

Connecticut Debate Association

December 11, 2021

This House believes that the United States should not defend Taiwan.

A Note on “This House”

Some debaters believe they have complete freedom to define “This House” and use this freedom to run cases that avoid the obvious meaning and intent of the motion. While one can argue about what Taiwan, NATO, the EU or someone else might or might not believe, as a practical matter only the US has the ability to actually act. The US decision may be influenced by the opinions of allies, adversaries, and neutrals, but unless explicitly stated otherwise, it is the US decision that should be the subject of the debate. (Of course, others may disagree.)

The US must avoid war with China over Taiwan at all costs

The Guardian, Lt Col Daniel L Davis (ret), 5 Oct 2021

The prevailing mood among Washington insiders is to fight if China attempts to conquer Taiwan. That would be a mistake

Since last Friday, the People’s Republic of China has launched a total of 155 warplanes – the most ever over four consecutive days – into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone; Ned Price said the state department was “very concerned”. There have been more than 500 such flights through nine months this year, as opposed to 300 all of last year.

Before war comes to the Indo-Pacific and Washington faces pressure to fight a potentially existential war, American policymakers must face the cold, hard reality that fighting China over Taiwan risks an almost-certain military defeat – and gambles we won’t stumble into a nuclear war.

Bluntly put, America should refuse to be drawn into a no-win war with Beijing. It needs to be said up front: there would be no palatable choice for Washington if China finally makes good on its decades-long threat to take Taiwan by force. Either choose a bad, bitter-tasting outcome or a self-destructive one in which our existence is put at risk.

The prevailing mood in Washington among officials and opinion leaders is to fight if China attempts to conquer Taiwan by force. In a speech at the Center for Strategic Studies last Friday, the deputy secretary of defense, Kathleen Hicks, said that if Beijing invades Taiwan, “we have a significant amount of capability forward in the region to tamp down any such potential”.

Either Hicks is unaware of how little wartime capacity we actually have forward deployed in the Indo-Pacific or she’s unaware of how significant China’s capacity is off its shores, but whichever the case, we are in no way guaranteed to “tamp down” a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

Earlier this year, Senator Rick Scott and Representative Guy Reschenthaler introduced the Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act which, Representative Reschenthaler said, would authorize “the president to use military force to defend Taiwan against a direct attack”. In the event of an actual attack, there would be enormous pressure to fast-track such a bill to authorize Biden to act. We must resist this temptation.

As I have previously detailed, there is no rational scenario in which the United States could end up in a better, more secure place after a war with China. The best that could be hoped for would be a pyrrhic victory in which we are saddled with becoming the permanent defense force for Taiwan (costing us hundreds of billions a year and the equally permanent requirement to be ready for the inevitable Chinese counter-attack).

The most likely outcome would be a conventional defeat of our forces in which China ultimately succeeds, despite our intervention – at the cost of large numbers of our jets being shot down, ships being sunk, and thousands of our service personnel killed. But the worst case is a conventional war spirals out of control and escalates into a nuclear exchange.

That leaves as the best option something most Americans find unsatisfying: refuse to engage in direct combat against China on behalf of Taiwan. Doing so will allow the United States to emerge on the other side of a China/Taiwan war with our global military and economic power intact.

That’s not to suggest we stand passively aside and let China run over Taiwan with impunity. The most effective course of action for Washington would be to condemn China in the strongest possible terms, lead a global movement that will enact crippling sanctions against Beijing, and make them an international pariah. China’s pain wouldn’t be limited to economics, however.

It would take Beijing decades to overcome the losses incurred from a war to take Taiwan, even if Beijing triumphs. The

United States and our western allies, on the other hand, would remain at full military power, dominate the international business markets, and have the moral high ground to keep China hemmed in like nothing that presently exists. Xi would be seen as an unquestioned aggressor, even by other Asian regimes, and the fallout against China could knock them back decades. Our security would be vastly improved from what it is today – and incalculably higher than if we foolishly tried to fight a war with China.

Publicly, Washington should continue to embrace strategic ambiguity but privately convey to Taiwanese leaders that we will not fight a war with China. That would greatly incentivize Taipei to make whatever political moves and engage in any negotiation necessary to ensure the perpetuation of the status quo. The blunt, hard reality is that a Taiwan maintaining the status quo is far better than a smoldering wreck of an island conquered by Beijing.

The only way the US could have our security harmed would be to allow ourselves to be drawn into a war we're likely to lose over an issue peripheral to US security. In the event China takes Taiwan by force, Washington should stay out of the fray and lead a global effort to ostracize China, helping ensure our security will be strengthened for a generation to come.

Daniel L Davis is a senior fellow for defense priorities and a former lieutenant colonel in the US army who deployed into combat zones four times. He is the author of *The Eleventh Hour in 2020 America*

Taiwan president warns of ‘catastrophic consequences’ if island falls to China

The Guardian, Helen Davidson in Taipei, 5 Oct 2021

Tsai Ing-wen says Taiwan will ‘do whatever it takes to defend itself’ against an increasingly assertive Beijing

Taiwan is committed to defending its democracy against an increasingly aggressive China, the island’s president has vowed, warning of “catastrophic consequences” for the region should it fall.

The comments from Tsai Ing-wen, in an essay published on Tuesday, came amid record-breaking incursions by Chinese warplanes into its air defence zone. On Tuesday Taiwan’s premier, Su Tseng-chang, said the “over the top” activity violated regional peace, and Taiwan needed to be on alert.

China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has sent nearly 150 planes into Taiwan’s air defence identification (ADIZ) zone in the first four days of October, in what mainland figures and media have labeled a demonstration of strength but which world governments condemned as an act of intimidation and aggression.

