

THE UNITED STATES' NEXT MOVE IN THE CHINA-TAIWAN
CONFLICT: THE ARGUMENT FOR A CONDITION
COMMITMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the United States' role regarding the potential Chinese invasion of the island of Taiwan. By examining this ongoing case, I recount the history between the three nations that has led to the start of this conflict. Then, I discuss the three major policy options being debated by scholars today—maintaining the status quo of strategic ambiguity, abandoning all defense commitments to Taiwan, and taking a stance of strategic clarity on the situation. This thesis then advocates for a fourth position that I argue the United States should take, a conditional commitment. My main research method to do so is literature reviews of the most renowned scholars on the topics, as well as an in-depth examination of a conditional commitment in practice today with South Korea. In order to make my argument, I address topics such as the legality of defending Taiwan and the reality of a war against China. Despite these risks, I conclude that Taiwan is worth defending due to the moral and strategic interests of the United States.

I. Introduction

“To be clear, sir,” Scott Pelly spoke to Joe Biden in a 60 Minute Interview, “U.S. forces, U.S. men and women, would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion?” “Yes.”¹ In perhaps the most straightforward approach yet, the President of the United States had just confirmed that the United States would send military forces to defend Taiwan from a Chinese invasion. The decision, one that finally seemed to be made after a murky four decades, shocked the People's Republic of China, the Taiwanese, the citizens of the United States, and most notably, even the White House. Despite what seemed to be an assured commitment from someone as powerful as the President of the United States of America, our true commitment to the defense of Taiwan remains unclear, debated, and dangerous.

It was not until 2021 that the majority of United States’ citizens expressed interest in defending Taiwan. For the first time, 53% of Americans supported the idea that the U.S. should sign a formal alliance with the nation. In the same year, 69% of Americans were in favor of recognizing Taiwan as an independent country, 57% voted in favor of a U.S.-Taiwan free-trade agreement, and 46% supported a clear commitment to defend Taiwan in the case of a Chinese invasion.² Despite the growing support for the twenty-three million inhabitant island, the United States continues to maintain a policy of strategic ambiguity regarding the defense of the island.

¹ CBS News, “Biden tells 60 Minutes U.S. troops would defend Taiwan, but White House says this is not official U.S. policy.” *CBS News*, September 18, 2022.

² Craig Kafura and Dina Smeltz, “For First Time, Half of Americans Favor Defending Taiwan If China Invades,” *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, August 26, 2021.

In light of recent events, the United States is being pressured more than ever to reevaluate their commitments to Taiwan as the PRC increasingly threatens the democratic island. In this article, I argue that the best option the United States can take towards Taiwan is a conditional commitment, contingent on economic and military commitments from Taiwan to its own self defense. In order to make my case, I analyze three of the current most talked about positions among international relation scholars: maintaining the status quo, offering an unconditional commitment, or abandoning relations with the island altogether.

This paper begins by discussing the history that has led to the crisis between Taiwan, China, and the United States, and why U.S.-Sino relations have deteriorated so fast in the past century. Then, I analyze the three opposing positions advocated for by different scholars and take my own supporting the idea of a conditional commitment. To make my case, I analyze why Taiwan is so important to the United States and what dangers we would face should China take the island. In order for a conditional commitment to realistically work, I address potential rebuttals made by other scholars; I show that Taiwan is capable of meeting American demands and analyze what steps they have taken so far to make this happen. I make the case that the United States has a right to defend Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act even if it was not a *de facto* state, for which China would not be able to provide sufficient democratic rights under a “One China, Two Systems” policy. I provide a potential outline of just what the United States needs to do in order to ensure victory in the case of an escalation between the United States and China, including calling on its most important allies in the region. Before I conclude my paper, I provide a brief case study on the relationship between the United

States and South Korea to strengthen the argument that a conditional commitment between two nations is feasible, as it is currently in place with another country.

II. Tensions Brewing: How Did We Get Here?

The Policy of Strategic Ambiguity

The tensions between China, the United States, and Taiwan are desperately in need of diffusion as 2022 comes to a close. None of the administrations seem to budge on compromising, whether or not the rest of the world believes they are justified in their positions. What has become increasingly clear is the unsustainability of an ambiguous future policy. Strategic ambiguity on the matter of Taiwan is essentially a formal policy declaring that the United States has no policy. However, we cannot invalidate the policy that has deterred a Chinese invasion since at least as early as 1979. Strategic ambiguity once worked, and with good reason.

The thought process behind strategic ambiguity was dual deterrence; “uncertainty about a U.S. intervention would deter Chinese aggression and restrain Taiwan from taking any reckless steps that might provoke a Chinese attack.” Back and forth between differing presidential administrations of the U.S. have mangled the situation further without the guidelines of a clear policy. Despite these mixed signals from the American government, the United States currently has no obligations to defend Taiwan in an invasion, but they have never denied that it is a possibility. In fact, per the TRA, the United States has a formal commitment to supply Taiwan with defensive weapons, and they maintain the capacity to defend Taiwan militarily should they choose to.³ In practice, this has long seemed like the best option for the United States as they almost miraculously maintained relationships with both China and Taiwan simultaneously. This miracle always had an inevitable expiration date. Now, China is pushing the United States further, either to see if they will put their military where their mouth is, or because China would not be deterred even if they did.

³ “Strategic Ambiguity Toward Taiwan.” *Model Diplomacy*.

The Biden Administration and Taiwan

China's immunity to the United States' "strategic ambiguity" grows more and more obvious as Taipei receives mixed signals from the Biden administration. U.S. President Joe Biden has a history of declaring a military commitment to Taiwan, such as a statement he made from Tokyo in May of this year; when asked by a reporter if the U.S. would defend Taiwan militarily, Biden confirmed by claiming "that's the commitment [the U.S.] made."⁴ Similar rhetoric from Biden has occurred since August of 2021, where he stated that "[the U.S.] made a sacred commitment to Article Five that if in fact anyone were to invade or take action against our NATO allies, we would respond... same with Taiwan."⁵

Joe Biden's most recent 60 Minute Interview on September 18, 2022 continues to add more fuel to the fire. Even more angering to President Xi must have been that while Biden said we will not encourage Taiwanese independence, they get to make their own decision on whether or not to declare it. Although Joe Biden seemed adamant on militarily committing the United States to the defense of Taiwan, the White House had different ideas. In what has begun to seem like routine procedure, Joe Biden made a verbal commitment to defend Taiwan, and the rest of his administration rushed to deny the allegations. Still, they claimed that the United States' commitments to the island remain "ambiguous."⁶ Each time, the Biden administration continues to "correct" his

⁴ Jack Lau, "Joe Biden's comments about defending Taiwan 'send signal to Beijing without changing US policy.'" *South China Morning Post*, May 23, 2022.

⁵ Thomas j. Shattuck, "Believe Joe Biden When He Says America Will Defend Taiwan." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, May 25, 2022.

⁶ CBS News, "Biden tells 60 Minutes U.S. troops would defend Taiwan, but White House says this is not official U.S. policy."

strong statements, ensuring Beijing that the United States' policy of maintaining the status quo remains the same. Unfortunately, "perceptions of administration disarray over the fundamental issue of U.S. engagement with Taiwan could fuel doubts about the viability of that strategy."⁷

In August of 2022, Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taipei proved just how disheveled the United States officials remain. Despite the plethora of what seemed like support given to Taiwan by Biden's statements, he publicly announced that the administration did not support Pelosi's travel plans as to not antagonize China.⁸ While many in Washington believed that Pelosi's move could solidify the Taiwan-U.S. relationship in a way that makes China back down, others (including the U.S. military, according to Biden) find the move too risky. Pelosi was not deterred by her critics. Instead, she believed that the visit to the island was crucial to show support for Taiwan, as well as America's democratic values.⁹ Pelosi's trip made a statement to Beijing from both the U.S. and Taipei. Had Pelosi canceled her appearance to the small democratic island, Katherine Hille believes it "would have created a precedent under which China successfully coerced the U.S... into isolating Taiwan."¹⁰ From Taipei's side, allowing Pelosi's trip meant that they were willing to face the repercussions from an angry Beijing. Hille claims that Taiwan's belief that their allies standing up for them will pay off in the long run was part of the reason that they were willing to shoulder backlash for Pelosi's trip.

⁷ Phelim Kine, "How Biden bungled the Pelosi trip." *Politico*, August 3, 2022.

⁸ Bonnie S. Glaser and Zack Cooper, "Nancy Pelosi's Trip to Taiwan was Too Dangerous." *The New York Times*, July 28, 2022.

⁹ Yasmeen Abutaleb and Tyler Pager, "Chinese leader asked Biden to prevent Pelosi from visiting Taiwan." *The Washington Post*, August 20, 2022.

¹⁰ podcast

In response to Pelosi's trip, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced sanctions against Nancy Pelosi and her immediate family for "seriously interfering in China's internal affairs and seriously undermining China's sovereignty and territorial integrity."¹¹ Beijing also angrily responded by launching unprecedented military exercises believed to be used to intimidate the small island; China launched military drills across the median line of the Taiwan strait and missiles that had not been used since the 1996 crisis into the waters surrounding and above the island, with some landing as far as within Japan's exclusive economic zone.¹² Days later, China announced a drastic suspension on U.S.-Chinese cooperation, including repatriation of illegal immigrants, legal assistance on criminal matters, the combat of transnational crimes, and most notably, climate change.¹³

The aftermath of such has resulted in pure shenanigans from the American leaders, as Biden sends warnings of precaution to Pelosi while flagrantly ignoring them himself, and the administration publicly goes back and forth on just what United States policy is. In response, China has only intensified their antagonization of Taiwan. China has been sending dozens of warplanes over the median line each day, as well as preparing to employ thirteen ships, missile batteries, and crews over the last few weeks. The Chinese operations give them insight as to how well Taiwan could respond to a potential strike, as well as how feasible a blockade of the island would be. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin continuously reaffirms opposition to unilateral changes to the status quo of Taiwan, but the Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe is not convinced. In July of 2022,

¹¹ "China imposes sanctions on Nancy Pelosi after Taiwan visit." *Made for Minds*, August 5, 2022.

¹² Abutaleb and Pager, "Chinese leader asked Biden to prevent Pelosi from visiting Taiwan."

