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Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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U.S. DEFENSE OF TAIWAN

IN THIS ISSUE

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Will America Defend Taiwan? Here's What History Says

By Ian Easton

In December 1949, Chiang Kai-shek moved the capitol of the Republic of China (ROC) to Taipei. He intended the relocation to be temporary. He had already moved his government multiple times: when the Empire of Japan invaded China, when World War II ended, and again when Mao Zedong's Communist insurgents took the upper hand in the Chinese Civil War.

To Chiang's eyes, Taiwan was the perfect place to refit his tattered forces and prepare them for the long struggle ahead to defeat the Communists. The main island was protected by dozens of tiny island citadels, many just off the mainland coast, and surrounded by famously rough waters. While Chiang's army had sustained crushing battlefield defeats and mass defections, he believed his superior navy and air force would make Taiwan an impregnable fortress.

The events that followed presented successive U.S. presidents with some of the most consequential foreign policy questions ever confronted by America's leaders. During the decades since 1949, there have been several incidents that tested whether or not Washington was willing to confront the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and support Taiwan. If past is prologue, how the United States responded to previous crises might say something important about what it will do in the future. So, what does the historical record say? What might we expect to see if China attacks Taiwan in the 2020s or beyond?

The Korean War

On January 12, 1950, U.S. secretary of state Dean Acheson gave a speech in which he suggested that America no longer intended to defend its erstwhile allies the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Republic of China (Taiwan). According to Acheson, those governments were outside of America's defensive perimeter in Asia. His speech encouraged the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) to accelerate plans to invade Taiwan. But before Mao Zedong and his generals could act, their North Korean ally Kim Il-sung launched an invasion of South Korea.

On learning of the attack, President Harry Truman decided that the U.S. would defend both Korea and Taiwan, and ordered the U.S. Navy to forestall the CCP from attacking the ROC's last redoubt. On June 29, 1950, an American aircraft carrier, heavy cruiser, and eight destroyers sailed into the Taiwan Strait to conduct a show of force within visual range of Communist forces arrayed along the mainland coast. Soon thereafter, armed American seaplanes were stationed on the Penghu Islands and began to search for any hostile movements toward Taiwan.

To further enhance its early-warning picture, the U.S. sent submarines to monitor Chinese ports across from Taiwan, areas where enemy vessels were expected to marshal if an invasion was imminent. In addition,



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four American destroyers were stationed in Taiwan. Their mission was to patrol near the coast of China, with at least two warships watching around the clock for signs of a pending amphibious assault. The Taiwan Patrol Force, as the mini-surveillance fleet became known, operated continuously for nearly three decades to come.

Soon thereafter, the U.S. established a defense command in Taipei and sent a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to Taiwan under the command of a two-star general. This organization was tasked with providing training, logistics, and weapons to the ROC military in order to develop it into a modern fighting force. By 1955, there were tens of thousands of American troops stationed in Taiwan, including over two thousand military advisors, making MAAG the largest of the U.S. advisory groups then deployed around the world. In the following years, MAAG transformed the ROC military into one of Asia's most capable fighting forces.

The 1954–1955 Taiwan Strait Crisis

In August 1954, the Chinese Communists launched a string of operations against ROC forces along the mainland coast. Mao and his top lieutenants judged that by attacking the offshore islands they could drive Washington and Taipei apart and set the stage for a final invasion of Taiwan. They began by shelling Kinmen and Matsu, island groups located just off the coast of Fujian Province. Not long after, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched air and sea raids on the Dachens, a group of islands 200 miles north of Taiwan, near Taizhou in China's Zhejiang Province.

In November 1954, the PLA encircled Yijiangshan, a ROC island base located at the extreme northern flank of the Dachens. Using modern equipment and tactics from the Soviet Union, the PLA carried out a successful invasion operation, taking the island on January 18, 1955. In response, the U.S. Navy steamed into the area with 70 ships, including seven aircraft carriers. The Americans then launched Operation King Kong, the evacuation of the Dachens. U.S. Marines assisted ROC forces to safely move some 15,000 civilians, 11,000 troops, 125 vehicles, and 165 artillery pieces back to Taiwan with no casualties.

On March 3, 1955, Washington formally cemented a mutual defense treaty with Taipei. President Dwight Eisenhower also received permission from Congress to exercise special powers in the defense of Taiwan, granted by the Formosa Resolution. In May 1955, the PLA stopped shelling Kinmen, and, three months later, the CCP released 11 captured American airmen. The 1954–1955 Taiwan Strait Crisis was over, but the stand-off continued.

The 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis

On August 23, 1958, the PLA launched a surprise attack on Kinmen, showering the island group with tens of thousands of shells as a prelude to planned amphibious landings. Beijing sought to test the resolve of the Americans, seeing if the seizure of Kinmen and the threat of war could break the U.S.–ROC alliance apart and demoralize Taiwan. The plan failed almost immediately. ROC military engineers had tunneled deep into Kinmen's granite, carving out subterranean bunkers and strongholds that allowed the defenders to weather the shelling with few casualties. The PLA made an amphibious assault on the nearby island of Tung Ting and was repulsed. To the north, Communist units launched artillery strikes against the Matsu Islands. But those were just as ineffectual.

The U.S. sent in four aircraft carriers, along with a large number of cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and amphibious ships. The American fleet was equipped with low-yield atom bombs, designed to stop a potential human-wave assault on the islands, a PLA tactic previously seen in Korea. After torpedo boats and artillery began to target ROC Navy ships resupplying Kinmen, the U.S. Navy began escorting the convoys from Taiwan with cruisers and destroyers. On September 18, 1958, American artillery guns were rolled ashore Kinmen, which were capable of firing tactical nuclear shells that could incinerate any invader (the shells were kept aboard U.S. Navy ships located nearby). The colossal guns also fired conventional rounds that increased the garrison's firepower and morale.

During the crisis, ROC Air Force pilots used new Super Sabre jets and Sidewinder missiles to engage PLA MiG-17s in air-to-air combat. The results were decisive: ROCAF pilots achieved 33 enemy kills in return for the loss of four of their own. On October 6, Beijing announced a cease-fire under pressure from its Soviet allies, who feared the fighting could escalate and go nuclear. The 1958 Crisis was over and Taiwan's offshore island bases remained undefeated.

The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis

In the early 1990s, Taiwan began peacefully transitioning to a democracy. With the Cold War over, it seemed hopeful that the U.S. and other nations would recognize Taiwan as a legitimate, independent country. Taiwan's president, Lee Teng-hui, publicly signaled that, in his view, the Chinese Civil War was over; Taiwan was now the ROC, the ROC was Taiwan, and his country would no longer claim sovereignty over territory controlled by the authorities in Beijing.

In June 1995, President Lee returned to his alma mater, Cornell University, to announce Taiwan's plans to hold free and fair elections. The CCP responded by conducting a series of ballistic missile tests, firing rockets into the waters north of Taiwan. In August, the PLA moved a large number of troops to known invasion staging areas, conducted naval exercises, and carried out further missile firings. That November, the Chinese military staged an amphibious assault drill. In March 1996, just before the elections, the PLA fired more ballistic missiles into waters directly off Taiwan's two largest ports, and implicitly threatened to turn a planned exercise into a real invasion operation.

The U.S. played an important role throughout the crisis. President Bill Clinton responded to Beijing's provocations by sending two carrier battle groups to waters near Taiwan. The American demonstration succeeded: China backed down, and Taiwan's elections went ahead as planned. President Lee won the elections with a decisive margin, and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis ended on a positive note. Nonetheless, Taiwan remained diplomatically isolated and has slowly become more vulnerable over time, a trend that continues unabated to present day.

Implications for the Future

While all historical analogies are imperfect, precedents previously set could provide American leaders with a guide in subsequent similar circumstances. The record of past policy decisions made by Washington demonstrates that, when tested, American presidents have always viewed it in their nation's interest to come to Taiwan's defense, even amid situations that could have escalated to the level of nuclear warfare. In 1958, for example, Washington was resolved to defend Taiwan against invasion even if that required the use of battlefield atomic weapons—and even if such usage invited nuclear retaliation from the Soviet Union, which was then closely aligned with Beijing.

Perhaps even more notable were those American leadership decisions undertaken in the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis. In that instance, the U.S. deployed aircraft carrier battle groups to waters near Taiwan in spite of the fact that the CCP had recently detonated two nuclear warheads at a test site; had carried out multiple tests of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles; and, in back-channel conversations, had implicitly threatened Los Angeles with nuclear attack. The resolve displayed by Washington in 1996 might be considered particularly remarkable given that the U.S. no longer diplomatically recognized Taiwan's government at the time.

To date, there is no known case in which an American president failed to send forces to support the defense of Taiwan in response to a credible CCP threat. If this track record is indicative of future performance, the years ahead are likely to see the U.S. government continually improve its operational readiness to defend Taiwan in accordance with the evolving threat picture. In times of crisis, American leaders will likely send overwhelming national resources to the Taiwan Strait area and make their commitments to Taiwan's defense more explicit in hopes of convincing the PRC to deescalate tensions.