Writing for *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Tsai stressed Taiwan’s desire for peace but said “if its democracy and way of life are threatened, Taiwan will do whatever it takes to defend itself”.

However she also urged other nations to “understand the value of working with Taiwan”, against the broader threat posed by Beijing. “And they should remember that if Taiwan were to fall, the consequences would be catastrophic for regional peace and the democratic alliance system.”

Beijing claims Taiwan as a province in China, and has pledged to take it, by force if necessary. It considers Tsai’s government to be separatists, but she has said Taiwan is already a sovereign nation with no need to declare independence, and has no wish for conflict.

“Amid almost daily intrusions by the People’s Liberation Army, our position on cross-strait relations remains constant: Taiwan will not bend to pressure, but nor will it turn adventurist, even when it accumulates support from the international community,” she said.

Few countries formally recognise Taiwan, a situation which Tsai said had compelled Taiwan to think asymmetrically, forming unofficial partnerships and agreements, and contributing to international bodies as a non-state party. With growing ties around the world, Taiwan was an increasingly important democracy, trading partner and global supplier, and a crucial segment of the first island chain, which stretches from northern Japan to Borneo, Tsai said.

“Should this line be broken by force, the consequences would disrupt international trade and destabilise the entire western Pacific,” she said. “In other words, a failure to defend Taiwan would not only be catastrophic for the Taiwanese; it would overturn a security architecture that has allowed for peace and extraordinary economic development in the region for seven decades.”

Analysts debate how imminent the threat is, but this week’s escalation of what had already grown to be near daily sorties, alarmed observers and prompted rebuke from various countries.

On Tuesday, Japan’s foreign minister, Toshimitsu Motegi, said he hoped Taiwan and China were able to resolve the issues peacefully. He said Japan was weighing up possible scenarios in order to make its own preparations.

It followed comments from Australia’s government and the US state department urging Beijing to cease its threats or use of force. The White House also said it was in private communications through diplomatic channels, about China’s actions regarding Taiwan.

Taiwan hopes to provide a deterrence to China through strong international ties and investment in its defence capabilities, including arms purchases through the US.

“Such initiatives are meant to maximise Taiwan’s self-reliance and preparedness and to signal that we are willing to bear our share of the burden and don’t take our security partners’ support for granted,” Tsai said.

Taiwan was “fully committed to collaborating with our neighbours to prevent armed conflict in the East China and South China Seas, as well as in the Taiwan Strait”.

What Taiwan Really Wants

The New York Times, By Natasha Kassam, Oct. 29, 2021

It started with an innocuous question from a town hall audience: A student asked President Biden whether he would vow to protect Taiwan from China.

Mr. Biden’s response — a quick “yes,” then “yes” again when pressed by a CNN anchor — was instant breaking news globally. The White House almost immediately moved to walk back the comments.

The foreign policy kerfuffle was brief but underscored the high stakes when it comes to Taiwan.

Relations between China and Taiwan are at their worst point in decades. Military provocations are rising: Record numbers of Chinese warplanes have crossed into Taiwan’s air defense zone in recent weeks, a stark reminder of Beijing’s desire to absorb Taiwan.

Some U.S. lawmakers — in both parties, echoed by former officials and commentators — have been calling for Washington to commit to a firm security guarantee toward Taipei and ditch the longstanding U.S. policy of strategic ambiguity, or at least to seriously consider doing so, which leaves open the question of whether the United States would come to Taiwan’s aid in the event of an attack from China.

So when Mr. Biden unambiguously said the United States was committed to defending Taiwan, the White House quickly clarified there was “no change” in its policy.

Whether Biden simply misspoke or was signaling his resolve to China, the suggestion of a shift to strategic clarity prompted a cautious response from Taiwan: The president’s office cautioned Taiwan would not “rashly advance” when it receives support.

That should not come as a surprise. But lost in the Beltway rhetoric is the will of Taiwan’s people. Many outsiders — myself included — are weighing in on what should be done about Taiwan. Few appear to be listening to what Taiwan is actually saying.

I study public opinion and foreign policy, specializing in China and Taiwan, and have watched anxiety over the Taiwan Strait reach a fever pitch. Decades of polling and heated debate in Taiwan’s democracy offer insight into what Taiwan really wants.

It is clear that almost all of Taiwan’s people do not want to unify with China. They want to continue living their lives as they see fit, under a democratically elected government.

In fact, most in Taiwan — 87 percent, according to a recent poll — want to maintain some form of the status quo.

The status quo means maintaining de facto independence but avoiding retaliation from China. And the percentage of Taiwan’s people who want to maintain the status quo indefinitely is growing. It is the best-case scenario in a sea of unenviable options.

To be sure, if there were no risk of invasion from China, the majority would choose independence.

But China’s President Xi Jinping has made clear that such a declaration is not available to Taiwan. So the status quo is pragmatic — and preferable.

Taipei’s responses to Beijing’s threats have been resolute, but the island nation has warned against unilateral changes to the status quo. Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen called for “maintaining” it in her recent National Day address, saying “we will do our utmost to prevent the status quo from being unilaterally altered.” While “status quo” for Taiwan is not a static idea, the broad contours of Chinese, U.S. and Taiwanese policy roughly define what has been acceptable as the status quo.

Taiwan can exist as an independent state, with its own elections, judiciary, currency and military. China doesn’t relinquish its claim to Taiwan, and other countries avoid recognizing Taiwan as a sovereign state, instead pursuing informal relations with it. The United States sells Taiwan arms for self-defense and does not clarify whether the United States will defend Taiwan if China invades. This serves to deter Beijing while not provoking it.

That works for Taiwan.

“Tsai has set the tone,” read a recent editorial in The Taipei Times. “There is no need for Taiwan to declare

independence.”

