



## FOREWORD

Over the last decade, and especially since the February 2022 launch of the latest and biggest phase of Russia's war on Ukraine, resurgent military aggression and various other forms of authoritarian power projection have changed the face of world politics. Even before it was fully formed, the hope that the end of the Cold War would usher in a new era of interstate peace was belied by Saddam Hussein's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. That should have been enough reminder of the timeless adage—written so frequently in blood across the pages of history—that power-hungry tyrants pose grave threats to their neighbors. By now, the illusions of a new, more peaceful and rule-bound era of world order have been shattered. Over the last three decades, Europe (along with the broader arc of post-Soviet space) and the Middle East have been the principal strategic theaters of authoritarian belligerence. But there is good reason to believe that in the coming decade, the greatest threat will come from Asia and the world's most powerful autocracy, the People's Republic of China (PRC).

As Matt Pottinger and his coauthors make clear in this brilliant and urgently important book, no country in recent decades has been expanding its military might with greater speed, intensity, and foreseeable consequence than China. This is not simply a general military buildup to buttress China's rise as a global superpower. It is quite specifically designed to achieve coercively—through military invasion,

strangulation by blockade, or some sequence of the two—what the Communist leaders in Beijing term “unification of Taiwan with the motherland.” As this book elucidates in chilling detail, China’s megalomaniacal dictator, Xi Jinping, is increasingly warning his Communist Party cadres, and the nation, to prepare for war—and quite specifically, a war for Xi to achieve the crowning victory that would elevate him above even Mao Zedong in the pantheon of China’s Communist leaders. Moreover, the authors show, it is not only through rhetoric and military expansion that China is preparing for a war of annexation against Taiwan. China is also restructuring its economy to insulate it from potential economic sanctions, escalating information warfare and gray-zone military exercises, and rapidly building and repositioning infrastructure in ways that signal preparation for a bold military exercise across the Strait of Taiwan, and even a “great struggle,” if that is what it takes to prevail.

This is hardly the first time that a dictator has given the world notice of his intent to aggress against a neighbor. Adolf Hitler did just that with his headlong pace of military modernization in the 1930s, and then his march of twenty thousand Wehrmacht troops into the Rhineland in 1936, in brazen violation of the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Pact. Europe’s democracies did nothing in response to Hitler then. What followed were repeated failures to deter Hitler’s thirst for conquest. The most famous of these was the 1938 Munich agreement, in which Britain and France, hoping to prevent the war that Hitler threatened, yielded to his territorial demand to annex a German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland. So naïve and calamitous was the Anglo-French concession to the German dictator that the Munich agreement has become synonymous with delusional appeasement of tyrants seeking to aggrandize their power, wealth, and territory.

Now it is Taiwan that is in the crosshairs of totalitarian aggressive ambition. And what today’s powerful democracies do or fail to do to deter the potential aggressor, China, will be every bit as consequential for the future of world peace and order. It is not merely that Taiwan—like Czechoslovakia in the 1930s—is a democracy in a difficult

neighborhood. In Taiwan's case, it is also perhaps the most liberal democracy in Asia and one of the most successful results of the post-1974 "third wave" of democratization. That should be reason enough to resolve, as we should have done in the 1930s, that we cannot allow a democracy to be swallowed by a power-hungry dictator without endangering all democracies.

There are also, as Pottinger and his coauthors enumerate, other powerful reasons why deterring China from forcibly annexing Taiwan is vital to world order. As this book explains, it is difficult to overstate the strategic importance of Taiwan to the world economy, to the free flow of goods throughout the Indo-Pacific, and to the national security of the United States. In conquering Taiwan, China might gain a chokehold over the global supply of semiconductors, especially at the advanced nodes. Or in the heat of battle, the development and fabrication facilities that produce over half of the world's chips (and over 90 percent of the most advanced chips) might be damaged or destroyed, sending the world economy into a deep tailspin, if not an outright global depression. Beyond this, if China captures Taiwan, it could reposition its submarines and numerous other military assets to the island and use that strategic location (between Japan and the Philippines in the so-called First Island Chain) to hold the rest of East Asia hostage to its demands. With China already using relentless coercion and intimidation to press its baseless claims to most of the South China Sea, the US commitment to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific would be fatally undermined. Democracies throughout Asia (and perhaps beyond) would abandon strategic confidence in the United States. And the stage would be set for the biggest shift in world power since the end of World War II.

It is still possible to prevent this scenario from happening. But as Pottinger and his colleagues argue (echoing George Washington and many other strategic thinkers), to maintain the peace, democracies must prepare for war. They must show they have not only the means but also the will to fight effectively, and that in launching a needless war, China would face a probability of defeat. With his economy stagnating, his entrepreneurial and scientific talent fleeing, and the society

(and even many Communist Party members) disillusioned with his rule, Xi would be courting personal ruin if he launched a war and lost it. Taiwan's job now, America's job now, Japan's job now, and Australia's and Europe's job now is to persuade China's leaders that using military force to resolve the Taiwan question would likely be disastrous—both for all these nations and for all of China.

In the pages that follow, Pottinger and his remarkable coauthors spell out the urgent steps that Taiwan, the United States, and their strategic partners must take to be able to hold off, repel, and ultimately defeat a PRC attempt at coercive annexation. They make clear that it is only through such strength, resolve, and readiness that a PRC attack on Taiwan will be deterred. We must hope that policymakers and democratic publics take their message to heart before it is too late.

LARRY DIAMOND

William L. Clayton Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution  
Mosbacher Senior Fellow in Global Democracy,  
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies  
Stanford University