Even barring a major political-military crisis, it seems probable that the years ahead will see the U.S. government improve its early-warning intelligence via regular ship, submarine, and aircraft patrols of the Taiwan Strait; more frequent overhead passes of space and near-space platforms; and expanded intelligence sharing arrangements with the Taiwanese security services. It also seems probable that the U.S. will make significant enhancements to its diplomatic, trade, intelligence, and military presence in Taiwan.

It remains an open question whether a Taiwan Patrol Force and MAAG-like organization will be reestablished—let alone an official country-to-country relationship and defensive alliance. But each could be considered past examples of political and military initiatives that, when combined, were successful in helping to deter CCP aggression. Herein we might find positive lessons for the future.



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Realism and Deterrence in Cross-Strait Relations

By Joseph Felter

The Strong Do What They Can and the Weak Suffer What They Must

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership has never felt more confident that its increasingly capable military could be deployed to successfully seize Taiwan by force. Decades of expanding defense budgets and investment in military modernization have significantly enhanced the CCP's potential to project power across the Taiwan Strait. Annexing what it considers to be a rogue Chinese province and realizing its aim of achieving national reunification remain the CCP's highest policy priority. Arguably, Chinese leaders have not attempted to forcibly occupy Taiwan to date because of the uncertainty of their chances of succeeding.

It's in the enduring interests of the United States to help safeguard and protect a flourishing Han Chinese democracy in the region. America's commitment to providing for Taiwan's defense as outlined in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act should remain strong. But what are the most effective ways to ensure the CCP leadership does not calculate that it can seize Taiwan at an acceptable cost and how can the U.S. best contribute to these ends?

The core tenets of realist theories of international relations are valuable concepts that can help answer these questions. Realists contend that states compete for relative power and survival in what is inherently an anarchic international system where no higher authority exists that can enforce rules and agreements or resolve disputes. Given these conditions, states must rely on "self-help" because ultimately no one but themselves can be counted on to provide for their security.

The fate of the small Aegean island of Melos in the fifth century BC at the hands of the powerful Athenian military as recounted by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* is a classic case study of political realism. After the Melians rejected the Athenians' ultimatum that they surrender their freedom, the Athenians brutally subjugated the weaker Melians, former colonists of Sparta, despite the Melians' appeals that they wished to remain neutral in the conflict. Unfortunately for the Melians, their hopes that their Peloponnesian allies would come to their aid never materialized. For Athens, the conquest of Melos demonstrated the capabilities of its military to all across the region and underscored its willingness to use decisive force to achieve its political aims. The Athenians' stark acknowledgment that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" captures the essence of how realists view the interaction between nation-states. The characteristics of wars and conquest throughout history indeed reflect these harsh maxims.

As Athens demanded the incorporation of Melos into its empire, so China hubristically wishes to do the same for Taiwan. If the United States wants to truly maximize Taiwan's chances of survival, it will heed the



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POLL: How could America help to defend Taiwan?

- America should re-partner with China to find diplomatic solutions.
- America should accept that Taiwan is not a vital U.S. interest and let events play out.
- America can sell weapons and offer intelligence to help even the odds.
- Stepped-up deployments of American naval and air forces will deter a Chinese attack.
- Taiwan should be under the American nuclear umbrella that alone will ensure its safety.

main tenets of realist theories—and the historical record—in the development and implementation of its policies. Succinctly, U.S. resources and support should focus on helping Taiwan help itself—building its capabilities in ways that prevent a strong state like China from calculating that it “can” annex this de facto independent state by force. This calls for a bias towards action not rhetoric, and an emphasis on building greater self-reliance versus dependency going forward.

Clarifying America’s commitment to defend Taiwan if attacked, as some respected policy professionals have called for, could provide an important signal of U.S. resolve. But as realists would argue, and the history of alliances and warfare can attest, such expressed commitments cannot be credibly enforced. The best way to prevent Taiwan from being attacked is to make the decision to do so untenable for China based on the certainty of failure and the incursion of staggering costs. The less Taiwan must rely on the decisions of foreign leaders and support from outside its own military to accomplish this, the better it is for all who hope to see this thriving democracy continue to flourish.

To be clear, Taiwan is far from the point of being able to defend itself from attack, and the capabilities gap is widening, not closing. U.S. interests are well served by continuing to be unwavering with China that it will not tolerate the use of force to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, and by credibly demonstrating that America is prepared to intervene militarily to help Taiwan defend itself in the event it is attacked. The United States should continue to strengthen its own capabilities to defend Taiwan by investing in the types of defense platforms and employing the operational concepts needed to defeat a rapidly evolving and increasingly capable People’s Liberation Army. America can also seek ways to encourage allies and partners in the region to contribute to deterring conflict over Taiwan short of military intervention, for example, by committing to raise the economic and diplomatic costs China would expect to incur should it choose to attack Taiwan.

Significantly, however, the U.S. should provide incentives and disincentives that encourage Taiwan’s capacities for “self-help,” which realists describe as the only dependable way for states to defend themselves. Encouragingly, Taiwan’s “Overall Defense Concept” (ODC), its current strategy for defending against a Chinese invasion, is a promising approach that aims to develop this self-reliance. It calls for the development and employment of an asymmetric defense posture that leverages the inherent defensive advantages Taiwan can exploit to deny the PRC’s ability to successfully invade the island and exert political control over its people.

Concurrent with efforts to ensure the U.S. maintains the capabilities needed to come to the defense of Taiwan and credibly signal its intention to do so, the U.S. should focus on assisting Taiwan in the development and fielding of the asymmetric capabilities it can employ to best deter and defend against a Chinese attack. For example, provide tangible incentives that encourage Taiwan’s acquisition of larger numbers of smaller/cheaper asymmetric weapon systems like advanced unmanned aerial vehicles, cheap precision guided munitions, and mobile anti-armor and air defense systems, to name a few. Employing a rotational presence of U.S. Special Forces to assist Taiwan in the development and fielding of a decentralized territorial defense force is an example of how U.S. support can be focused on helping Taiwan help itself. Conducting

joint training and exercises that hone Taiwan's asymmetric defensive capacities is another opportunity—albeit provocative in the eyes of Beijing.

It's in U.S. interests—and the interests of all states committed to safeguarding democratic freedoms in the region—to avoid conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Increasing Taiwan's capabilities to defend itself, and complicating China's calculus of its chances of succeeding in the forcible annexation of the island, is the most effective way to deter an attempt by China to do so.



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Taiwan: Time for a Real Discussion

By Admiral Gary Roughead

There has been a spate of recent articles proffering when the People's Republic of China (PRC) will likely be capable of invading Taiwan. The prognostications are interesting but unhelpful as they distract from the reality of the range of coercive actions the PRC may impose on Taiwan and what could happen *now* as a result of the PRC increasing pressure and a related military accident or misstep in the vicinity of Taiwan.

The current American penchant to jump to military options to address thorny global problems often casts the Taiwan dilemma in a superficial bilateral or trilateral military context. That aperture must be opened more fully to consider the realities, attributes, and interests of Taiwan, and how those factors will influence the methods and timing of Beijing's reunification objective. Moreover, those realities, some inconvenient, must underpin new and broader thinking about how to ensure Taiwan's existence as a vibrant democracy.

Geography

Americans are notoriously bad at geography, but geography matters. Even among policy makers, atlases seem to have fallen out of favor. But understanding Taiwan's circumstances and assessing policy implications must start by looking at a map to avoid glossing over the vastness of the Pacific region, as is usually the case. The East China Sea to the north of Taiwan and the South China Sea to its south are an enormous expanse of approximately 1.83 million square miles of ocean, roughly equal to two Mediterranean Seas. The Taiwan Strait is 110 miles across, Shanghai to Taipei is 425 miles, Tokyo to Taipei 1,300 miles, and San Francisco to Taipei is just shy of 6,500 miles, or two and a half times the distance from Washington to San Francisco. With respect to those distances—advantage Beijing.

Resources—Physical and Human

Some countries enjoy the geological good fortune of being energy self-sufficient. Taiwan does not. Energy dependency is a reality in Taiwan's political, economic, security, and social calculi. Prosperous societies with vibrant middle classes rely on energy for manufacturing, transportation, and quality of life. Taiwan imports 98 percent of its energy.¹ That dependency is a vulnerability. Taiwan's laudable renewable energy objectives hold promise, but limited land available for solar energy is a physical reality.² Offshore wind farms are viable options but when realized add a new dimension of maritime critical infrastructure that will add to monitoring and defense needs.

Population density, limited agricultural land, and a declining labor force are factors in Taiwan's low food self-sufficiency rate of 35 percent.³ These limiting factors will not improve in the coming years, keeping food imports an essential and critical import for Taiwan.

