Voted Off the Island: Amending the Taiwan Relations Act

By Jonathan T. Helton

**Resolved: The United States federal government should considerably decrease its military commitments**

First a little background. Starting in the 1920s, a Communist rebel movement began developing in the countryside of China. It battled the main governing force of the Nationalists into the 1930s, when Japan invaded. They called an uneasy truce, then picked up their civil war again after World War 2 ended with the Japanese defeat in 1945.
The Communists won the civil war in 1949 and the defeated Nationalists fled to the island of Formosa, better known today as Taiwan. Both the Communist government on the mainland in Beijing (the “People’s Republic of China” PRC) and the Nationalist government in exile in Taiwan (the “Republic of China”) claimed to be the one true legitimate government of China. Pres. Nixon began diplomatic overtures to normalize US relations with Beijing, and Pres. Carter formally concluded the process by recognizing the mainland government as the government of China, instead of Taiwan.
Congress, worried that we would be abandoning a Cold War anti-communist ally, enacted the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979. The TRA guarantees the U.S. will sell Taiwan weapons and implies, without coming out and saying it, that the U.S. will protect Taiwan in a conflict. The goal was to prevent the mainland from forcibly absorbing or invading Taiwan to bring the island into its domain. However, today that commitment risks drawing the U.S. into war with the PRC —something that would be catastrophic for both countries and the world. This plan has the US drop the TRA.
There are three possible mutually exclusive things that could happen, all of which still support an AFF ballot. One, China might do nothing and continue hoping and trying to influence Taiwan to reunify peacefully. Two, China might invade but Taiwan’s defenses are strong enough on their own to scare them off. Three, China might invade and win because Taiwan is indefensible due to the overwhelming numbers and power of mainland China’s military. In case #1 or #2, the US military commitment isn’t needed. In case #3, if the US intervenes, it would probably end in nuclear war, or else the loss of Taiwan PLUS the loss of a lot of US military force for no benefit, if Taiwan is indefensible. China absorbing Taiwan without a nuclear war would be far better than them absorbing after a nuclear war.

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Voted Off the Island: Reforming the Taiwan Relations Act

“It’s a trap!” This iconic line from Admiral Ackbar from *Return of the Jedi* sums up the U.S. policy towards Taiwan quite well. Despite our noble intentions, we risk war with China over the small island of Taiwan. Such war would be devastating for everyone involved, which is why my partner and I are affirming that: The United States federal government should considerably decrease its military commitments.

OBSERVATION 1. INHERENCY, or the structure of the Status Quo.

FACT 1. The Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, also known as the “TRA”

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen 2019. “The Taiwan Relations Act at Forty and U.S.-Taiwan Relations” 2 Apr 2019 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/taiwan-relations-act-forty-and-us-taiwan-relations>

What the TRA also reflects is the United States’ commitment to our shared interests of peace, security, and stability in the Pacific. It has supported Taiwan’s development of the defense capabilities that we need in order to resist any form of coercion. And this commitment and support has been honored by successive administrations and the U.S. Congress. It featured prominently in March in 1996 when the Clinton administration sent two aircraft carriers to sail through the water near Taiwan to stop China’s attempt to disrupt Taiwan’s first direct presidential election. At that historic moment the U.S. stood with Taiwan, showing the world its commitment to our shared democratic values.

FACT 2. US commitment to the defense of Taiwan in both law and actions

Taijing Wu 2019 (journalist) Associated Press 30 Aug 2019 “A more assertive Taiwan as US arms sales increase” <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/08/30/a-more-assertive-taiwan-as-us-arms-sales-increase/>

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said Friday the island has been “aggressively promoting indigenous national defense” with help from U.S. arms sales that have raised Beijing’s ire. “Welocally build our submarines and fighter jets, and these are not just slogans,” Tsai said at an annual Armed Forces Day event in Taipei City. She also noted recent U.S. sales of M1A2 tanks and F-16Vs to Taiwan as proof that “our determination to defend ourselves also won support from the international society.” A blueprint for new submarines, submarine factory construction and a jet trainer prototype are all in the works, Tsai said. Taiwan is a democratically governed island that split from Communist Party-ruled mainland China amid civil war in 1949. Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its territory and maintains that "unification" is the goal. While the U.S. cut formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1979 to recognize Beijing, U.S. law requires Washington to ensure Taiwan has the means to defend itself.

 OBSERVATION 2. THE HARM. The TRA commitment carries a high risk of devastating war with China

A. Mainland China seriously wants to reunify with Taiwan, by force if necessary

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2018 (Carpenter is contributing editor to both the National Interest and American Conservative, serves on the editorial boards of Mediterranean Quarterly and the Journal of Strategic Studies, and is the author of more than 800 articles and policy studies. Carpenter received his Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from the University of Texas.) 20 February 2018 “Will the U.S. Go to War with China over Taiwan?” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/will-us-go-war-china-over-taiwan>

Chinese officials are hypersensitive about any Taiwanese trappings of independence, even though the island has never been under the PRC’s control. Australian scholar Andrew Tan aptly summarizes Beijing’s attitude: “For China, Taiwan represents unfinished business from the Chinese civil war and an emotionally charged nationalist issue that far outranks tensions in North Korea, the Senkaku Islands and the South China Sea. For a rising great power that is increasingly confident, assertive and nationalistic, the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland is its top, non‐​negotiable national priority.” Indeed, the PRC passed its Anti‐​Secession Law in 2005, emphasizing that China would use force if necessary to prevent any move by Taiwan toward formal independence.

