

Anticipation Is Making Me Wait: The “Inevitability of War” and Deadlines in Cross-Strait Relations

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Two increasingly important facets of the debate over possible conflict between China and Taiwan are discussions of the “inevitability of war” and deadlines, particularly with reference to Taiwan’s proposed constitutional revision in 2006 and the Beijing Olympics in 2008. This paper examines official and unofficial writings on these two subjects, assessing changes in tone and content from summer 2003 to late summer 2004. On the one hand, unofficial pronouncements asserting concrete dates of resolution can make for useful psychological operations to undermine morale in Taiwan and deter U.S. military intervention. On the other hand, official commentary to the contrary underscores the difficult trade-offs between specificity and flexibility in Beijing’s policymaking toward Taipei. On balance, the evidence does suggest that China’s position toward Taiwan (and, by extension, toward the role of the United States in a future conflict) has hardened since President Chen Shui-bian’s reelection in spring 2004, portending the possibility of a military crisis in the next four years.

Introduction

The reelection of Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian in May 2004 has only increased tensions in the strategic triangle of China, Taiwan, and the United States. Prior to the election, Beijing’s policy approach was cautious and deliberately avoided the use of saber rattling, perhaps reflecting an understanding that the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) 1996 missile exercises and general bellicosity in the run-up to the 2000 Taiwan presidential election had in fact resulted in the opposite of their intended outcome. Instead, Beijing placed its bets on a victory by the pan-blue coalition of the Kuomintang (KMT) and People First Party (PFP). This careful approach continued through the failed assassination attempt against Chen, the election, and the highly tumultuous vote recount, culminating in Chen’s May 20 inauguration speech.

In the wake of Chen’s remarks, however, cross-Strait relations have been marked by a harsher, more confrontational line. Among Beijing officials and analysts, Chen is judged to be fundamentally untrustworthy, and therefore not someone with whom China can negotiate in good faith. His inauguration speech was perceived as disingenuous, masking a clear Taiwan independence agenda. At the same time, Beijing cannot simply wait until the next election in 2008, given what are perceived to be very negative trend

lines in a number of critical areas. First, Beijing is troubled by the long-term implications of Chen's efforts to accelerate the "Taiwanization" of the island's society and political system, for these efforts emphasize "native" identity at the expense of affinity to the mainland and traditional Han culture. Second, analysts in China are frustrated that increasing economic integration between the two sides has not resulted in greater political integration. Third, in terms of cross-Strait relations, China is upset at Chen's almost daily declarations that Taiwan is an independent, sovereign country. However, Beijing is most concerned about Chen's stated plans to revise the island's constitution, beginning in 2006. Despite promises in his inauguration speech that the revisions would not touch any of the sections of the constitution dealing with sovereignty or national identity, Beijing analysts doubt that Chen can control the process once it gets started. Official Chinese interlocutors have signaled over both public and private channels that the potential codification of Taiwanese independence in the constitution, referred to as "juridical independence," is the ultimate "redline," the crossing of which would compel China to use military force.

As cross-Strait tensions have heightened, U.S.-China ties have clearly deteriorated. Before and after the election, Beijing has attempted to leverage the renewed strategic Sino-U.S. relationship forged since September 11, 2001, calling for Washington to rein in Taipei. While President Bush's perceived rebuke of Chen in December 2003 was well received in Beijing, more recent events—especially the intense debate in Taipei over more than \$18 billion in U.S. arms sales and Washington's advocacy of Taiwanese participation in the World Health Organization—have become an increasing source of frustration for the Chinese government. As a result, Beijing has once again begun to emphasize military options for resolving the cross-Strait stalemate, publishing official commentaries about the inevitability of war and warning that the impending 2008 Beijing Olympics would not be an impediment to forceful unification with the island. In their reading of Chinese military sources, Western experts point specifically to the 2005–6 timeframe as being especially dangerous. They warn that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) might conduct its largest joint exercises to date in 2005, thereby preparing itself to conduct military operations against Taiwan and the United States should Chen push forward with the planned constitutional revision in 2006.