In the near and mid term, Taiwan's demographics with respect to workforce, military service, and public expenditures are a predictable reality. Like other Asian countries where immigration is restricted Taiwan's demographic trend is not favorable. A growth rate of .18 percent, a fertility rate that is below the 2.1 percent replacement rate, and a median age of 40.7 years portend policy challenges in the future. Taiwan's population will peak in 2029 and its high median age will usher in a decline in its workforce and an increased demand for elderly care and health care.⁴ Those unavoidable realities will drive budget apportionment and policy and define the future workforce and armed forces. Technology will compensate for some of the human shortfall in the nonmilitary sector where adoption of technology is more readily accepted. The declining availability of young men and women for military service is real and, unlike the private sector, militaries do not readily assimilate new technology, often stubbornly holding onto the old. Taiwan is no different and the consequences of not confronting its demographic reality and thinking anew must be addressed boldly and now.

Math Still Matters

Changing defense strategy to adjust to new circumstances can't simply discount the realities of today. The interaction of the Air Forces of Taiwan and the PRC in 2020 was extraordinarily high and costly for Taiwan, and maritime and naval considerations will also continue to loom large for Taiwan's security.

PRC naval force structure both in terms of capacity (numbers) and capability (effectiveness and quality) has grown impressively in the past two decades and some comparisons are worth noting. There are over 330 ships in the PLA Navy and construction continues at an impressive pace.⁵ The Chinese Coast Guard numbers 255 ships.⁶ The PLA Navy, except for short episodic out-of-area deployments of small numbers of ships, is concentrated within the First Island Chain. Taiwan's navy has 86 ships in service; more than half are coastal patrol craft.⁷ Its small Coast Guard of 23 ships is not close to being on par in numbers, ship size, or capability as that of the PRC.⁸ The U.S. Navy stands at 296 ships.⁹ The American fleet enjoys a qualitative advantage, but only approximately 60 percent of the U.S. Fleet is assigned to the Pacific, with 11 of those forward deployed to Japan. The remainder are thousands of miles away.

PLA Air Force and Taiwan Air Force aircraft inventories are similarly imbalanced with fighter numbers 600 (Eastern Theater) and 400 respectively. The PLA Air Force's fighter total is 1,500 and would inevitably backfill shortages and combat losses. The U.S. Air Force combat coded fighters number 1,011.¹⁰ The PRC's Air Force and Navy regional concentration is reinforced by a Rocket Force of nearly 1,000 intermediate and lesser range ballistic missiles and 300 ground launched cruise missiles.¹¹

China's focus on "informationized" warfare integrates cyber operations into the PRC's anti-access area denial strategy and architecture. The BeiDou satellite network enables full autonomy in positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) information for PLA ground, sea, and air forces and is the essential factor in precision weapon employment. Another contributor to precision engagements and overall situational awareness is China's 120 reconnaissance and remote sensing satellites.¹² A robust People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia also provides close-in maritime locating information and has and will interfere with U.S., Taiwanese, and other nations' naval and maritime operations.

Scenarios

The United States' ambiguous policy regarding Taiwan will likely remain. However, *not* preparing and investing to deter and counter the PRC's designs on Taiwan or in the East and South China Seas is an unambiguous policy. The most discrete moves: seizure of offshore islands, a blockade (complete cutoff) of Taiwan or quarantine (denying the entry of commodities), missile strikes on the island, and ultimately a full-on invasion must be addressed. But more consideration must be given to more extensive and aggressive "gray zone operations," that activity between peace and war. It may include traditional military activity accompanied by cyberattacks on financial, power, transportation, government, and military networks. Even if U.S. forces were not directly involved in countering complex gray zone activity, they very well may be the only logistic

lifeline to Taiwan. At a minimum U.S. forces will be heavily taxed in monitoring activity in the region and Beijing's broader economic and political influence campaigns.

U.S. logistic support must come from Japan, Southeast Asia, Australia, Guam, Hawaii, or a very distant Alaska or California. Unlike strategists who have the luxury of expounding in generalities, logisticians must deal with facts such as the closest modern airbase in use by the U.S. is in Okinawa which is 460 miles from Taiwan. Guam is 1,720 miles away and Singapore, a key U.S. Navy logistic hub is 1,930 miles distant. Should Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand choose to support operations, the former Clark Air Force Base near Manila and Da Nang, Vietnam (Clark and Da Nang) are over 600 miles away. Thailand's robust Utapao airbase is 1,900 miles from Taiwan, requiring a significant dogleg to avoid overflying Hainan Island.

Coordinated cyberattacks on Taiwan's civil and military networks will complicate and confound logistic operations and disrupt life on the island. Cyberattacks on shipping terminals, transportation systems, and power distribution grids could constitute a quasi-blockade by jamming flows at ports of entry and inhibiting movement of supplies once they are on the island. Such interference could be undeclared and denied. Cyber disruption can also occur at ports of cargo origin such as happened in San Diego and Barcelona in 2018.

Resetting

The PRC, since 1996, has reset the region economically and militarily. It has transformed the PLA and fortified its eastern littoral. The number of forces and geography seemingly favor Beijing. But rather than only speculate on the benefits of future technology, hardware, and a "when we have X" optimism, today's realities must be accounted for, confronted, and only then can there be a serious reset of capabilities, capacities, and concepts to address the reshaped region. This must go beyond just the military dimension and address the "gray zone." Indeed, Beijing's potential activities must be viewed as a "gray region" with malign activity and pressure applied surgically and in a coordinated manner around Taiwan, the SCS, and the ECS and malign activity in the cyber and informational domains.

Secretary of Defense Austin has properly addressed the "say-do" gap that has plagued the Pentagon. Overcoming that gap falls on more than just the Pentagon. Congress must adopt a renewed sense of urgency and address the changing nature of the range of contingencies in the Western Pacific. It must accept that the two decades of war in the Middle East have not prepared the U.S. for the complex air and naval environment in the Pacific today. Maintaining accurate domain awareness over such a vast area requires capacity and robust networks, and the tyranny of distance will stress logistics, particularly in a highly contested environment. Moreover, the large operating base logistics model of the Middle East staffed by thousands of contractors is likely not an option for supplying wide area, multi-domain complex activity.

Rather than jump to an invasion scenario it's best to start with what Taiwan might face today—increased operational pressure on its military accompanied by disruption to essential imports and domestic services. As recent ransomware attacks in the U.S. have demonstrated, disrupting essential elements of daily life are consequential and have broader political and economic effects. Cyberattacks, whether attributable to Beijing or not, will disrupt life in Taiwan. Detecting, responding, and recovering from malicious activity must encompass financial systems, power generation and distribution grids, ports and transportation nodes and networks, government services, and military networks.

A Starting Point

Much can and needs to be done to recast the security equation of Taiwan, the East Asian littoral, and the broader Indo-Pacific. Adoption of new concepts, technology, and systems must be undertaken with urgency. They must be developed, tested, and fielded much more quickly than today's norm. Leaders in the executive branch and in Congress must not be satisfied with simply starting programs or announcing new concepts but rather with achieving quickly the intended outcome. The other top priority must be enhancing our ability to rapidly move forces to the region and sustain high intensity protracted air and naval operations. The latter is a powerful and essential enhancement and signal to the region, and both are strategic and operational imperatives. The following are worthwhile starting points.

Taiwan

Taiwan's dilemma demands a new way of doing things. It cannot continue to rely on old procurement strategies and operational concepts. However, it still must know what is taking place in and around the island. Accordingly, Taiwan must prioritize air, surface, and subsurface domain awareness systems to accurately monitor PRC military and quasi-military (i.e., Coast Guard and Maritime Militia) activity to respond efficiently and husband its under-matched force. This should include immediate recapitalization of airborne early warning aircraft while transitioning rapidly to a reliance on long endurance unmanned platforms. Investments should be made in high-speed unmanned surface craft for close-in monitoring of areas of maritime importance (e.g., ports, critical infrastructure, and likely infiltration and landing areas). This is a good match with Taiwan's technological competence and a shift to more unmanned systems, if done efficiently (no old staffing models) will mitigate its looming demographic pressures. The bias toward a preponderance of unmanned networked systems means turning away from small numbers of exquisite platforms that consume a disproportionately large portion of the defense budget.

Keeping the lights on and the island supplied are essential, and here Taiwan can lead in the development of an Integrated Conflict (not solely Battle) Management System. That distinction implies a whole of government and island monitoring and response system that encompasses military and nonmilitary conditions, operations, and infrastructure. Financial, transportation, power, and other essential utilities and services must be included. The military and transportation dimensions of the system must be able to rapidly integrate with U.S. and U.S. alliance Integrated Air and Missile Defense Systems, Battle Management Systems, and logistic networks.