B. US weapons discourage progress on peaceful reunification

Bobby Naderi 2019 (He is a journalist, current affairs commentator, documentary filmmaker and member of the Writers Guild of Great Britain.) 8 June 2019 “The U.S. should stop showing its flag in Taiwan Strait” <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e3459544d35457a6333566d54/index.html>

Sending more arms will foment insecurity and distrust. It won't encourage the political class in Taipei to sit down for talks with Beijing to find a solution to the long-drawn-out dispute over the legal and political statuses of the island.

C. US arms sales to Taiwan contribute to rising tensions with China

Bobby Naderi 2019 (He is a journalist, current affairs commentator, documentary filmmaker and member of the Writers Guild of Great Britain.) 8 June 2019 “The U.S. should stop showing its flag in Taiwan Strait” <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e3459544d35457a6333566d54/index.html>

The U.S. is therefore responsible for contributing to, rather than impeding, the militarization of the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Tensions will not go away as long as the U.S. continues to sell arms to Taiwan and roil the Chinese territories.

D. US / China tensions are increasing and coming to the brink of war

Kevin Rudd 2020. (former Prime Minister of Australia and President of the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York) 3 Aug 2020 “Beware the Guns of August—in Asia” <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-08-03/beware-guns-august-asia>

Unmoored from the strategic assumptions of the previous 50 years but without the anchor of any mutually agreed framework to replace them, the world now finds itself at the most dangerous moment in the relationship since the Taiwan Strait crises of the 1950s. The question now being asked, quietly but nervously, in capitals around the world is, where will this end? The once unthinkable outcome—actual armed conflict between the United States and China—now appears possible for the first time since the end of the Korean War. In other words, we are confronting the prospect of not just a new Cold War, but a hot one as well.

E. The risks of supporting Taiwan are massive: Global economic collapse and nuclear war with China

Prof. Hugh White 2015 (Professor of Strategic Studies in the School of International, Political & Strategic Studies at the Australian National Univ. Served as an intelligence analyst with the Office of National Assessments; from 1995 to 2000 he was Deputy Secretary for Strategy and Intelligence.) 5 May 2015 “Will America defend Taiwan?” <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/will-america-defend-taiwan>

US leaders must therefore ask what happens if Beijing does not back down as a crisis escalates. At what point would they back down instead? What would be the damage to US global leadership if Washington brought on a confrontation with China and then blinked first? What could happen if Washington didn't blink first? Is Taiwan's status quo worth a global economic collapse? It is worth a real risk of nuclear war with China?

OBSERVATION 3. We need our Plan, to be implemented by Congress and the President

1. Congress repeals the Taiwan Relations Act.
2. Enforcement and funding through existing agencies and existing budgets. Plan is purely legislative and establishes no new costs.
3. Plan takes effect 30 days after an Affirmative ballot
4. All Affirmative speeches may clarify.

OBSERVATION 4. THE ADVANTAGE. Dropping the TRA is the best hope for the long-term interests and security of the United States

A. Withdrawing from TRA is the best policy option for promoting US long-term interests

Eric Gomez 2016 (director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute. His research focuses on U.S. military strategy in East Asia, missile defense systems and their impact on strategic stability, and nuclear deterrence issues in East Asia. He has presented research on these topics at annual meetings of the International Studies Association and the American Political Science Association) 28 Sept 2016 “A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship” <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/costly-commitment-options-future-us-taiwan-defense-relationship>

The United States should no longer provide the military backstop for Taiwan’s de facto independence. The security commitment to Taiwan outlined in the TRA is a product of a different time, when the United States enjoyed clear military advantages over China, and Taiwan could be defended on the cheap. China’s growing military power strains the credibility of the American commitment. Policymakers in Washington could respond to this changing environment by restoring American military superiority, sustaining a minimum military advantage, or stepping down from the commitment. All of these options carry risks and negative consequences, but it is in the best long‐​term interest of the United States to step down from the commitment to Taiwan.

B. Dropping the TRA commitment is the prudent response to reduce the risk of nuclear war

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2019 (contributing editor to both the National Interest and American Conservative, serves on the editorial boards of Mediterranean Quarterly and the Journal of Strategic Studies. Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from University of Texas.) 8 June 2019 “Forget the U.S.-China Trade War: Is a Conflict Over Taiwan the Real Threat?” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/forget-us-china-trade-war-conflict-over-taiwan-real-threat>

Washington has a vague but very real commitment under the Taiwan Relations Act to protect the island’s security. Both Congress and the Trump administration seem to be drifting toward boosting the traditional level of U.S. support in response to Beijing’s escalating pressure on Taiwan. The danger is growing that the TRA’s paper security commitment may be put to a real‐​world test. U.S. leaders and the American people need to ask themselves whether they are really willing to risk war with a nuclear‐​armed power to protect Taiwan. The prudent answer clearly should be “no.”

C. The impact of war with China over Taiwan would be far worse than reunification

Prof. Hugh White 2015 (Professor of Strategic Studies in the School of International, Political & Strategic Studies at the Australian National University. He is a regular columnist for The Age and the Sydney Morning Herald. From 2001 to 2004 Professor White was the first Director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI). Before that he had served as an intelligence analyst with the Office of National Assessments, as a journalist with the Sydney Morning Herald, as a senior adviser on the staffs of Defence Minister Kim Beazley and Prime Minister Bob Hawke, and as a senior official in the Department of Defence, where from 1995 to 2000 he was Deputy Secretary for Strategy and Intelligence.) 15 April 2015 “The harsh reality that Taiwan faces” <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-harsh-reality-that-taiwan-faces>

Even more worryingly, this reality does not yet seem to have sunk in in Washington, where leaders still talk boldly about their willingness to stand by Taiwan without seriously considering what that might mean in practice. Any US effort to support Taiwan militarily against China would be almost certain to escalate into a full-scale US-China war and quite possibly a nuclear exchange. That would be a disaster for everyone, including, of course, the people of Taiwan itself - far worse than reunification, in fact.