¹³ Jessie Yeung, "China suspends cooperation with US on range of issues, sanctions Pelosi over Taiwan trip." *CNN*, August 5, 2022.

Wei reminded the world that China would not hesitate to start a war over Taiwan if necessary.¹⁴ Soon after, foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin sent a direct message to the United States, telling us that China will “firmly smash the Taiwan authorities’ illusion of gaining independence through the U.S.,” and that we should do self-reflection to correct our mistakes.¹⁵ Although all the drills performed by the PLA may clearly indicate an angry China, Lonnie Henley says that they are technically perfectly routine. Still, the unpredictable, dense span of military operations and aggressive warnings from China signal to the U.S. and their small ally that they should prepare for battle.¹⁶

China-Taiwan History

Much of China’s actions against Taiwan can be best explained through the lens of classical realism, formed from a “unique mix of cultural, historical, and geographical factors.”¹⁷ The history and identities shared by the mainland Chinese and Taiwanese islanders complicates their relationship. Pushback from international competition, such as the United States, may be further heightening tensions between the mainland and the island as powerful leaders use the idea of an “enemy of the state” to ignite a sense of

¹⁴ “China will 'not hesitate to start war' over Taiwan, Beijing tells US.” *The Economic Times*, June 10, 2022.

¹⁵ “Taiwan holds live-fire drills as China extends war games.” *Al Jazeera*, August 9, 2022.

¹⁶ Paul McLeary and Lara Seligman, “China’s military exercises are an intel bonanza — for all sides.” *Politico*, August 5, 2022.

¹⁷ Kerby H. Davis and William J. Norris, PhD, “Classical Realism in the Case of China: How Politics Within Nations Shapes Emerging Politics Among Nations.”

nationalism in their followers. Because of the history between Taiwan and China, this nationalism is felt in different ways on both sides of the strait.¹⁸

In 1885 the Qing Dynasty declared Taiwan, an island approximately 100 miles off the coast of the Chinese mainland, an official province of the empire. After being ceded to Japan and then back to China as the result of war, Taiwan was under Chinese rule again by 1945. In the mid-twentieth century, 1.2 million people fled China, following the Republic of China (ROC) to the island and escaping the Chinese Communist Party, now called the PRC.¹⁹ Since then, Taiwan has grown to see the island as a nation independent from Chinese rule, considering itself a democracy since the late twenty-first century.

Unfortunately for the people of Taiwan, the “One China” policy has been an ideology in place for decades. The One China Policy is the idea that there is only one China, and Taiwan is a part of it. Since 1949, when so many Chinese citizens fled to the island, China has continued to think of its issues with Taiwan as domestic rather than foreign. China has issued statements claiming that “the complete reunification of China [embodies] the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation,” and the country has been attempting to work towards this goal for over fifty years.²⁰ As Taiwan begins to fight more and more for their independence, China has made efforts to fight back.

The Taiwan Strait has been a point of contention between the island and mainland since their split. In 1954, the first Taiwan Strait crisis occurred. After the Nationalist leader deployed troops to the offshore, ROC controlled islands of Quemoy and Matsu, the PLA began bombarding them. Two American military advisors were killed in just the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “The Taiwan Question.” *Embassy of the PRC in the Kingdom of Norway*, May 17, 2004,

first five hours of the crisis. In the spring of 1955, the U.S. threatened a nuclear war and China agreed to negotiate.²¹ A similar situation happened again in 1958, this time resulting in a ceasefire. In 1995, the U.S. granted the president of Taiwan a U.S. visa, on top of the first Taiwanese democratic presidential election looming, and Beijing was enraged.²² China retaliated by launching a military exercise that included launching missiles off the coast of Taiwan, with a nuclear capable M-9 missile flying over the capital.²³

Chas W. Freeman, assistant secretary of defense, recalls his warning to China and their frightening response. Unbothered when Freeman told them the U.S. would respond militarily, Chinese officials disregarded the threats saying, “No, you won't. We've watched you in Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia, and you don't have the will.” Freeman also says the Chinese officials commented on nuclear war, claiming that the U.S. had lost the ability to use it as a threat now that China was able to respond.²⁴ Washington, however, did respond militarily. They sent two aircraft carriers to the East Asian waters. China played out one more missile test and exercise in the following week. In the end, the election went on and the crisis was over.²⁵

China has continued to put pressure on those that Taiwan considers overseas allies. In 2017, twenty-one foreign countries recognized Taiwan as an independent

²¹ “1949-2022. U.S.-China Relations” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2022.

²² Michael Mazza, “Reflections on 25 Years Ago—risks for a Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis.” *Global Taiwan Institute*, May 24, 2021.

²³ Barton Gellman, “U.S. AND CHINA NEARLY CAME TO BLOWS IN '96.” *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1998.

²⁴ Gellman, “U.S. AND CHINA NEARLY CAME TO BLOWS IN '96.”

²⁵ Michael Mazza, “Reflections on 25 Years Ago—risks for a Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis.”

country. Going into 2022, only fourteen of these diplomatic Taiwanese allies remain.²⁶ Its counterpart holds 180 diplomatic relationships. One thing to note about the foreign affairs of Taiwan's ROC and China's PRC is that relationships with the countries are strictly an "either/or" situation; neither allows an outside state to maintain diplomatic relations with both simultaneously.²⁷ In efforts to coerce other countries to concede to China's will, it uses its economic power as reprimandments and intimidation.²⁸ This economic bullying by the superpower was portrayed just recently, when China implemented a boycott on all Lithuania products after the Baltic country opened a Taiwanese Representative's Office in their capital city.²⁹

The use of Chinese forces becomes even more threatening after comments from Xi Jinping, the president of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In a speech given in October of 2021, President Xi emphasized the importance of reunifying what he commonly refers to as "China," referring to both the mainland and the island of Taiwan. In what seemed like a warning to the United States, Xi said the issue of Taiwan is internally Chinese and that nobody should underestimate their will and ability to protect their national sovereignty and identity.³⁰ Xi has made plenty of similar threats in the past year, implying that the U.S. has bullied China and will find themselves up against 1.4

²⁶ Jenni Marsh, "These Are All the Friends Taiwan Has Left in the World," *Bloomberg.com* December 10, 2021.

²⁷ Thomas J Shattuck, "The Race to Zero?: China's Poaching of Taiwan's Diplomatic Allies." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, March 4, 2020.

²⁸ Pratik Jakhar, "China's Economic Coercion Is More Bark than Bite," *Foreign Policy*, October 5, 2021.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Chinese President, Xi Jinping says peaceful reunification with Taiwan 'must be realised.'" *South China Morning Post*, October 9, 2021.

billion Chinese if they attempt to infringe on the “historically inevitable” reunification.³¹ Shortly after the given speeches, Xi reportedly told military troops to prepare for war in response to U.S. weapon sales to Taiwan.³² As recently as March of 2022, Xi told President Biden that Taiwan remains the most sensitive and important issue in U.S.-Chinese relations, and improper handling of Taiwan’s future would be very dangerous.³³

U.S.-Taiwan History

In 1979, the U.S.-PRC Joint Communiqué established diplomatic recognition of Taiwan in Beijing, acknowledging China’s claim to sovereignty over Taiwan. The Joint Communiqué allowed the U.S. to maintain unofficial relations with the island, including commercially and culturally. That same year, the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) was also signed “to help maintain peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific.”³⁴

The Taiwan Relations Act stated that a diplomatic relationship with the PRC is contingent on the expectation that the future of Taiwan is determined by peaceful means. Moreover, the U.S. should provide Taiwan with defensive arms and resist any forms of coercion that would threaten the security or systems of the Taiwanese people, and “whenever the laws of the United States refer or relate to foreign countries, nations, states, governments, or similar entities, such terms shall include and such laws shall apply

³¹ David Sacks, “What Xi Jinping’s Major Speech Means For Taiwan.” *Council of Foreign Relations*, July 6, 2021.

³² William Zheng, “Xi Jinping tells Chinese marines to focus on 'preparing to go to war' during military base visit.” *South China Morning Post*, October 13, 2020.

³³ Ryan Woo and David Brunnstrom, “Xi says improper handling of Taiwan issues will hit China-U.S. ties.” *Reuters*, March 19, 2022.

³⁴ “Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 Et Seq.),” *American Institute in Taiwan*, December 30, 2020.

with such respect to Taiwan.”³⁵ Despite the language used in 1979, as of 2022, the United States Department of State has expressed that it still does not recognize Taiwan as an independent state nor explicitly support the idea.³⁶ In 2019, we began to see more aggressive support for Taiwan from Washington. The Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) was enacted in March of 2020. The act used language declaring Taiwan “a free, democratic, and prosperous nation,” and states that it is U.S. policy to provide defense tailored to meet the threats of the PRC.

Since the Cold War, the United States has maintained strategic ambiguity on the island of Taiwan as a way to deter Chinese interference. To this day, the United States fails to formally recognize the independence of the Taiwanese nation but continues to diplomatically advocate for their rights and security. Recently, there has been a stronger push for an explicit promise of defense from the U.S. should China proceed with a likely invasion of the island. Whether it be China’s own growing capabilities or their doubt of United States interference, China has begun to seem less and less deterred by the current hegemon.

The Great Power Competition

The Great Power Competition between China and the United States began in the twentieth century, and while Taiwan seems to be the most pressing issue between the two countries, it can more accurately be described as the tipping point of a balance that has become increasingly sensitive. As the Western world saw China begin to rise in

³⁵ John Bolton and Derik R. Zitelman, “Why Taiwan Matters to the United States.” *The Diplomat* August 23, 2021.

³⁶ “U.S. Relations with Taiwan - United States Department of State.” *U.S. Department of State*, April 15, 2021.

economic, cyber, and military capabilities, there was a call for a strategic partnership.³⁷ It was believed that a prosperous China would best serve the interests of the U.S. and its allies.³⁸ Others rejected this idea off the bat, knowing that history often repeats itself, and the case of the U.S. and China would be no different. These realists believed that the shift between the established power and the rising new one would inevitably lead to a Great Power Competition. In this view, realists are inclined to blame the United States' potential loss in the competition on "wrongly believing that a better, more cooperative relationship was possible."³⁹ Though this may have been the fate of the two superpowers either way, it is possible to analyze the hottest spots along the way to attempt to decipher just how the U.S. began to lose its footing in the race.