To address the most stressing scenarios, a key component of Taiwan's defense capability must include a robust, integrated coastal and shore defense system capable of precision anti-ship weapons (missiles and directed energy) and high-volume fires whose killing fields will be the island itself should Mainland forces attempt to gain a foothold. As adversary unmanned underwater and air systems become more common, defensive systems to counter individual or swarming adversary unmanned vehicles must be part of that defensive wall.

Taiwan must prepare for protracted pressure along any or combinations of measures the PRC could apply. Accordingly, adequate supplies of fuel, food, and military consumables and expendables must be maintained, and the means and methods of resupply ascertained and exercised in advance.

The United States

Persistent American naval presence in the Indo-Pacific is a powerful and reassuring signal. Apart from a Taiwan contingency, the military growth of the PLA, the shifting balance of military power in the Indo-Pacific, and the economic importance of Asia demand an immediate rebalancing of U.S. force structure to 80 percent in the Pacific and 20 percent to the Atlantic rather than the current 60–40 apportionment. The cost of that realignment is not insignificant but biasing to the west is a strong strategic signal to the region. The primary impediment to such a realignment is domestic U.S. politics as eastern states are loath to see any migration of forces away from their respective states and economies. This is an important time and strategic imperatives must outweigh local politics.

Any military contingency in the Indo-Pacific will be logistically intensive and more sealift from the U.S. to the region will be required. Distances and assured resupply require more U.S. flagged ships as Beijing can be expected to use its global maritime footprint and clout to dissuade non-U.S. shipping companies from supplying Taiwan. Sadly, there are only 99 U.S. flagged ships engaged in U.S. foreign commerce today.¹³ Sixty of those ships can be called upon to participate in possible military contingencies and may be the only means to replenish Taiwan's military supplies in a crisis. Moreover, U.S. leaders will have to decide how to apportion shipping to support Taiwan and what to retain for other military contingencies. Even if the decision is made to commit U.S. flagged ships, their average age of 45 years—nearly twice what is considered full-service life in commercial fleets—portends availability and readiness shortcomings. The shipping shortfall can be closed rapidly by purchasing relatively new excess capacity foreign built ships.

Apart from moving commodities and equipment, in-theater sources of supply, primarily fuel, must be diversified and in-theater tanker aircraft and ships should be in the region continuously to respond promptly to contingencies and sustain persistent operations over large areas.

U.S. operational command and control organizations should be optimized for broader crisis response and combat operations in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. Navy is a first mover in that regard with a proposal to establish a new fleet headquarters with responsibility for the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Particular effort should be made to include Japan and Australia as key participants (not observers) in evolving command and control organizations. Redesigned headquarters must be capable of exchanging military and non-military data, information, and intelligence relevant to gray zone activity to include information originating and terminating in Taiwan.

U.S. unmanned system procurement and operational concepts must go beyond variations of systems and operations used in the Middle East wars. Long endurance underwater systems must be developed aggressively. The creation of robust network architectures must be as much a focus as the vehicles. The systems must be commonly operable and interchangeable with allies, which requires codevelopment of control stations and networks. The hard work of breaking down intellectual property and security constraints must be a priority. For allies and partners Missile Technology Control Regime limitations must be relaxed.

Japan

Japan and the strength, capacity, and resolve of the U.S.–Japan alliance will determine the future of the security environment in East Asia. Japan has long appreciated and valued the strategic importance of Taiwan as the key to controlling the vital sea lanes within the First Island Chain. The Alliance must have a coherent and coordinated approach to collective activity in the East China Sea, the areas around Taiwan, and the South China Sea. No longer can each be viewed in isolation.

Compatibility and connecting domain awareness platforms, methods, and networks are essential. Accordingly, the intelligence dimension of the U.S.–Japan alliance must be elevated to be on par with the Five Eyes intelligence alliance which should fold Japan into a Six Eyes or, as an initial step, a Five Plus One relationship.

Detailed planning for contingencies within the First Island Chain should be prioritized and must include responses to economic pressures that could be applied by the PRC to influence regional access and support. In that vein a key element of the planning effort must be logistic support to wide area operations and support to a quarantined Taiwan.

As the U.S. evolves its command and control organization for the region, Japan should undertake complementary changes with the initial step of creating a distinct operational joint warfighting headquarters.

Japan's extraordinary maritime force is essential in maintaining dominance in regional undersea warfare. That should be enhanced with cooperative programs to develop and employ new families of unmanned autonomous undersea vehicles and associated networks.

Although politically sensitive, Japan should acquire and field a long-range strike capability. The complexity of defending its territory and forces against advanced missiles will increase in the coming years and to rely on intercepting every one is flawed. Striking the archer before the arrows are let go is a far more prudent and effective defense.

Conclusion

Taiwan is a unique democracy and a vibrant society. In the last great conflict in Asia, Fleet Admiral Ernest King referred to the unique and strategically important island as the “cork in the bottle.” It remains so today. In this time of challenge, it is time to think beyond military contingencies and examine more deeply how to support Taiwan over the long term, and what that portends for the region, U.S. allies, and America's position in Asia and beyond. I hope this paper opened the aperture for that discussion.

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Taiwan: Deterrence of China Is Failing

By Gordon G. Chang

Taiwan, *The Economist* proclaims on its May 1–7 cover, is “the most dangerous place on earth.”

The Chinese foreign ministry says the island has been an “inalienable” part of China “since ancient times,” and Beijing demands Taipei agree to annexation. Should the United States try to resist a Chinese attack, it will, according to the Pentagon’s Franz Gatl writing in the Communist Party’s *Global Times*, lose. Taiwan, the paper said in April, “won’t stand a chance” if China invades.

Are any of these Chinese narratives correct? No. Most important, even though deterrence is clearly breaking down, Washington can reestablish it. The U.S. can and should defend the Republic of China, as Taiwan is formally known.

Although Taipei calls itself “China,” Taiwan is not now and has never been “Chinese,” no matter how many times Beijing repeats its contentions. The People’s Republic has never exercised control over the island—actually a collection of islands—and the international community has not formally recognized any Chinese regime as the legitimate government of Taiwan. People in Taiwan overwhelmingly identify themselves as “Taiwanese,” not “Chinese.”

In short, China forcibly taking over Taiwan would be an act of aggression, not, as Beijing says, one of “re-unification.”

There are three principal reasons why Taiwan is critical to American security. First, since the latter part of the nineteenth century, Washington policy makers have drawn America’s western defense perimeter off the coast of East Asia, and Taiwan sits at the center of that line, where the South China Sea and the East China Sea meet. Taiwan’s islands protect the southern approaches to America’s “cornerstone” ally Japan and guard the northern approaches to the Philippines, also a U.S. treaty partner. Moreover, Taiwan prevents the Chinese navy and air force from surging into the western Pacific.

Second, Taiwan, although not a formal treaty ally, is seen in the region and elsewhere as a test of American resolve to defend alliance partners. Fail to defend it, and America’s alliance structures could fail.

Third, in these days of the Communist Party’s unrelenting assaults on democratic governance, America cannot allow Beijing to take over any democracy, especially one as important as Taiwan.

At the moment, America maintains a policy of “strategic ambiguity,” not telling either Beijing or Taipei what the U.S. would do in the face of imminent conflict. This approach worked when rulers in Beijing were impressed by American power.

They no longer are in awe. China’s top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, in the Anchorage meeting in the middle of March, told Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in no uncertain terms that the U.S. could no longer talk to China “from a position of strength.”

Ominously, Beijing is openly challenging America. *Global Times*, which the Communist Party uses to signal future policies, on April 14 ran an editorial titled “When Real Determination Is Lacking, the U.S. Should Maintain ‘Strategic Ambiguity.’”

In effect, China’s leaders were saying they do not believe the U.S. will defend Taiwan because the military balance of power has shifted in their favor. Chinese self-perception of overwhelming strength is a sure sign that deterrence is quickly eroding.

So it’s time to restore it. As Joseph Bosco, a Pentagon China desk officer in the George W. Bush administration, told me in April, “Given the dramatically changed circumstances, different words are needed now.”

President Biden should publicly declare the United States is adopting a policy of “strategic clarity”; in other words, Biden should issue a clear declaration that America will defend the island. Beijing has publicly dared the president to issue such a declaration; a failure to respond will therefore have consequences.

Because it does appear China has, at least on paper, a stronger conventional force in the region, can America still deter Beijing?

Many say China’s most important foreign policy objective is the absorption of Taiwan.

That is not correct. China’s No. 1 foreign policy goal is the continuation of Communist Party rule.

This means Franz Gayl in his *Global Times* piece is incorrect. He mentions Beijing will defeat the United States over Taiwan because “casualty-tolerance” is “China’s decisive advantage in any fight with the U.S.” Its “whole-of-society commitment to core national security priorities is legendary,” he writes.

Xi Jinping may believe he can take the island but will not launch an invasion if he thinks the casualties will be too high. As much as he would like to be Mao Zedong, he almost surely knows he cannot do what Mao did in Korea in the early 1950s: lose over 900,000 or so soldiers and still maintain power.

