army-led Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (JMTG-U) supported the development of a modern brigade-level training center near Yavoriv, Ukraine. Over that seven-year timespan, the JMTG-U progressed from training company-level units to preparing for a division-level exercise composed of units spread across Ukraine.¹⁷³ Complementing individual and unit-level training, the U.S. military conducted a range of exchanges, exercises, and advisory missions with Ukraine’s senior political and military leaders intended to support numerous reforms, including developing Ukraine’s noncommissioned officer corps, enabling mission command, and implementing meritocratic promotion practices.¹⁷⁴

Similar to the training of Ukrainian forces, U.S. personnel could reinforce the Taiwanese military’s training processes and enhance the operational proficiencies of its personnel. As Taiwan’s military orients toward modern asymmetric operations, its personnel would require training in new types of operations and missions. In-person training between U.S. and Taiwanese forces could cover a broad range of operations, from counteramphibious landing to urban warfare, and could involve Taiwanese reserves, which are severely under-trained, and even new civil defense forces.¹⁷⁵ Opportunities to cooperate with experienced U.S. servicemembers may also help Taiwan’s military recruit the highly educated and technically adept personnel required for modern combat.

The U.S. military could structure training to support the Taiwanese military’s own development and implementation of peacetime reforms in strategy, concepts, capabilities, and resources.¹⁷⁶ Through various forums and methods, U.S. and Taiwanese personnel could routinely engage each other on how each understands and is preparing for modern littoral warfare against the PLA. American forces could structure exercises and other engagements to reflect Taiwan’s operational needs and its likely missions in combined operations. To advance such training, U.S. and Taiwanese forces could collaborate to establish training standards and certification processes and build associated training modules. The U.S.

173 These plans were interrupted by Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022. Since 2022, JMTG-U has been conducting training in Grafenwoehr, Germany. “Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine,” *Defense Visual Information Distribution Service*, <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/jmtgu>.

174 John F. Kirby, Joseph Hilbert, and Todd Hopkins, “Defense Officials Hold Media Brief on the Training of Ukrainian Military,” *DoD*, May 4, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3020390/defense-officials-hold-media-brief-on-the-training-of-ukrainian-military/>.

175 Hsiao, “Taiwan’s Bottom-Up Approach to Civil Defense Preparedness.” On the capabilities of Taiwan’s reserve forces, see Easton, Stokes, et al., *Transformation of Taiwan’s Reserve Force*, pp. 25–31.

176 Michael Hunzeker and Alexander Lanoszka, “Real Friends Twist Arms: Taiwan and the Case for Conditionality,” *War on the Rocks*, July 27, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/07/real-friends-twist-arms-taiwan-and-the-case-for-conditionality/>.

military could also provide the resources necessary for training and exercises by directly or indirectly subsidizing Taiwanese training expenses or by furnishing equipment and systems.

Beyond simply training Taiwanese forces, U.S.–Taiwan combined training would provide a direct and expedient way for American and Taiwanese forces to build consensus on the types of combined operations necessary for a multinational defense of Taiwan. Combined training would provide opportunities to plan and simulate combat-realistic combined U.S.–Taiwan operations in areas such as intelligence sharing, airspace deconfliction and coordination, maritime domain awareness, air and missile defense, maritime strike, counteramphibious landing, and intratheater sustainment.¹⁷⁷

New remote and virtual reality training systems such as U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's Pacific Multi-Domain Training and Experimentation Capability may offer opportunities for American, Taiwanese, and allied forces to regularly train together despite physical separation.¹⁷⁸ Virtual methods would likely be valuable for combined training, given that Taiwan's small size and dense population limit exercise areas and constrain the type of training conducted. Large-scale maneuvers involving heavy military platforms, even without live-fire exercises, can be disruptive to daily life and seriously destructive to infrastructure and private property. Moreover, virtual training arrangements would be less visible, so they would minimize the PLA's ability to observe and learn from allied operations and tactics and reduce the potential public backlash within mainland China.

American and Taiwanese forces could also train at various American facilities in the Pacific and in the continental United States, but the inherent demands of distant training could create major logistical and fiscal difficulties for Taiwan. Although the U.S. military routinely transports large units across oceans for training operations, the Taiwanese military lacks the logistical platforms, skills, and organizational structures to support large-scale overseas training. Moreover, the U.S. military's expeditionary training operations hone the same logistical skills that would be required for real-world combat in regions distant from the U.S. homeland. In contrast, Taiwan's development of expeditionary logistics would sap time and resources from the practical warfighting competencies vital for conflicts around Taiwan. The preparation and recovery process for overseas training would add months of downtime for any units involved, which would limit the number of units that could be sent at one time and strain an already undersized Taiwanese military.¹⁷⁹ These financial and logistical constraints

177 In this aspect, U.S. training efforts with Taiwan would differ from those with Ukraine, which were not focused on building U.S.–Ukraine military interoperability for combined operations against Russian forces.

178 Samuel J. Paparo, "Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Samuel J. Paparo, USN Nominee for Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command," *U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee*, p. 20, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/paparo_apq_responses.pdf; and Maureen Thompson, "Synthetic Training Environment Offers Multi-Dimensional Combat Preparation," *U.S. Army Futures Command*, February 15, 2022, https://www.army.mil/article/254005/synthetic_training_environment_offers_multi_dimensional_combat_preparation.

179 My thanks to Tyler Hacker for this point.

and opportunity costs may be so significant that the operational value of training far from Taiwan may be limited in many circumstances.

Thus, despite some opportunities to use remote systems or overseas facilities, training would ideally occur on, around, and near Taiwan so large numbers of Taiwanese personnel could more easily be involved in combined exercises.

Enabling Combined Operations through an Operationally Relevant U.S. Military Presence in Taiwan

As they develop credible deterrence and warfighting strategies for Taiwan's defense, policymakers cannot ignore the inherent links between strategy, operational concepts, and posture. Achieving wartime unity of effort at the strategic and operational levels is difficult to imagine without a permanent operationally relevant U.S. presence on Taiwan. Conducting combined missions in wartime and building a sufficient level of interoperability in peacetime through command structures, dialogues, planning, technological integration, and training would be inordinately challenging without U.S. military personnel regularly working side by side with their Taiwanese counterparts.

Although positioning U.S. forces in Taiwan has been controversial, the Department of Defense already appears to be moving in that direction. Recent press reports have noted U.S. training in Taiwan has been expanding since at least 2020, as noted above.¹⁸⁰ In October 2021, Taiwanese President Tsai Ying-wen even publicly confirmed the presence of U.S. military personnel on the island.¹⁸¹

Some commentators have recently called for a U.S. military presence in Taiwan, but the political and operational arguments for that have not been fully developed.¹⁸² Specific posture options are usually presented in terms of individual American combat units, such as a U.S. Marine Corps marine littoral regiment.¹⁸³ Little publicly available policymaker-relevant analysis assesses the purposes, structure, and capabilities of a potential U.S. presence on Taiwan. Given limited American resources, a U.S. presence on the island would need to

180 Keoni Everington, "U.S. Marines Officially Training in Taiwan for 1st Time since 1979," *Taiwan News*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4049035>; and Lubold, "U.S. Troops Have Been Deployed in Taiwan for at Least a Year."