³⁷ James B. Steinberg, "What Went Wrong? U.S.-China Relations from Tiananmen to Trump." *Texas National Security Review*, 2020.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Steinberg, "What Went Wrong? U.S.-China Relations from Tiananmen to Trump."

III. Taiwan's Importance to the United States

One of the most crucial debates in deciding whether or not the United States should even defend Taiwan rests on the island's importance to our own country. Because of the proximity to China and distance from the United States, claiming that Taiwan is important to the United States is a hard argument to make. Still, it is a valid one. Taiwan's democracy, trade with the United States, and position as an ally all prove that the United States has a substantial interest in maintaining relationships with and defending the island.

Taiwan today is home to twenty-three million people; roughly 600,000 of those residents are recognized as Indigenous to the island. In terms of gross domestic product, Taiwan is the 22nd largest economy in the world. Its number two trade partner is the United States, to whom it holds 9th place the other way around. China is its first. More importantly, Taiwan is a "fully functioning democracy, respects human rights and the rule of law, and has an open economy." In stark contrast to the communist China, Taiwan represents "a robust, prosperous, free, and orderly society with strong institutions that stands as a model for the region."⁴⁰ Taiwan's democratic elections are free, fair, and highly praised for their political progress.⁴¹

Taiwan's democracy comes as a threat to communist China, who "depicts democracy as unable to deliver sustainable growth."⁴² In order for the PRC to keep their

⁴⁰ Micheal J Green and Bonnie Glaser, "What Is the U.S. 'One China' Policy, and Why Does It Matter?," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 7, 2022.

⁴¹ Richard C. Bush. "Taiwan's Democracy and the China Challenge." *The Brookings Institution*, January 21, 2021.

⁴² John Bolton and Derik R. Zitelman, "Why Taiwan Matters to the United States."

population of 1.5 billion people in check, they must convince them that democracy clashes with classic Chinese values and culture.⁴³ For China, allowing the ethnic Chinese population of Taiwan to partake in a functioning democracy is threatening to their current communist system. If the mainland Chinese see the successful democracy of their peers, neighbors, and family members, there is a chance they may demand it for themselves. Instead, President Xi Jinping finds it in his best interest to squash any hope for democracy in the Eastern hemisphere to preserve his authoritarian government.

The United States has an interest in promoting democracy globally, and the government of Taiwan is a major step in implementing the liberal world order into the eastern hemisphere. According to the democratic peace theory, democracies promote stability and security where the U.S. can easily spread its interests, values, and peacefully resolve issues with other states.⁴⁴ Moreover, they also “deter aggression, expand open markets, promote economic development, protect American citizens, combat international terrorism and crime, uphold human and worker rights, avoid humanitarian crises and refugee flows, improve the global environment, and protect human health.”⁴⁵ The successful democratic government of Taiwan could act as inspiration and a model to other eastern countries in the face of pressure from authoritative governments while also protecting U.S. interests and promoting human rights.

Scholars like Doug Bandow have put out statements claiming that Taiwan is geographically too far away from America to be worth defending as it is not a vital security interest to the U.S., while other scholars disagree. Elbridge Colby says that

⁴³ “China Population (Live).” *Worldometer*, Accessed March 8, 2022.

⁴⁴ “Human Rights and Democracy - United States Department of State,” *U.S. Department of State*, November 24, 2021.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

defending Taiwan is in our best interest because Asia is the world's supermarket, making the island a key factor to the United States' security.⁴⁶ For example, the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company is responsible for 50% of the world's revenue from the manufacturing chips necessary to power the most advanced technology. Steve Blank writes that if the PRC was to take control of Taiwan, the U.S. would be set back by five years, he argues, which is crucial considering today's fast evolving technology.⁴⁷

Colby also believes that allowing China to dominate Asia with a Taiwanese takeover will directly affect American security back home. This could potentially be the effect of a Communist world order led by the Chinese replacing the status quo of the U.S. liberal one. Preventing China from taking Taiwan is crucial to stopping its spread of influence from passing beyond the South China Sea. While America is currently more powerful than any standalone country, multiple banded together would have the ability to coerce Americans into actions that they would normally oppose. Currently, Europe, North America, and China are the three major theaters in terms of military and economic strength. Though neither of the other two regions could currently exert significant influence over the United States, a Chinese regional hegemony over central Asia would be a different story. Colby believes that China has incentive to exclude America from the international community by means of restricting free trade or accessing wealthy regions. Other scholars support this idea within their theory of balance-of-power realism, claiming a hegemon in Asia could leave the nation vulnerable to attack or compromise our

⁴⁶ Buck Sexton and Elbridge Colby, "Elbridge Colby Strategizes About Defending Taiwan." *The Clay Travis and Buck Sexton Show*, October 20, 2021.

⁴⁷ James Lee, "Will the U.S. Go to War Over Taiwan?" *University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation*, October 29, 2021.

economy in the long-run.⁴⁸ This in turn would undermine American power and make vulnerable our freedom, prosperity, and security.⁴⁹

IV. Options

Now, the United States' strategic ambiguity is being put to the test as the PRC escalates its military exercises to signify the threat of a probable invasion. While it is almost unanimous among scholars that a Chinese takeover of Taiwan would not be ideal, they must decide if the benefits of defending the island outweigh the risks. If they do, what is their best way to ensure victory? The U.S. has many options still being debated and discussed by scholars as to what is the next best move to take. I examine three of the main policy options being discussed in today's foreign policy debates: maintaining strategic ambiguity on U.S. commitments to Taiwan, an unconditional commitment to Taiwan, and withdrawal of any forms or potential forms of commitment to the island.

After discussing the three mainstream arguments, I argue that the United States would be better off taking a different approach. Instead, the United States should drop the ambiguity curtain and tell Taiwan they will protect them, but it must be under certain conditions. This conditional commitment allows the United States to only defend the island if the U.S. deems the Taiwanese efforts worthy of defense in terms of their own military progress and commitment to diplomacy with the mainland. In order for the

⁴⁸ Paul C. Avey, Jonathan N. Markowitz, Robert J. Reardon. "Disentangling Grand Strategy: International Relations Theory and U.S. Grand Strategy." *Texas National Security Review*: Volume 2, Issue 1, November 2018.

⁴⁹ Elbridge Colby. "Alliances and Their Effective, Credible Defense." *In The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict*, 38–64. *Yale University Press*, 2021.

United States to defend Taiwan at all, however, it must have a valid argument within international law to do so. I make the case that the United States has the right to defend Taiwan against the PRC.

Strategic Ambiguity

As mentioned before, strategic ambiguity has been used to deter China from invading Taiwan for three decades. The threat of United States military interference has been what many believe has stopped China from forcefully taking back the nation. One of the reasons that Shelly Riggers, a leading authority on Taiwan and Professor of Political Science at Davidson College in North Carolina, argues for strategic ambiguity is that it is used to not only deter China, but also to deter Taiwan. She believes that an explicit commitment to defend Taiwan may lead the country to declare independence. Supporting Taiwan's declaration of independence would escalate the situation by asserting the U.S. as an enemy of Chinese nationalism.⁵⁰ Other scholars, like Walter Lohman, a policy analyst who focuses on U.S. relations with Southeast Asia, agree with Rigger's prediction of how "an unconditional presidential security pledge" would affect Taiwan's future actions.⁵¹

Other than dual deterrence, many scholars adhere to strategic ambiguity simply because they believe its alternatives to be worse. Michael Clarke and Matthew Sussex call strategic ambiguity the "least bad option" as it was designed to encourage

⁵⁰Simon Shin-wei Chen, Wang Kai-chun, and Samuel Hui, "Why Us Strategic Ambiguity Is Safer for Taiwan," *The Diplomat*, April 28, 2021.

⁵¹ Walter Lohman, "Preserve America's Strategic Autonomy in the Taiwan Strait." *War on the Rocks*, October 30, 2020.

cooperation between the Chinese mainland and the island.⁵² Michael Malinconi points out the dangers of the other end of the spectrum, strategic clarity, writing that the United States' pledge to defend the island would do more to anger than deter the mainland. Because of the long awaited goal of most PRC leaders to reunify China, Raymond Kuo says that clarity may put what seems like a time restriction on Xi Jinping, leading him to seize Taiwan while he still has a chance.⁵³

Stephen M. Goldstein questions what kind of relationship the United States and China would have should the United States change their stance on strategic ambiguity. He says that it would taint any future prospects of cooperation between the two countries as China believes America's goal for Taiwan is independence.⁵⁴ For him, this change would not be wise for the American people as it goes against what he deems an essential national interest in the area—a working relationship with China and Taiwan simultaneously. Goldstein tells his readers that a strategically ambiguous commitment to Taiwan does not actually mean a question of whether or not the United States would intervene, but rather a question of whether or not it would be appropriate for the United States to intervene.⁵⁵

Lohman also believes that a defense commitment would strip the American people of deciding when and where they go to war with China, leaving “America

⁵² Michael Clarke and Matthew Sussex, “Why ‘Strategic Ambiguity’ Trumps ‘Strategic Clarity’ on Taiwan.” *Rusi*, November 24, 2021.

⁵³ Raymond Kuo, “Strategic Clarity and the Future of U.S.-Taiwan Foreign Relations.” *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, February 3, 2022.