2A Evidence: Taiwan Relations Act

DEFINITIONS / TOPICALITY

Considerably

Merriam-Webster Dictionary copyright 2020 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/considerably>

: large in extent or degree

Military

Merriam-Webster Dictionary copyright 2020 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/military>

: of or relating to soldiers, arms, or war

Commitment

Merriam-Webster Dictionary copyright 2020 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commitment>

**:**an agreement or pledge to do something in the future

U.S. defense relationship with Taiwan is a “commitment” – and it’s costly, dangerous, and wrong

Eric Gomez 2016 (director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute. His research focuses on U.S. military strategy in East Asia, missile defense systems and their impact on strategic stability, and nuclear deterrence issues in East Asia. He has presented research on these topics at annual meetings of the International Studies Association and the American Political Science) 28 Sept 2016 “A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship” <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/costly-commitment-options-future-us-taiwan-defense-relationship>

The U.S. defense relationship with Taiwan is a risky and costly commitment that has become increasingly difficult to sustain. Barry Posen of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology put it best when he wrote, “The U.S. commitment to Taiwan is simultaneously the most perilous and least strategically necessary commitment that the United States has today.” The United States can and should strive for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan dispute, but through means other than an implicit commitment to use military force to defend the island.

A/T “TRA is vague, and isn’t really a commitment” – It’s on the same level as NATO

Prof. Jerome A. Cohen 2019 (Professor of Law at New York University School of Law, Senior Fellow for Asia Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations) 8 Apr 2019 “The Taiwan Relations Act: Charting a Stable Course for the U.S. in Asia” <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/04/the-taiwan-relations-act-charting-a-stable-course-for-the-u-s-in-asia/>

The key was really the first function because, when the U.S. ended diplomatic relations with Taiwan, it affected the 1954 mutual defense treaty between the ROC and the United States. The abrogation of diplomatic relations meant an end to the defense treaty. The U.S. terminated the treaty with China’s agreement in an orderly way. The defense treaty had a provision like many treaties: If you wanted to withdraw, you could give one year’s notice that you were going to do so, and that is what the U.S. did. But what would substitute for the defense treaty? The answer, in part, was the Taiwan Relations Act, which was to provide comfort to Taiwan. Of course, the TRA was not formally a treaty, but only a law, and the language on defense cooperation is very vague, even by the standards of mutual defense treaties. In effect, it says to Beijing, “If you take non-peaceful steps, we will consider this a very grave threat to our security.” It doesn’t say, “And we will come to the defense of Taiwan.” But it leaves open this possibility and implies that the U.S. has the discretion to do so. The NATO agreement also has this kind of language, but people understand the context, and over time, vague words take on added weight. Forty years later, the Taiwan Relations Act is rightly regarded as having become very important.

INHERENCY

Recent $2.2 billion US/Taiwan arms deal

Taijing Wu 2019 (journalist) Associated Press 30 Aug 2019 “A more assertive Taiwan as US arms sales increase” <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/08/30/a-more-assertive-taiwan-as-us-arms-sales-increase/>

China fiercely opposes all arms sales to Taiwan but has specifically objected to advanced fighter jets such as the F-16V, whose Active Electronically Scanned Array, or AESA, radar is compatible with the F-35 stealth fighters operated by the U.S. military. President Donald Trump announced approval earlier this month of the sale of 66 F-16Vs in an $8 billion deal. The U.S. has also approved in recent months the sale of 108 M1A2 Abrams tanks and 250 Stinger missiles, valued at $2.2 billion.

More arms sales planned

Shannon Van Sant 2019 (journalist) 21 Aug 2019 “China Vows Sanctions On U.S. Firms For Arms Sales To Taiwan” NPR <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/21/753060405/china-vows-sanctions-on-u-s-firms-for-arms-sales-to-taiwan>

China is threatening sanctions on U.S. firms selling arms to Taiwan, after the U.S. government said it supported an $8 billion sale of fighter jets and other equipment to the island. Geng Shuang, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said China would impose sanctions if the arms sales go forward, according to Chinese state media. Geng also urged the U.S. to end military contact with Taiwan. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency released a statementTuesday that the U.S. State Department had approved a possible sale of 66 F-16 fighter jets and related equipment.

¾ of arms transferred to Taiwan came from the U.S.

Eleanor Albert 2020 (Her research interests are in the evolving nature of Chinese power and how it exerts its influence and builds relationships. Prior to her PhD, she worked as the Asia writer for the explanatory journalism arm of the Council on Foreign Relations.) 22 January 2020 “China-Taiwan Relations” <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-taiwan-relations>

In response, Taiwan continues to purchase weapons, primarily from the United States. Between 1979 and 2018, Taiwan ranked as the ninth largest recipient of arms globally. During the same period, the United States supplied more than three-quarters of Taiwan’s imported weapons, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s arms transfers database.