181 Will Ripley, Eric Cheung and Ben Westcott, "Taiwan's President Says the Threat from China Is Increasing 'Every Day' and Confirms Presence of U.S. Military Trainers on the Island," *CNN*, October 28, 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/27/asia/tsai-ingwen-taiwan-china-interview-intl-hnk/index.html>.

182 Jake Yeager and William Gerichten, "Reestablish the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group–Taiwan," *War on the Rocks*, January 7, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/reestablish-the-u-s-military-assistance-advisory-group-taiwan/>; Michael Mazza, "Imagining a New U.S. Military Presence in Taiwan," *American Enterprise Institute*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/imagining-a-new-us-military-presence-in-taiwan/>; Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022), pp. 181–82; and John Bolton, "Revisit the 'One-China Policy,'" *Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/revisit-the-one-china-policy-1484611627>.

183 Cancian, Cancian, and Heginbotham, *First Battle of the Next War*, p. 57.

be closely tailored to how American, Taiwanese, and allied forces intend to work together in peacetime and wartime.

The peacetime operational-level efforts and wartime missions addressed above point to a U.S. posture consisting of (a) a permanent forward-stationed headquarters, advisory, and combat enabler element and (b) rotating combat and advisory units that participate in training events, exercises, dialogues, or planning meetings. This organizational and command structure would be roughly analogous to U.S. Army V Corps, which is headquartered at Fort Knox and maintains a forward headquarters in Poland.¹⁸⁴ The forward element in Taiwan would ideally be led by a senior military leader with a rank high enough to enable regular impactful interactions with high-ranking Taiwanese leaders. Forward-stationed personnel could be drawn in part from a U.S. Army security force assistance brigade and special operations units from across the services.

For the forward headquarters, an official presence would be the cleanest legal and bureaucratic option for advancing peacetime and wartime coordination. Although notionally private options—such as establishing an unofficial organization alongside or within the nominally independent American Institute in Taiwan—are creative ways to parry potential PRC objections, their status could create substantial bureaucratic impediments to interoperability with the U.S. military, and their use in combat could raise legal issues under the law of armed conflict.¹⁸⁵

The forward element would in part staff the decentralized combined command and control structure argued for above. The headquarters could include the coordination centers, liaison teams, and communications personnel necessary for peacetime coordination of U.S. forces on Taiwan that are involved in exchanges, training, and other interoperability-related efforts. Some of these personnel could also embed in Taiwanese military headquarters to ease coordination. Additional personnel could be assigned to the forward headquarters to provide key enabling capabilities for combined joint military operations among American, Taiwanese, and allied forces, particularly for command and control, ISR, electronic warfare, air defense, long-range fires, and sustainment. In wartime, an existing forward command element on Taiwan and an embedded presence within Taiwan's military headquarters would substantially reduce the friction involved in deconflicting and coordinating a broad array of American, Taiwanese, and allied operations against PLA forces. Wartime duties could include sharing ISR and targeting information between Taiwanese and U.S. forces, synchronizing American and Taiwanese counteroffensive operations against PLA forces, organizing external sustainment operations, and coordinating the arrival of U.S. reinforcements.¹⁸⁶ To

184 My thanks to Tyler Hacker for this point. When announced in 2020, the U.S. Army planned to staff the forward headquarters with 200 personnel. Kyle Rempfer, "Army's Resurrected V Corps Will Go to Poland," *Army Times*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/08/04/armys-resurrected-v-corps-will-go-to-poland/>.

185 Yeager and Gerichten, "Reestablish the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group–Taiwan."

186 My thanks to Tyler Hacker on several of these points.

ensure U.S. military efforts achieve consistent progress and to build strong rapport with Taiwanese personnel, deployments of U.S. personnel to the forward element would need to be measured in years rather than months.

The U.S. military could consider placing combat forces in Taiwan, on either on a permanent or rotational basis, that reflect the littoral forces the U.S. military is posturing elsewhere along the First and Second Island Chains. For instance, U.S. special operations forces units, a U.S. Marine Corps marine littoral regiment, or even a U.S. Army multidomain task force may play important roles in sensing and targeting PLA forces near Taiwan or conducting operationally impactful offensive missions against nearby PLA forces. Small U.S. reconnaissance units operating unmanned air and sea systems from Taiwan could conduct unique, persistent surveillance operations and transmit targeting data rearward to U.S. long-range strike platforms and to incoming salvos of munitions equipped to receive in-flight updates.¹⁸⁷ These units may not be large enough to be self-sustaining, so they would probably need to be embedded or integrated with Taiwanese forces, particularly for air defense and sustainment.¹⁸⁸ Regardless of the specific unit composition, U.S. combat forces on Taiwan should be sized and configured primarily to deliver capabilities and effects that the Taiwanese cannot produce themselves and that the U.S. military would find difficult to independently generate from bases further afield.

Permanent or rotating combat and advisory elements could also support the training requirements of Taiwanese, American, and perhaps allied forces. Combined exercises in Taiwan would enable American forces to become intimately familiar with the terrain where conflict would occur. U.S. and Taiwanese forces could practice operating concurrently in the same geographic area without interfering with each other's operations or engaging in friendly fire. For instance, if U.S. special operations forces or other ground units plan to operate unmanned air, surface, or subsurface platforms from Taiwan, these American units would need to conduct operational- and tactical-level exercises with Taiwanese ground, air, and sea forces. Together, these units could practice real-time combat identification and rehearse deconflicting and coordinating operations in areas such as the electromagnetic spectrum, access and basing, and sustainment. A separate set of exercises could focus on deconfliction and coordination between Taiwanese operational-level headquarters and U.S. aircraft and ships flying or sailing near Taiwan.

Overall, a modest but credible U.S. combat presence on Taiwan composed of sensing, strike, and sustainment forces would redress a major gap in American posture in the Western Pacific and alleviate several of the U.S. operational-level vulnerabilities addressed in Chapter 3. An operationally relevant presence on Taiwan would result in a formidable,

¹⁸⁷ For an example of sensors that can be employed in U.S. coastal defense operations, see Aaron-Matthew Lariosa, "Marines Perfect Maritime Domain Awareness, Coastal Defense in Joint Philippines," *USNI News*, November 22, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/11/22/marines-perfect-maritime-domain-awareness-coastal-defense-in-joint-philippines-exercise>.