Inevitability of War

For pessimistic observers of cross-Strait relations, particularly those who regard Chen Shui-bian as an unrepentant independence radical and savor the idea of using military force to settle the issue, war between the two sides sometimes seems inevitable. This view gained greater prominence in April 2004, when an essay, purportedly written by PLA Air Force General Liu Yazhou, was widely circulated on the Internet, quoting Jiang Zemin to the effect that "there will certainly be a war in the Taiwan Strait" (*tai hai biyou yizhan*). This theme was repeated in a prominent *Wen wei po* article by Xing Ben, who asserted, "Peace and development remain the themes of the present era. A new world war is unlikely in the foreseeable future. *However, partial wars are inevitable.* The Taiwan issue is China's greatest security threat in the next 10 or 20 years" (emphasis

added).¹ “Partial wars” in this case is presumed to refer to a cross-Strait contingency. Even one prominent former official of the Taiwanese Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) adopted the fatalist posture. In August 2004 Xu Xinliang, former chairman of the DPP, forecasted that “under the leadership of President Chen Shui-bian, cross-strait relations will remain in deadlock and, eventually, a war will be inevitable.”²

Yet the vast majority of official and unofficial commentary on the issue explicitly argues that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between Taiwanese actions and the likelihood of war, as summarized in the oft-quoted policy statement that “‘Taiwan independence’ means war.”³ Following Chen’s statements about constitutional referenda but prior to Wen Jiabao’s visit to Washington, Feng Changhong, a strategist at the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS), was quoted in a PRC-owned magazine in Hong Kong warning that Taiwanese behavior could lead to war: “[W]e hope the Taiwan authorities will clearly recognize the resolve of the Chinese Government to safeguard its overriding national interests and will not misread any signs on this issue, or else a war will be unavoidable.”⁴ His comments were seconded on the same day in *People’s Daily* by noted AMS hard-liner Luo Yuan:

The Chinese Government has issued a warning on this in the most severe terms. We have issued such a severe warning also to demonstrate our greatest sincerity in settling the Taiwan issue peacefully. The mainland would not have issued such a severe warning if the cross-strait situation had not reached the brink of danger. The purpose of the warning is to sober them up, so that they can pull back before it is too late and return to the track of peace from the brink of war. This warning also shows that the mainland is handling the situation with utmost decency and kindness and is putting words before blows. We are presenting our bottom line in its entirety and creating a fire lane, to prevent the flames of war from flaring up.⁵

After Chen’s apparent rejection of President Bush’s statements on December 9, 2003, about the need for both sides to avoid upsetting the status quo, former PLA general officer and current deputy head of the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Wang Zaixi raised the stakes in an article titled “Taiwan Authorities Should ‘Stop Playing with Fire’”: “If Chen will recklessly take more risky pro-independence moves . . . it will trigger tension and even a clash in bilateral ties.”⁶

Stern warnings about the direct relationship between Taiwan’s actions and the possibility of war did not change after Chen’s reelection in May 2004. In a high-profile article in the conservative military journal *Strategy and Management* that same month, Zhang Xuezhong of the Civil Law Teaching and Research Section at the East China Institute of Politics and Law declared, “[I]f Taiwan is bent on breaking away from China and the mainland does not allow the third kind of outcome [peaceful independence], war will be inevitable, no matter what the balance of forces at the time.”⁷ In the same issue, hard-line television pundit Yan Xuotong bellowed, “If Chen Shui-bian carries out legally

based independence in 2008 according to plan, China will be forced to launch all-out war.”⁸

Perhaps playing “good cop,” the Taiwan Affairs Office on May 17, 2004, issued a revised policy document on cross-Strait relations that emphasized China’s peaceful approach but also warned of the dangers of any further moves toward independence by Chen and the DPP, stating that “‘Taiwan independence’ does not lead to peace, nor national division to stability.”⁹ The statement clarified five policy principles that emphasized both peace and war:

We will never compromise on the one China principle, never give up our efforts for peace negotiations, never falter in our sincere pursuit of peace and development on both sides of the Straits with our Taiwan compatriots, never waver in our resolve to safeguard China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and never put up with “Taiwan independence.”¹⁰

Implicitly rejecting the inevitability of war, the TAO then outlined the nature and consequences of Taipei’s choices:

The Taiwan leaders have before them two roads: one is to pull back immediately from their dangerous lurch towards independence, recognizing that both sides of the Taiwan Straits belong to the one and same China and dedicating their efforts to closer cross-Straits relations. The other is to keep following their separatist agenda to cut Taiwan from the rest of China and, in the end, meet their own destruction by playing with fire. The Taiwan leaders must choose between such two roads.¹¹