U.S. security “commitment” to Taiwan is strengthening

[Yu-Hua Chen](http://chl.anu.edu.au/our-people/details/yu-hua-chen) 2019 (Lecturer in the School of Politics and International Relations at the Australian National University, with particular expertise in Chinese foreign and security policy, international relations theories, and the history-security nexus in the Asia-Pacific region.) 8 August 2019 “What Brings the US and Taiwan Close Together?” <https://taiwaninsight.org/2019/08/08/what-brings-the-us-and-taiwan-close-together/>

Ten years have since passed and US-Taiwan relations are growing stronger and closer than ever. Many signs show that US-Taiwan ties have entered a new era wherein the US gradually treats Taiwan as an independent country and indispensable ally. For example, US officials and congress members now often publicly refer to Tsai Ing-wen as “President of Taiwan.” Moreover, US National Security Adviser John Bolton met his Taiwanese counterpart David Lee in Washington in May, a move unprecedented since the US severed its diplomatic recognition of the Republic of China on Taiwan in 1979. In the 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, Taiwan is listed as one of four “countries” upholding the rules-based international order where the US has a vital interest. The most telling evidence is these recent [two](http://www.jpolrisk.com/stay-the-course-on-china-an-open-letter-to-president-trump/?fbclid=IwAR3NgSzGyVkepaiipv3oF44-qingH5AyPpVB5FH3Zx-CqKGe9U-usuFIZlw) [open](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/making-china-a-us-enemy-is-counterproductive/2019/07/02/647d49d0-9bfa-11e9-b27f-ed2942f73d70_story.html?utm_term=.73d5fc4cb244) letters to Donald Trump. Despite the fundamental difference in how they propose the US address China’s increasingly assertive behaviour, neither of the letters touches the idea of lessening US-Taiwan relations. The trend that the US is gradually strengthening its security commitment to Taiwan is too obvious to ignore.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

US/China conflict over Taiwan would escalate and nuclear war is possible

Prof. Hugh White 2015 (Professor of Strategic Studies in the School of International, Political & Strategic Studies at the Australian National Univ. Served as an intelligence analyst with the Office of National Assessments; from 1995 to 2000 he was Deputy Secretary for Strategy and Intelligence.) 5 May 2015 “Will America defend Taiwan?” <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/will-america-defend-taiwan>

Militarily, America can no longer expect a swift and certain victory in a war over Taiwan. China's anti-access/area-denial capabilities would preclude direct US intervention unless those capabilities had first been degraded by a sustained and wide-ranging strike campaign against Chinese bases and forces. China would very likely respond to such a campaign with attacks on US and allied bases throughout Asia. The US has no evident means to cap the resulting escalation spiral, and no one could be sure it would stop below the nuclear threshold. The possibility of nuclear attacks on US cities would have to be considered.

Arms sales and commitments risk dragging the US into a broader war with China

Enea Gjoza 2019 (fellow at Defense Priorities and a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.) 11 June 2019 “The US Wants to Sell Taiwan the Wrong Weapons” <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/06/us-wants-sell-taiwan-wrong-weapons/157630/?oref=d1-related-article>

The United States is in negotiations to sell Taiwan $2 billion in weapons, a move sure to upset Beijing. Ensuring that Taiwan can credibly deter an invasion on its own is a worthy goal. Given the existing, if ambiguous, U.S. security commitment to the ROC, a conflict in the Taiwan Strait risks drawing the United States into a broader war with China. However, this weapons package fails to materially improve Taiwan’s defenses and continues to saddle the United States with most of the (putative) defensive burden. A better approach is to push Taiwan to acquire more countermeasures to China’s naval and air forces, thereby increasing the cost of a Chinese invasion.

A war over Taiwan is a poor tradeoff

Enea Gjoza 2019 (fellow at Defense Priorities and a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.) 11 June 2019 “The US Wants to Sell Taiwan the Wrong Weapons” <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/06/us-wants-sell-taiwan-wrong-weapons/157630/?oref=d1-related-article>

U.S. efforts to provide Taiwan with weaponry have long hinged on a faulty strategy: that Taiwan only needs to be strong enough to hold out before the United States intervenes on its behalf. As China’s capabilities grow, a scenario in which America fights a great power war over Taiwan looks like an increasingly poor tradeoff.

U.S.-China relationship at a critical point

Michael D. Swaine 2019 (senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) 16 Jan 2019 "A Relationship Under Extreme Duress: U.S.-China Relations at a Crossroads" <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/01/16/relationship-under-extreme-duress-u.s.-china-relations-at-crossroads-pub-78159>

The U.S.-China relationship is confronting its most daunting challenge in the forty years since the two countries established diplomatic ties. Current trends portend steadily worsening relations over the long term, with increasingly adverse consequences for all actors involved. Specifically, Beijing and Washington are transitioning from a sometimes contentious yet mutually beneficial relationship to an increasingly antagonistic, mutually destructive set of interactions. The often positive and optimistic forces, interests, and beliefs that sustained bilateral ties for decades are giving way to undue pessimism, hostility, and a zero-sum mindset in almost every area of engagement. Both sides bear responsibility for this pervasive deterioration, but at present the United States under President Donald Trump is unquestionably contributing most publicly to it, primarily through its ill-considered rhetorical and other overreactions to perceived Chinese misbehavior. While nothing about this degenerating relationship is inevitable (despite the uninformed alarmist predictions of doomsayers on both sides), the threat of an even more precipitous and dangerous decline in the relationship is very real and demands serious corrective measures to avert a potential catastrophe.

Confrontations are increasing: there’s high risk of a shooting war between the US and China over Taiwan

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2019 (Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from Univ of Texas.) 8 June 2019 “Forget the U.S.-China Trade War: Is a Conflict Over Taiwan the Real Threat?” (brackets added) <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/forget-us-china-trade-war-conflict-over-taiwan-real-threat>

While Americans are focused on the ongoing trade war between the United States and China, the danger is growing of an actual shooting war that could involve Taiwan. The rhetoric coming out of both Beijing and Taipei is increasingly confrontational and shrill. Taiwan’s governing party is firmly committed to resisting the PRC’s pressure for unification; indeed, incumbent president Tsai Ing‐​wen is being challenged by an even more hardline, pro‐​independence faction within the DPP [Democratic Progressive Party]. At the same time, Chinese leaders seem intent on pushing their reunification agenda with greater insistence and urgency.