¹⁸⁸ My thanks to Tyler Hacker for this contribution.

dispersed, and resilient U.S. posture along the entire First Island Chain—from South Korea to the Philippines—that would be mutually supporting and offer multiple axes of counter-attack against PLA forces. Unlike the small islands in Japan’s Southwest Island Chain or the rugged, underdeveloped Philippine islands in the Luzon Strait, Taiwan is a large island with modern logistics infrastructure. This offers advantages to U.S. forces that may need to conceal and sustain themselves over a protracted conflict. Placing a combat-credible U.S. presence on Taiwan in advance of a potential conflict, rather than waiting until wartime, would also support timely U.S. counterattack operations and eliminate the risk that the PLA would interdict forces in transit to Taiwan during wartime.¹⁸⁹ Further, Taiwan-based American combat forces would reduce the potential impact of access, basing, and overflight restrictions that other regional allies may impose on U.S. forces. An operationally relevant U.S. posture on Taiwan would thus complicate Chinese planning, reduce Beijing’s incentives to conduct a surprise first strike, and improve crisis stability. A Taiwan-based U.S. combat presence may also increase the PLA’s required preparations to take the island, which would increase the likelihood that United States and its allies would detect indications and warnings of a forthcoming PLA attack.

Over time, a U.S. presence on Taiwan could even include a public diplomacy element. If staffed with politically adroit military and civilian leaders and staff, this U.S. presence could privately and at times publicly engage with Taiwanese politicians and the Taiwanese people. Through briefings, media interviews, and social media, the staff would be able to provide assessments of the PLA threat and updates on allied preparations for Taiwan’s defense. Statements made by Taiwan-based American personnel would need to be carefully drafted and coordinated with Washington to avoid upsetting the U.S.–Taiwan military relationship and U.S.–China–Taiwan relations. Nonetheless, the U.S. military’s expertise and judgment would carry significant weight with a U.S.-friendly Taiwanese public and Washington would be remiss if it did not selectively participate in Taiwan’s public discussion of defense issues.

As U.S. presence increased in size, Washington and Taipei may need to publicly negotiate a status of forces agreement to codify the rights and privileges of U.S. personnel on the island. This negotiation process could be lengthy and politically contentious in Taiwan and would raise the domestic and international profile of the U.S. military presence. Within China, this publicity could produce calls from nationalistic elements of the party-state and the general public to take a harder line against Taipei and Washington. American and Taiwanese policy-makers would therefore need to carefully consider the size of any U.S. presence on Taiwan and ensure that its posture is closely tied to U.S. strategic goals and the operational-level requirements of Taiwan’s defense.

189 Transporting U.S. forces to Taiwan in wartime appears to be one type of planned U.S. operation. The PLA would likely lie in wait for such a predictable response. In the Chinese Civil War, the PLA routinely besieged Nationalist Army positions to provoke the Nationalists to dispatch reinforcements, which would be ambushed in transit by PLA forces. Lawrence, “Defending a Mock Invasion of Taiwan.”

Navigating Money, Manpower, and Talent Constraints

U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence on Taiwan are feasible given the budgetary realities and manpower constraints the United States will probably face over coming decades. Yet the U.S. military may face challenges in finding the talent needed to implement these proposed tactical-level training, operational-level planning, and combat and sustainment operations.

Although U.S. policymakers face stark tradeoffs within the defense budget, the operational-level actions proposed above are not fiscally prohibitive. Compared to the multibillion-dollar price tag of many major defense acquisition programs, the costs of building operational-level coordination—through combined dialogues, exercises, and planning and through establishing mechanisms for bureaucratic and technological integration—are much smaller and more manageable. For instance, the European Deterrence Initiative’s combined annual budget for building partner capacity and conducting exercises and training has averaged approximately \$582 million over fiscal years 2023 to 2025 (compared to an annual defense budget of over \$800 billion over that same period).¹⁹⁰ In contrast with that multicountry theaterwide program, a targeted and robust program to build U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination could likely be conducted for about a few hundred million dollars annually. Taiwan is also prosperous enough that it could offer host nation support like what is provided by other U.S. allies and partners.

Similarly, there are several feasible ways to overcome manpower constraints. The posture options above are not particularly large relative to U.S. deployments elsewhere, and personnel could be reallocated from other locations. Even within Indo-Pacific Command, there are opportunities to reallocate existing forces. For example, some of the approximately 54,000 personnel in Japan could be relocated to Taiwan. The Japanese government and public may be comfortable with this realignment given Taiwan’s link to the security of Japan’s southern flank and major sea lines of communication.

Most importantly and perhaps counterintuitively, a modest investment in U.S.–Taiwan interoperability and a U.S. presence on Taiwan may free U.S. Defense Department budgetary resources for other theaters and contingencies. The interoperability and posture recommendations would considerably improve the effectiveness and resilience of America’s forward posture in the Western Pacific, thereby reducing stress on the U.S. military’s standoff power projection platforms and intertheater sustainment capabilities.

Although these interoperability and posture options do not call for dramatic increases in budgets or manpower, they do require skilled, experienced personnel from within

¹⁹⁰ This figure combines the actual FY 2023 figure with the requested amounts for FY 2024 and 2025. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *European Deterrence Initiative* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2024), p. 3, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2025/FY2025_EDI_JBook.pdf. For total defense budget spending, see Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, *Defense Budget Overview*, p. 1-3.

the services. Efforts to build U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination would demand personnel who not only are highly proficient in tactics and operations but also have strong leadership, diplomatic, and cross-cultural awareness skills and Mandarin language abilities. Such individuals can be difficult to find.¹⁹¹ American special operations forces and other technically skilled personnel are already in high demand. The U.S. military has repeatedly found it difficult to recruit and retain military advisors. Many uniformed personnel perceive that advisory positions are not beneficial to career advancement, so they decline such roles or remain in them briefly.¹⁹²

To implement a U.S. presence on Taiwan, recruiting, training, and retaining highly qualified personnel is essential. Expanding bilateral interactions in the short term through exercises, training, dialogues, planning, and posture would improve U.S.–Taiwan operational-level familiarity and trust. Over the long term, these efforts would yield a large pool of U.S. personnel adept at U.S.–Taiwan combined operations and allied operations in the Indo-Pacific.

Involving Allies in Taiwan's Operational-Level Defense

Clarity about allied—and even American—responses in a potential future Taiwan contingency is elusive, yet American, Taiwanese, and allied forces could still work together at the operational level in peacetime to improve deterrence around Taiwan. Enhancing multilateral coordination in the short term would reduce the vulnerabilities of a combined defense of Taiwan and provide future allied policymakers with safer and more effective options for using their forces in combat. Similar to the U.S. efforts proposed above, Washington should look to its allies and partners for complementary Taiwan-related actions on strategy, interoperability, and posture. These actions should be designed to ameliorate the major operational challenges of a combined defense of Taiwan.