⁵⁴ Steven M. Goldstein, “In Defense of Strategic Ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait.” *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, October 15, 2021.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

exceptionally vulnerable to calculations made outside Washington.”⁵⁶ Andy Zelleke, a Harvard Business School senior lecturer and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, agrees, questioning whether or not the United States would even be logistically and financially prepared to go to war with China. He believes that it could potentially draw away from the United States’ own domestic issues exacerbated by COVID-19, such as “political dysfunction and social division, deep recession, and a giant debt overhang.”⁵⁷ Similarly, Eric Sayers believes that dropping ambiguity would make the United States’ commitments to Taiwan even more unclear. By specifically outlining United States’ assurances to Taiwan, the details of such are subjected to change with rotating presidential administrations.⁵⁸ He claims that the “confusion and uncertainty would undermine any positive effects” as China watches the United States own leaders debate over the best course of action.⁵⁹

The scholars that support strategic ambiguity do so with good reason. Unfortunately, these scholars seem to be stuck idealizing situations that have already proven themselves impossible. Riggers is rational in arguing for dual deterrence of both Taiwan and China, which would work if China still seemed to be deterred. In reality, China continues to take actions that the rest of the world ‘condemns’ even with the United States ambiguous policy in place. As a result, Malinconi’s fears that a clear commitment may push Xi Jinping into a time crunch also begin to seem outdated as we

⁵⁶ Walter Lohman and Frank Jannuzi, “PRESERVE AMERICA’S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT.” *War on Rocks*, October 29, 2020.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Eric Sayers, “Ending Strategic Ambiguity Won’t Help Taiwan.” *Defense One*, December 2, 2021.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

learn that the United States is now the one running out of time; China is speculated to be able to perform a full-scale invasion of Taiwan by 2025.⁶⁰

After seeing what lengths China will go to in order to take back a free, democratic island, Goldstein's morals seem to be skewed. The Chinese government not only threatens the people of Taiwan, but also uses economic terrorism to intimidate the rest of the world into bowing to China's will. Goldstein argues that a relationship with communist China, who has a history of bullying other countries into appeasement, takes priority over ensuring a free world order. If he truly believes that maintaining relationships with Taiwan and China simultaneously is important, then he must recognize that without a commitment from the U.S. to defend Taiwan, this will not be a possible reality for long. We cannot maintain relationships with the Taiwanese if China overthrows them.

It would be ideal for the United States to have the luxury of waiting until the last minute, as Lohman offers, to decide whether or not they will defend Taiwan.

Unfortunately, this option means waiting until China has already crossed a red line, and the ultimate goal of policy makers should be to avoid an escalation altogether. The current policy of ambiguity is failing to do that. Chinese aggression continues to build because they believe that their actions come without consequences from the rest of the world, and they doubt that the United States truly honor their alliance to the island.

Lohman's dream of allowing the U.S. to wait to determine if they will be defending the island means that we would have failed in our mission of avoiding the need for defense.

⁶⁰ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-01/taiwan-cant-wait>

Abandoning Commitment

For those that believe the United States should back off completely from the issue between the two East Asian countries, they do so because of the idea that Taiwan remains a “strategic liability, expensive diversion, and most often, an obstacle to more important U.S.-China relations.”⁶¹ Others doubt the U.S. ability to successfully fight a war with the other world superpower. In a conversation with Matthew Kroenig, senior fellow with the New American Engagement Initiative in the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security Emma Ashford takes a realist approach to the situation, believing that “the imbalance in interests and capabilities is just too high.”⁶² She argues for abandoning our commitments to the island as the costs of defense will outweigh the benefits of our relations with Taiwan.

Because of the historical ties and physical proximity between China and Taiwan, Ashford also stated that it would be hard to fight a war that American citizens are not committed to while the Chinese remain devoted. In fact, Charles Glaser and others believe that it would be hard to fight a war that not even the people of Taiwan themselves are committed to. Despite reports claiming that 77% of Taiwanese are willing and ready to fight for their country, their military power remains subpar. The inability and unwillingness to defend themselves could disrupt the United States’ abilities to defend them as well, leaving a strong case to cut off commitments to Taiwan. Glaser writes that for a declining power, abandoning prior commitments may be the best option. To him,

⁶¹ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker & Bonnie Glaser, “Should the United States Abandon Taiwan?” *The Washington Quarterly*, September 14, 2011.

⁶² Emma Ashford and Matthew Kroenig, “Is Defending Taiwan Worth the Risk?” *Foreign Policy*, October 8, 2021.

this includes “giving Beijing greater leeway in the South China Sea, letting go of Taiwan, and accepting that the United States is no longer the dominant power it once was in the region.”⁶³

On the pyramid of importance, Glaser places Taiwan behind the protection of the homeland and the protection of what he deems to be crucial East Asian allies (Japan and South Korea) because Taiwan is protected for humanitarian and ideological reasons more than security. Glaser believes that this makes Taiwan merely a secondary interest to the United States, allowing the U.S. to feel more comfortable about reducing their commitments to the island. In order to calm an angry Beijing, Glaser considers appeasing the communist country. In doing so, he believes the United States should shake the pressure from foreign actors and the public, and instead make clear the United States’ commitment to avoiding war over their commitments to their allies.⁶⁴

Some liberalist arguments can also support the abandonment. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Christensen believes a one China, multiple systems policy may do the best to advocate for political liberalization of the mainland.⁶⁵ Others, like Ted Galen Carpenter, claim a rising China calls for cooperation with the United States. He argues that “Washington should have a thoughtful review of the TRA and other outdated legislation.”⁶⁶ Others echo this view as the power gap between the U.S. and China continues to shrink. Chas Freeman, former United States Assistant Secretary

⁶³ Charles L. Glaser, “Washington Is Avoiding the Tough Questions on Taiwan and China.” *Foreign Affairs*, April 28, 2021.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Tafia Yu. “Relations between Taiwan and China after the Missile Crisis: Toward Reconciliation?” *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 1, 1999.

⁶⁶ Lin, Gang, and Wenxing Zhou. “Does Taiwan Matter to the United States? Policy Debates on Taiwan Abandonment and Beyond.” *China Review* 18, no. 3 (2018): 177–206.

of Defense for International Security Affairs, believes the best policy America can adopt is accepting the Chinese Reunification in order to maintain the long friendship and cooperation between the two superpowers.⁶⁷ Jessica Weiss conquers, believing that America has been more interested in reacting to Beijing's actions with punitive measures rather than focused on finding a solution to their differences. This focus potentially threatens American democracy at home as our leaders get caught in a cycle of reacting to the communist government with no end goal.⁶⁸

Scholars that support this option are mistaken in believing that Taiwan is not vital America's much needed leadership in the Pacific. The loss of Taiwan amounts to much more. Similar to Colby's theory, Grant Newsham claims that after taking Taiwan, China would have the ability to turn most of Asia "red overnight."⁶⁹ China would assert itself as the new hegemon over America and every country except Japan and Australia would bow to China's whim.⁷⁰ Allowing China to overtake Taiwan leaves other islands in proximity exposed to the pressures of the rising superpower, including Guam and Hawaii. After taking Taiwan, it is likely that China would also take the rest of the first island chain, including the Kuril Islands, Okinawa, and the Philippines. America would lose its primacy in the Western Pacific and drastically diminish its global influence.⁷¹

Former NSA intelligence officer Wang Mouzhou believes that "China's appetite would likely grow larger with eating: Chinese claims to former territories currently

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Jessica Chen Weiss, "The China Trap." *Foreign Affairs*, October 2022.

⁶⁹ John Feng, "Taiwan Could Be First Domino in Chinese Land Grab Across Asia." *Newsweek*, November 19, 2021.

⁷⁰ Feng, "Taiwan Could Be First Domino in Chinese Land Grab Across Asia."

⁷¹ Lami Kim, "Should the United States Defend or Ditch Taiwan?" *The National Interest*, June 3, 2022.

occupied by India, Mongolia, North Korea, Pakistan, and Russia could grow increasingly strident.”⁷² It is likely that we would see a great-power influence from the eastern hemisphere as Western ideals dwindle, as well as losing allies such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea because of the United States’ unreliability. So, should China use force against Taiwan, the United States would be obligated to defend Taiwan in defense of our own vital national interests.⁷³ While the perfect American commitment would simultaneously minimize commitment and risk, this policy is unlikely to form the powerful coalition that would be needed to deter China.⁷⁴ Therefore, it should not be a question of whether or not America would step up to defend Taiwan, but when.⁷⁵ Making a commitment to the island before China makes miscalculations is crucial to avoid a U.S.-Chinese war.

Strategic Clarity

As the PRC’s military influence increases and the human rights in the area decrease, other scholars believe it is necessary for the United States to make a clear their intentions Taiwanese people. They believe that America should instead opt for strategic clarity, defined “as an unconditional commitment to use military force to defend the island in the event of a mainland Chinese attack.”⁷⁶ Though strategic ambiguity has lasted for three decades, its ability to deter China decreases with their respect for American

⁷² Wang Mouzhou, “What Happens After China Invades Taiwan?” *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2021.

⁷³ Robert D. Blackwell and Phillip Zelikow, “The United States, China, and Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 2021.

⁷⁴ Colby, “Alliances and Their Effective, Credible Defense.”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/how-avoid-war-over-taiwan>

abilities. Doug Bandow believes that strategic ambiguity is actually doing the exact opposite of its intended effects.⁷⁷ As of March 1, 2022, China's Ministry of Defense spokesperson has already described U.S. commitments to Taiwan as "futile," made even less convincing as President Biden and his team continue to go back and forth on the issue.⁷⁸ Because of the time, effort, and hope that the United States has put into the island, it is in the United States' interest to stand by their ally. In an article by Richard Haas and David Sacks, the two believe that defending Taiwan is the best way to save face for the United States and their current allies that remain. After the U.S. failure to live up to its assurances to Crimea in 2014, stand up for Hong Kong, and the abandonment of Afghanistan, China has may be miscalculating the United States' commitment to its allies and emboldening the chance of invasion.⁷⁹ Without the assured commitment to defend their ally, the U.S. risks deterioration of all allies and the U.S. led world order.⁸⁰

The ambiguous commitment was originally based on the premise that either side had the capabilities to change the status quo, therefore, the threat of United States' action worked to maintain the status quo. As of this decade, however, it has become obvious that Taiwan lacks this capability that it once had. Despite the yearn for independence from the democratic island, they know that any changes to the status quo would be met by a much larger, more sophisticated Chinese military. The Taiwanese government is already deterred, and not by the threat of United States interference. Moreover, China is no longer as afraid of the United States either as it closes the power gap between the two

⁷⁷Doug Bandow, "Should We Go to War for Taiwan?" *The Cato Institute*, April 15, 2021.

⁷⁸ John Feng, "After Russia Invades Ukraine, China Says U.S. Support for Taiwan 'Futile'" *Newsweek*, March 3, 2022.

⁷⁹ Richard Haas and David Sacks, "The Growing Danger of U.S. Ambiguity on Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs*, December 13, 2021.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

countries.⁸¹ Now, the United States must change to a policy that is specifically aimed at deterring Chinese aggression, not Taiwan.