China has more at stake, so they are unlikely to back down in a confrontation over Taiwan

Prof. Hugh White 2015 ((Professor of Strategic Studies in the School of International, Political & Strategic Studies at the Australian National Univ. Served as an intelligence analyst with the Office of National Assessments; from 1995 to 2000 he was Deputy Secretary for Strategy and Intelligence.) 5 May 2015 “Will America defend Taiwan?” <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/will-america-defend-taiwan>

These new realities of power mean that today a US-China conflict would impose equal risks and costs on both sides. And where costs and risks are equal, the advantage lies with those who have more at stake, and hence greater resolve. China's leaders today seem to think they hold this advantage, and they are probably right. It is therefore a big mistake to keep assuming, as many people seem to do, that China would be sure to back off before a crisis over Taiwan became a conflict.

A/T “Taiwan and China are reconciling” – But that’s old news. It started changing in 2014

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2018 (Carpenter is contributing editor to both the National Interest and American Conservative, serves on the editorial boards of Mediterranean Quarterly and the Journal of Strategic Studies, and is the author of more than 800 articles and policy studies. Carpenter received his Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from the University of Texas.) 20 February 2018 “Will the U.S. Go to War with China over Taiwan?” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/will-us-go-war-china-over-taiwan>

Bilateral tensions receded in 2008 when Taiwanese voters elected Kuomintang Party (KMT) leader Ma Ying‐​jeou as president. Ma pursued a policy of détente and worked assiduously to increase economic ties with the mainland. Bilateral trade exploded and large numbers of Chinese tourists came to the island for the first time, facilitated by the establishment of commercial airline routes. U.S. officials breathed a sigh of relief, and Chinese leaders exuded confidence that the web of economic ties would cause pro‐​independence sentiment in Taiwan to recede and eventually lead to the island’s reunification with the mainland. Instead, there was a backlash. Taiwanese sentiment for reunification was—and remains—exceedingly low. Growing worries that the trade links to the PRC were undermining Taiwan’s autonomy, combined with mounting public anger at the KMT’s pervasive corruption, led to the so‐​called Sunflower Movement of students and civic leaders, which erupted into [widespread protests](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1740013/one-year-impact-sunflower-movement-protests-taiwan-continue-blossom) and demonstrations against Ma’s government in 2014 and 2015.

Chinese General: Chinese military will fight at all costs to prevent Taiwan independence

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2019 (Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from the University of Texas.) 8 June 2019 “Forget the U.S.-China Trade War: Is a Conflict Over Taiwan the Real Threat?” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/forget-us-china-trade-war-conflict-over-taiwan-real-threat> (brackets added)

Speaking on June 1 at the Shangri‐​La Dialogue, an annual multilateral conference on Pacific security issues, [PRC Minister of National Defense, General] Wei [warned](http://chinascope.org/archives/18692) against efforts either in Taiwan or foreign countries to thwart China’s goal of reunification. Moreover, “any underestimation of the PLA’s resolve and will is extremely dangerous.” Wei added ominously that, “If anyone dares to split Taiwan from China, the Chinese military will have no choice but to fight at [all costs, at all costs](https://news.yahoo.com/taiwan-lashes-back-chinese-defense-ministers-threats-045141553.html), (sic.) for national unity. If the PLA cannot even safeguard the unity of our motherland, what do we need it for?”

Pretending that China is just bluffing is dangerous

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2019 (Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from the University of Texas.) 18 June 2019 “Washington Needs to Take Seriously Beijing’s Growing Determination About Taiwan” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/washington-needs-take-seriously-beijings-growing-determination-about-taiwan>

U.S leaders and the American people need to ask themselves if they are really willing to risk a war with China to defend Taiwan’s de facto independence. Continued complacency about Beijing’s “real” intentions, along with making empty symbolic gestures like the Taiwan Assurance Act is not a realistic strategy. Americans risk a tragic outcome if they continue to embrace the comforting illusion that Chinese leaders probably are just bluffing and posturing.

Taiwan will not peacefully reunify with the Mainland

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2019 (Carpenter is contributing editor to both the National Interest and American Conservative, serves on the editorial boards of Mediterranean Quarterly and the Journal of Strategic Studies, and is the author of more than 800 articles and policy studies. Carpenter received his Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from the University of Texas.) 8 June 2019 “Forget the U.S.-China Trade War: Is a Conflict Over Taiwan the Real Threat?” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/forget-us-china-trade-war-conflict-over-taiwan-real-threat>

The Mainland Affairs Council responded with equally harsh and uncompromising language. In a statement issued the following day, the council reasserted that Taiwan has never been a part of the PRC and would never accept Beijing’s control or threats. It accused China not only of “challenging international norms and order,” but added the gratuitous slap that Beijing’s claim to seek peaceful development was “a lie of the ages.” Lest anyone not fully grasp the extent of Taipei’s hostility toward the PRC, the statement went on: “We need to remind the public that the Chinese Communist Party is practicing anti‐​democracy, anti‐​peace between the two sides of the strait and further resorting to war. This is the main cause of the tension in the Taiwan Strait and the region, and it is the source of danger and provocation against peace and stability.”