American and allied forces could engage in a broad range of multilateral Taiwan-focused exercises, training, dialogues, and planning sessions.¹⁹³ As necessary, creative avenues could be explored to facilitate such engagement and overcome initial political obstacles. For instance, multilateral exercises involving Taiwanese forces could initially focus

191 Grant Newsham, “U.S. and Taiwan Militaries Doing More Together, but There’s a Catch,” *Epoch Times*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.theepochtimes.com/opinion/us-and-taiwan-militaries-doing-more-together-but-theres-a-catch-5101641>.

192 The Army’s difficulty in recruiting and retaining personnel when establishing the Security Forces Assistance Brigade provides one recent example. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Divided Responsibility: Lessons from U.S. Security Sector Assistance Efforts in Afghanistan* (Arlington, VA: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2019), pp. 8, 27, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-19-39-LL.pdf>; and Jared Keller, “The Army’s Much-Hyped Advise-and-Assist Brigade Couldn’t Find Enough Soldiers to Actually Advise and Assist, SIGAR Chief Says,” *Task & Purpose*, July 30, 2019, <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/sigar-army-sfab-recruiting-retention/>.

193 As one example of an initial policy effort in this direction, the United States and Japan issued a joint statement in 2021 in which they “recognize the importance of deterrence to maintain peace and stability in the region” and “underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.” “U.S.–Japan Joint Leaders’ Statement: U.S.–Japan Global Partnership for a New Era.”

on nontraditional or noncombat missions such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, maritime domain awareness, and noncombatant evacuation operations. Although exercises on or near Taiwan would be ideal, multinational exercises with Taiwanese forces could be conducted in geographic areas beyond Taiwan's immediate waters if that is necessary to increase allied participation. To enable greater allied participation in Taiwan-related planning discussions, the U.S. government could also encourage unofficial workshops, wargames, and other exercises among multinational groups of nongovernmental experts and former officials.

The allies could even begin to discuss informal and formal multilateral military groupings designed to uphold peace and stability in the Western Pacific. Such coordinating bodies or task forces could focus on operational and technical military coordination and/or strategy and policy issues. For instance, a security grouping could be formed among military forces in the Western Pacific region, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, and other potential allies and partners. The group could agree to communications and technology standards to facilitate information sharing, improve domain awareness, and coordinate air defense systems. The participants could eventually consider establishing a permanent organization for command and control and planning in the Western Pacific.¹⁹⁴ The group would not need to be an alliance nor state a position on Taiwan's legal status. Creative parallel command arrangements could be pursued if member nations were unwilling to agree on Taiwan's participation. Two separate command structures—for instance, one with the United States and Taiwan and one with the United States and regional allies—could be coordinated under a single dual-hatted U.S. commander, or a coordination center could be established to closely coordinate operations between the two structures. In wartime, the structures could be merged if there were political willingness among the member nations.

More expansively, regardless of its position on Taiwan's status, this multilateral group could issue a statement or treaty in which the participants proclaim the need to resolve regional disputes peacefully and reserve the right to intervene in armed conflicts that threaten regional stability and international commerce. Even if Taiwan were not part of such an arrangement, the participants could specify a relevant area where such a statement applied. Precedent for such a statement can be found in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which covered Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia even though those countries were not treaty signatories. Admittedly, SEATO was rightly maligned as a hollow institution dominated by extraregional powers and lacking necessary planning and command and

194 Recent publications have highlighted potential new bilateral and multilateral joint structures for conducting combined command and planning in the Western Pacific. Zach Ota, "Forging the Force: A Joint Task Force in the Indo-Pacific," *War on the Rocks*, April 26, 2024, <https://warontherocks.com/2024/04/forging-the-force-a-joint-task-force-in-the-indo-pacific/>; and Christopher B. Johnstone and Jim Schoff, "A Vital Next Step for the U.S.–Japan Alliance: Command and Control Modernization," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/vital-next-step-us-japan-alliance-command-and-control-modernization>.

control functions.¹⁹⁵ In contrast, a legitimate and militarily effective future Western Pacific security arrangement could be centered around key Indo-Pacific democracies such as Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea and include a standing organization for combined planning, exercises, and command and control.

Regardless of the group's specific form and focus, multilateral security activities and structures involving Taiwan would pay dividends for regional security. Improving allied interoperability is necessary for handling a wide range of Indo-Pacific contingencies. Perhaps counterintuitively, placing Taiwan in a larger Indo-Pacific interoperability framework and routinizing military coordination with Taiwanese forces could help the allies avoid overplanning for a Taiwan conflict. Removing obstructions and simplifying complexities in allied planning for Taiwan would free up time and resources that the allies could dedicate to other security concerns. Efforts to develop Indo-Pacific allied interoperability could even improve the effectiveness of allied operations around the globe, particularly if Indo-Pacific allies began to adopt NATO standards.¹⁹⁶

The options raised above are not a reflexively hawkish attempt to push American power to its limits or permanently separate China and Taiwan. As senior U.S. policymakers examine the cross-strait military balance and the U.S.–Taiwan military relationship, they should carefully assess U.S. national interests and the costs and risks of various options to defend those interests. If Washington's strategic objective is to deter and, if necessary, defeat a PLA invasion of Taiwan, then policymakers and planners should assess the range of American, Taiwanese, and allied ways and means required to meet that objective's operational requirements. This chapter is an initial assessment of potentially valuable ways to improve deterrence and warfighting through U.S.–Taiwan–allied operational-level coordination. U.S., Taiwanese, and allied military planners would need to conduct additional analysis to assess the feasibility of implementing these and other measures.

195 reen, *By More than Providence*, pp. 289–96. See also Nixon, “Asia after Viet Nam.”

196 Gabriel Dominguez, “Japan and NATO Usher In New Era of Cooperation Amid China Concerns,” *Japan Times*, July 12, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/07/12/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-nato-new-cooperation-agreement/>.

CHAPTER 6

Managing Competing Risks

Political leaders routinely confront competing risks. Actions intended to mitigate one type of threat may increase the intensity of a different set of dangers. Strategy is the art of choosing which risks to accept.

For the U.S. government, risk is unavoidable in Taiwan policy. When crafting a defense strategy toward Taiwan, U.S. policymakers must assess and balance three unavoidable risks: (a) suffering deterrence failure and military defeat, (b) provoking Beijing into initiating conflict, and (c) creating a moral hazard in Taipei that encourages Taiwanese politicians to push toward a unilateral declaration of independence and/or to avoid necessary increases in defense spending.