Like Ms. Tsai, senior figures across parties in Taiwan are calling for international support while urging caution against escalation. Influential Taiwanese have been warning against warmongering and saber-rattling. That all helps explain why Mr. Biden’s remarks last week raised such alarm. A Beijing official warned that the United States should “be cautious with its words.”

A shift to strategic clarity from strategic ambiguity would likely be interpreted by China as a sign that Washington intends to support a formal declaration of Taiwanese independence. Then Mr. Xi could claim he had no choice but to act militarily. The lives of millions of Taiwan residents would be at stake.

To be clear, it is China’s aggression that is threatening lives in Taiwan. Increased aerial incursions are a challenge to the status quo.

In response, Taiwan’s leaders have stressed domestic resilience while asking partners to advocate on its behalf in international institutions. Rather than calling for an explicit mutual defense guarantee, Taipei is seeking further security cooperation, economic links and opportunities to join regional trade initiatives.

These moves are not an attempt to change the status quo but rather a response to China’s efforts to tip the balance. Taiwan’s requests are measured and moderate, designed to create more space for it to exist without crossing Beijing’s red lines.

The United States has an important role to play in communicating that China’s threats will not be tolerated without cost. Closer Taiwan-U.S. relations can help to keep the peace and are supported by most people in Taiwan. Three-quarters of them want the United States to help Taiwan participate in international organizations like the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

Signals from Washington to Tokyo, Canberra and Seoul show Beijing that Taipei is not isolated. But the risk of miscalculation is high. In this fraught moment, the United States’ response must be to follow Taiwan’s lead.

Otherwise, the risk is that various nations will act with urgency to suit their own domestic settings — inching closer to a catastrophic war, without reference to Taiwan’s people, or viewing Taiwan as a problem to be solved, a flashpoint or the most dangerous place on earth, not a peaceful democracy of 24 million people.

Of course, if Beijing does take hostile action, all bets are off. Ms. Tsai’s moderate path would no longer be tenable, and Taipei would need to look to Washington for unambiguous support.

But this is unlikely to happen in the short term. U.S. and Taiwan defense officials agree that China could be several years away from having the capability to invade Taiwan.

Helping Taiwan requires understanding the history and political aspirations of the people of Taiwan. Yes, measured responses are needed to Beijing’s provocative actions. But those wanting to help should take their cues from the people they claim to defend.

Natasha Kassam (@natashakassam) is the director of public opinion and foreign policy at the Lowy Institute in Sydney and a former Australian diplomat in Beijing.

Beijing Won’t Bow to Bluster on Taiwan

The Wall Street Journal, By Walter Russell Mead, Jan. 11, 2021

Biden will have to coordinate a military buildup with allies to stop a catastrophe.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s announcement last week that he’s lifting restrictions on meetings between U.S. and Taiwanese officials will enrage Beijing, but the impact on Taiwan’s security is harder to judge.

Taiwan has divided America from China since Chiang Kai-shek’s defeated Kuomintang fled to the roughly Maryland-sized island about 100 miles from the Chinese mainland back in 1949. Ever since Henry Kissinger’s groundbreaking diplomacy in the early 1970s, Washington has embraced a one-China policy. The U.S. rejects the use of force to resolve the Taiwan issue, but under the policy of “strategic ambiguity,” America declines to say what it would do if Beijing attempted forceful reunification.

President-elect Biden, unfortunately, inherits a situation in which the basis of the old compromise is coming apart. For its part, China has launched one of the greatest military buildups in the history of the world across the straits from Taiwan. Coupled with the artificial islands and military buildup in the South China Sea, it’s clear Beijing has been systematically seeking to create the conditions for a successful invasion of Taiwan.

China is closer to this goal than many Americans realize. Twenty years ago, Beijing had no prospect of conquering the island. The Chinese Communist Party could bluster about reunification all it wanted, but the Taiwanese, the Japanese and the mainlanders themselves understood that this was empty talk.

It gets less empty every day. Increasingly the military balance has shifted from a clear U.S. advantage into a gray zone as China's buildup accelerates. This is anything but a secret; the gradual decline of America's ability to forestall an invasion of Taiwan is well understood by governments around the Pacific.

Permitting the erosion of the U.S. position around Taiwan was one of the great strategic blunders of modern times. The fall of Taiwan would be bad news not only for Taiwan's democracy-loving and independence-minded residents. It would be a strategic catastrophe for Tokyo, leaving Beijing in control of the sea routes Japan needs for survival. A Chinese takeover would be such a conclusive demonstration of American weakness that no country, from India to Vietnam, could or would risk its security on U.S. ties. Given that the island also hosts the world's most advanced semiconductor industry, controlling Taiwan would put China on the road to world technological and economic supremacy even as it became the arbiter of Asia.

It doesn't take a war to change the politics of Asia. Already, signs that the strategic balance is drifting in Beijing's favor undermine confidence in America and strengthen the arguments of China appeasers from Tokyo to New Delhi.

Restoring a stable power equation is possible but cannot be achieved overnight. It will require significant military spending and perhaps some difficult trade-offs elsewhere, but it also necessitates a renewal of U.S. diplomacy in the region. By coordinating military planning and burden sharing more closely with countries like Japan, India, Vietnam and Australia, the military balance can be stabilized and secured in less time and with less cost. And solidifying relationships with neighboring countries like the Philippines and Pacific island nations to allow the allies to disperse their forces to more bases will make those forces harder for China to target.

Some fear that this kind of military and diplomatic push would further destabilize U.S.-China relations. That concern is misplaced. The risks of an ambiguous and tipping military balance far outweigh those of shoring up the allied position. As the military balance shifts, Washington will have to resort to increasingly dramatic gestures and threats that are likely to provoke China but unlikely to deter it.