Animosity from Taiwan and China’s military buildups and threats are increasing tensions

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2019 (Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from the University of Texas.) 8 June 2019 “Forget the U.S.-China Trade War: Is a Conflict Over Taiwan the Real Threat?” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/forget-us-china-trade-war-conflict-over-taiwan-real-threat>

The vitriolic exchange constituted a worrisome escalation of the animosity between Taipei and Beijing that has been roiling for the past three years. The victory of the pro‐​independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan’s 2016 elections dashed any hopes Chinese leaders had that the burgeoning economic ties with the mainland would translate gradually into increased Taiwanese popular support for political reunification. Anger at that strategy’s failure led Beijing to revive a campaign to increase Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation by poaching the few small nations that still maintain formal relations with Taipei. The PRC’s menacing military activities also increased. Chinese war games in and around the Taiwan Strait have soared since 2016. The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency’s 2019 report to Congress also concludes that Beijing is building up its ground, air, and naval forces to achieve a more robust capability to invade Taiwan.

China could inflict heavy losses on the U.S. navy

Dr. Ted Galen Carpenter 2019 (Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from the University of Texas.) 18 June 2019 “Washington Needs to Take Seriously Beijing’s Growing Determination About Taiwan” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/washington-needs-take-seriously-beijings-growing-determination-about-taiwan>

Even more worrisome, the PRC’s menacing military activities have also increased dramatically. Chinese war games in and around the Taiwan Strait have soared since 2016. The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency’s 2019 report to Congress also warns that Beijing is building up its ground, air, and naval forces to achieve a [more robust capability](https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/us-intelligence-china-building-its-capability-invade-taiwan-56857) to invade Taiwan. One key element of that buildup has been the development of sophisticated anti‐​ship missiles and other [“access denial” systems](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/29/world/asia/china-navy-aircraft-carrier-pacific.html) that would put U.S. aircraft carriers and other assets at increased risk if the United States attempted to intervene militarily to prevent a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

Impact: War with China causes cataclysmic damage

Michael D. Swaine 2019 (senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) 16 Jan 2019 "A Relationship Under Extreme Duress: U.S.-China Relations at a Crossroads" <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/01/16/relationship-under-extreme-duress-u.s.-china-relations-at-crossroads-pub-78159>

The huge potential risks and dangers inherent in the current situation are compounded by the fact that the United States is more insecure, less confident, more internally divided, and more dependent on the world now than it was during the height of the Cold War. As a result, in a new Cold War, a stronger China would be more likely to overestimate its ability to outmaneuver and pressure the United States. By the same token, a more insecure yet still very strong Washington could prove more susceptible to overreaction than it was in the face of Soviet Cold War threats. Taken together, these factors indicate that efforts by either or both sides to isolate or undermine the other in the spirit of the Cold War of the 1950s and early 1960s will produce major dangers for both countries and other nations. For that reason, many other capitals would resist attempts by Washington or Beijing to compel them to choose sides in a zero-sum struggle for dominance. The resulting disruption would severely undermine the world economy, cripple global and regional cooperation on many issues, and impel some nations to devote more resources to military defense instead of economic development. The net result of all this would be the increased likelihood of instability and crisis within nations, within regions, and ultimately across the globe.

A/T “Strategic ambiguity” – At this point, it’s failing – risks outweigh the benefits

Prof. Michael Hunzeker and Mark Christopher 2020 (Hunzeker - assistant professor at George Mason University’s Schar School of Policy and Government. He is also the associate director of the Center for Security Policy Studies. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 2000–06 and has Ph.D., M.P.A., and M.A. from Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School. Christopher is a fellow with the Truman National Security Project) 24 February 2020 “It’s Time to Talk About Taiwan” <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/02/its-time-talk-about-taiwan/163291/>

Collectively, these trend lines suggest that strategic ambiguity’s costs and risks now outweigh its benefits. Perhaps ambiguity still deters Taipei from pursuing independence. But Chinese military power alone is already sufficient to impose restraint on Taiwan. It is also true that strategic ambiguity affords the United States options in a crisis. Yet the logic of deterrence tells us that keeping one foot out the door does not deter your adversaries—it emboldens them.

A/T “Strategic ambiguity” – It enables Chinese aggression, makes everything worse

Prof. Michael Hunzeker and Mark Christopher 2020 (Hunzeker - assistant professor at George Mason University’s Schar School of Policy and Government. He is also the associate director of the Center for Security Policy Studies. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 2000–06 and has Ph.D., M.P.A., and M.A. from Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School. Christopher is a fellow with the Truman National Security Project) 24 February 2020 “It’s Time to Talk About Taiwan” <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/02/its-time-talk-about-taiwan/163291/>

U.S. ambiguity already seems to be encouraging Chinese assertiveness and aggression toward Taiwan. Failing to clarify the true depth of Washington’s commitment—or lack thereof—increases the risk of a war that both sides could have avoided had one side (the United States) not misrepresented its true resolve.

DISADVANTAGE RESPONSES

A/T “US arms sales help Taiwan/China negotiations” – Arms sales don’t motivate Taiwan towards negotiations

Richard C. Bush III 2014. (Director, Center for East Asia Policy Studies and Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, John L. Thornton China Center, Brookings Institution) 14 Jan 2014 Thoughts on U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan http://www.brookings.edu/research/speeches/2014/01/14-us-arms-sales-taiwan-bush

My third point is to question the very premise of the PRC logic that created the linkage between U.S. arms sales, Taiwan’s willingness to negotiate, and whether China need to use force to fulfill its goals. Obviously, whether Taipei is willing to negotiate with Beijing is a function of its confidence that those negotiations won’t hurt Taiwan’s fundamental interests. Precisely because Beijing reserves the right to use force, the greater Taiwan’s ability to deter, the more confidence it will have to negotiate. And there is plenty of evidence that there is a weak correlation at best between U.S. arms sales and Taipei’s willingness to negotiate with Beijing. Just look at the last five years.