In implementing the strategy of *peaceful resolution*, American policymakers would be managing the severity of these three existing risks, not taking on new risks. In other words, the issue for U.S. risk management is one of degree rather than of kind. Adopting *peaceful resolution* would decrease the risk of deterrence failure, but it may raise the severity of the other two risks. Concerns about this shift in risk acceptance should not be easily dismissed, yet the provocation and moral hazard risks are not as automatic or extensive as some may believe. These two risks are manageable, and greater tolerance of them is preferable to passively allowing the military balance to further tip in Beijing's favor, which courts the risk of instability and defeat.

Provoking Beijing into Initiating Conflict

Recasting U.S. policy toward Taiwan as *peaceful resolution* and pursuing U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination would more directly challenge the PRC’s sovereignty claim and set a more confrontational tone with the PRC. In Beijing, senior policymakers could interpret *peaceful resolution* and its operational-level components as a cynical attempt to mask an aggressive, escalatory strategy in the trappings of a traditional status quo U.S. policy. Chinese leaders could grow fearful that Taiwan is slipping out of its grasp, both politically and militarily, and that time would no longer be on the PRC’s side. Some American observers may thus be concerned that *peaceful resolution* would incentivize Chinese policymakers to initiate conflict in the short-term, before new U.S.–Taiwan operational-level efforts bear fruit and the U.S. military’s Indo-Pacific forces are fully prepared.¹⁹⁷

Concern over conflict in the short-term is legitimate, but it does not undermine the rationale for *peaceful resolution*. First, the United States and the PRC are in a rational competition in risk taking. Maintaining deterrence around Taiwan requires a greater American willingness to endure risk, given the PRC’s increasingly aggressive behavior and growing military power. Second, the probability that the PRC would hasten a Taiwan conflict in response to *peaceful resolution* is moderated by the CCP’s limitations in accelerating PLA modernization and Xi’s reading of global geopolitical trends. Third, U.S. policymakers can mitigate the PRC’s reaction to *peaceful resolution* through careful policy statements, ad hoc implementation, and transparency about ultimate U.S. objectives.

PRC–U.S. Competition in Risk Taking Requires a Higher U.S. Risk Tolerance

The United States and the PRC have entered a more unrestrained risk-taking competition.¹⁹⁸ The PRC’s Cold War-era incentives to avoid confrontation with the United States and its allies have been removed, and CCP leaders have clearly become more risk acceptant since at least 2009, when the PRC began increasing its efforts to enforce sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. Today, Beijing is implementing an intentional strategy to manipulate U.S. risk tolerance to China’s advantage.¹⁹⁹ PRC policymakers are increasing the genuine risk of a

197 As one prominent American expert group argues, “The stationing of significant U.S. forces on the island in peacetime...would undercut assurances to Beijing that are an essential element of deterrence and thereby greatly increase, rather than decrease the likelihood of conflict across the Taiwan Strait.” Task Force on U.S.–China Policy, *Avoiding War over Taiwan* (La Jolla, CA: 21st Century China Center, UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy, 2022), p. 7, <https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/2022-avoiding-war-over-taiwan.pdf>. For a similar argument, see Blanchette and Hass, “The Taiwan Long Game.”

198 As Schelling notes, “International relations often have the character of a competition in risk taking, characterized not so much by tests of force as by tests of nerve.” Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 94.

199 Chinese behavior can be described as brinksmanship. As Schelling defines the term, “Brinksmanship is thus the deliberate creation of a recognizable risk of war, a risk that one does not completely control. It is the tactic of deliberately letting the situation get somewhat out of hand, just because its being out of hand may be intolerable to the other party and force his accommodation.” Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 200.

crisis—through tactics such as conducting reckless maneuvers around U.S. military aircraft and ships, refusing to meet with U.S. defense officials and military officers, and rejecting U.S. attempts to establish Sino-American crisis communications capabilities—in order to pressure the United States to decrease its risk propensity in response.²⁰⁰ Put differently, the PRC is rationally using risky behavior to advance its objectives, and the United States is unavoidably a participant in this risk-taking competition.

Peaceful resolution would be a U.S. effort in calculated risk-taking, repairing deterrence to the extent necessary to prevent conflict without provoking the PRC into initiating conflict. With the 1970s Sino-American consensus on global order long gone, deterrence around Taiwan is now the primary guarantee of cross-strait peace.²⁰¹ The risk of cross-strait conflict will increase as the military balance shifts further in Beijing's favor. Arguments that actions like the presence of U.S. forces on Taiwan risk a near-term backlash by Beijing must be complemented by the likewise valid risk that the U.S. military may otherwise be unable to defend Taiwan if Beijing attacks in the near future.²⁰²

If the United States compromised its longstanding principle that peace be maintained around Taiwan, Washington would soon find itself in an unfavorable middle ground, involved enough that U.S. credibility is too much at stake to retreat but not involved enough that the U.S. military could defend Taiwan despite suffering grim losses in any attempt to do so. Building U.S.–Taiwan interoperability and an operationally relevant U.S. posture on Taiwan are time-intensive, long-term projects. If these measures are critical to Taiwan's future defense, then today's U.S. policymakers are actively incurring risk by blocking their implementation. Moreover, delaying U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination and a U.S. posture on Taiwan out of fear of PRC retaliation is shortsighted, given that China's ability to retaliate against the United States and Taiwan will only grow in the years ahead as the PLA further expands its power projection and nuclear capabilities. Policymakers must explicitly identify and weigh the short-term and long-term gains, costs, and risks embedded in their actions and nonactions.

200 Jim Garamone, "U.S. Accuses China of Conducting 'Centralized, Concerted' Campaign of Harassment of Aircraft," *DOD News*, October 17, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3560463/us-accuses-china-of-conducting-centralized-concerted-campaign-of-harassment-of/>; and David E. Sanger, "Biden Approved Secret Nuclear Strategy Refocusing on Chinese Threat," *New York Times*, August 20, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/20/us/politics/biden-nuclear-china-russia.html>.

201 Matthew Pottinger and Matthew Turpin, "The Myth of Accidental Wars," in Matthew Pottinger, ed., *The Boiling Moat*, pp. 43–58.

202 Such discussions need to consciously account for how humans weigh the expected value of gains and losses given status quo conditions, framing, and uncertainty. See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011), pp. 278–88.