Friendly “bad cop” commentary reinforced the consequences side of the message. In comments to a regional newspaper in Singapore the next day, Yu Keli, director of the Institute of Taiwan Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the primary author of the 2002 Taiwan White Paper, warned:

If Chen Shui-bian insists on his “Taiwan independence” stance and rejects the one-China principle, it will be absolutely impossible for both sides of the strait to hold peace talks. Once Chen Shui-bian steps on mainland China’s “bottom line,” his act “will definitely lead to serious consequences.”¹²

At the same time, the leadership continued in its “good cop” role. President Hu Jintao in July held out hope for peacefully resolving the conflict in a telephone conversation with President Bush, without letting Chen and the DPP off the hook: “China will exert its utmost efforts with its utmost sincerity to resolve the Taiwan issue by peaceful means, but will never tolerate ‘the independence of Taiwan.’”¹³ Nothing in the statement implied that war was inevitable.

Setting Deadlines: Crazy Like a Fox or Just Plain Crazy?

Deadlines and Timetables

If war is not inevitable, then the timing of the use of military force, whether as a response to a *casus belli* or as a preplanned maneuver, becomes critically important. At first blush, setting deadlines for resolution of the Taiwan issue seems like an attractive strategy for Beijing. Backed by credible threats of the use of military force, deadlines focus the mind of the adversary, establishing a timetable for a decision to accept or reject terms. Yet deadlines also undermine flexibility and stake the credibility of the issuer on an artificial timeline, divorced from cause and effect. As a result, the recipient of the deadline threat is less likely to be blamed for provoking a potential resulting conflict and more likely to be seen as the victim of bullying. Deadlines also cede significant leverage to the adversary, which knows it can wait to resolve the crisis until the very last moment, hoping for the best possible deal. Most importantly, failure to follow through on threats after the deadline has passed or the failure of the post-deadline coercion to achieve the desired outcome fatally wounds the credibility of the threatener, possibly even triggering serious domestic political consequences for the leaders who issued the deadline in the first place.

Immediately after renormalization with the United States, Beijing was not interested in setting deadlines for unification. Deng Xiaoping was widely quoted as saying that China could wait 50 or 100 years to bring Taiwan back into the fold, and this policy guidance was dominant through the 1980s and early 1990s. The 1993 White Paper on “The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China” added only slight urgency to the issue, stating, “In order to put an end to hostility and achieve peaceful reunification, the two sides should enter into contacts and negotiations at the earliest possible date.”¹⁴ Yet the democratization of the island, Lee Teng-hui’s attempts to redefine the relationship between Taiwan and China, and the growing frustration in Beijing over the failure of economic integration to foster political integration across the Strait all served to undermine this policy. The February 2000 White Paper on Taiwan formalized this shift, declaring that unification could not be put off “indefinitely”:

China remains firm in adhering to “peaceful reunification” and “one country, two systems,” doing its utmost to achieve the objective of peaceful reunification. However, if a grave turn of events occurs leading to the separation of Taiwan from China in any name, or if Taiwan is invaded and occupied by foreign countries, or if the Taiwan authorities refuse, *sine die*, the peaceful settlement of cross-straits reunification through negotiations, then the Chinese government will only be forced to adopt all drastic measures possible, including the use of force, to safeguard China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and fulfill the great cause of reunification.¹⁵

Nonetheless, Beijing remains loath to officially declare a deadline for resolution of the Taiwan issue. All mentions of deadlines, which began to appear in the mid-1990s,

have been relegated to regional media in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan. One could advance a number of hypotheses to explain this pattern, including the proven capacity of threat-oriented articles to sell periodical subscriptions. But it seems reasonable to argue that some of the mentions of deadlines in the media, especially in publications closely associated with Beijing, are a form of plausibly deniable information operations meant to affect the psychology of the leadership and population on Taiwan, as well as those of its regional neighbors and the United States.