A/T “China takes over Taiwan without US support” – China can take over Taiwan even WITH U.S. support, they’re just waiting for the right time

Kevin Rudd 2020. (former Prime Minister of Australia and President of the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York) 3 Aug 2020 “Beware the Guns of August—in Asia” <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-08-03/beware-guns-august-asia>

Although both Chinese and American war-gaming exercises suggest that China would prevail in any major conflict in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing remains cautious, seeking to avoid unnecessary political or strategic risk. After all, to fail in such an attempt, or to succeed at great cost, would potentially end Xi’s leadership and undermine the party’s legitimacy. Accordingly, any Chinese military push against Taiwan is more likely to come later in the 2020s, when Beijing thinks the military balance will have shifted even further in its favor—enough to effectively deter the United States and perhaps cause Taiwan to capitulate without a fight.

A/T “Chinese aggression” – The U.S. would risk substantial losses in a battle with China over Taiwan

Eric Gomez 2016 (director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute. His research focuses on U.S. military strategy in East Asia, missile defense systems and their impact on strategic stability, and nuclear deterrence issues in East Asia. He has presented research on these topics at annual meetings of the International Studies Association and the American Political Science Association.) 28 September 2016 “A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship” <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/costly-commitment-options-future-us-taiwan-defense-relationship>

Since China enjoys an advantage in the balance of interests, the credibility of the U.S. commitment rests on American military power. According to Press’s model, if the United States can carry out its threat to intervene with relatively low costs, then the threat is credible. When the TRA was passed in 1979, the United States enjoyed a clear advantage over a militarily weak China. That is no longer the case. Several recently published assessments of a U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan have sobering conclusions: America’s lead is shrinking, victory is less certain, and the damage inflicted on the U.S. military would be substantial. In China’s Military Power, Roger Cliff of the Atlantic Council writes, “Although China’s leadership could not be confident that an invasion of Taiwan in 2020 would succeed, it is nonetheless possible that it could succeed.… Even a failed attempt, moreover, would likely be extremely costly to the United States and Taiwan.” The RAND Corporation reached a similar conclusion: “At a minimum, the U.S. military would have to mount a substantial effort—certainly much more so than in 1996—if it hoped to prevail, and losses to U.S. forces would likely be heavy.” It is impossible to determine exactly how many American ships, aircraft, and lives would be lost to defend Taiwan from a PLA attack. But given the improved quality of PLA weapons systems and training exercises, it is safe to assume that the U.S. military would have to cope with losses that it has not experienced in decades.

A/T “Chinese Aggression” – Turn: Dropping the TRA would motivate Taiwan to improve its own defenses enough to block China

Eric Gomez 2016 (He is director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute. His research focuses on U.S. military strategy in East Asia, missile defense systems and their impact on strategic stability, and nuclear deterrence issues in East Asia. He has presented research on these topics at annual meetings of the International Studies Association and the American Political Science Association) 28 September 2016 “A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship” <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/costly-commitment-options-future-us-taiwan-defense-relationship>

Without a U.S. commitment, Taiwan would have to improve its self‐​defense capability to deter an attack by China and fight off the PLA if deterrence failed. Taiwan does face an unfavorable balance of power vis‐​à‐​vis China, but this does not doom Taiwan to military defeat. In fact, research by Ivan Arreguín‐​Toft of Boston University indicates that large, powerful actors (such as China) have lost wars against weaker actors “with increasing frequency over time.” However, in order to have the greatest chance of success, the weaker side must have the right military strategy. A head‐​on, symmetric fight with the PLA would likely end in disaster for Taiwan, but Taiwan could successfully deny the PLA from achieving its strategic objectives through the same kind of asymmetric strategy that China uses to make it difficult for the United States to defend Taiwan. A military strategy emphasizing mobility, concealment, and area denial would both raise the costs of war for China and be sustainable, given Taiwan’s limited means.

A/T “Chinese Aggression” – Arms sales won’t help. US weapons are symbolic, not actually doing anything

Eric Gomez 2016 (He is director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute. His research focuses on U.S. military strategy in East Asia, missile defense systems and their impact on strategic stability, and nuclear deterrence issues in East Asia. He has presented research on these topics at annual meetings of the International Studies Association and the American Political Science Association) 28 September 2016 “A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship” <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/costly-commitment-options-future-us-taiwan-defense-relationship>

Stepping down from the U.S. defense commitment would likely involve reductions in U.S. arms sales. Reductions in the size, quantity, and frequency of arms sales would likely precede any reductions to the defense commitment because arms sales are a measurable signal of American support for Taiwan. Lyle J. Goldstein of the U.S. Naval War College points out, “Arms sales have for some time taken on a purely symbolic meaning.” This implies that the negative effects of reducing arms sales would be relatively small, since China’s extant military advantages are not being offset by U.S. weaponry.

A/T “Chinese aggression” – China’s reputation would take a major hit if it invaded Taiwan + it could lose out on other territorial interests

Eric Gomez 2016 (He is director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute. His research focuses on U.S. military strategy in East Asia, missile defense systems and their impact on strategic stability, and nuclear deterrence issues in East Asia. He has presented research on these topics at annual meetings of the International Studies Association) 28 September 2016 “A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship” <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/costly-commitment-options-future-us-taiwan-defense-relationship>

One common argument made by opponents of stepping down from the commitment is that it is the only thing preventing China from attacking Taiwan. This argument ignores several important factors that make the use of force unattractive for Beijing. First, China’s reputation and standing in East Asia would be seriously damaged. Other countries in East Asia would harshly criticize China’s use of force, and would likely take steps to defend themselves. For example, countries involved in territorial disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea have responded to Chinese aggressiveness by improving their military power and pushing back politically and diplomatically.61 China’s reputational costs for attacking Taiwan would be very high. Additionally, any military operation against Taiwan would tie up a great deal of resources. Other states could take advantage of a Taiwan‐​focused Beijing to push back against other Chinese territorial claims.