So, yes, the United States can deter Xi by making it clear that the cost in Chinese life in taking Taiwan would threaten the rule of the Communist Party. Washington can, therefore, deter China in the Taiwan Strait.

And the sooner the U.S. speaks clearly the better.



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Put Nukes on Taiwan

By Angelo M. Codevilla

For three generations, U.S. diplomats have purchased what they imagined to be the Chinese Communist Party’s good will by serial reductions in America’s own geopolitical interest in Taiwan. They have refused to see that tiny Taiwan is key to Beijing’s political vulnerabilities and ambitions. The ambiguity and flexibility of

U.S. policy made it easier for China's Communist regime gradually to secure its domestic legitimacy as well as to reduce America's influence in the Western Pacific. It also has enabled Beijing to establish the political and military conditions for forcefully taking the island. Acknowledging this error, reversing what has been basic U.S.–China policy since 1949 by putting Taiwan beyond Beijing's reach politically as well as militarily, is essential to avoiding an increasingly likely war for the Western Pacific. Nothing would so surely change Beijing's calculus on Taiwan as the presence there of nuclear weapons targeted on the Party's leadership.

The Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan, a mere 23 million people, challenges the Communist regime's legitimacy by reminding the mainland's 1.4 billion Chinese that they are not free. Dominating the China Sea from the south to the north, the ROC is the fortress that Beijing must conquer if it is to establish control over its ocean flank. And over Japan's lifeline. So long as Taiwan is free, Beijing cannot expel American influence from the Western Pacific.

Taiwan's place atop Beijing's priorities has never been in doubt. From Chiang Kai-shek's founding of the ROC on Taiwan in 1949, the Beijing regime demanded that the U.S. denounce it as the precondition for continuing its then good relations with the Washington foreign policy establishment. Secretary of State Dean Acheson agreed, and gave Beijing all that the U.S. political system allowed. That is why he refused to believe that Mao would challenge the U.S. in Korea. When Mao did sponsor and then lead the 1950 Korean invasion, the Truman administration ordered the U.S. Seventh Fleet to prevent the ROC from attacking Beijing from the rear. Thus did the establishment compound its stupidity.

Two decades later, China's Communist regime was in bigger trouble, having defied Moscow politically and militarily. It feared Soviet nuclear strikes on its own nuclear program, and was facing fifty-three nuclear-armed Soviet divisions on the Amur River border. It begged for help from the Nixon administration—the only power that might restrain the angry Bear. When Henry Kissinger went to China in 1971, its prime minister Zhou Enlai was over the proverbial barrel—the classic *demandeur*. Nevertheless, Zhou boldly demanded that the U.S. de-recognize the Republic of China on Taiwan as the price for being allowed to pull Beijing's chestnuts out of the Bear's maw. Henry Kissinger agreed, in arguably his greatest show of incompetence. U.S. de-recognition effectively turned Taiwan into an international outlaw.

A decade after that, the Reagan administration proved to be a brief, partial exception to incompetence. At a dinner I attended as part of the Reagan transition team, China's ambassador suggested, as Zhou had done with Kissinger, that good U.S.–China relations depended on America's flexibility regarding Taiwan. Our group unanimously let him know that the Reagan administration's interest in China was chiefly on what China was prepared to do “about the Bear.”

But the foreign policy establishment never wavered from its course. Already in January 1977, George H. W. Bush, director of Central Intelligence and recently U.S. ambassador to Beijing, had sworn to a secret session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the U.S. government knew nothing either about China's military preparations against Taiwan, or even about a famine that had claimed millions of lives. As Reagan's vice president, Bush fostered the beginning of the massive U.S. corporate presence in mainland China, and resisted efforts within the administration to sell Taiwan armaments comparable in sophistication to what China was deploying.

Bush 41, Clinton, Bush 43, and Obama lived by the mantra that Beijing would grow in peaceful responsibility, the richer and more powerful it became. And that Taiwan was an irritant to that salvific process. Over that generation, our establishment's identification of U.S. interests with the Chinese regime enabled that regime to build the world's second-ranking economy and to become the Western Pacific's dominant military power. Rather than using opportunities to moderate Beijing's international behavior, this generation's presidents have given that regime sound cause to believe that, after all is said and done, America would let Taiwan go quietly.

But this political confidence, coupled with its overwhelming military advantage in the region, has led Beijing's regime to flaunt its determination to take Taiwan while humiliating the Americans. This "middle finger" policy was on display in January 2021, when Chinese aircraft made mock attack runs on U.S. carriers in the Taiwan Strait, and again in April, when some twenty bombers hooked around to Taiwan's eastern side, emphasizing that there is no safety for any Americans anywhere near Taiwan.

Meanwhile, the regime has just completed the world's largest heliport a mere 150 miles from Taiwan. Were China to invade, the first wave would arrive by air. Were China to strike, it could defeat organized resistance in 8–12 hours. Some 1,200 accurate ballistic missiles would strike every military target of any importance. Chinese fifth generation fighters, supported by AWACS, would sweep the skies of Taiwan's obsolete F-16s. As the remaining Taiwanese ground forces moved to defend the beaches, they would be bombed. As the tanks were about to land, heliborne divisions would be hitting the defenders from the rear. Beijing has been building this hard-military reality in plain sight.

Suddenly, it seems, some in our foreign policy establishment are entertaining the possibility that China might not be playing games. Of course, the attack would succeed. How would the U.S. government respond? Make war on China? What for? To restore the independence of an island the independence of which it had denounced, and that it had refused to protect? The U.S. would suffer geopolitical shrinkage. A Sino-Japanese war would be among the consequences.

Nothing Americans say could deter this horrible prospect, because no words could counter seventy years of U.S. policy's ambiguity and flexibility to Chinese demands. There is no reason why Beijing should credit any U.S. declaratory policy, especially given its now deep grip on the U.S. political process atop overwhelming local military advantages.

Deterrence worthy of the name could come only by deploying forces that could actually defeat China's military preparations. Such forces would also have to preclude the possibility that China would escape unacceptable consequences for even trying to invade Taiwan. Defending Taiwan would have to begin by providing a thick anti-missile defense—many batteries of AEGIS-ASHORE. But nothing could so surely deter aggression as the presence of nuclear weapons. Deterrence is what happened in the 1980s, when the U.S. deployed Pershing II missiles with W-85 nuclear weapons to Europe, targeted them on the Soviet leadership, and let it be known that they would be launched were Soviet forces to have invaded. The Pershings are gone. But other missiles and nukes could substitute.

Would such a move trigger war? On the contrary. It is difficult to imagine a less forceful, less unambiguous move, preventing war.



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The Defense of Taiwan: A Matter of Willingness, Not Capability

By Seth Cropsey

Taiwan lies within the United States' defense umbrella out of strategic necessity. It is the critical link in the First Island Chain. If the chain is broken, China will be able to roll up U.S. defenses, attacking Japan and the Philippines from their exposed, Pacific-facing flanks. Moreover, Taiwan is China's most likely target, given these geostrategic realities and the threat that Taiwan's democratic, capitalist regime poses to the Chinese Communist Party. The U.S. does have the means to defend Taiwan, particularly if it chooses to fight forward and engage China before it can envelop the island. U.S. submarines and island-based missiles can disrupt likely People's Liberation Army pincer movements, and U.S. carrier strike groups, ground-based fighters, and strategic bombers can support Taiwan during an air campaign. The question is not whether Taiwan is within the United States' defense perimeter, or whether the U.S. is capable of defending it. The question is whether the U.S. is willing to commit to Taiwan's defense, and the possibility of a broader conflict with China.



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The Taiwan Question

By Edward N. Luttwak

Dividing the Taiwan question—does or should Taiwan lie within the defensive umbrella of the U.S., and, if so, does America currently possess the wherewithal to help Taiwan successfully repel a Chinese attack—the first needed determination is whether the US should defend Taiwan, and that determination must be made

anew every time the question comes up, just as it would be made anew in the hour of decision by any U.S. president and his chosen advisors.

There are many considerations to take into account in making that decision. The People's Republic of China (PRC) possesses nuclear weapons and its leadership is at present centralized as never before by Xi Jinping. Mao had even more authority for much of his career but lacked today's communications, command, control and intelligence (C3I) technology. Xi is the irascible product of a deeply traumatic childhood and desperately precarious adolescence and youth. Many in his exact position, including a half sister, died of malnutrition and neglect as Xi might easily have done in horrid Liangjiahe village in barren Yan'an of impoverished Shaanxi province. Xi's failure to deliver Taiwan after boasting so loudly of China's risen power might lose him his job, and very likely more than that, given his own extremely cruel treatment of fallen leaders.

Given those factors, President Biden's decision in the face of an imminent or actual onslaught would certainly be the most weighty decision made by any president in the relatively short history of the American presidency. In the meantime, the military risks increase every day because the naval/air strength of the PRC increases every day.

