

**TAIWANESE SOVEREIGNTY & THE UNITED STATES' STRATEGIC  
DETERRENCE OF CHINA**

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## **Abstract**

Since the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949, the United States has maintained a rather complex relationship between the governments of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) (China). Recently, Beijing has taken an increasingly aggressive stance towards Taipei with their "One China Principle". Under the "One China Principle", the end goal is the reunification of China under the government of the PRC. With the aim of preserving regional stability in the Indo-Pacific, the United States and its allies require innovative, as well as traditional solutions. This paper explores the solutions that the United States could employ to maintain regional stability, as well as geopolitical ties in the region.

## **Introduction**

Historically, the United States has sustained a healthy level of strategic dominance regarding deterrence and China in the INDOPACOM (Indo-Pacific Command) region. However, China has experienced tremendous economic growth over the past two decades, which has led to their defense budget growing by approximately 640 percent between 1996 and 2014.<sup>1</sup> As China continues to grow economically and militarily, dominance is no longer a necessary condition for deterrence.<sup>2</sup> Rather than focusing on dominance, it is necessary for the United States to employ other forms of deterrence with its new-peer competitors. With its sustained growth, China now has three distinct red lines regarding military conflict and Taiwan. These three red lines are: 1) If Taiwan were to try to formally separate from China and become a sovereign state; 2) If Taiwan were to develop the capability to deter a Chinese invasion (mainly regarding the attempt to acquire nuclear weapons); and 3) If China believes that an outside power was too friendly with Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> For the United States to maintain regional stability and geopolitical ties in the INDOPACOM region, viable solutions need to be developed and employed with a greater understanding of the Chinese approach. Three possible solutions include formal recognition of Taiwan as a sovereign state, a forward deployed military presence, and multinational agreements.

## **Taiwan Recognition**

This proposal would be to have Taiwan recognized as a sovereign state by most of the international community. At this current time, there are only 15 countries that recognize Taiwan

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<sup>1</sup> Heginbotham and Heim, *Deterring Without Dominance: Discouraging Chinese Adventurism Under Austerity*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ward, *Why There's Talk About China Starting A War With Taiwan*

due to the “One China Principle”.<sup>4</sup> The recognition proposal can be leveraged through the United Nations to provide a respected international forum for discussion. Though China’s red line is crossed if Taiwan were to try to split and formally separate from China and become a sovereign state, there is no guidance as to how they would react if the international community recognized Taiwan jointly. By having the international community recognize Taiwan’s sovereignty, China could be dissuaded from their reunification attempts because they could fear the potential military, economic and diplomatic repercussions. Additionally, at this current time Taiwan is not recognized by the United Nations, World Health Organization, or any other international body. As a result, Taiwan cannot legally be a party to international treaties and is under no obligation to follow them.

In an absolute worst-case scenario, if Taiwan felt that its sovereignty was on the verge of being violated, they could ultimately choose to restart their nuclear program. If they were to continue along this route, it would not take long for Taiwan to develop weapons as they already have the materials needed and the technical capacity.<sup>5</sup> Taiwan currently has four operable nuclear power reactors, had successfully produced plutonium in the 1970s and continued working on their nuclear program through the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> As previously mentioned, the prospect of Taiwan obtaining nuclear weapons is a red line for China that would see them immediately attempt to engage in conflict with Taiwan. This could potentially lead to a rather troubling development, as there has never been a direct military conflict between two nuclear states and no nuclear-armed country has ever been invaded.<sup>7</sup> China could ultimately decide that the potential

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<sup>4</sup> Yip, *It's Time To Stop Pandering To Beijing Over Taiwan*

<sup>5</sup> Littlefield & Lowther, *Would A Nuclear-Armed Taiwan Deter China?*

<sup>6</sup> Albright & Stricker, *Taiwan's Former Nuclear Weapons Program*

<sup>7</sup> Tertrais, *In Defense of Deterrence: The Relevance, Morality and Cost-Effectiveness of Nuclear Weapons*

conflict with a nuclear-armed Taiwan could be too costly to justify. Additionally, while Taiwan had ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970 and had signed a trilateral agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United States to not develop nuclear weapons, the United Nations does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state and only recognizes the government of China. Having the international community give Taiwan recognition would significantly reduce the probability of this scenario occurring since Taiwan would feel more compelled to ensure they are following international law.