A/T “Chinese occupation” – Occupying Taiwan would be a major challenge

Mike Sweeney 2019 (He is a fellow at Defense Priorities. He spent thirteen years as think tank analyst in Washington, DC, where he focused on U.S. foreign policy and defense planning, undertaking research and studies, including for the Department of Defense.) April 2019 “Could America Lose a War Well?” <https://smallwarsjournal.com/index.php/jrnl/art/could-america-lose-war-well>

In fact, it’s worth considering whether victory in a Taiwan or Baltic scenario would truly improve either China or Russia’s standing in the international system. Operational success could be short-lived as the costs of absorbing those territories begin to accrue. There is every reason to believe that Chinese and Russian forces would each be treated with open hostility. In 2018, a survey by Taipei’s Chengchi University found that almost [a third of the Taiwanese population](https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/are-taiwans-citizens-willing-to-fight-against-china/) would accept significant losses (over 50,000 dead) in a battle to keep their island free. Large numbers of Baltic citizens have also expressed a willingness to resist an outside aggressor, including [by taking up arms](https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/total-defense-how-the-baltic-states-are-integrating-citizenry-into-their-national-security-). Even the Russophone communities in Estonia and Latvia are hardly partisans-in-waiting. Despite some problems with integration, they still [see their economic prospects](https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/jobs.2015.1.issue-2/jobs-2016-0023/jobs-2016-0023.pdf) as far better under their current situation.

A/T “Step up U.S. commitment” – Damages relations with China, which hurts US interests

Eric Gomez 2016 (director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute. His research focuses on U.S. military strategy in East Asia, missile defense systems and their impact on strategic stability, and nuclear deterrence issues in East Asia. He has presented research on these topics at annual meetings of the International Studies Association and the American Political Science Association.) 28 Sept 2016 “A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship” <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/costly-commitment-options-future-us-taiwan-defense-relationship>

The most important negative consequence of restoring U.S. military superiority is the severe damage that would be done to U.S.-China relations. China and the United States do not see eye‐​to‐​eye on many issues, but this does not make China an outright adversary. Chinese cyber espionage against American companies, the rise of alternative development institutions led by Beijing, and island‐​building in the South China Sea are of great concern to policymakers in Washington. However, U.S.-Chinese cooperation on other pressing issues, especially environmental concerns and punishing North Korea after its recent nuclear tests, has supported U.S. goals. China is certainly not a friend or ally of the United States, but treating it as an enemy that needs to be contained is unwise. Restoring U.S. military superiority would set back much of the progress made in U.S.-China relations.

A/T “Alienates U.S. allies” – failing to defend Taiwan wouldn’t hurt US alliances elsewhere

Note: This author was discussing if the U.S. fought China or Russia and lost, but the rationale still applies

Mike Sweeney 2019 (He is a fellow at Defense Priorities. He spent thirteen years as think tank analyst in Washington, DC, where he focused on U.S. foreign policy and defense planning, undertaking research and studies, including for the Department of Defense.) April 2019 “Could America Lose a War Well?” <https://smallwarsjournal.com/index.php/jrnl/art/could-america-lose-war-well>

Likewise, I am unconvinced that US failure to successfully defend either Taiwan or the Baltics would undermine the strength of its alliances elsewhere in Asia or Europe. If anything, by openly attacking their neighbors, China and Russia are more likely to make other regional states balance against them by allying more tightly with the United States. To the extent NATO’s constituent members have raised individual defense spending in recent years, it may have had more to do with the annexation of Crimea than American brow-beating. Is Vladimir Putin truly content that his revanchist projects have led to NATO’s rotating Enhanced Forward Presence (or EFP) deployments in the Baltics or to realistic discussions about permanently basing US forces in Poland? A passive, non-aggressive Russia would probably do more to undermine alliance cohesion than what we’re experiencing now. The current rapprochement in US-Philippines relations can similarly be attributed to Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea.

A/T “Alienates U.S. allies” – No allies would support us in a war with China over Taiwan

Prof. Hugh White 2015 (Professor of Strategic Studies in the School of International, Political & Strategic Studies at the Australian National Univ. Served as an intelligence analyst with the Office of National Assessments; from 1995 to 2000 he was Deputy Secretary for Strategy and Intelligence.) 5 May 2015 “Will America defend Taiwan?” <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/will-america-defend-taiwan>

What about America's allies and friends in Asia? Wouldn't they help America defend Taiwan, if only because they are so worried themselves about China? Many Americans seem to assume they would. But even Australia, America's most reliable ally in Asia, is uncertain about this. And if Australia is uncertain, it is pure wishful thinking to expect the likes of India, Singapore, Vietnam or even the Philippines to offer anything more than mild diplomatic support to America over Taiwan.

A/T “Alienates U.S. allies” –No country would support the US and risk its relations with China for Taiwan’s sake

Prof. Hugh White 2015 ( Professor of Strategic Studies in the School of International, Political & Strategic Studies at the Australian National Univ. Served as an intelligence analyst with the Office of National Assessments; from 1995 to 2000 he was Deputy Secretary for Strategy and Intelligence.) 15 April 2015 “The harsh reality that Taiwan faces” <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-harsh-reality-that-taiwan-faces>

No one visiting Taipei can fail to be impressed by what the Taiwanese have achieved in recent decades, not just economically but also politically, socially and culturally. But the harsh reality is that no country is going to sacrifice its relations with China in order to help Taiwan preserve the status quo. China is simply too important economically, and too powerful militarily, for anyone to confront it on Taiwan's behalf, especially when everyone knows how determined China is to achieve reunification eventually.

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