The stakes are straightforward: defend Taiwan against an invasion actually underway, initiating a process in which the U.S. would certainly expand its own efforts if needed, as would the PRC, with no true, absolute certainty that the nuclear inhibition would remain in effect; or else, allow the PRC to occupy Taiwan, thereby establishing the PRC's hegemony over East Asia—unless the Japanese themselves were to join the fight while still underway, and with escalating force while fully mobilizing at home, thereby defining Taiwan as nothing more than a weak outpost of fortress Japan (unimaginable a decade ago, such a sequence is possible now, and even probable now that high-level decision makers are discussing the possible role of Soryu-class attack submarines in the defense of Taiwan).

Whether the government of Taiwan deserves to be defended at great cost and with greater risks is irrelevant of course, and that is very fortunate for the Taiwanese government because the answer must be a resounding no!

First, the Taiwanese have broken their long-standing agreement with the United States (formed with their prior Kuomintang leaders) whereby they would reduce tensions by holding never-ending but calming unification talks with Beijing, while the U.S. undertook to prevent PRC attacks, or defeat them. Now only the U.S. reassurance stands, but not Taiwan's risk-reducing diplomacy.

Second, the Taiwanese have steadfastly refused to build up serious defense forces, i.e., distributed territorial and coastal defenses manned by reservists who have gone through intensive initial conscript training (a hard six months at least) followed by short annual refreshers. That is what serious small countries do, e.g., Israel, or Finland, which is ready to outnumber any invading Russian army with more than 600,000 refresher-trained reservists.

By contrast, Taiwan with more than four times the population, has half as many reservists who have received any recent training to speak of. In fact, Taiwan does not even have coastal (missile) artillery units manned by local reservists to capitalize on its island geography, by covering every invadable coastal segment with multiple batteries of anti-ship missiles of different ranges (all locally producible under license, or homemade).

What the Taiwan ("Republic of China") armed forces do have are lots of high-ranking officers (the IDF gets along with a single, lonely three-star general) and expensive "Great Power"-style weapon systems (jet fighters, battle tanks, warships) destined to be destroyed by the initial missile strikes of a PRC offensive. Perhaps the best example of the hopeless formalism that cripples Taiwan's military capability is the current effort to build eight oceangoing submarines budgeted at \$2 billion each that will be operational someday, using resources that could have produced many more small coastal-defense submarines that would be ready now. But the latter would only be useful to defend Taiwan, while the Republic of China navy, as it calls itself, wants the Big Power token of oceangoing submarines.

President Biden has affirmed the “U.S. commitment” to Taiwan, but within his administration there are officials who do note that the U.S. has declared that Taiwan is a part of China, so that the U.S. would be fighting to defend not Taiwan per se, but the independence of its government, which is indeed so independent that it refuses to make the task any easier by adopting a conciliatory diplomacy or, alternatively, a serious national-mobilization defense, my own preference by far.

Fortunately, the second question is easily disposed of: yes, the U.S. can defend Taiwan (though not necessarily its islands actually within the Bay of Xiamen) given the mostly theoretical nature of PRC naval and aerial capabilities: yes, the PLAN operates many warships, but their crews and their chiefs are still trained more to look good than to fight effectively; and yes, the PRC too has a “Fifth Generation” stealthy fighter, but its J-20 is still very much a work in progress.

The one thing the PRC does have are very large numbers of vessels in toto, between the PLAN formal navy, its large coast guard, and still more numerous paramilitary vessels . . . and that is why the absence of a Taiwan coastal (missile) artillery manned by local reservists everywhere is so damnable.

Nevertheless, if President Biden were to so decide, U.S. forces could definitely defeat an invasion of Taiwan; but then the decision to resort to nuclear weapons to nullify that outcome, or accept a defeat likely to be politically fatal for himself, would rest with Xi Jinping . . .



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Strategic Ambiguity and the Defense of Taiwan

By Peter R. Mansoor

As with so many foreign policy and national security issues today, the U.S.–Taiwan relationship stems back to World War II and U.S. policy in the postwar period.

During the Second World War, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt believed that the postwar world would be secured by the “Four Policemen”—the wartime alliance of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China. This idea morphed into the United Nations, with the four great powers (plus France) becoming permanent members of the Security Council. The fall of China to Mao Zedong’s Communists in 1949 led to the retreat of Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government to the island of Taiwan, but the Republic of China (ROC) continued to hold China’s seat in the United Nations until 1971.

During the Korean War, the Truman administration extended economic and military aid to the ROC on Taiwan and employed the U.S. Seventh Fleet to neutralize the Taiwan Strait. After the intervention of the Chinese Communists in Korea in the fall of 1950, General Douglas MacArthur argued for the employment of ROC troops in the conflict. Truman declined to do so but placed a Military Assistance Advisory Group and the U.S. Taiwan Defense Command on Taiwan. In 1955 the U.S. Senate ratified a Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty, which was in force until January 1, 1980, one year to the date after the United States recognized the People’s Republic of China.

Since then, the relationship between the United States and Taiwan has been one of deliberate strategic ambiguity. The United States maintains *de facto* if not *de jure* diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act states “the United States will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.” U.S. arms sales—under both Democratic and Republican administrations—to Taiwan have included advanced fighter jets, air defense missiles, naval frigates and anti-ship missiles, attack helicopters, anti-tank weapons, tanks, and other weapons and equipment. The United States does not explicitly guarantee it will come to the defense of Taiwan should China attack, but as late as 1996 the U.S. Seventh Fleet intervened to neutralize the Taiwan Strait following Chinese missile tests and naval exercises put in motion to protest the granting of a visa to Taiwan’s president Lee Teng-hui to allow him to attend a reunion at his alma mater, Cornell University.

Officially, the United States supports a “One-China policy,” which asserts that China and Taiwan are parts of a single sovereign state. The United States seeks a political solution to the issue, rather than a declaration of Taiwanese independence or the forcible reunification of Taiwan with China. China and Taiwan also follow this principle, albeit with intractable disagreement over which is the legitimate government of the one China. This ambiguity has kept the peace, more or less, since 1949. But recently Chinese president Xi Jinping has refused to renounce the pursuit of unification via force of arms. China’s increasing military capabilities and bellicose nationalist rhetoric threaten to inflame tensions, especially as the Taiwan independence movement grows.

The United States has three broad policy options: 1) to formalize a defense treaty with Taiwan to protect its sovereignty, 2) to retain the concept of strategic ambiguity, or 3) to renounce the defense of Taiwan, leaving it to defend itself in any conflict with mainland China. The Taiwan Relations Act commits the United States to “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.” This continues to be sound policy. A U.S. guarantee of Taiwan’s sovereignty would thrust the United States and China into a cold war, with grave and uncertain consequences for East Asia and the world. Abandoning Taiwan publicly would inevitably lead to an invasion of the island, which would entail horrific consequences for the Taiwanese people and have a chilling effect on the nations of the region. Best to deter conflict by keeping China guessing.

But should China invade Taiwan, the United States should come to the island’s defense. Failure to do so would send a message that the United States will no longer protect the world’s democracies from aggression, and seriously undermine U.S. power and prestige. China’s rise as an Asian hegemon would then become inevitable, much to the detriment of the United States and its allies in the region. The United States currently maintains defense capabilities adequate to bolster this policy. But given China’s rapid military buildup, the military balance may soon tilt in China’s favor. Given Xi’s rhetoric, it behooves the United States to take his bellicosity seriously and to acquire the capabilities to win any conflict over

Taiwan, whether outright warfare or the kind of gray zone hybrid operations that have typified Chinese operations in the South China Sea in recent years.



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U.S. Resolve Is Taiwan’s Best Defense

By Mark Moyar

Taiwan has enjoyed the protection of the U.S. defensive umbrella ever since the fall of Nationalist China to Mao’s Communists in 1949. Although the United States ended its mutual defense treaty with Taiwan in 1979, it has continued to deter China from invading Taiwan by selling arms to Taiwan and maintaining the specter of military intervention. Although President Biden has in the past questioned the need to confront and contain China, recent Chinese behavior has made it more difficult for any American president to remove the protective umbrella. The slow strangling of democracy in Hong Kong has eroded American hopes that Taiwan could be peacefully united with China without losing its democratic institutions, and Americans are increasingly fearful of a Chinese takeover of the Taiwanese economy, especially its semiconductor industry.

Whether the United States has the wherewithal to help Taiwan repel a Chinese attack successfully depends on the nature of the Chinese attack and whether a successful defense is defined as one that spares Taiwan from massive physical devastation. It is conceivable that China would launch an attack so indiscriminate in its destructiveness that it would leave Taiwan in smoldering ruins. Beijing might view the physical damage as an acceptable price for the seizure of Taiwan’s territory and the termination of its democratic government. But such a conquest would deprive China of access to Taiwan’s high-tech industries, assets that China’s rulers covet.