Selling high-profile arms to Taiwan, stepping up official contacts with the island, or even—as increasingly senior figures in the American foreign-policy establishment suggest—replacing “strategic ambiguity” with an open U.S. guarantee of Taiwan's security won't help Taiwan all that much as long as the mainland is becoming more capable of invasion. But such moves do antagonize Beijing and deepen its commitment to the military buildup.

It was American military strength that made the Kissinger compromise over Taiwan possible in the first place. That compromise remains, as it has been for the past 50 years, the cornerstone both of Taiwan's security and of pragmatic and peaceful U.S.-China relations. While China's rise makes that military edge harder to sustain in some ways, the accompanying ascent of regional allies makes it easier.

Stabilizing U.S.-China relations and protecting the Pacific status quo require the same things from Mr. Biden's administration: A hard-nosed understanding of the military facts of life, a sophisticated diplomacy that embraces the game-changing potential of both old and emerging American alliances, and a clear-sighted approach to the economic and technological foundations of national power.

Does Taiwan's Military Stand a Chance Against China? Few Think So

The Wall Street Journal, By Joyu Wang and Alastair Gale, Oct. 26, 2021

The concern that China might try to seize Taiwan is preoccupying American military planners and administration officials. Few of them think Taiwan's military could hold the line.

Soldiers, strategists and government officials in Taiwan and the U.S. say the island's military is riven with internal problems, many of which have built up over years of calm and economic prosperity and now are eating away at Taiwan's ability to deter China.

Among the most pressing concerns are poor preparation and low morale among the roughly 80,000 Taiwanese who are conscripted each year and the nearly 2.2 million reservists.

Xiao Cheng-zhi, a 26-year-old from central Taiwan, said his four months of basic training that ended last year mainly involved sweeping leaves, moving spare tires and pulling weeds. Aside from some marksmanship training, he said, his classes were meaningless.

Mr. Xiao dismissed his cohorts as strawberry soldiers, a term used in Taiwan to describe young people raised by overprotective parents who bruise easily. While he said he is willing to serve, he doubted the island would stand much chance against China's People's Liberation Army.

China's Communist Party considers Taiwan part of its territory despite never having ruled it. Although there is no sign of imminent conflict, Beijing has made clear it intends to bring Taiwan under its control eventually.

In interviews, Taiwanese soldiers and reservists expressed concerns about training and readiness. One said he watched

American war movies during training after running out of useful things to do. Another said he spent a lot of time reading and drawing, and that there wasn't much to worry about anyway. Public opinion polls and interviews suggest many Taiwanese expect the U.S. to take charge if serious danger arises.

Two young men described how they had put on extra weight to get disqualified from military conscription, a practice some Taiwanese youths say is common. One said he stuffed himself with large meals every four hours for a month, including McDonald's combo meals, to gain enough pounds to be exempted.

Grant Newsham, a retired U.S. Marines colonel who spent 2019 in Taiwan studying the island's defenses, said Taiwan has a solid core of well-trained troops and "superb officers that are ready to fight." Other military experts compare Taiwan's top pilots and officers to the world's best.

But the Taiwanese military is underfunded, and its reserves system is a shambles, Mr. Newsham said. It needs improved pay packages, and it could become far more effective by training with the U.S. and its allies, he said.

Taiwan's government acknowledges many of the weaknesses and says it is working to fix them. A government watchdog agency said in a July report that some reservists have a "just passing through" mentality, and called for better training using technology such as virtual reality.

An unpublished government report commissioned by Taiwan's defense ministry, which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, found a culture of paperwork that cut into combat training. It said "endless misconduct and mismanagement" had weakened young people's willingness to join the forces.

At a news conference on Tuesday after this article was published, a spokesman for Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said the military is working to strengthen its forces to prevent wars and maintain national security. "Military buildup and war preparations are long-term tasks and missions," he said. "We ask for support from our fellow citizens."

Last month, Taiwan's defense ministry made changes to its mandatory military training, saying all incoming conscripts will be sent to combat units for more hands-on experience.

Concerns about Taiwan's readiness have intensified as China flexes its muscles, with a surge in military flights near the island and the crushing of democracy in Hong Kong.

On Oct. 9, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan. China's leaders say the use of force remains an option.

Adding to unease among Taiwanese and U.S. officials are major investments by China's armed forces. With a military budget 13 times the size of Taiwan's, China now has more than one million ground troops, according to Pentagon estimates. Taiwan's military has shrunk to 187,660 active-duty soldiers, from 275,000 in 2011.

This year, China put into service its first ship capable of launching armored troop-carriers, hovercraft and helicopters for amphibious assaults. It held drills simulating sea crossings and beach landings, and has fielded rocket artillery systems with the range to strike Taiwanese targets, according to Pentagon reports.

Taiwan still has some advantages, including a tricky coastline that would be hard for PLA forces to swarm. Also, there are doubts about battle-readiness in China, which hasn't fought a war since a brief conflict with Vietnam in 1979.

An annual Taiwanese defense ministry assessment of China's military, reviewed by the Journal, warns that Beijing could use cyberattacks to paralyze Taiwan's command centers. A crippling of defense infrastructure could increase the reliance on Taiwanese soldiers to prevent a rapid takeover.

Taiwan's defense minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng, said recently the PLA would be able to launch a full-blown attack on Taiwan with minimal losses by 2025.

U.S. dilemma

The U.S. hasn't committed to defend Taiwan, but most military analysts assume it would.

Last Thursday, President Biden said twice during a CNN town hall event that the U.S. would defend Taiwan, but the White House said later there was no change to U.S. policy.