Ironically, discussions of deadlines since the beginning of 2003 have been driven by schedules created more in Taiwan than in Beijing, especially Chen Shui-bian's timetable for constitutional revision, which is proposed to begin in 2006 with ratification in 2008. In response, the Chinese side has both formally and informally communicated its proposed actions should Chen move forward with amendment or replacement of the constitution. Speaking to *People's Daily* in early December 2003 before Wen Jiabao's trip to Washington, Academy of Military Sciences academic Peng Guangqian declared:

Chen Shui-bian has proposed a timetable for "Taiwan independence." If he insisted on pushing it through regardless, it would be our timetable for crushing "Taiwan independence" and striving for the reunification of our country. We have the resolve and confidence to do so, and the ability and strength to do so.¹⁶

After Chen's reelection in May 2004 and the issuance of the TAO statement on May 17, Tsao Ching-hsing, Phoenix TV Beijing correspondent, opined:

[T]he [TAO] statement signals a shift in Beijing's policy toward a proactive approach and marks the end of its four-year-old strategy of "judging him by his deeds, not just by his words" [*ting qi yan guan qi xing*]. The statement reflects the consensus of the top Chinese leadership that the cross-strait situation is stern and [that] the most pressing task at present is to prevent Taiwan independence "at any cost." . . . Whether Chen will go ahead with the proposed 2006 referendum on the adoption of a new constitution will be a benchmark in his pursuit of incremental independence, and Beijing will by no means allow him to take this step.¹⁷

Zhang Tongxin, director of the Center for the Studies of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan at Renmin University, was more direct:

If Chen Shui-bian amends the Constitution in 2006 and implements the new Constitution in 2008 according to his timetable, it will be tantamount to creating "major incidents of 'Taiwan independence.'" Mainland China will then have no choice but to use force to resolutely crush Chen Shui-bian's separatist schemes.¹⁸

From these statements it seems clear that Beijing still sees a cause-and-effect relationship between Taipei's actions and its own responses, and that it will not act on deadlines alone.

Importance of the Olympics

While the timing of Chen's proposed constitutional revision is coterminous with his four-year term as president, the congruence of the schedule with Beijing's hosting of the Olympic Summer Games in 2008 should not be deemed a coincidence. Indeed, during the selection process for the host site, members of the international community openly cited the potential pacifying effect that a Beijing choice might have upon cross-Strait relations, judging that China would want to avoid a repeat of the international boycotts of the 1980 Moscow Olympics following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Opportunistically employing the same logic, Taiwan independence activists advocated pushing the ratification of the new constitution to a date near 2008, believing that Beijing would be deterred from attacking so as not to lose significant international "face" during an event designed to showcase China's emergence as a global power. To this end, former Taiwanese president and Chinese bête noire Lee Teng-hui had suggested that 2008 would be an opportune time for Taiwan to declare independence.¹⁹

Official and unofficial Chinese responses to this line of analysis were swift and unyielding. In November 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao told the *Washington Post* that "the Chinese people shall safeguard the unity of their motherland at all costs," a line later parroted by unofficial interlocutors in the context of the Olympics.²⁰ On the eve of Wen Jiabao's visit to Washington in December 2003, AMS researcher Feng Changhong stated the case plainly in a PRC-owned magazine in Hong Kong:

As far as China is concerned, the unity of the motherland and the integrity of her territory are the greatest and most important national interests of the Chinese nation. Although hosting the Olympic Games has become part of China's national interests, it cannot be placed on a par with the greatest and most important national interests of the Chinese nation, i.e. unity of the motherland and the integrity of her territory, within the hierarchy of national interests. The Taiwan authorities should be able to infer from this analysis that although the mainland hopes it can host the Olympic Games without trouble, it is more eager to see the motherland reunified at an early date. If the Chinese Government has to choose between these two types of national interests, there is no doubt that it will choose the latter.²¹

On the same day, Feng's AMS colleague Peng Guangqian reinforced the same argument on the much more authoritative *People's Daily* online network:

If a war did break out to counter "Taiwan independence," the following prices would have to be paid: the 2008 Olympic Games; less investment; retrogression in relations with some countries; the southeast coast facing

the flames of war; economic standstill or regression; and necessary sacrifice on the part of the People's Liberation Army [PLA]. But it is worthwhile to earn the reunification of the country by making temporary, localized sacrifices. . . . If we were to fight a war to counter "Taiwan independence" and safeguard our country's unity and territorial integrity, we would do it without turning back, even if there could be a price to pay. We would pay whatever price we need to pay. We are prepared to do so and can afford to do so. The prices involved are no more than the following: First, the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 World Exposition may be affected. The Taiwan authorities said that we might refrain from using force for the sake of the Olympic Games. If one weighs the Olympic Games against our country's territory and sovereignty, the latter will always be of overriding importance. These two issues are not on a par with each other. They are not in the same class. Whoever thinks that we would forsake or sacrifice national sovereignty in order to host the Olympic Games would be thinking like a primary school pupil. It is not the logic of a normal person, still less that of the Chinese people. The Olympic Games will be a flower embroidered on the brocade. But if the brocade were torn and trampled upon, what is there to embroider the flower on? . . . It is worthwhile to earn the complete reunification of the country and revitalization of the nation by making temporary, localized sacrifices.²²