Peaceful resolution would improve deterrence by repairing the combat credibility of U.S. and Taiwanese forces and by signaling America's willingness to take risks to maintain peace. U.S. officials already publicly acknowledge Xi's preparations to take the island by force,²⁰³ so Chinese leaders could reasonably interpret half-hearted U.S. measures to defend Taiwan as a signal that America is no longer willing to militarily intervene in the face of China's military power. In contrast, the implication of U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination would be that America would directly intervene against a PLA attempt to take the island. Moreover, an operationally relevant U.S. military presence on Taiwan would alter U.S.–PRC deterrence dynamics in America's favor, in that Beijing would more likely be the party with the last clear chance to avoid a conflict. Sending U.S. forces to Taiwan amid a crisis would be escalatory, but with U.S. forces already on Taiwan, the U.S. military would be in position to respond to a Chinese attack without offering Chinese leaders a clear pretext for escalation.²⁰⁴

U.S.–Taiwan interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence in Taiwan do not cross Beijing's threshold—a Taiwanese declaration of independence—for initiating military conflict. These new American actions should be viewed as a hardly surprising counterresponse to the unfolding strategic environment, PLA modernization, and China's increasingly threatening military operations around Taiwan. The writings of Chinese strategists strongly convey the expectation that a declining United States will vainly attempt to reassert itself to contain China's rising power. In the case of Taiwan, CCP leaders already believe in an ongoing "American strategy of 'containing China with Taiwan' [以台制华]" and they are certainly aware of Washington's implicit threat to militarily intervene in a China–Taiwan conflict.²⁰⁵ Further, despite much bombast, Beijing already tolerates actions like U.S. arms sales to Taipei that implicitly undermine the PRC's sovereignty claim.

PRC leaders would nonetheless vehemently protest *peaceful resolution* and its operational-level components. Beyond repeating recent examples of military exercises and incursions into Taiwan's air and sea space, China could pursue more aggressive actions. Beijing could direct the PLA to conduct large-scale exercises around Taiwan, engage in more confrontational incursions into Taiwanese airspace and waters, interfere with air and maritime transportation around Taiwan, or blockade or seize one or more of Taiwan's outlying islands.

203 Brennan, "Transcript: CIA Director William Burns."

204 My thanks to Gabriel Collins on this point. Further, although there remains debate about the efficacy of tripwire forces, the answer is not a clear yes or no. As Schelling explains, the existence of a tripwire force could complicate an adversary's thinking in various ways. Schelling, *Strategy of Conflict*, p. 203.

205 寿晓松 [Shou Xiaosong], ed., *战略学 [Science of Military Strategy]* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), p. 80. See also Andrew Scobell, Shao Yuqun, Carla Freeman, Wu Chunsi et al., *U.S.–China Signaling, Action-Reaction Dynamics, and Taiwan: A Preliminary Examination* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2022), pp. 7–15, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/09/us-china-signaling-action-reaction-dynamics-and-taiwan-preliminary-examination>.

These military actions could be complemented by punitive measures against Taiwanese, American, and allied economic interests in China.²⁰⁶

Although these potential counterresponses are concerning and carry risk, Washington must accept that Beijing's reactions would be an unavoidable consequence of taking necessary steps to stabilize the cross-strait military balance. China could make considerable noise about its displeasure, but these short-term costs pale in comparison to the potentially devastating long-term consequences of inaction.

PLA Modernization and Global Geopolitical Conditions Constrain Xi's Timing

In contemplating a prospective Taiwan operation, Xi's timing is constrained by the pace of PLA modernization and global geopolitical conditions. These factors moderate the probability that Xi would directly respond to *peaceful resolution* by initiating conflict. Further, these considerations should incentivize U.S. policymakers to exploit a current window of opportunity to improve deterrence before the risk of conflict increases in future years.

First, the corollary to Xi's directive that the PLA should be prepared to force unification by 2027 is that the PLA is unprepared for such an operation today. If it were, such a directive would not need to exist. China's military is already moving rapidly to try to meet Xi's objective, and the PLA may find it difficult to further accelerate its efforts.²⁰⁷ CCP leaders have dedicated substantial funding to PLA modernization since the mid-1990s and have been focused for decades on acquiring capabilities for a Taiwan conflict, particularly since the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. Beyond an even higher defense budget, an acceleration of existing efforts would require overcoming inevitable bottlenecks in areas such as recruitment, training, and exercising. Further, in April 2024, Xi decided to disband the Strategic Support Force—forces essential for network and space warfare—and to split its components into three new independent arms. The information domain is the high ground of a future conflict, according to China's military strategists, and PLA leaders may caution patience regarding a potential conflict if their information-focused forces are still amid a bureaucratic reorganization.

Second, Xi is seeking to realize a grand strategic vision, of which Taiwan is one component. Xi has proclaimed for years that the world is experiencing “great changes unseen in a century,” referring to the inevitable decline of the U.S.-led international order, China's

206 Lingling Wei, “China Ratchets Up Pressure on Foreign Companies,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 28, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-ratchets-up-pressure-on-foreign-companies-524b958e>.

207 This type of argument is often used to counter more provocative proposals for U.S. policy toward China. This counterargument could be valid depending on the case, but a fuller understanding of the context is essential. For instance, the same reasoning was frequently used to argue against U.S. technological disengagement from the PRC in the late 2010s and early 2020s, with critics stating U.S. government technology restrictions risked accelerating the PRC's efforts to develop advanced technology indigenously. These critics did not sufficiently recognize the formidable structural weaknesses in China's innovation ecosystem and the already high opportunity costs of China's drive for technological self-reliance.

inexorable rise, and the ongoing global transition toward a multipolar system.²⁰⁸ Through greater coordination with Russia and Iran, including support for Russia's war in Ukraine, Xi is attempting to strain finite U.S. resources across multiple theaters and accelerate the inevitable decline of the U.S.-led international order. Xi is unlikely to think these inevitable global geopolitical trends can be undone by a modest footprint of U.S. trainers, headquarters personnel, and combat-enabling forces on Taiwan. He would be hesitant to risk his grand vision by initiating a Taiwan conflict before he believed global geopolitical conditions favored action.

U.S. Options to Mitigate Beijing's Reaction to Peaceful Resolution

American policymakers could mitigate Beijing's reaction to *peaceful resolution* through a combination of public messaging, ad hoc implementation, and candidness about U.S. objectives.

First, in publicly framing *peaceful resolution*, U.S. policymakers could justify their efforts in terms of the text of the Three Communiques and the U.S. government's enduring, principled commitment to regional peace. Beijing would portray the strategy as a violation of the communiques and a reckless attempt to undermine the foundation of U.S.–China relations. Yet insistence on peaceful resolution has been at the core of America's Taiwan policy since the early 1950s. Throughout the negotiation of the communiques, U.S. negotiators clearly communicated America's interest in a peaceful resolution of Taiwan's status and directly linked Beijing's behavior to U.S.–Taiwan arms sales and U.S. posture in Taiwan (see Chapter 2). Remaining faithful to these clearly stated U.S. principles requires Washington to undertake new actions to balance the PLA's modernization and the PRC's coercive behavior. Reframing America's defense strategy to maintain alignment with enduring U.S. principles would not be a discontinuous change in Washington's approach toward Taiwan.