Currently, the U.S. maintains a policy of "strategic ambiguity," in which it aims to prevent conflict by declining to say what it would do if clashes break out. Some U.S. foreign-policy experts want the U.S. to explicitly commit to intervene if China attacks Taiwan. Others worry that even small gestures by Washington could provoke Beijing and entangle the U.S. in foreign trouble.

For now, the U.S. supports Taiwan mainly by selling it weapons and other defense equipment. For at least a year, the U.S. has sent small contingents of Special Forces and Marines to help train ground troops and maritime forces. The U.S. defense policy bill this year calls for closer cooperation.

Some military strategists have suggested Taiwan needs to become more like Israel. Despite having less than half of Taiwan's population, Israel spends nearly \$22 billion on defense annually, compared with \$13 billion by Taiwan last

year. Young Israeli men are required to serve 2½ years, while women must spend nearly two years.

Taiwan used to require about two years of mandatory service for men. It now requires four months. After that, they become reservists, with some, though not all, called up again every one or two years for a refresher course that usually lasts five to seven days. The period will be extended to two weeks beginning next year. Plans to phase out conscription entirely have been stalled by difficulties in attracting volunteers.

Current and former U.S. officials and military analysts say Taiwan must spend more on weapons such as sea mines and coastal cruise missiles that would better deter an amphibious invasion. That might allow it to beat back an invasion for a few days, providing time for the U.S. to come to its defense or for it to impose enough casualties to force a rethink in Beijing.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen has tried to rally the public behind improving the military, while pushing initiatives such as building more naval ships and missiles in Taiwan. A new agency to oversee a revamp of military reserve forces is launching in early 2022.

Military spending has risen, though it remains unpopular with some Taiwanese. Last month, the government proposed an \$8.7 billion special budget for missiles, naval ships and other weapon systems, on top of annual spending set to grow 4% in 2022 to a record \$15.1 billion.

Chiang Kai-shek's legacy

Ronan Fu, a former second lieutenant at the Taiwanese Reserve Command and assistant research fellow at the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica, a state-funded think tank, questions whether young people have a strong enough sense of duty. While training has improved somewhat recently, he said, “adult men in Taiwan don’t actually want to fight.”

A 2019 survey found around half of Taiwanese would be willing to fight to defend the island, but polls also show most don’t expect they will ever have to.

Many young Taiwanese view the military as a legacy of Taiwan’s authoritarian past. The island’s military grew out of the armed forces led by former Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, who lost to Mao Zedong’s Communist forces in the Chinese Civil War. In the late 1940s, Chiang’s forces fled to Taiwan, where his party imposed martial law.

After Taiwan became a democracy, its military began recruiting volunteers to replace conscripts. With better salaries available in the corporate sector, recruiting proved challenging. In 2018, the defense ministry said it would adopt a hybrid model combining volunteers with the conscripts now obligated to serve four months.

“There is no profession or any professional knowledge that you could master within four months,” said Wang Yi, an officer in Taiwan’s Army Aviation and Special Forces Command.

Harry Goo, a 31-year-old film producer in Taipei, said he was willing to fight to prevent “Taiwan becoming like Hong Kong.” When called up for military service in 2012, though, he took what he said was a local government officer’s advice to rapidly gain weight to avoid conscription. His father told him to get a job rather than wasting time in the military, he said.

Recruitment also has been undermined by the view that China wouldn’t invade because it would be too damaging for its international standing, or because nations such as the U.S. would intervene.

“If China dares to make any trouble, wouldn’t the rest of the world issue sanctions against it?” said Ian Su, a 25-year-old insurance broker from the central county of Changhua who trained as a signal operator last year.

Some Taiwanese and American military officials and analysts say Taiwan needs to develop a commitment to civil self-defense, such as in Finland and Switzerland.

Enoch Wu, a former Taiwanese corporal who now heads the ruling party’s Taipei chapter, is leading an effort to promote civil defense through speeches and workshops. He said there needs to be more acceptance that Taiwan must prepare for a Chinese attack.

During annual military exercises last month, Charley Su and his girlfriend, Lucia Chang, both 29, came to watch jet fighters landing on a provincial highway as part of a contingency exercise if airport runways were destroyed.

“Our hard-fought freedom is not for granted,” said Mr. Su, who works in construction. Many in Taiwan don’t realize how fragile its liberty is, he said, because “the military is so far away from the people.”

It’ll Take More than American Military Might to Shore Up Taiwan

The Wall Street Journal, By John Bolton, Oct. 20, 2021

Team Biden needs a fuller strategy that includes international recognition and new regional alliances.

China’s threat to Taiwan is real, not hypothetical, as recent incursions into the island’s air-defense zone demonstrate. To

counter Beijing's renewed belligerence, a successful strategy must go beyond eliminating the "strategic ambiguity" over whether the U.S. will come to the island's defense. A successful strategy will require clarifying Taiwan's status, its critical place in Indo-Pacific politics, and its economic importance globally. The U.S. military contribution to Taiwan's security is crucial, but it requires strong political support here and abroad.

It begins by affirming that Taiwan is a sovereign, self-governing country, not a disputed Chinese province. It meets international law's criteria of statehood, such as defined territory, stable population and the performance of normal governmental functions such as viable currency and law enforcement. Washington, Tokyo and others would be entirely justified to extend diplomatic recognition, and its attendant legitimacy, to Taipei.

The 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, the foundational statement of current U.S.-China relations, is effectively dead. The communiqué says that "the United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China," and "doesn't challenge that position." Beijing warped these words to mean "one China run by Beijing," a formulation the U.S. never accepted.