An initial Chinese attack would therefore more likely begin the concentration of China’s most powerful military asset—ballistic missiles—on Taiwan’s military assets. Chinese missiles could devastate most of

Taiwan's military assets in a matter of minutes. If Taiwan refused to capitulate after taking the initial blows, the Chinese could move ground forces to Taiwan by sea and by air.

Should the Chinese simultaneously attack American forces to inhibit an American response, their weapons could destroy or seriously damage most of the American military assets in the vicinity of Taiwan. The Chinese government, however, might refrain from striking the Americans, in the hope that the United States would acquiesce to the defeat of Taiwan in order to avoid a great-power conflict, much as it acquiesced to Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. Even if the United States were not attacked, though, it might launch a counterattack with the full range of American conventional forces. No one can be certain how that conventional counterattack would play out, or whether it would escalate to nuclear war. Chances would be high, however, that Taiwan would suffer horrific damage, with highly adverse economic consequences for both China and the United States.

Admiral Philip Davidson, the commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, has spoken publicly of the need to increase American conventional power in the Pacific to deter Chinese attacks on Taiwan and other strategic allies. Increases in American conventional strength certainly affect China's strategic calculus, by increasing the pain China would incur at the outset of hostilities and the amount of time the United States would have to marshal resources from elsewhere in the world. The situation is similar to that in Europe during the Cold War, when the United States did not maintain enough conventional power to ensure the failure of a conventional Soviet invasion but possessed enough to slow a Soviet advance into Western Europe. Then as now, nevertheless, nuclear power is the most compelling deterrent.

Deterrence, of course, also depends on a nation's will to employ its capabilities. The Chinese are unlikely to attack Taiwan unless they calculate that the United States has lost the will to come to Taiwan's defense. The only way they would reach that conclusion would be clear indications from the White House that the United States would not fight for Taiwan. Two of America's most recent wars—the Korean War and the Gulf War—began when the United States gave indicators that it would not fight for allies. It is thus imperative that the Biden administration continue to make clear the willingness of the United States to defend Taiwan, and that it reinforces the message by continuing the robust arms sales of the previous administration.



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The Crucial Importance of Taiwan

By Williamson Murray

There appear real moral reasons why the United States should do everything it can to protect the independent state of Taiwan diplomatically, politically, and militarily as long as the People's Republic of China represents a direct threat to American interests directly and globally. In nearly every one of its major international actions over the past three decades, its leaders have staked out positions that are inimical to the values that the United States purports to uphold. Their treatment of the Uyghur people suggests a level of callousness that borders on genocide, in this case one that destroys the culture and religion of a people without killing them—and an effort that has brought the most modern technologies to bear. Chinese disregard for international behavior in its relations to its neighbors in the South China Sea hardly needs mentioning to this audience. The behavior of creating military bases in that area represents, however, more of a political than a military threat.

The real threat to America's position comes strategically in two areas in East Asia: the Senkaku Islands and Taiwan. Both of them represent distinct threats to the geographic advantage that the Americans and their allies enjoy in the great sweep of islands that lie immediately to the east of the Asian mainland. Swinging south from Japan through Okinawa, then Taiwan and the Philippines and finally to Malaysia and Indonesia, that island chain blocks China in a military sense from access to the great spaces of the Central Pacific. Currently, the islands represent as great an impediment to Chinese strategy as the British Isles represented to the *Kriegsmarine* in two world wars. In effect Britain's geographic position limited the German Navy to the North Sea and the northern entrance to the English Channel.¹

The Senkaku Islands represent less of a threat because Japanese and American naval and air forces appear more than sufficient to block any Chinese efforts to seize and utilize those islands militarily. Taiwan represents a different case entirely. Its control by the naval and air arms of the People's Liberation Army would punch an enormous hole in the whole strategic geography of the current situation in East Asia. It would outflank Japan and South Korea to Taiwan's north, putting both of America's crucial allies in considerable danger. It would certainly make U.S. cooperation with those two islands more difficult politically and militarily. Equally seriously, it would place the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia in an even more dangerous strategic position, because none of those three nations possess the economic or military strength to resist Chinese pressure of any kind unless the United States is in a position to render significant military help.

Finally, and perhaps most important, possession of Taiwan by the People's Liberation Army would open up a vast hole in the first line of island defenses that shields off the island chains in the Central Pacific, beginning with Guam on which America's military strength in the Eastern Pacific rests. It would put the United States on the defensive throughout the Marianas rather than having them as jumping off points for operations on islands to the east. Moreover, it might well force America's defensive line all the way back to the Marshalls and even Hawaii.

And so does the United States at present possess the wherewithal to defend Taiwan? At present, this author believes that it does. But the larger issue is that we have every reason to want to ensure that Taiwan's defenses are such that the Chinese dare not undertake dangerous political or military actions against that crucial strategic piece of real estate. It might well involve selling the F-35 to Taiwan instead of the upgraded F-16s. But above all we need to ensure that our military ducks are in line to deter China from making the disastrous mistake of attempting to invade Taiwan.

1 One might of course object, what about the U-boats? Britain's geographic position also played a major hindrance in limiting the options open to German submarines in the course of both world wars.



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Taiwan

By Paul Rahe

Taiwan is a problem. It is a problem for China, and that makes it a problem for the United States and for what used to be called “the Free World.” There are two reasons for this. The first is geopolitical; the second is technological, economic, and strategic.

The latter concern arises from the fact that Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) currently holds a monopoly on the production of the cutting-edge semiconductors necessary for supercomputers and artificial intelligence applications. For the time being, he who controls the fabrication plants on the island of Formosa controls computing’s future, and it is fair to say that he who controls the future of computing controls the future of the globe. TSMC’s monopoly is a situation that the United States should not have allowed to develop, and it is a temporary condition. For the government on the Chinese mainland is putting vast resources into catching up with Taiwan in this particular, and if the United States does not develop an industrial policy aimed at the same end, no one will be at fault for the fate meted out to us other than those who govern us. For a while, however, both China and the United States and her allies will be dependent on Taiwan, and that really is a problem given the first reason for concern: Taiwan’s geopolitical situation.

Located roughly one hundred miles off the Chinese coast, Taiwan belongs to what is called the First Island Chain. As such, it sits astride two of the channels that serve as entrances to and exits from the seas that Nicholas Spykman once dubbed “the Asiatic Mediterranean.” It was this region and the mainland opposite that late Imperial Japan attempted to turn into what it euphemistically called “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.”

For ancient China, the island of Formosa mattered not at all. The evidence from the Warring States Period suggests that the peoples on the Chinese mainland at that time were blissfully unaware of the existence of the island chain offshore. For the most part, thereafter, Taiwan remained of no geopolitical importance for

China. Except for one brief period in the sixteenth century, Imperial China was a land power that focused its attention northward, westward, and southward but not eastward toward the sea. Even in the time of Mao, naval affairs were considered secondary. The presence of Chiang Kai-shek and the remainder of the Kuomintang on Formosa was an irritant but not much more.

All of this changed with the ascent of Deng Xiaoping—when China set out to become a modern commercial power; abandoned, in considerable measure, the communist economic model; and began exporting goods by sea on an ever-expanding scale. Of course, even today Chinese defense intellectuals display a Mackinderite bias. After all, the Belt and Road Initiative has as its principal focus overland transport by railroad, and it is easy for those situated in Beijing to suppose that he who controls Mackinder's Eurasian heartland controls the world. But Spykman with his Rimland Thesis had a point, and Chinese defense intellectuals know that railroads alone cannot do the job. Sea transport is much, much cheaper—and the tonnage that railroads can carry cannot compare with what can be and is transported by sea.

None of this would much matter if China were a status-quo commercial power intent solely on joining and profiting from the rules-based international order. That is not, however, the case—for contemporary China's principal aims are political, not economic. In this regard, it more nearly resembles Louis XIV's France, the German Kaiserreich, the Third Reich, and late Imperial Japan than it does contemporary Britain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Its aim is to create something very much like Japan's short-lived Greater East Asia Co-Prospereity Sphere. What today's Chinese ruling order wants is a variant of what its predecessors always wanted: dominion—tribute and trade; and the goal is to extend this "co-prospereity sphere" well beyond the Pacific Rim. It is this aim that constitutes Xi Jinping's "China Dream." What is "a win" for the Middle Kingdom is, Chinese diplomats repeatedly say, "a win" for everyone.

But imperial dominion the Chinese cannot achieve without becoming the dominant power at sea; and, until and unless the western Pacific becomes a Chinese lake—with Chinese control of the entrances and exits to the various seas off their coast so that their navy has easy and secure access to the world's oceans—this cannot be done. China's recovery of Taiwan would, as Xi Jinping and his advisors are well aware, contribute mightily to this end. So, until and unless there is a change in the regime and the attendant regime imperatives driving China, Taiwan's centrality will be a permanent feature in the geopolitical landscape.