Former US secretary of defense Mark Esper is sure that the United States' current policies are insufficient to maintain peace in the South China Sea. While China's rise is almost inevitable, he believes it is crucial to make sure it happens in an international order that allows peace and freedom for the rest of the world and not allow the communist country to dismantle the current order.⁸² In order to make this a reality, Esper believes in maintaining the peace by showing strength.⁸³ Haas and Sacks contend that the best way to do this is to tell China that the United States is willing to use all the tools at its disposal, including severe economic sanctions as well as military force.⁸⁴

Peter Devine defends committing to Taiwan because he believes it will also persuade other allies of the nation to take similar stances. Currently, he says, China is likely to invade not just because it is determined to unite its "One China," but also because they calculate a victory with acceptable costs. Because of the extreme difference that U.S. involvement would make in the fight against China, it would influence other countries to commit to helping the island as they project a higher likelihood of success. Instead, what we currently see is an isolation of Taiwan directly caused by Chinese aggression and indirectly caused by the United States inability to commit. This leads to China knowing that an invasion is likely to succeed, and therefore, likely to occur.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Harshit Sharma, "A Case for the United States to Embrace Strategic Clarity in the Taiwan Strait." *Vivekananda International Foundation*, July 15, 2022.

⁸² Shelley Shan, "US strategic clarity required, Esper says." *Taipei Times*, July 20, 2022.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Haas and Sacks, "The Growing Danger of U.S. Ambiguity on Taiwan."

⁸⁵ Peter Devine, "Strategic Ambiguity Isn't Working to Deter China on Taiwan – It Will Invade Anyway. It's Time to Commit." *Just Security*, September 1, 2022.

Former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo agrees, saying “there must no longer be any room for doubt in our resolve concerning Taiwan, and in our determination to defend freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.”⁸⁶

While the United State’s best bet is declaring a clear and aggressive commitment to Taiwan, America must also address the reality that an unconditional commitment to the island could come with unwanted repercussions. The need for dual deterrence, though arguably waning, is still essential if the goal of America is to avoid a military escalation. Telling Taiwan that American boots will be on the ground no matter what is a recipe for disaster and validates Rigger’s concerns about allowing Taiwan to antagonize their nuclear-armed counterpart, as well as Glaser’s worries that Taiwan may just be waiting for their superhero to come and save them. Moreover, tactical considerations must be made when considering something as important as sending American citizens to potentially sacrifice their own lives. Luckily for the United States, strategic clarity does not need to be limitless.

⁸⁶ Abe Shinzō, “US Strategic Ambiguity Over Taiwan Must End.” Project Syndicate, April 12, 2022.

V. Let's Be Clear... Clarity Needs Conditions

Although many scholars have mainly focused on the three previous arguments discussed, there is another course of action for the American people. Strategic ambiguity is no longer an option as Beijing continues to grow in aggression despite the United States' policy. Obviously, the status quo cannot maintain peace in the Taiwan Strait or justice for Taiwan. The United States has the best interest in defending the people of Taiwan on a conditional commitment. Robert D. Blackwell and Philip Zelikow argue that U.S. strategy "regarding Taiwan should be to preserve its political and economic autonomy, its dynamism as a free society, and U.S.-allied deterrence—without triggering a Chinese attack on Taiwan."⁸⁷ A conditional commitment from the United States would ensure that the people of Taiwan are protected, but only if certain standards are met. If the Taiwanese people expect help from the United States, they must ensure that they embrace their own military responses, as well as withhold from taking irresponsible, dangerous actions to provoke China. In order to receive American support, it is crucial that the American public and leaders see the Taiwanese' commitment to fighting for democracy and against communist leadership.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Blackwell and Zelikow, "The United States, China, and Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War."

⁸⁸ Shelley Shan, "US strategic clarity required, Esper says." Taipei Times, July 20, 2022.

Conditionality is Key

Conditional commitment to Taiwan trumps a basic commitment to Taiwan because it will continue to work as dual-deterrence as strategic ambiguity has done. It would address the fears like that of Riggers by ensuring that Taiwan does not make moves to provoke China. The protection offered by strategic ambiguity, while it has maintained peace for three quarters of a century, has begun to deteriorate. Not only has China declared that they are not convinced of the United States threats of involvement due to their poor alliance maintenance around the world, but it has become clear that Xi Jinping has set out to fulfill his mission of “reuniting” China. In a recent study, there is evidence that the people of Taiwan would be more likely to fight for their rights with a United States backing. Unfortunately, there is also evidence that this would lead to a people more determined to declare independence, almost certainly leading to war.⁸⁹ Because of the fear of this possibility, the United States has managed to just be stuck in limbo about committing or abandoning the Taiwanese. A conditional commitment is able to address both of these seeming contradictory problems by telling Taiwan we specifically will not get involved if they do declare independence, given that the United States is in favor of deterring war over defending the island’s independence.

The United States has the liberty to tell Taiwan that they will commit to its defense if the island is invaded unprovoked. Though independence for Taiwan sounds appealing, it is in their best interest to hold off on declaring it for the island. Currently, more than 70% of Taiwanese citizens already consider their country independent,

⁸⁹ Joshua Rovner, “Ambiguity is a Fact, Not a Policy.” *War On The Rocks*, July 22, 2021.

shutting down the need to declare independence and needlessly provoke the mainland.⁹⁰

Still, a commitment of any kind would work to deter Chinese action. Clarity that the United States will come to the defense of Taiwan reduces the risk of China miscalculating and starting a conflict with consequences it had not expected.

Proposed Conditions of America's Commitment

Considering the NATO 2% Requirement

The U.S. should draw from the NATO model as a way to ensure that Taiwan is committed to defending themselves more than a third-party country is committed to the defense of the island. Taiwan needs to know that if they do not work to defend themselves, Americans will not do the job for them.⁹¹ Since 2006, NATO has implemented a requirement that their members allocate a minimum of 2% of their gross domestic product towards their countries' own defense budgets. NATO says this requirement was put in place in order to ensure "military readiness" and "serves as an indicator of a country's political will to contribute to NATO's common defense."⁹² The United States does not need a carbon copy of the NATO requirements for Taiwan, as a 2% GDP commitment would be way too low for a country on the verge of invasion. However, an explicit monetary value would act as a standard for Taiwan to prove they are willing to do what it takes. For the United States, the fight needs to be about helping

⁹⁰ Fang-Yu Chen, Austin Wang, Charles K.S. Wu, and Yao-Yuan Yeh, "What Do Taiwan's People Think About Their Relationship to China?" *The Diplomat*, May 29, 2021.

⁹¹ Doug Bandow, "Why Is Taiwan Only Spending 2.1 Percent of Its GDP on Its Defense?" *Cato Institute*, October 6, 2021.

⁹² "Funding NATO," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, December 17, 2021.

people who value democracy and liberty just as much as Americans, not about starting a war with China over a territory that does not prove its values align with ours.

The United States should not be viewed as a security blanket for Taiwan, but an ally. In order to do so, Taiwan must take the additional strategic steps it needs to defend itself. Like many critics of the NATO 2% requirement urge the organization to do, America must also place a focus on how exactly the finances are being spent.⁹³ Military experts have recently begun to advise Taiwan to “heavily invest in asymmetric weapons, such as anti-ship missiles, air defenses, and drones” because of their effectiveness at a relatively low cost.⁹⁴ As of May of 2022, the Biden administration has been pressuring Taiwan to buy certain asymmetric weapons that fulfill these capabilities and warns weapon makers to refrain from pressuring U.S. agencies to approve Taiwanese requests to buy anything the U.S. government has deemed unsuitable for successful warfare.⁹⁵

Extending Compulsory Military Service

Another way to strengthen the Taiwanese security is reinstating the compulsory two-year military service. A U.S. requirement of an explicit military personnel count and training requirements must be a contingent factor in order to gain American support. In July of 2022, former Pentagon chief Mark Esper called on Taiwan to triple their military conscription, putting mandatory service at one year.⁹⁶ With a military of roughly 180,000,

⁹³ Kathleen J. McInnis, “2 Percent Defense Spending Is a Bad Target for NATO.” *Foreign Policy*, June 10, 2022.

⁹⁴ Michael A. Hunzeker and Dennis L. Weng, “The Painful, But Necessary, Next Steps In The U.S.-Taiwanese Relationship,” *Texas National Security Review*, September 24, 2020.

⁹⁵ Edward Wong and Damien Cave, “U.S. Presses Taiwan to Buy Weapons More Suited to Win Against China.” *New York Times*, May 7, 2022.

⁹⁶ Lawrence Chung, “Taiwan left divided by US ex-defence chief’s call for longer compulsory military service.” *South China Morning Post*, July 24, 2022.

the Taiwanese people would need to step up their man power if they ever want to have a chance at holding their own against China.⁹⁷ Currently, Taiwanese men are only required to serve a mere four months in the military, barely enough time for adequate basic training. Taiwan's military capabilities suffer as a result.⁹⁸ Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng says the government is considering extending the mandatory service length, though he did not specify by how long. Taiwan is expected to make a decision on the extension by the end of 2022, a change that would not be implemented for at least a year after it is announced.⁹⁹

Taiwan Matters to the U.S.-Australian-Japanese Alliance

Now more than ever, the United States also owes two of its biggest allies, Australia and Japan, a commitment to the defense of Taiwan. Since August of 2022, China has repeatedly made advances towards Japan and Australia in an effort to scare the two countries away from backing Taiwan or the United States. In May, China intercepted an Australian surveillance flight in international airspace as a dangerous move to assert dominance in the region. In August alone, China launched at least five missiles landing in Japanese waters in response to Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.¹⁰⁰ Edward Wong and Damien Cave believe this aggression is China's attempts to isolate America from two of its largest allies by telling them they will attack U.S. allies before they would go for the

⁹⁷ Erin Hale, "Taiwan Revamps Military Training for Reserves Amid China Pressure," *Al Jazeera*, November 23, 2021.

⁹⁸ Hunzeker and Weng "The Painful, But Necessary, Next Steps In The U.S.-Taiwanese Relationship."

⁹⁹ Huizhong Wu, "Taiwan Considers Extending 4-Month Military Conscription." *Military.com*, March 23, 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Wong and Damien Cave, "U.S. Seeks to Reassure Asian Allies as China's Military Grows Bolder." *New York Times*, August 5, 2022.