The reality the U.S. acknowledged in 1972 no longer exists. Taiwan's National Chengchi University has polled the island's people about their identity for 30 years. Between 1992 and 2021, those identifying as Taiwanese rose to 63.3% from 17.6%; those identifying as Chinese fell to 2.7% from 25.5%; those identifying as both Taiwanese and Chinese fell to 31.4% from 46.4%. (Some 2.7% didn't respond, down from 10.5%.) The "silent artillery of time," as Abraham Lincoln called it, will likely continue these trends. Taiwan's citizens have made up their own minds: There is no longer "one China" but "one China, one Taiwan," as Beijing has feared for decades.

Broader recognition of Taiwan's status as an independent state would be extremely helpful in expanding politico-military alliances to buttress the island's defenses against China. Yet Washington's support may be insufficient to deter Beijing from attempting to subjugate Taiwan (or near-offshore islands like Quemoy and Matsu). Formal or informal alliances that include Taipei would show Beijing that the costs of belligerence toward Taiwan are significantly higher than China may expect.

One step would be forming an East Asia Quad, consisting of Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and America, complementing the existing Japan-India-Australia-U.S. Quad. Japan should welcome this development. Its decision makers increasingly understand that a Chinese attack on Taiwan is an attack on Japan. Both are part of "the first island chain" separating the mainland from the broader Pacific, and their mutual security is inextricable.

It would be harder to persuade South Korea to join in such an effort due to historical animosities toward Japan and other factors, but its people are nonetheless aware of the consequences of Taiwan falling to China. The 2022 presidential election is an opportunity to debate whether to stand with its neighbors or risk eventually living under Greater China's suzerainty. Vietnam, Singapore, Australia and Canada could join this Taiwan-centric grouping in due course.

Taipei's residual South China Sea territorial claims could be bargaining chips for closer relations with other partners, especially littoral states like Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore. At this southern end of the first island chain, Taiwan's navy could make material contributions to freedom-of-navigation missions. Taiwan is also developing increasingly important cyberwarfare capabilities and artificial intelligence.

Similar cooperation with Pacific island states would also enhance Taiwan's reputation as a good neighbor. In addition, American and Taiwanese information statecraft in the Indo-Pacific and globally should expose China's hypocritical behavior on climate change and Covid and its repression of Uyghurs, Hong Kong and religious freedom. Failure to counter Beijing's extensive influence operations hamstring efforts to constrain China and protect Taiwan.

Few Americans appreciate how critical an economic partner Taiwan is, especially its semiconductor manufacturing industry and its extensive trade links throughout the Indo-Pacific, all of which could support enhanced politico-military ties. Economic issues are important for regional countries and Europeans, who may be less willing to engage in military action. These countries should be reminded of China's threat, including Beijing's weaponizing telecommunications companies like Huawei and ZTE and its brutality in taking Canadians hostage in retaliation for the legitimate arrest of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou.

More military assets supporting Taiwan are critical but potentially futile without a fuller American strategic vision, with buy-in from citizens and other like-minded countries. That vision must be broad, persuasive and implemented without delay, to ensure the sustained popular support needed to prevail.

Mr. Bolton is author of "The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir." He served as the president's national security adviser, 2018-19, and ambassador to the United Nations, 2005-06.

Needed: A Military Strategy for China

The Wall Street Journal, By Seth Cropsey, Nov. 2, 2021

The Pentagon, with its outdated policies, may not have the luxury of time when a crisis develops.

‘Strategic ambiguity’ is the longstanding U.S. policy toward Taiwan, but President Biden’s approach has been more ambiguous than strategic. Asked at an Oct. 21 town hall whether he would defend the island nation against a Chinese attack, Mr. Biden replied, “Yes, we have a commitment to do that.” The White House then “clarified” his answer by reasserting its commitment to ambiguity.

All this begs the question: What should the U.S. do in defense of Taiwan? And it raises a broader one: What should the U.S. do to counter China’s military challenge?

These two inextricable questions are united by U.S. policy makers’ failure to answer either. China’s strategic objective is to monopolize the South and East China seas and use the resulting economic power to reshape the global order. But doing so requires breaking the U.S. Indo-Pacific alliance system, which in turn requires shattering the First Island Chain, which runs through the Japanese archipelago, Luzon in the Philippines, and Borneo, terminating with the Vietnamese coastline. The First Island Chain limits China’s maritime exit points into the Philippine Sea and the Indian Ocean, making control central to Chinese strategy. Taiwan lies at the center of the First Island Chain.

In such a conflict, deterrence and warfare become synonymous in policy. The U.S. has yet to articulate what victory would mean in a war with China. The Biden administration has suggested no desire to overthrow the Chinese Communist Party and replace it with a regime that respects international order. Rather, the objective seems to be to maintain the status quo, which means defending the sovereignty of all Pacific states, the territorial integrity of regional allies including Taiwan, and the freedom of navigation that undergirds the international system. Accomplishing these objectives means convincing China to stand down from its increasing regional aggression or in a war, to sue for peace. Accomplishing that requires identifying what China holds most valuable.

The answer is simple. The Chinese Communist Party desires survival. President Xi Jinping fears that the managed capitalism of his predecessors won’t prevent the emergence of a middle class that challenges the party domestically. He has turned for inspiration to three past Chinese rulers: Mao Zedong ; Qin Shi Huang (247-221 B.C.), the first Chinese emperor; and Gaozu (202-195 B.C.), the first Han emperor.

The most effective way to destroy the Chinese economy is a long-term blockade. A Sino-American confrontation would trigger a global economic depression that would harm Americans and their allies. But democracies’ electoral legitimacy makes them more resilient to such shocks than authoritarian regimes. A war-generated economic downturn in the West would bring high unemployment and tighter household budgets in the U.S. and, at the very least, an energy crisis elsewhere in the world. In China, such a downturn would usher in cascading power failures, production stoppages, soaring unemployment, and likely riots challenging the Communist Party’s legitimacy.