A January 15, 2004, article in *People's Daily*, quoting deputy head of the Taiwan Affairs Office Wang Zaixi, added an official sanction to this view:

The Taiwan issue is not allowed to be postponed indefinitely. However, the reunification of Taiwan is a process; therefore, it cannot be set as a flight schedule. We will make our decision on the progress according to actual situations. China must seize the precious opportunity of the first 15 to 20 years of the 21st century in which China is likely to have some great achievement. The Chinese government and Chinese people hope for cross-Straits stability and a stable and peaceful international environment to concentrate on developing [the] economy and gradually realize the peaceful reunification across the Straits. If the Taiwan authorities make [a] wrong judgment on the situation, quicken the pace of "Taiwan independence," make provocation against the mainland and the one China principle and cross the bottom line of the mainland, the schedule of solving the Taiwan issue will be changed as these situations change.²³

Official and unofficial reactions after Chen's inauguration speech in May 2004 continued many of these themes. That same month, Premier Wen told Chinese Embassy staff in London that reunification was "more important than our lives," and by inference, more important than the Olympics.²⁴ In a high-profile May 2004 *Strategy and Management* article titled "The Pros and Cons of Using Force to Constrain Law-based Taiwan Independence," pundit firebrand Yan Xuetong roared, "[S]o long as China

adheres to the principle of ‘not hesitating to pay any price,’ constraining Taiwan independence by force is bound to succeed, because no external force can ‘not hesitate to pay any price.’”²⁵ On May 17, the Taiwan Affairs Office released its official policy response to Chen’s victory and speech, emphasizing the theme of “paying any price” for unification:

The Chinese people are not afraid of ghosts, nor will they be intimidated by brutal force. To the Chinese people, nothing is more important and more sacred than safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their country. We will do our utmost with the maximum sincerity to strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification of the motherland. However, if Taiwan leaders should move recklessly to provoke major incidents of “Taiwan independence,” the Chinese people will crush their schemes firmly and thoroughly at any cost.²⁶

Over the summer, additional arguments along this line began to appear in the usual regional media sources. On May 18, 2004, an unidentified Beijing expert asserted, “[M]ainland China is willing and ready to forgo the hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games and even to forgo the golden period of development in the next 20 years.”²⁷ On July 22, Chinese diplomats leaked to *Christian Science Monitor* that retired generals had urged Central Military Commission (CMC) Chairman Jiang Zemin to take swift action against Taiwan, well ahead of the 2008 Olympics. Promilitary thinkers assert that the world will react badly to aggression against Taiwan but that “everyone will get over it.”²⁸ On July 23, Lin Zhibo argued in an Internet essay titled “The United States Is Playing a Dangerous Game,” on the *People’s Daily*-affiliated network site *Huanqiu shibao*, “The Chinese Government and people regard the motherland’s reunification as much more important than short-term economic development and staging the Olympics, and there is no room whatever for compromise on this question.”²⁹ Reinforcing the message again at the official level, former PLA general officer and current deputy head of the Taiwan Affairs Office Wang Zaixi on July 28 asserted, “[I]t is extremely dangerous for the Taiwan authorities to miscalculate the situation that the motherland would tolerate ‘Taiwan independence’ in consideration of economic development and the hosting of [the] Beijing Olympics.”³⁰ But these many messages clearly failed in deterring one of the originators of the idea. On August 9, Lee Teng-hui hailed Taiwan’s “independence opportunity,” since Beijing would be preoccupied with internal problems until at least 2007.³¹

The New Deadline: 2020?