### **Military Option/Hard Power**

One option that the United States could implement is to utilize hard power by increasing their military presence in the region. During the 2020 wargaming scenario the U.S. Air Force conducted regarding a conflict in the South China Sea, the Air Force was able to repel a Chinese invasion of Taiwan after taking heavy casualties.<sup>8</sup> Though this war gaming scenario offered a clear-cut vision of the capabilities needed to ensure this outcome, I assess that the scenario was fundamentally flawed. During this scenario, neither China nor the United States utilized nuclear weapons with the viewpoint that the United States has the arsenal necessary to retaliate against a Chinese strike.<sup>9</sup> However, this disregards China's military doctrine regarding high-altitude electromagnetic pulses (HEMPs). China's doctrine does not consider HEMP attacks to be a "nuclear strike", but rather an extension of information or electronic warfare and equivalent to non-nuclear EMP weapons and cyber warfare.<sup>10</sup> After fielding the Dong Feng 17 medium-range ballistic missile (DF-17), China now possesses an operational Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (HGV)

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<sup>8</sup> Insinna, *A US Air Force War Game Shows What The Service Needs To Hold Off— Or Win Against — China In 2030*

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Pry, *China: EMP Threat*

that could carry a nuclear warhead for a HEMP first strike against Taiwan. The capability of HGVs in the region is significant because it has the potential of considerably increasing the amount of time it would take to obtain dual phenomenology. Dual phenomenology is how we would receive confirmation of a missile or rocket launch. In this case, we would be searching for two types of phenomenon to confirm a potential launch—a heat signature from the missile as it is launched, and when the missile is detected on our satellite systems. Since HGVs are capable of maneuvering and operating at lower altitudes, it becomes much more difficult to obtain the second phenomenon of our satellite systems to tracking it.<sup>11</sup>

To reduce the potential of a HEMP attack on Taiwan and to increase military presence in the region, I propose that the United States Taiwan Defense Command (USTDC) be reestablished. However, rather than rebuild USTDC in Taiwan, the command should be established in either Japan or Guam. As previously noted, one of China's red lines is if they feel that an outside power is getting too friendly with Taiwan. If the United States were to attempt to have a sub-unified military command in Taiwan, China would likely see that as a threat and a revocation of the Shanghai Communique, which previously withdrew all United States forces from Taiwan.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it is necessary to maintain the forward deployment of the USS Ronald Reagan of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, along with multiple Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers. Having Arleigh Burke-class destroyers in the region drastically reduces the potential of a HEMP first strike by China due to their new AN/SPY-6(V)1 radar. During Missile Defense Agency (MDA) flight tests, this radar was successfully able to detect and track ballistic missiles,

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<sup>11</sup> Reif & Bugos, *Pentagon Tests Hypersonic Glide Body*

<sup>12</sup> Nixon 1972, *Richard Nixon: Containing The Public Messages, Speeches, And Statements Of The President*

as well as HGVs.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Aegis Ashore missile defense sites should continue to be planned to be built in Guam as it would be more effective than solely relying on Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) systems.

### **Soft Power**

A more diplomatic option that could be available to deter Chinese aggression towards Taiwan would be a multilateral agreement between China, Taiwan, Japan, and the United States. This agreement would be about the territorial dispute that exists in the Senkaku/Diaoyutai/Tiaoyutai Islands. Though these uninhabited islands are currently under the possession of Japan, China, and Taiwan still hold claim to these islands, as well. The multilateral agreement can state that if China were to agree to recognize the sovereignty of Taiwan and not seek to expand their territorial claims beyond their current borders, then Japan would give up the Senkaku/Diaoyutai/Tiaoyutai Islands to China. Furthermore, the United States can be party to the agreement if they were to recognize and support China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, while China recognizes the United States' and Japan's Blue Dot Network. With this multilateral agreement, each country can ultimately come out ahead by promoting tranquility in the region and significantly boosting economic growth.

Another way the United States could utilize its soft power would be to leverage the European Union (EU) to assist Russia in countering the economic growth of China. Russia has been attempting to maintain their economic ties in Central Asia and China's OBOR would drastically alter that dynamic. If the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Russia's economic union with Eurasian countries) were to cooperate more efficiently with a multilateral

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<sup>13</sup> Congressional Research, *Navy Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) Program: Background And Issues For Congress*

agreement, China's OBOR would have much less of an impact in the region. Traditionally, the EU has preferred to conduct business with EAEU countries on a bilateral basis, rather than negotiating with the entire EAEU.<sup>14</sup> If this were to happen, then the slowdown of China's economic growth could dissuade them from getting into a conflict with Taiwan.

### **Conclusion**

The stated problem of Chinese aggression towards the sovereignty of Taiwan is a complex issue that will ultimately require a combination of both innovative and traditional solutions. It is my conclusion that the most efficient and effective solution would be through diplomatic and international means. By gaining the support of our allies and a multinational solution towards this issue, China would be much more likely to back down from their threats and more willing to cooperate.

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<sup>14</sup> Van der Togt, *EU & Eurasian Economic Union: A Common Chinese Challenge*



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