U.S. itself. Their suspicions seem to be true, as a Chinese Embassy spokesperson cautions the Australian government not to be persuaded by other countries in what seems like a warning about their alliance with America.¹⁰¹ Wong and Cave write that the U.S. current allies do realize that the easy route would be to appease Chinese requests rather than back the questionable United States.¹⁰²

In reality, however, Taiwan and the United States' chances at a victory over China diminish substantially with the loss of Australia and Japan. While Taiwan is an important matter to the United States, going into a war that the U.S. is likely to lose would be potentially devastating to the world order and understandably hard to pitch to the Americans that would be risking their own lives. Instead, the U.S. must secure its allies in the region to avoid probable failure. In terms of deterring Xi Jinping, Thomas J Shattuck believes that a United States commitment to defend the island would push Japan and Australia to do the same. When asked if there was any way to deter Xi Jinping from invading Taiwan, senior analyst from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and expert on defense strategy and capability issues Dr. Malcolm Davis replied it would require the involvement of the United States and its allies, including Australia.¹⁰³

On the other hand, Abraham Mahshie says that Japan and Australia are the ones feeling they have to call on America to do more in the region. Both Australia and Japan host American military bases, meaning that the United States' involvement in Taiwan would draw all three of them into the conflict. Australia's current position, according to

¹⁰¹ Reuters Staff, "China embassy: Australia should be 'prudent' on Taiwan-related issues." Reuters, August 6, 2022.

¹⁰² Wong and Cave, "'U.S. Seeks to Reassure Asian Allies as China's Military Grows Bolder.'"

¹⁰³ Belinda Palmada, "What China invading Taiwan would mean for Australia." *Nationwide News Pty*, September 16, 2022.

Malcolm Davis, is most likely that they are willing to defend Taiwan and back America. However, in order to adequately do so, Australia and Japan need to prepare to defend the U.S. military bases. If the United States is planning to get involved in a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, it needs to tell its allies now, allowing them time to make the necessary preparations for victory.¹⁰⁴ Australia and Japan are two key players in the region, and the United States would be unwise not to secure a security alliance for Taiwan as soon as possible, before a persuasive China gets to them first.

What about a “One China, Multiple Systems” Policy?

If the United States is going to base a majority of their justification in defending Taiwan on democratic values, it needs to address proposals regarding the possibility and benefits of a “One China, Multiple Systems” policy. To do so, the case of Taiwan provides explicit empirical evidence of just how successful a democracy would run under the sovereignty of the PRC. As mentioned above, In 2012, Thomas Christensen along with former National U.S. Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski believed that Taipei should advocate for a “one China, two systems” policy in order to untangle Washington from the Taiwan-China conflict while respecting the Taiwanese demands. On the other hand, Elbridge Colby argues that no Taiwanese citizen in their right mind would fall for the same trap as Hong Kong did. Since 2012, it is obvious that multiple systems cannot run freely under the PRC. After being handed over by Britain over two decades ago, Beijing pledged to preserve the free, capitalist society in their territory. The concept was

¹⁰⁴ Abraham Mahshie, “Pacific Allies Worry About Taiwan Invasion, Call for Closer US Cooperation.” *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, June 9, 2022.

also intended to unite China with other territories running under different governments—Taiwan and Macua.

Despite Hong Kong's Basic Law promising them freedom of the press, expression, assembly, and religion and protections under international law, Beijing aggressively encroached on them in recent years. Slowly, Beijing chipped away at Hong Kong freedoms, such as attempting to implement Chinese propaganda in schools and only allowing political candidates in Hong Kong to be chosen from a list of Beijing picked individuals. When Hong Kongers began to protest, Beijing prosecuted the protest leaders, expelled several new legislators, and increased media censorship. In summer of 2019, Hong Kong saw the worst protests it had seen yet. Police brutality resulted in tear gas, rubber bullets. In 2020, Beijing passed a law that allows them to establish a security force in Hong Kong and decide what judges preside over the protester cases. Jerome A. Cohen calls Hong Kong “the death of the democratic hopes of most of its 7.5 million people.”

Regardless of what may have been optimism from Brzenski and Christensen a decade ago, it is obvious that a one China, multiple systems policy could never take fruition. The people of Hong Kong and Taiwan deserve the democratic governments they have fought so hard for. The United States should do what they can in conjunction with the Taiwanese people to ensure the freedoms they have enjoyed for decades are not stripped away against their will as we saw in Hong Kong.

Would Taiwan Be Capable of Meeting American Demands?

As of 2021, military analysts believe that in an initial attack on Taiwan, Taiwan does have a chance at victory if and only if they are ready and determined.¹⁰⁵ As the threat of a Chinese invasion materializes in the minds of the Taiwanese, it appears they have begun to take the advice of military analysts more seriously. In 2021, Taiwan had already allocated 2.1% of their GDP towards defense.¹⁰⁶ However, for a country on the verge of invasion from a global superpower, their budget of about \$8 billion was not enough.

Where Taiwan continues to fall short is their man-power. The Taiwan military remains significantly understaffed. In 2021, Taiwan's "frontline combat units in the Taiwan military were assessed as being manned at a shockingly low 60%." The unwillingness to fight may come from a belief that China will not attack, that defeat is inevitable if they do, or more likely, the reliance on American feet on the ground coming to do their dirty work when the Taiwanese people have fallen short on their commitment to their country. John Babbitt is completely accurate in his judgment that "directing aid to a problem that the people in the country don't want to fix won't help," and in the case of military aid, it would do America more harm than good.¹⁰⁷ Americans should not be expected to risk their lives in the place of others who will not. At the current rate, Daniel Davis believes, it would be immoral to expect Americans on the ground in Taiwan. The United States needs to make it clear to the Taiwanese that if they continue to fall short in

¹⁰⁵ Blackwell and Zelikow, "The United States, China, and Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War."

¹⁰⁶ Bandow, "Why Is Taiwan Only Spending 2.1 Percent of Its GDP on Its Defense?"

¹⁰⁷ John Babbitt, "How should aid be given in the 21st century?" *California State University*, Accessed September 2022.

morale and fierceness to fight for their own country, they do not deserve American defense. A stern warning from the United States could work as a wake-up call for the Taiwanese, influencing them to prove they are ready to do what it takes. If the Taiwanese are not ready to take on these burdens and the conditions are not met, it would save the United States from getting involved in a war that would not be worth fighting.

In January of 2022, Taiwan's parliament passed an extra spending bill of \$8.6 billion, on top of their record-high \$17 billion allocated for this fiscal year, in an effort to prepare for combat with the Chinese. In light of recent events, they upped their spending to \$27 billion for the fiscal year 2023. Taiwan says the budget increase will go towards “‘asymmetrical’ capabilities, such as unmanned vehicles, anti-ship missiles and air-to-ground cruise missiles.” Taiwan's increase in defense spending is coupled with their recent retaliation to Chinese intimidation. Drone flights over Taiwan began in late July, in what Taiwan believes is an attempt to embarrass their military; a Chinese magazine published an article claiming “the frequent flights of civilian drones from the mainland expose the Taiwan armed forces’ weak defenses.”¹⁰⁸ Taipei fired warning shots and flares at the drones that crossed into their territory lines, and finally shot one down on August 25, 2022. To show their military presence in the region, the U.S. navy sailed two guided missile cruisers through the Taiwan Strait.¹⁰⁹

On August 24, 2022, Taiwan declared that they would launch a counterattack against China should the Chinese military enter its territorial waters and airspace.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Cindy Wang and Philip Glamann, “Taiwan Shoots Down Drone, Showing Risk of Escalation With China.” *Bloomberg*, September 1, 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “Taiwan vows tough response if China enters its territory.” *Deutsche Welle*, August 31, 2022.

Though the Chinese military has yet to come within 12 nautical miles of the main island, Taiwan says it will continue to match the incursions symmetrically and “will exercise the right to self-defense and counterattack without exception.”¹¹¹ The Biden administration seems to be moved by both the Chinese and Taiwanese efforts, as they propose a \$1.1 billion package worth of arms sales to Taiwan.¹¹² Currently, Congress is also discussing passing bills that would push Taiwan in the right direction to be able to defend themselves. The Arm Taiwan Act of 2021 was one of these bills proposed by Senator Josh Hawley in an effort to send \$15 billion to the island between 2023 and 2027. The assistance, however, would not be unlimited. It would be contingent on Taiwan’s commitment to “spending an equal amount on asymmetric defense capabilities; on spending at least three percent of its gross domestic product on defense; on buying asymmetric capabilities from foreign suppliers, if those suppliers can more quickly deliver capabilities than Taiwan’s own manufacturers; and on ‘undertaking the defense reforms required to maximize the effectiveness of an asymmetric defense against an invasion.’” The bill is still being discussed, but it resembles closely to the requirements of the NATO allies.

¹¹¹ Jake Epstein, “Taiwan's military warns it will counterattack without exception if Chinese forces enter its waters or airspace as Beijing's ships and planes move nearby.” *Insider*, August 31, 2022.

¹¹² Laura Seligman and Andrew Desiderio, “Biden administration to ask Congress to approve \$1.1B arms sale to Taiwan.” *Politico*, August 29, 2022.

Is the United States Legally Allowed to Defend Taiwan?

De Facto State

What legal right would the United States have to defend Taiwan if the island's status quo position remains vague? International law allows a state to use self-defense and call on allies for help with defense when a state is confronted with an armed attack from another state. If Taiwan is to be considered a part of China, the PRC has a sovereign right to maintain authority over the island, even by force. However, for Taiwan, it is not as obvious as to whether or not the island is considered a Chinese territory. Instead, many factors point to the fact that Taiwan qualifies, runs, and acts as a *de facto* state.¹¹³

International law requires that to be a state, an entity must have “permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and a capacity to enter into relations with other states.”¹¹⁴ Despite the dwindling support from the international community as they bow to China's whim, recognition is not technically crucial for the island. 1933

Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, Article 3 contends that:

The political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states. Even before recognition the state has the right to defend its integrity and independence, to provide for its conservation and prosperity, and consequently to organize itself as it sees fit, to legislate upon its interests, administer its services, and to define the jurisdiction and competence of its courts.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Ben Saul, “Would a war over Taiwan be legal?” *The Lowy Institute*, October 14, 2021.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Christopher R. Hughes, “The Legal Case for Defending Taiwan.” *The Lowy Institute*, October 19, 2021.