Second, to limit the scale and intensity of Chinese counterreactions, Washington could flexibly implement *peaceful resolution* in an ad hoc manner. The form of U.S.–PRC–Taiwan relations is at times even more important than the substance. U.S. policymakers could refrain from public statements that directly connect all new operational-level actions to *peaceful resolution*, conceal interactions (e.g., combined planning sessions) when feasible, and gradually increase U.S. military activities on Taiwan to inure Beijing to U.S. operations and avoid a clear provocation. For instance, the president could direct and stimulate concrete bureaucratic action in discreet ways—such as issuing

208 "Great Changes Unseen in a Century," *The Center for Strategic Translation*, <https://www.strategictranslation.org/glossary/great-changes-unseen-in-a-century>; and Peter Mattis, "Changes Unseen in a Century: Seeking American Partnership in U.S. Decline," *China Brief*, November 21, 2023, <https://jamestown.org/program/changes-unseen-in-a-century-seeking-american-partnership-in-us-decline/>.

nonpublic guidance that accelerates U.S. military efforts to develop U.S.–Taiwan interoperability and create an operationally relevant U.S. posture on Taiwan—without issuing public statements that Beijing could react against. Although this guidance would probably become publicly reported in subsequent months or years, the intervening period would buy time for U.S. and Taiwanese forces to bolster deterrence.

American operations or personnel in Taiwan could be discussed using oblique and benign terms that avoid unnecessary public disclosure of specific on-the-ground actions. For instance, as a means of downplaying the ongoing presence of U.S. forces on Taiwan, the U.S. military could to some extent employ heel-to-toe deployments that would allow personnel levels to remain stable but are notionally rotational. A U.S. presence focused on enabling functions such as command and control, ISR, electronic warfare, and logistics would be much less provocative than weapons-toting military personnel. For any U.S. military efforts on Taiwan that are unavoidably public, the U.S. government could portray the small American footprint as insignificant when compared with the PLA's dramatically larger presence across the strait.

Finally, U.S. policymakers should be transparent with all audiences—including China, Taiwan, U.S. allies, and the American people—about ultimate U.S. objectives toward Taiwan. American leaders could stress the enduring continuity in U.S. policy: any resolution between Beijing and Taipei should be peaceful, and neither side should take unilateral actions to change the status quo. New U.S. efforts to stabilize the cross-strait military balance simply reflect the objective situation posed by China's remarkable growth in military power. *Peaceful resolution* would not be an attempt to permanently separate Taiwan from China, nor would it foreclose the possibility that Taiwan might unify with the mainland—an outcome Washington would accept if an agreement were negotiated without duress and accepted by people on both sides of the strait. Without placing pressure on either side, Washington could continue to publicly convey that it would be pleased to see friendly cross-strait interaction and communication on terms acceptable to both sides. Further, the U.S. government could convey the above positions to the Chinese public in an attempt to preemptively undercut the CCP leadership's future case for war.

Despite such U.S. measures, Chinese policymakers would likely continue to suspect that the United States is encouraging Taiwanese independence through its actions. Even so, conducting these activities and stressing America's interest in peace would be necessary to maintain unity with America's frontline allies and partners, who are highly sensitive to the risk of a regional conflict.

Creating a Moral Hazard in Taipei

The proposals in this report—*peaceful resolution*, U.S.–Taiwan interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. posture on Taiwan—would more strongly indicate that America intends to defend Taiwan from a PRC attack. Yet some analysts fear a closer military relationship with Taiwan could subject the United States to dangerous swings in Taiwanese domestic politics. Some may argue this report’s proposals could create a moral hazard whereby certain Taiwanese politicians, emboldened by U.S. support, more forcefully antagonize Beijing or even launch a formal campaign for de jure independence.²⁰⁹ Alternatively or in combination, analysts may believe a greater American commitment to Taiwan could dissuade Taiwanese leaders from making necessary increases in defense spending.

Historical U.S. apprehensions about Taiwanese entanglement are less relevant now than they were decades ago. First, Taiwan’s electorate has proven itself pragmatic, seeking to preserve the status quo rather than pursue destabilizing actions or de jure independence.²¹⁰ The majority of Taiwanese voters have refrained from supporting initiatives that advance de jure independence, such as a 2008 referendum on pursuing United Nations membership under the name “Taiwan.” Although Taiwan’s DPP explicitly sought independence in the 1990s, it has moderated its position on relations with Beijing over successive presidential elections in order to maintain its electoral viability.²¹¹

Second, China’s military power strongly incentivizes the Taiwanese public to be more risk averse than in previous decades.²¹² The PLA’s deep capacity of modern weaponry all but ensures that Taiwan’s cities and infrastructure would be devastated after a declaration of independence, regardless of whether the PRC could conquer Taiwan. Although Taiwanese people today are less willing to unify with China and are more receptive to the idea of independence at some undefined future point, their rational interest in self-preservation moderates Taipei’s policies.

209 Such arguments have been used to oppose the idea of strategic clarity. For examples, see Task Force on U.S.–China Policy, *Avoiding War Over Taiwan*; Alastair Iain Johnston, Tsai Chia-Hung, George Yin, and Steven Goldstein, “The Ambiguity of Strategic Clarity,” *War on the Rocks*, June 9, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/06/the-ambiguity-of-strategic-clarity/>; and John Bolton and Derik R. Zitelman, “Why Taiwan Matters to the United States,” *The Diplomat*, August 23, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/why-taiwan-matters-to-the-united-states/>.

210 “Taiwan Independence Vs. Unification with the Mainland (1994/12~2024/12),” National Chengchi University Election Study Center, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>; and Tsai Ying-wen, “Taiwan Meeting the Challenges Crafting a Model of New Asian Value,” June 4, 2015, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/event/150603_Tsai_Ing_wen_transcript.pdf.

211 The DPP’s revised 1991 charter even called for a new constitution and a referendum on independence, though the party later dropped these points, stating instead that the ROC is already an independent country. Rigger, *Politics in Taiwan*, pp. 156–57. See also Tucker, *Strait Talk*, p. 180.

212 My thanks to Toshi Yoshihara for this point.

Third, the United States is not required to defend Taiwan if it unilaterally pursues de jure independence.²¹³ Even America's formal defense treaties are ambiguously worded to provide U.S. policymakers flexibility, and Washington is rarely if ever entangled by its alliances. Moreover, despite a strategic shift in Washington toward *peaceful resolution*, Taiwanese fears of U.S. abandonment would persist. Washington's derecognition of the ROC, the abrogation of the U.S.–ROC mutual defense treaty, and the removal of U.S. forces from Taiwan in 1979 remain embedded in Taiwanese consciousness. The Taiwanese public generally recognizes that the context of a future conflict, including Taiwan's behavior, would determine whether and to what extent America would become involved. Continued U.S. statements that both China and Taiwan should avoid unilateral actions to change the status quo would reinforce to Taiwanese leaders and citizens that U.S. military support would be unlikely if Taipei pursued de jure independence.²¹⁴

Alongside entanglement concerns, some in Washington fear that Taiwan is too complacent about the PLA threat and that stronger U.S. security assurances may disincentivize Taiwan's own military preparedness.²¹⁵ Although progress has been uneven in recent years, Taiwan's national security establishment appears to be reorienting to meet the PLA threat. Taiwan's defense budget has been increasing as a percentage of gross domestic product, mandatory conscription has been extended from four months to one year, and civil defense groups are organically organizing and expanding.²¹⁶ Treating Taiwan as a genuine U.S. military partner and building U.S.–Taiwan operational-level coordination should give Taiwan increased confidence about rebalancing its military modernization toward asymmetric weapons and away from large conventional platforms that are redundant with U.S. capabilities. Nonetheless, U.S. policymakers would need to remain active in supporting Taiwan's military modernization efforts and be vigilant in assessing the effects of U.S. policy upon Taiwan's domestic politics and defense resourcing decisions.