The most recent deadline craze arose from a July 15, 2004, *Wen wei po* article, in which author Xing Ban discusses a speech by Jiang Zemin at an enlarged Central Military Commission meeting and later quotes an “authoritative organization” as asserting that “although the first 20 years of the 21st century represents an important period of strategic opportunities, the possibility of resolving the Taiwan issue during this period of time cannot be ruled out.”³² CNN then misquoted *Wen wei po* as reporting that

Jiang Zemin had told an enlarged CMC meeting that “before or after 2020 is the time to resolve the Taiwan issue.”³³ Interestingly, *Ming pao* was used on July 16 as a channel for correcting the misinterpretation of the *Wen wei po* piece: “Although some Hong Kong media recently reported that top officials at Zhongnanhai plan to resolve the Taiwan issue by 2020, the information this newspaper received indicated that if any major Taiwan independence incident occurs in Taiwan, a cross-strait war would start at any time.”³⁴ Within 10 days, more fulsome rebuttals appeared in Chinese sources. Xu Bodong, director of the Institute of Taiwan Studies at Beijing Union University, offered the following refutation of the 2020 deadline:

The first point concerns the “specific nature” of the timetable. Since it is a “reunification timetable,” it will naturally lay down a relatively specific time limit—the first 20 years of this century, that is, “we cannot rule out settling the Taiwan issue during this period,” the 16 years from 2004 to 2020, thus strongly expressing the resolve and will that “it cannot drag on indefinitely.” This is in fact equivalent to setting down a “military pledge” [*jun ling zhuang*]. The second concerns the “flexible nature” of strategic thinking. After the “reunification timetable” was revealed, many outsiders said that the mainland “will reunify Taiwan in 2020.” This is an erroneous reading. If that is really the case, it means that the mainland has made a stupid move in “binding itself hand and foot.” In fact there are two meanings to this “timetable”: The first is to say that the mainland does “not rule out” [settling] but does not say that it “definitely will” settle the Taiwan issue in the first 20 years of the century, that is to say, the time may still be extended; the second is that the time for settling the reunification issue may also be “shortened,” that is, the issue could be resolved ahead of schedule, at any point in time during “the period” before 2020. Hence, this “timetable” has very great “flexibility,” or one could say “elasticity.”³⁵

To further underscore the point, Chen Binhua, a Xinhua reporter previously posted in Taipei, told the viewers of China Central Television (CCTV)—4:

There is no fixed timetable for reunification, noting that the PRC will not wait until 2020 if Taiwan declares independence earlier. But the PRC sees no pressing need to resolve the matter by force or by 2020 if the behavior of the Taiwan authorities does not reach a point that the PRC finds intolerable. The PRC’s timetable for reunification by force will follow the Taiwan authorities’ timetable for Taiwan independence. The constitutional reforms being promoted by Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party authorities carry connotations of incremental Taiwan independence. If the reforms result in a change to the country’s sovereignty, such as a change to the country’s name, the PRC will then take “actions of justice.”³⁶

The fact that the Beijing authorities would take such pains to demolish a CNN misinterpretation of an article on deadlines reemphasizes the concern, expressed at the beginning of this analysis, that setting timetables can dangerously undermine one's goals. In this case, the worry would not be that the deadline was too soon, and therefore perhaps unachievable, but that it was too far away, and therefore might encourage a belief in Taiwan that Beijing had returned to something closer to the Deng Xiaoping policy of the 1980s.

Conclusion

On August 3, 2004, President Hu Jintao, in a meeting with a delegation of U.S. senators, said that “to safeguard China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to realize *at an early date* a completely reunified motherland, is the common will and strong decision cherished by the 1.3 billion Chinese people” (emphasis added).³⁷ This use of intentionally vague and flexible timetable language was reminiscent of the 1993 White Paper on Taiwan, which reflected the views of a time before the 1995–96 missile exercises and two elections of DPP presidents, and it was a far cry from the constant refrain of deadlines and the inevitability of war that dominated most of 2003 and 2004. It likely represents more of the usual “good cop/bad cop” routine, with the leadership taking the high road and leaving the deniable ad hominem attacks and fire breathing to “scholars” and other unnamed experts. The leadership’s reluctance to set deadlines also highlights the significant dangers of getting trapped in timetables, particularly given the potentially dire costs of failure to execute the mission in the time allotted. In the end, deadlines likely serve a usual internal purpose of providing programmatic guidance to the PLA for modernization and the like, but they offer little but downsides as public, official strategy. When the two dialogues blur, however, perhaps the greatest danger is miscalculation and misperception by Taiwan and the United States, and a resulting escalation to a war desired by no one.

Notes

¹ Xing Ban, “Taiwan Issue Will Probably Be Resolved by 2020,” *Wen wei po*, July 15, 2004.

² “Chen Is Pushing Taiwan to War, Says Former Ally,” Reuters, August 4, 2004.