The huge Chinese social-media site Weibo reveals discontent with some government acts. For example, despite being accused of murder, Ou Jinzhong, who died Oct. 18 while awaiting arrest by Chinese police, received widespread public support on Weibo. He had lived in a shack for five years while local officials denied his requests to build a proper home. Similarly, although the Communist Party appears to have the Evergrande default under control, protests in Shenzhen and Hubei broke out when the full extent of the disaster was revealed.

China isn’t on the cusp of revolution. But the party understands that a sustained economic downturn would trigger unrest that could overwhelm its internal security. A blockade carries risks, not least because it is a long-term strategy that the U.S. would conduct over months or years. The People’s Liberation Army may believe that it can destroy enough U.S. combat ships in the first weeks of a war that such a blockade would become unfeasible, or that co-belligerents—likely Iran, Pakistan and Russia—would complicate the blockade enough to reduce its viability. Beijing may—understandably—assess that the U.S. logistics fleet is unlikely to sustain a multimonth conflict, and that Washington lacks the political will to do so.

Or Beijing may miscalculate, encounter its worst-case scenario, and adopt Russia’s mentality to “escalate to terminate”—that is, use nuclear weapons. The general assumption that the U.S. and its allies are better equipped to handle a long war than the Chinese Communist Party, and that the party therefore hopes to avoid a long war, is likely correct.

The alternative to blockade is to “fight forward” or, as Lord Nelson signaled at the Battle of Trafalgar, to “engage the enemy more closely.” That means defending Taiwan and the sovereignty of U.S. allies by denying China its short-term operational objectives. This would require much more naval and amphibious basing in East Asia than the U.S. currently maintains. American aircraft carriers must be equipped with long-range antiship missiles, and U.S. Marines with ground-based anti-aircraft and antiship missiles, to disrupt an amphibious assault on Taiwan. The U.S. Navy must deploy more submarines to Guam, Yokosuka, Sasebo and perhaps the Australian cities of Sydney and Perth to exploit the PLA’s undersea vulnerabilities and sink Chinese merchantmen and warships. A Marine expeditionary force or Army airmobile division must be deployed within range of the Taiwan Strait, likely to Southern Japan or Darwin, Australia. Air Force and Marine fighter squadrons must be placed in new bases throughout the First Island Chain, supported by ground-based anti-aircraft missile units, to deny the PLA immediate air control.

Achieving this would entail the most sweeping reorientation of American force structure and deployment since the end of World War II. But it is the safer strategic choice given the dangers of a longer conflict.

There is no articulated plan for the U.S. to defend our allies while conducting offensive operations against China. We build ships, buy aircraft and tanks, and train soldiers with no strategy in mind, lumbering forward under institutional inertia, guided by policies 10 to 30 years out of date. In Iraq it took the U.S. military three years to grasp the nature of the conflict, another year to implement a new strategy, and another year for the country to stabilize. We won't have five years from China's first missile launch. We may not have five months.

Mr. Cropsy is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and director of Hudson's Center for American Seapower. He served as a naval officer and as deputy undersecretary of the Navy.

Will China Really Invade Taiwan?

Slate, BY FRED KAPLAN, NOV 09, 2021

In March, one senior U.S. admiral warned that it could happen “in the next six years,” setting off a freakout among some in D.C. But how likely is it?

In March, Adm. Philip Davidson, the outgoing commander of U.S. military forces in the Pacific, told a Senate panel that China posed a “manifest” threat of invading Taiwan “in the next six years.”

No senior official had ever issued such a specific or urgent warning about the fate of the tiny democratic island 100 miles off of China's eastern coast. But since Davidson's testimony, boatloads of military officers, active and retired, have sounded similar alarm bells. Some congressmen, such as Republican Sen. Tom Cotton, have even called for recognizing Taiwan as an independent nation and making NATO-like commitments to defend it from invasion—a step that would reverse 42 years of U.S. policy, further destabilize relations with China, and possibly precipitate war.

At the same time, a debate has erupted among more scholarly analysts over whether China's Communist leaders really want to invade Taiwan—and, if they do, whether the Chinese military is capable of doing so now or in the near future. With few exceptions, the pessimists tend to be military officers, who measure the balance of power by which side has more or less of what sorts of weapons systems, while the less-panicked tend to be experts on China's history and politics who view the statistics in a broader context.

It is worth noting that Davidson did not clear his March testimony with the secretary of defense (something that officers are supposed to do, especially if they're about to make provocative statements). Nor did his warning of a Chinese invasion “in the next six years” reflect any estimate by the U.S. intelligence community. In fact, the Pentagon's latest report on China's military power—while citing accelerating, and worrisome, trends in the production of Chinese ships, missiles, and nuclear weapons—downplays concerns about China's ability or desire to mount and sustain an invasion of Taiwan.

Key sections of the Pentagon's 173-page report—titled *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China: A Report to Congress* and published just last week—help explain why, though many military officers jumped to echo Davidson, no senior Pentagon officials chimed in with Davidson's dire prediction.

The report notes that, in the past year, China “intensified” its “diplomatic, political, and military pressure against Taiwan.” However, the notion of an actual invasion seems beyond China's capabilities. The report elaborates:

Large-scale amphibious invasion is one of the most complicated and difficult military operations, requiring air and materiel superiority, the rapid buildup and sustainment of supplies onshore, and uninterrupted support. An attempt to invade Taiwan would likely strain [China's] armed forces and invite international intervention. These stresses, combined with...the complexity of urban warfare and counterinsurgency...make an amphibious invasion of Taiwan a significant political military risk.