213 Michael Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of U.S. Defense Pacts," *International Security* 39, no. 4, 2015, pp. 7–48, <https://direct.mit.edu/isec/article/39/4/7/12305/The-Myth-of-Entangling-Alliances-Reassessing-the>. See also Tongfi Kim, "Why Alliances Entangle but Seldom Entrap States," *Security Studies* 20, no. 3, 2011, pp. 350–77.

214 As one example of such a warning, see Thomas J. Christensen, "A Strong and Moderate Taiwan," *Department of State*, September 11, 2007, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2007/91979.htm>.

215 Christopher McCallion, "Strategic Clarity on Taiwan Will Paint the U.S. into a Corner," *Responsible Statecraft*, June 14, 2022, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/06/14/strategic-clarity-on-taiwan-will-paint-the-us-into-a-corner/>; and Bolton and Zitelman, "Why Taiwan Matters to the United States."

216 Caitlin Campbell, *Taiwan: Defense and Military Issues* (Washington, DC: CRS, August 15, 2024), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12481>; "New Reservist Training Plan to Continue in 2023: Taiwan Defense Chief," *Focus Taiwan*, October 19, 2022, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202210190009>; and Russell Hsiao, "Taiwan's Bottom-Up Approach."

The proposed U.S. actions do not preclude, and may even enable, American incentives to facilitate Taiwan's defense reforms. America's post-1945 treaty alliances with South Korea and Taiwan were the solution to, not the cause of, Washington's fears of overdependence and entrapment in a future conflict involving either of those states.²¹⁷ Although foreign allies certainly possess agency and can buck Washington's will, America's bilateral alliances can be a means of influencing, directing, and restraining allied behavior. Although Taiwan needs to do more to sufficiently meet the PLA threat, Taiwanese political dynamics do not undermine the justification for *peaceful resolution*, U.S.–Taiwan interoperability, and an operationally relevant U.S. posture in Taiwan.

²¹⁷ Cha, *Powerplay*, pp. 120–21.

CHAPTER 7

Envisioning Resolution

The ambiguity of past American positions and the two-way nature of the Three Communiques should enable, rather than constrain, policy flexibility in Washington. While continuing to assure the people of China and Taiwan that the United States does not support unilateral changes to the status quo, Washington must adjust to the discomforting fact that China's growing military power and the expanding operational-level requirements of Taiwan's defense now demand a more overt and risk-tolerant strategic approach. *Peaceful resolution*, U.S.–Taiwan military interoperability, U.S.–Taiwan combined exercises, and an operationally relevant U.S. military presence in Taiwan are necessary and interrelated steps toward repairing cross-strait deterrence and righting the balance of power around Taiwan.

Xi sees unification with Taiwan as essential for China's national rejuvenation and the realization of his Chinese Dream. Despite Xi's stated preference for peaceful unification, he has been unable to forge a constructive vision of cross-strait relations acceptable to Taiwan's people, and the CCP's domestic political repression will undermine and discourage any prospect of peaceful unification for decades to come. The CCP's failure to create a more compelling vision of future cross-strait relations is jeopardizing cross-strait stability. Eschewing outreach, Beijing is increasingly willing to use its growing military power to intimidate and threaten Taiwan.

A democratic Taiwan and the CCP's Marxist–Leninist political system appear irreconcilable. Rejection of a CCP-controlled China is a major reason why Taiwanese are increasingly wary of any form of unification.²¹⁸ The CCP habitually violates the basic human freedoms of Chinese citizens. More importantly, by failing to designate a successor and breaking precedent to claim a third term as head of the party-state, Xi has reopened the greatest threat to China's long-term stability: CCP leadership succession. Taiwanese people, who enjoy basic political freedoms and a stable democratic political system, thus distrust the CCP's willingness to respect Taiwan's long-term stability and autonomy in any agreement on

218 Rigger, Nachman et al., "Why Is Unification So Unpopular in Taiwan?"

unification.²¹⁹ Further, under a one China framework, there are multiple forms of peaceful unification—such as a federation, confederation, or commonwealth—that may ultimately be acceptable to most ordinary Chinese and Taiwanese. Yet these options are incompatible with the CCP’s Leninist drive to eliminate political rivals. CCP leaders have explicitly ruled out these options or the possibility of a unified political system in which Taiwan’s government has equal standing with the government in Beijing.²²⁰

In short, *peaceful resolution* is a strategy that buys time for peace. From America’s perspective, military means cannot solve Taiwan’s status, they can only preserve the prospect of a peaceful resolution between Beijing and Taipei. Taiwan’s international status is unlikely to be peacefully resolved—and America’s military role in Taiwan’s defense is unlikely to conclude— at least until the CCP’s political monopoly ends.

219 For instance, in 2019 and 2020, Taiwan’s domestic politics were directly impacted by the CCP’s suppression of Hong Kong protests held in opposition to the pending termination of the territory’s legal autonomy. The CCP’s oppression in Hong Kong led to an unexpected turnaround in DPP support and a resounding reelection victory for Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan’s 2020 presidential election. James Pomfret and Yimou Lee, “Hong Kong Protesters Fete Landslide Election Win for Taiwan’s Tsai,” *Reuters*, January 12, 2020, [reuters.com/article/uk-taiwan-election-hongkong/hong-kong-protesters-fete-landslide-election-win-for-taiwans-tsai-idUKKBN1ZBo7B](https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-taiwan-election-hongkong/hong-kong-protesters-fete-landslide-election-win-for-taiwans-tsai-idUKKBN1ZBo7B).

220 “China Opposes ‘Confederation’ System in Solving Taiwan Issue,” *People’s Daily*, March 4, 2001, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/8436.htm>.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems
IRI	Islamic Resistance in Iraq
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JADC2	Joint All-Domain Command and Control
JMTG-U	Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine
KMT	Kuomintang
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSB	National Security Bureau
ROC	Republic of China
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
UAS	unmanned aerial systems



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