Still, Taiwan does have relations with other states while being “acknowledged” by many as under the control of the PRC. Currently, it is a full member of the World Trade Organization and sits as an observer in the World Health Assembly.¹¹⁶ The other stipulations of a state are easily surpassed by the tiny but mighty island. On the island, their population of roughly 23 million would make them the 57th largest country in the world, even larger than countries such as Cuba or New Zealand. Additionally, Taiwan has developed a full-fledged democracy. Over the last two decades, there have been three peaceful transfers of presidential power and an institutionalized party system.¹¹⁷

In 1996, Stephen Lee claimed that given Taiwan’s population, territory, and government, Taiwan’s status as an independent political entity is undeniable. Lee also argues that many factors point to the fact that the U.S. regards Taiwan as an independent state: maintaining the Taipei Economic and Cultural Offices in Washington separate from its PRC embassy, selling arms to Taiwan, maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan as if it were a sovereign country. Lee believes that the behavior of the United States does not truly exhibit a One China Policy mentality.¹¹⁸ Even if it did, Victor H. Li argued in 1979 that recognizing Taiwan as a *de facto* state does not violate the One China policy or U.S. relations with the PRC. Li believes that because *de facto* only refers to the reality of the present state, it would not undermine the idea that reunification is eventually possible, but

¹¹⁶ Sigird Winkler, “Biding Time: The Challenge of Taiwan’s International Status.” *Brookings*, November 17, 2011.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Stephen Lee, “American Policy Toward Taiwan: The Issue of the De Facto and De Jure Status of Taiwan and Sovereignty.” *Buffalo Journal of Law*, January 1, 1996.

that you cannot deny the present circumstances.¹¹⁹ He also argues that it has been Congress' policy to treat *de facto* states as though they are another foreign country or government.

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Scholars like Quoc Tan Trung claim that whether or not Taiwan is a state is the wrong question to be asking, and instead the self-defense rights of Taiwan were already confirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1970. The Charter of the United Nations fights for the elaboration of the principle of equal rights and self-determination, which means that “all peoples have the right freely to determine, without external interference, their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development, and every State has the duty to respect this right in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.”¹²⁰ This includes the people of Taiwan. Moreover, in defense of the United States' involvement, the resolution also states that each state has a duty to promote this realization of rights.¹²¹

Taiwan Relations Act

Additionally, the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 blurs America's entanglement with the Taiwanese even further. While the Taiwan Relations Act only requires that the United States make available the military capabilities for Taiwan to defend itself, it also gives them the right to “determine, in accordance with constitutional processes,

¹¹⁹ Victor H. Lee, “The Law of Non-Recognition: The Case of Taiwan.” *Northwestern Journal of International Law and Business*, Spring 1979.

¹²⁰ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 2625. October 24, 1970.

¹²¹ Quoc Tan Trung Nguyen, “Does International Law Protect Taiwan?” *U.S.-Asia Law Institute*, February 15, 2022.

appropriate action” in the case of an invasion.¹²² Julian Ku, while recognizing that this is not an obligation to defend Taiwan militarily, believes that the United States still may do so. He says that a United States commitment to “peace and security” (words used within the TRA in reference to Taiwan) has a history of leading to the use of military force.¹²³ Even if the United States’ involvement in a Taiwanese invasion may be questionable internationally, he believes international legality is trumped by the domestic law determined from political will.

Could the U.S. Win a War Against China?

The ultimate goal of any U.S. policy towards Taiwan should be made with the intention to deter any actions that would escalate to a war between China and the United States while simultaneously remaining committed to their allies and the spread of democracy. Still, the United States must be prepared for the worst. Robert D. Blackwill, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Henry A. Kissinger senior fellow for U.S. foreign policy, and Philip Zelikow, University of Virginia White Burkett Miller professor of history, believe that a United States victory is possible, but contingent on many other factors. Currently, they suggest that a Chinese assault on Taiwan would likely not result in World War III, or even strikes against the Chinese mainland. On the off-chance that China does attack Taiwan, the United States needs to be prepared militarily and working

¹²² Julian Ku, “Taiwan’s U.S. Defense Guarantee is Not Strong, But It Isn’t That Weak Either.” *Lawfare*, January 15, 2022.

¹²³ Ibid.

with diligent allies.¹²⁴ Though the United States should not promise Taiwan that they will defend them regardless of Taiwan's own actions, they can promise to be prepared.¹²⁵

Defending an island is much easier than retaking it, and China realizes this. Elbridge Colby believes that if China is going to use force against Taiwan, they will do so quickly, with little warning. That way, the United States is bogged down by their own political processes and military mobilization until China has quickly wrapped Taiwan before the United States gets a chance to come to its defense. He believes that the United States needs to begin making dramatic moves now if it has a chance of success.¹²⁶ Though Colby believes a U.S. win is possible, he is not delusional. Even if the U.S. begins preparations today, the U.S. must work with its ally closest in proximity to the island: Japan. Potential partnerships for the U.S. could be receiving help from South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, or Australia, but it would not be impossible without them. David Sacks wrote in 2022 that "the United States cannot effectively come to Taiwan's defense without the use of its forces and assets located in Japan and significant Japanese logistic and operational support."¹²⁷ Recently, Japan has begun to take the Taiwan conflict more seriously as it connects its own security to that of Taiwan, roughly only a thousand miles away from each other.¹²⁸ In 2021, a joint statement issued

¹²⁴ Blackwell and Zelikow, "The United States, China, and Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War."

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Sexton and Colby, "Elbridge Colby Strategizes About Defending Taiwan."

¹²⁷ David Sacks, "Enhancing U.S.-Japan Coordination for a Taiwan Conflict." *Center for Preventive Action Plan*, January 18, 2022.

¹²⁸ David Sacks, "The United States and Japan Should Prepare for Chinese Aggression Against Taiwan." *Council on Foreign Affairs*, January 18, 2022.

by the U.S. and Japan warned that the countries are working together to deter and respond to destabilizing issues in Taiwan.¹²⁹

Economic warfare, Michael E. O’Hanlon believes, is also crucial to ensure a victory.¹³⁰ This would involve halting absolutely all trade with China should they begin a war, as well as pressuring United States’ allies to do the same. This risky strategy would require the United States to immediately begin implementing steps to make this possible and feasible. Jason McMan and Scott Moscovitz, both geopolitical risk analysts, urge companies with Chinese exposure to begin rerouting their supply chains to other places in Asia. These companies fear the risk of reputational fallout.¹³¹

¹²⁹ “Joint Statement of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee ("2+2")” *United States Department of Defense*, January 6, 2022.

¹³⁰ Michael E. O’Hanlon, “An Asymmetric Defense of Taiwan.” *Brookings*, April 28, 2021.

¹³¹ Jason Mcmann and Scott Moskowitz, “If China Invades Taiwan, Commercial Ties Will Be the First to Go.” *Geopolitics*, July 29, 2022.

A Successful Example Conditions-Based Commitment

Conditions-based commitments are not entirely foreign to U.S. foreign affairs. Since the 1950's, America has maintained wartime control of thousands of South Korean troops after being relinquished by the Asian country in an effort to defend themselves. Recently, South Korea has pushed to gain back control of their wartime military operations with support from their counterpart. In 2006, the United States and South Korea agreed to jointly create a set of commitments that would need to be fulfilled in order to transfer operational control (OPCON) back to the South Korean government. Similar to the intended result for Taiwan (expressing the ability of and aspiration for self-defense), the "OPCON transition is an expression used to convey the ROK's aspiration to assume and exercise unilateral control over its armed forces in wartime" as a move by both sides to confront reality.¹³²

While total military operation control may have been the best policy for South Korea and the U.S. at the time, America should be careful not to fall into the same position with Taiwan. Instead, the military commitments made by the island (similar to what is now being asked of South Korea) will allow the United States to remain in a supporting role rather than lead, as they are now attempting to do with South Korea. Like Taiwan's threats from China, South Korea also faces challenges from their nuclear weaponized neighbor, North Korea. While some scholars and politicians had thought American OPCON provided optimal security, this idea has begun to shift given the worsening relationship between China and the U.S. By having merely an allegiant

¹³² Shawn P. Creamer, "Setting the Record Straight on OPCON Transition in the U.S.-ROK Alliance." *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, July 16, 2021.

relationship, some scholars believe that Seoul will have to “tighten cooperation around what [they bring] to the deterrence equation,” as well as improve coordination with Tokyo and other United Nations members.¹³³ The United States operational control of the South Korean military was always supposed to be temporary, and both players have developed a bilateral plan to allow the transfer to run smoothly.

South Korea and the United States have agreed to the transfer on the contingency that three conditions be met: South Korea acquire key military capabilities, develop the ability to counter nuclear and missile threats posed by North Korea, and security of the Korean peninsula. More specifically, it requires five critical capabilities of South Korea:

- “Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR)
- Command, control, communication, computers, and intelligence (C4I)
- Ballistic missile defense (modernized missile defense)
- Countering WMD (warning, protection, decontamination capabilities)
- Critical munitions (increased munition stockpiles)”¹³⁴

In order to decide what requirements to set, the two governments studied the best way for the transfer to occur with the needs of the security of the alliance in mind. South Korea’s Minister of Defense calls the conditions of the OPCON transfer “essential” to ensuring their security and ability to defend themselves.¹³⁵ Some of the requirements have proved beneficial. Since 2007, South Korea has been incentivised to invest in their military capabilities, spending \$129 billion and increasing their military capabilities

¹³³ Clint Work, “No More Delays: It’s Time To Move Forward with Wartime OPCON Transition.” *Stimson*, June 21, 2022.

¹³⁴ Johannes Nordin, “Taking Back Control: South Korea and the Politics of OPCON Transfer.” *Institute for Security and Development Policy*, January 2020.

¹³⁵ Yonhap, “Defense minister stresses military's 'will, efforts' for OPCON transfer assessment.” *The Korea Herald*, January 19, 2022.

“bounds and bounds.”¹³⁶ This is evidence that South Korea is working to achieve self-reliance “while at the same time realizing U.S. goals for allies and partners to actively contribute militarily to the collective self-defense of the free world.”¹³⁷

The conditions set for the ROK have actually worked to strengthen the United States’ relationship with the country. In a joint-statement issued in 2022, the two countries described their relationship as stronger than ever.¹³⁸ Instead of relying on the U.S. for defense, South Korea will be able to provide not only itself but also its long-term ally with its own strengths and abilities. The commitments are also crucial to the safety and security of the South Koreans as well. Currently, South Korea does lack the capabilities it would need to seamlessly conduct military operations. Both the United States and South Korea are pushing for the country to be able to maintain control of their own self-defense, and these conditions are crucial to making that situation a reality. Although both the South Korean and the United States’ governments were aware of the potential consequences of a time restraint, the transition is predicted to occur in 2022.