³ Liao Yi, “State Council Taiwan Affairs Office Director Wang Zaixi: Taiwan Independence Means War, Armed Force Seems Hard to Avoid,” http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-11/18/content_1185507.htm.

⁴ “China Will Not Sit By and Watch Taiwan Going Independent, Just to Keep Its Olympic Hosting Rights,” *Tzu ching* 158 (December 1, 2003): 42–43.

⁵ Huang Hai and Yang Liu, “Military Experts on War to Counter ‘Taiwan Independence’: Six Prices; War Criminals Cannot Escape Punishment,” *Renmin wang*, December 3, 2003.

⁶ “Taiwan Authorities Should ‘Stop Playing with Fire,’” *People’s Daily*, January 8, 2004.

⁷ Zhang Xuezhong, “Reflections on Measures to Guard against Worst Case Scenarios for the Taiwan Issue,” *Zhanlue yu guanli*, 2004, no. 3 (May 1): 6–9.

⁸ Yan Xuetong, “The Pros and Cons of Using Force to Constrain Law-based Taiwan Independence,” *Zhanlue yu guanli*, 2004, no. 3 (May 1): 1–5.

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- ⁹ “Curbing ‘Taiwan Independence’ Most Urgent Task,” *People’s Daily*, May 17, 2004.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Yu Zeyuan, “Mainland Chinese Scholars: Chen Shui-bian Is Creating a Major ‘Taiwan Independence’ Incident If He Implements His Timetable for Amending Constitution,” *Lianhe zaobao*, May 18, 2004.
- ¹³ “Hu Reaffirms Opposition to US Arms Sales to Taiwan,” Xinhua News Agency, July 30, 2004.
- ¹⁴ For the text of the 1993 White Paper, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/employment/2002-11/18/content_633183.htm.
- ¹⁵ The full text of the 2000 White Paper can be found at <http://english.people.com.cn/features/taiwanpaper/taiwan.html>.
- ¹⁶ Huang Hai and Yang Liu, “Military Experts on War.”
- ¹⁷ *Newsline Program*, Phoenix TV, May 17, 2004.
- ¹⁸ Yu Zeyuan, “Mainland Chinese Scholars.”
- ¹⁹ “PLA Stands Ready to Intervene, Warn Mainland Military Analysts,” *South China Morning Post*, December 3, 2003.
- ²⁰ “Interview with Wen Jiabao,” *Washington Post*, November 23, 2003.
- ²¹ “China Will Not Sit By and Watch.”
- ²² Huang Hai and Yang Liu, “Military Experts on War.”
- ²³ “Official with Taiwan Affairs Office on the Bottom Line for Use of Force,” *People’s Daily*, January 15, 2004.
- ²⁴ “Chinese Premier Wen to Consider Taiwan Reunification Legislation,” *Taiwan News*, May 12, 2004.
- ²⁵ Yan Xuetong, “The Pros and Cons of Using Force.”
- ²⁶ “Curbing ‘Taiwan Independence.’”
- ²⁷ Yu Zeyuan, “Mainland Chinese Scholars.”
- ²⁸ Robert Marquand, “Would China Invade Taiwan?” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 22, 2004.
- ²⁹ Lin Zhibo, “The United States Is Playing a Dangerous Game,” *Huanqiu shibao*, July 23, 2004.
- ³⁰ “Taiwan Warned: Don’t Miscalculate the Situation,” *China Daily*, July 28, 2004.
- ³¹ Kathrin Hille, “Taiwan Leader Hails ‘Independence Opportunity,’” *Financial Times*, August 9, 2004.
- ³² Xing Ban, “Taiwan Issue Will Probably Be Resolved by 2020,” *Wen wei po*, July 15, 2004.
- ³³ “China’s War Game Warning to Taiwan,” CNN.com, July 16, 2004.
- ³⁴ “Several of China’s Military Regions Are Preparing for Cross-Strait War; The War Might Start as Soon as Taiwan Independence Incidents Occur,” *Ming pao*, July 16, 2004.
- ³⁵ Xu Bodong, “The ‘Reunification Timetable’ Is the Palm of the Tathagata Buddha,” *Guoji xianqu daobao*, July 16, 2004.
- ³⁶ “Across the Strait,” CCTV-4, July 26, 2004.
- ³⁷ “Chinese President Meets U.S. Senate Leader,” *People’s Daily*, August 3, 2004.