The stakes for the United States and for like-minded countries all over the world are high—for if they lose the leverage over China that their position athwart the exits from the pertinent seas affords them, they might well become China's satellites. The sheer size of the China market, the capital that the Chinese have to invest, and China's ruthless exploitation of its economic leverage makes this a plausible prospect.

But the fact that Taiwan's independence is vital for American strategic interests does not mean that Taiwan can be defended. From 1948 until the last few years, the United States had the requisite means. China's navy was not a threat, and the Chinese could neither mount a successful invasion of Formosa nor impose a blockade. All of that has changed or is about to change. The Chinese navy is now formidable, and it will grow more formidable with time; and the Chinese have invested a great deal of money in missile technology. They now have the capacity to destroy in short order with a missile strike every base that the United States has in the region, and the odds are good that they can also take out in a similar fashion all of the surface vessels we have in the western Pacific.

Of course, it is by no means clear that an invasion would be successful. Amphibious landings are notoriously difficult to pull off; the Taiwanese army is well trained and well armed; and the Taiwanese appear to be willing to fight. Xi's crackdown in Hong Kong has had a sobering effect. A blockade, however, would be possible, and without imports Taiwan cannot feed itself. Whether a challenge to such a blockade would be effective is unclear.

What might work as a counter to China's military superiority in this theater would be a worldwide embargo on Chinese trade. If the United States, its allies in the Indo-Pacific, the European Union, and the third-world

countries under the influence of the nations in this coalition were to make it clear to China that commercial ruin would be the price exacted if they were to use military force to seize or blockade Taiwan, and if this were backed up by a credible threat that they would also institute a blockade on Chinese trade, that might be enough. Putting together such a coalition would, however, require statesmanship of the first rank on the part of the United States, but I cannot imagine the current administration summoning the energy and resolve to even make an attempt. It is telling that there is no one in a cabinet or sub-cabinet post today with a deep knowledge of East Asia. Personnel is policy.

Even, however, if such a counter were to be deployed, there would be this to ponder. Deng Xiaoping was, like Josef Stalin, a cautious man—alert to what could go wrong and willing to wait. “Hide your strength,” he told those around him, “and bide your time.” Xi Jinping does not appear to be a patient man. He may, in fact, be like Adolf Hitler and Nikita Khrushchev—high-stakes gamblers, both. Taiwan really is a problem, and we may look back on the administrations of George H. W. Bush, William Jefferson Clinton, George Bush, and Barack Obama the way that Winston Churchill in 1938 looked back at the British administrations led by Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain. “Improvident stewardship” is the Churchillian phrase that comes to mind.



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Defending Taiwan

By Andrew Roberts

In retrospect, the Reagan administration made one of its very rare foreign policy errors when it forced Taiwan to abandon its nuclear weapons program in 1988. If Taiwan today had the capacity to threaten devastating retaliation against Beijing for an invasion, we would not even be having this debate. Of course, it is well within the United States' capacity simply to give or sell a deliverable device to Taipei, but it is

unthinkable that the Biden administration would plunge Asia into the kind of crisis that such an action would undoubtedly provoke from the People's Republic of China.

The story of Taiwan's nuclear weapons program is a long and complex one, full of sudden stops and starts (usually as a result of interventions from Washington rather than Beijing) and at one point in the late 1970s the Taiwanese were possibly around two years away from developing a testable weapon, although delivering a bomb the 1,800 miles to Beijing seemed a very tall order for the technology of the day.

Far more often than the Left likes to admit, the USA's intervention in the affairs of other countries has historically been to its benefit, but sadly that is not the case when it comes to the constant American interference in Taiwan's perfectly legitimate right to defend itself in the only way that would genuinely deter the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from realizing its three-quarter century-long dream of forcing Taiwan into the People's Republic. China has no right to do so—the Kuomintang were as (il)legitimate a government of Formosa as the Red Chinese were in Beijing in 1949—but that in no way lessens its lust.

It is fascinating to see quite how many of the world's most intractable problems essentially stem from the willingness in the late 1940s to see partition and population transfer as an acceptable long-term solution. The partitions of Palestine, Kashmir, and China in that period still bedevil international relations. In some places it worked, however brutally, such as in Poland—East Prussia and in some former Soviet republics, but in others, such as Myanmar, the pain of the 1947–49 period can still be felt by peoples such as the Rohingya. For the CCP, the Taiwan situation is still considered unfinished business, however outrageous that might be to the rest of a world that conforms to a rules-based international order.

The fact that Taiwan is still not allowed to be a member of the United Nations is an outrage, not least against common sense as it has operated as an independent country for almost three-quarters of a century. Whether the Biden administration has the intestinal fortitude to deter further Chinese saber-rattling will be a key test of its mettle. Instead of the United States showing the foresight to allow Taiwan to build a nuclear device half a century ago—which it had the expertise, wealth, plutonium, facilities and (thanks to Canada) heavy-water nuclear “research” reactor to do—Washington insisted on her reactors coming under IAEA supervision. The Israelis never allowed their continued sovereign existence to be farmed out to the U.S., and neither should the Taiwanese have.



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Award), *Napoleon the Great* (Grand Prix of the Fondation Napoléon and the *Los Angeles Times* Biography Prize), *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* (Council on Foreign Relations Arthur Ross Prize), and *Leadership in War: Essential Lessons from Those Who Made History*. He is the Roger & Martha Mertz Visiting Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, the Lehrman Institute Distinguished Lecturer at the New York Historical Society, a visiting professor at the Department of War Studies at King's College London, and a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Historical Society. He lives in London.

Five Reasons Why Taiwan Should Lie within the Defense Umbrella of the United States

By Miles Maochun Yu

1. For the same reason the Americans defended West Berlin during the Cold War, because we all knew if West Berlin fell, freedom would die in that part of the world. Taiwan is the most free and vibrant democracy in the region and is also at the forefront of today's fight between freedom and tyranny, facing another authoritarian bully. Taiwan deserves America's support if freedom and democracy still mean anything at all to us Americans. To let the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) take over Taiwan will inflict incalculable reputational cost to the U.S. and our global leadership, let alone a devastating blow to our friends and allies around the world.

2. Taiwan holds a strategic choke point in preventing the CCP from breaking through the American defense perimeter in the western Pacific. Taiwan is the most crucial strategic stronghold in the First Island Chain south of Okinawa. If Taiwan fell to the CCP, America's defense parameters in the Asia Pacific from Japan, the Republic of Korea in northeast Asia to the Philippines and Singapore in the South China Sea would be broken up midway, and U.S. vital national interests in the Pacific, including Guam and Hawaii, in addition to global commons such as the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, would be subject to more imminent and direct threats from the CCP. In this sense, defending Taiwan is also the first defense of the U.S. when the People's Republic of China has clearly shown its belligerence toward the U.S. interests in the region.

3. Taiwan is a key economic and technology partner of the U.S. that serves as a trusted supplier of vital parts and materials to many of America's vital industries, especially in electronic parts and high-quality semiconductor chips. To keep Taiwan's vibrant democratic capitalism from the CCP's domination is crucial to America's endeavor to diversify the supply chains of our critical industries and alleviate our suicidal supply-chain dependence on the PRC.

4. Taiwan has the most sophisticated understanding, rich experiences, and highly efficient tool kits to deal with its old foe, the CCP that has now become a global threat. The world can learn many things from the Taiwanese in dealing with the CCP: The miracle of Taiwan's COVID-19 prevention and mitigation is critically hinged on Taiwan's utter distrust of the CCP/WHO propaganda and lies from day one. In today's global awakening to and coalescence against the CCP threat, Taiwan has proved to be a force for good, and an inspiration for the Chinese world. If democracy should come to China one day, our best and most efficient partner should be Taiwan. A partnership with Taiwan, not its demise at the hand of the CCP, is crucial to our common cause to eradicate the CCP's authoritarianism.

5. The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act mandates the U.S. government to maintain Taiwan's defense capabilities proportional to the military threat posed by the CCP. Defending Taiwan therefore is not a new U.S. commitment. It's been a decades-long promise and Taiwan has become a major recipient of U.S. military sales of key weapons platforms. That's good for Taiwan, and it's good for America too.



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Discussion Questions

1. What are the relative military strengths of the Taiwanese and the Chinese?
2. Can Japan, South Korea, and Australia help Taiwan to create deterrence?
3. What will be the role of North Korea in any Taiwanese–Chinese standoff?
4. Does Russia contribute to tensions or reduce them or neither?

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and America's Strategy in Asia* (Project 2049 Institute, 2017). <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1546353259>
- Hoover Institution 2020 Conference on Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific Region, "China's Rise and Prospects for Security and Stability in the Indo-Pacific Region" (October 29, 2020). <https://www.hoover.org/events/chinas-rise-and-prospects-security-and-stability-indo-pacific-region-2020-conference-taiwan>
- *Strategika* Issue 65, "U.S. Recognition of Taiwan" (May 29, 2020). <https://www.hoover.org/publications/strategika/issue-65>



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The Prospects of a New Iran Deal

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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