South Korea has proven that the conditions set for them have been working in their own favor as well as the United States’ as we encourage the country to be more self-sufficient. South Korea is upgrading from its partial leadership in 2019 to the entire leadership of a military exercise in 2022. U.S. CFC Commander Paul LaCamera stressed the impact that this had made to the South Korean military, stating “for the first time

¹³⁶ Park Byong-su, “Conditions for OPCON transfer are excessive, S. Korean analyst says.” *Hankyoreh*, August 21, 2020.

¹³⁷ Byong-su, “Conditions for OPCON transfer are excessive, S. Korean analyst says.”

¹³⁸ “United States-Republic of Korea Leaders’ Joint Statement.” *The White House*, May 21, 2022.

ever, the CFC deputy commander will take the lead as the future CFC commander.”¹³⁹

South Korea's Defense Minister Suh Wook seems to agree that the conditions-based transfer is positively affecting their military's capabilities. Suh was said to have made remarks regarding the way the tasks have pushed them to unify their “will and efforts” to prove that their defense is their own responsibility with the help of their allies, just as a conditions-based commitment should be aimed at doing for Taiwan.¹⁴⁰

Although the United States should follow suit with a conditions-based commitment to Taiwan similar to South Korea, it cannot do so in exactly the same way. First of all, Taiwan does not have the luxury of time that South Korea does. While Seoul and Washington have been adamant on ensuring that the transition is not rushed, time is of the essence in the case for Taiwan. Deadlines for Taipei should be set with consequences for failing to meet them. Similar to the situation in South Korea, the Taiwanese government could work side-by-side with the United States to determine specific conditions that they believe are feasible. However, many South Koreans have grown suspicious of the United States' goals in the conditions-based OPCON transfer (COTP). Many of these fears stem from the belief that the three basic conditions to be met are intangible and the essential tasks required are unclear.¹⁴¹ If the United States were to require conditions be met in Taiwan, they would need to learn from their mistakes in the South Korean COTP. These issues could be solved with explicit fiscal

¹³⁹ Song Sangho, “S. Korean military leading key exercise with U.S. in step toward OPCON transition.” *All News*, August 24, 2022.

¹⁴⁰ Yonhap, “Defense minister stresses military's 'will, efforts' for OPCON transfer assessment.”

¹⁴¹ Institute for Security and Development Policy, “Not a Sovereignty Issue: Understanding the Transition of Military Operational Control between the United States and South Korea.” *American Foreign Policy Council*, April 2021.

and capability requirements on the Taiwanese government, such as defense spending goals and clear expectations for military capabilities.

VI. The Cost of Commitment

The Price of Victory

The goal of the United States is to deter China from taking actions that would cause Taiwan to even need to call on the U.S. for help. However, a commitment to defend Taiwan is just that, and the consequences of such must be weighed adequately. In a perfect world, America could be sure that their partners in and near the South China Sea would aid them in coming to the defense of Taiwan, achieving a swift victory with minimal losses. Unfortunately, intimidation tactics and military advances from the PRC cast a reasonable, intense shadow of doubt on that possibility. A series of war games conducted throughout fall of 2022 simulating a Chinese invasion of Taiwan alarms scholars and citizens alike. While the Pentagon conducts their own classified games, the ones put on by the Center for Strategic and International Studies allow the public to fill in the gaps.¹⁴² The games take place in the year 2026, using only capabilities that each army has already shown to have in real life.¹⁴³ In the simulations, the United States artificially created all feasible possibilities, including ones with and without the help of key partners like Japan. Mostly, the United States is victorious.¹⁴⁴ Mark Cancian, a senior adviser at CSIS, says that in most of these hypothetical situations, Taiwan even comes out autonomous... but at what cost?

Despite what could be deemed a victory, the United States will undoubtedly pay a heavy toll. They have yet to release the quantitative estimates regarding loss of lives or

¹⁴² Tony Capaccio, “What-if DC war game maps huge toll of a future US-China war over Taiwan,” *Bloomberg News*, August 8, 2022.

the economic consequences. In the worst situations, the United States loses 900 of the Airforce and Navy's combat planes—half of their inventory. Robert Haddick thinks the Chinese may bank on beating the U.S. morale after a high toll makes for political defeat back home, a risk Washington should not take.¹⁴⁵ Fortunately, scholars believe there are still other options. Haddick also proposes a strategy that would include the utilization of U.S. bomber forces against the Chinese navy and suggests that defeating their maritime capabilities will allow the United States to obtain a cleaner victory.

Cancian says that the Taiwanese ability to fend off China is an essential key to the successful fending off of China. So far, the games are looking to favor Taiwan. In most simulations, China can hold part of the island but falls short of conquering it.¹⁴⁶ These results come even after calculating for the shortcomings of the Taiwanese military. While the think tank's war games give us a plethora of insight concerning what calculations the U.S. needs to make while it still can, Cancian says that deterrence is still on the table. The war games so far have shown the U.S. that improvements in strategy, such as investing in long-range missiles and shelters on Guam and in Japan could convince China it is not worth the fight.¹⁴⁷ While we await the final analysis of the war games still being

¹⁴³ Alia Shoaib, "The US could lose up to 900 warplanes fighting a Chinese invasion of Taiwan but would emerge victorious, says think tank." *Business Insider*, August 14, 2022.

¹⁴⁴ Todd South, "In think tank's Taiwan war game, US beats China at high cost." *Military Times*, August 12, 2022.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Haddick, "Defeat China's Navy, Defeat China's War Plan." *War On the Rocks*, September 21, 2022.

¹⁴⁶ Capaccio, "What-if DC war game maps huge toll of a future US-China war over Taiwan."

¹⁴⁷ Shoaib, "The US could lose up to 900 warplanes fighting a Chinese invasion of Taiwan but would emerge victorious, says think tank."

conducted, we must also consider the games put on by Center for a New American Security in May of 2022 and how they alerted the world to the possibility of nuclear war.

The Threat of Nuclear War

Though nuclear war remains the biggest fear of any rational human being, the chances of such are never zero, especially considering China's fast amplification of nuclear capabilities announced in 2021.¹⁴⁸ China's strategies show that they are working to be nuclearly on par, if not superior, to the United States. Since 1964, China has kept their arsenal strictly focused on deterrence with a "No First Use" policy. This meant that China would have only enough nuclear weapons to be able to respond to attacks, not to be on the offensive. However, Patty-Jane Geller, a senior policy analyst for nuclear deterrence and missile defense at The Heritage Foundation, argues that China's vamping indicates they are abandoning their current policy. In fact, they are developing nuclear-capable hypersonic weapons with the ability to avoid U.S. early warning radars.¹⁴⁹ Geller goes further, saying that the building of their nuclear weapons is to ensure China reaches their goals, including unifying Taiwan with the mainland.¹⁵⁰ China would have the ability with their new backing to escalate tensions should they believe that the costs of a nuclear disaster would hurt the United States more than themselves. China deploys hundreds of nuclear-capable missiles into the Indo-Pacific, whereas the U.S. deploys none. Being said, China could potentially use the threat of nuclear weapons to coerce the United States to back down in the region.

¹⁴⁸ Patty-Jane Geller, "China's Nuclear Expansion and its Implications for U.S. Strategy and Security." *The Heritage Foundation*, September 14, 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Xi Jinping has stated over and over again how important the reunification of Taiwan to China is to him. The PRC has an interest in ensuring they are successful and avoiding another era of humiliation. Stacie L. Pettyjohn and Becca Wasser believe we should not underestimate the lengths that China will go to to make sure that this conflict ends on terms they will find acceptable. But the United States cannot be backed into a corner, scared of the capabilities of communist countries and willing to appease them to avoid a nuclear war. The United States, as of this moment, still has an advantage on China. We do have greater nuclear deterrence, a stronger military, and more allies. The United States can still prevent China from asserting the authoritarian influence they so wish to hold over the world. In order to do so, we must listen to the advice of Pettyjohn and Wasser, who urge the government to recognize that the biggest risk for the United States to take is to not act now; in the future it may be too late.¹⁵¹ Commander of U.S. Strategic Command Admiral Charles Richard concurs, gravely warns the United States that they need to work to stay ahead of the Chinese lest they “will be the ones that are getting deterred.”¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Stacie L. Pettyjohn and Becca Wasser, “A Fight Over Taiwan Could Go Nuclear.” *Foreign Affairs*, May 20, 2022.

¹⁵² Geller, “China’s Nuclear Expansion and its Implications for U.S. Strategy and Security.”

VII. Conclusion

In the case of Taiwan, Nancy Tucker's philosophy on America holds true: "American national interests, defined as much by values as by security or strategic goals, render [the] sacrifice of Taiwan unacceptable."¹⁵³ Mixed signals from a wavering United States administration has emboldened the Chinese government to act sooner than later. The time has ended for a vague strategy, and Americans could not pretend to stand for democracy and justice if they abandon the Taiwanese people. The repercussions of such would be devastating not only to the island that has had a taste of freedom, but also to the rest of world if the U.S. were to let China undermine the liberal world order so many have the right to enjoy. Still, we can not do it alone. The United States needs to have the best interest in mind for those who are willing to fight for democracy worldwide, including their own citizens. To do this, Taiwan needs to prove that they want it as badly as they say by meeting military and financial obligations set forth by themselves alongside the ally they so depend on. The ongoing successful conditions-based OPCON transfer in South Korea proves that goals can be met when a country is determined to defend themselves. To ensure success in the unfortunate case of a Chinese military invasion, America must build their military capabilities now, including an alliance with their powerful friends in the region, Japan and Australia. The consequences of not acting on these crucial factors will prove to have grave consequences for the United States and the rest of the world. Though the history of Taiwan and China has led to a dangerous,

¹⁵³ Lin, Gang, and Wenxing Zhou. "Does Taiwan Matter to the United States? Policy Debates on Taiwan Abandonment and Beyond." *China Review* 18, no. 3 (2018): 177–206.

sensitive reality, it no longer needs to define the future of people who desire freedom, security, and democracy.

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