Not only that, the Chinese military isn't even trying to build the things it would need for an invasion. It has just two amphibious assault ships, with a third under construction. There is “no indication,” the report states, that China is “significantly expanding” its force of landing craft, “suggesting [that] a traditional, large-scale direct beach assault operation...remains aspirational”—a polite way of saying: They just can't do this.

But let's assume that China does someday build enough boats and other resources to cross the Taiwan Strait, assault the island, and set up a beachhead. The arriving Chinese troops would still have to move inland, occupy territory, including the capital, Taipei (a modern metropolis of 2.6 million people), and fight off an armed resistance.

China's military is not well equipped to do this either, and its officers seem aware of that fact. According to the Pentagon report, the Chinese army's “media outlets have noted shortcomings in military training and education,” which have left operational commanders “inadequately prepared for modern warfare.” The media outlets itemize these shortcomings as the “Five Incapables”: some commanders cannot judge situations, deploy forces, understand the

intentions of higher authorities, make operational decisions in combat, or manage unexpected developments.

The Chinese military is only beginning to train in “combined arms” (coordinated fighting by two different types of units, e.g., infantry and artillery) or “joint operations” (fighting by two military branches, e.g., the army and the navy). Finally, except for a few brief skirmishes, China hasn’t fought any wars since 1979 (when a border battle with Vietnam ended in a draw), meaning that its current commanders and troops have no combat experience.

So where did Adm. Davidson come up with the idea that China will be set to invade Taiwan in the next six years? Bonnie Glaser, director of the Asia program at the German Marshall Fund, says he inferred too much from a recent goal, set by Chinese President Xi Jinping, to achieve “national rejuvenation” by 2027 (six years from now). That year “is the 100th anniversary of the People’s Liberation Army,” Glaser told me, referring to the official name of the Chinese military. There is “no evidence” of Xi or anyone else tying this date to a takeover of Taiwan.

M. Taylor Fravel, a China expert and director of M.I.T.’s Security Studies Program, agrees. “Those who say China can invade Taiwan conflate changed rhetoric with changed capability,” Fravel told me. “It’s a misreading of China’s emphasis on 2027 as a milestone for PLA modernization.”

Glaser and Fravel also note that, even if China improved and expanded its military to the point where it could invade Taiwan, that doesn’t mean it would actually do it. China has increased its global presence and influence in the past few years, through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—a string of loans and investments designed to lure other countries into China’s financial system and economic orbit—and a foreign policy that features (or at least attempts) pressure and intimidation. “Using force against Taiwan,” Glaser says, “would cause backlash from the international community”—not least from the United States, which has sold \$23 billion worth of arms to Taiwan since 2015 and has dispatched special forces to train Taiwan’s armed forces.

This doesn’t mean Taiwan is safe and secure. The subjugation of Hong Kong has shown that China can dominate a small island power without resorting to military force. China’s military strategy—which the Pentagon report describes as “active defense”—is designed to keep foreign military forces, especially U.S. forces, as far away as possible from China’s territory. China has done this in part by building artificial islands in the South China Sea—thus widening the area of what it regards as “Chinese sovereign territory”—and then turning the islands into military bases. It has also, in recent years, churned out a staggering number of warships, anti-ship missiles, and air-to-air missiles, as part of a strategy known as “A2/AD,” which stands for “anti-access / area-denial.” This could be seen as a purely defensive strategy—or as a way to keep U.S. military forces at bay, thus enabling the Chinese military to control vital sea lanes in the South China Sea or to pressure Taiwan into compliance with China’s desires.

Yes, Xi has declared the reabsorption of Taiwan into the People Republic of China’s sovereign territory as a long-term goal. However, Thomas Fingar, a China specialist, distinguished fellow at Stanford University, and former chairman of the National Intelligence Council, says that this is nothing new. “Every leader going back to Chou En-lai”—China’s first premier from 1949-76—“has expressed the goal of liberating Taiwan.”

Fingar is concerned about China’s recent military expansion, which at least theoretically could bring Beijing closer to this goal. However, he too thinks the risks of an outright invasion of Taiwan would be too great. “The U.S. and the allies should quietly agree that, if China mounts a blockade against Taiwan, no ship registered to China will be allowed into any port in the U.S. or allied countries,” Fingar says. “That’s 80 percent of China’s export economy.”*

Most worrisome to Fingar is China’s lack of transparency. U.S. officials, he says, have asked Chinese counterparts “why they’re doing all the things they’re doing, and they give us no answer.” This could compound misunderstandings and intensify tensions in a crisis. “Accidents could happen more easily, and I blame China for this,” he says.

However, Fingar, Glaser, and Fravel, as well as many other China hands, are also concerned that the overreaction to Adm. Davidson’s testimony might trigger new tensions. Some legislators are urging President Biden to drop the longstanding policy of “strategic ambiguity” and to declare that the U.S. will defend Taiwan against an invasion in the same way that it commits to defend the NATO allies from an armed attack. This would reverse the 42-year-old policy of the Taiwan Relations Act, which allows the U.S. to arm Taiwan without recognizing it as an independent nation.* (No country recognizes Taiwan as an independent nation, and Taiwan’s current president is very careful to stop short of asserting any such claim.) The Pentagon report states that Beijing views Taiwanese independence—or moves toward independence—as a cause for war. It is, in fact, one of the very few things that would spur China to initiate a war.

To adopt a policy of “strategic clarity”—which would mean to treat Taiwan as an independent nation—“would only push China into a corner,” Glaser says. “Xi would be severely weakened domestically if he accepted that. He would have to challenge it. Congressmen pushing for this don’t understand this. They don’t see that reacting this way to exaggerated assessments of China’s power and intentions will only make things worse.”