

## Victory Denial Deterrence and a “Porcupine Strategy” for Taiwan

### Introduction

Deterring China from taking action to end Taiwanese autonomy and bring the island under Beijing’s political control requires a strategy that focuses on a broad victory denial approach to deterrence. While China seeks to use multiple means of aggression—including asymmetric “gray zone” tactics and the threat of kinetic military force—to bend Taipei to its will and eliminate the reality of a free and democratic Taiwan, a successful victory denial deterrent must make the costs to Beijing of military aggression outweigh the anticipated cost of tolerating an autonomous Taiwan. As discussed at length above, this is an unprecedented deterrence challenge given contemporary deterrence conditions.

If China expects that a military assault on Taiwan will be relatively quick and easy, the prospect of deterring an attack may be remote. Therefore, it is critically important for Taiwan—with the help of the United States and like-minded partners—to bolster its own self-defense capabilities such that the island becomes “indigestible” and that any military action taken by China will result in a prolonged and costly endeavor—one that might lead to internal dissent and call into question the legitimacy of the ruling Communist Party.

Denying China any anticipation of an easy *fait accompli* is a necessary but insufficient part of a broad victory denial deterrence strategy. Such a deterrence strategy must deny China confidence that its threatened or actual escalation of a local conflict could salvage a failing or stalemated regional attack. The deterrence goal is to create the conditions, locally and more broadly, in which China should logically be deterred at each threshold. Precluding the expectation of a rapid *fait accompli* is the first, local threshold. This is the initial basis for a victory denial deterrence strategy, and it requires an approach to deterrence that integrates multiple potential levers of U.S. power—military, economic, and diplomatic. The requirements for this deterrence goal and strategy are not limited to U.S. and Taiwanese efforts; greater Western collaboration in the military, economic and diplomatic spheres is essential to creating the deterrence conditions in which China’s leadership calculates that continued autonomy for Taiwan, short of statehood, is a more tolerable option than a forceful move to end that autonomy.

Making Taiwan “indigestible” has been referred to as a “porcupine strategy.” It requires significant changes in Taiwan’s defensive approach that include reforming its acquisition policy to focus on procurement of the kinds of capabilities most useful to defending against and defeating a Chinese invasion of the island; adapting the organizational structure of its armed forces to be more resilient against potential Chinese tactics; and revising its doctrinal approach to provide for a comprehensive defense in depth of the island that acknowledges the prospect that a Chinese assault will likely be multifaceted, involving traditional kinetic and non-kinetic asymmetric means.



## The Correlation of Forces

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA)<sup>1</sup> is vastly superior in numbers, equipment, and resources than the armed forces of the Republic of China on Taiwan. Indeed, Taiwan's Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng has stated that China will be capable of launching a "full scale" invasion by 2025.<sup>2</sup> Many experts, including most of those interviewed for this study, agree that successfully defending the island against a potential Chinese assault is likely to be extremely difficult.<sup>3</sup>

To strengthen a victory denial approach to deterrence, Taiwan needs to boost its defenses in ways that would make invasion extremely painful and costly for Beijing. This approach—a "porcupine strategy"—would find Taiwan "indigestible" should Beijing attempt to take the island through the use of military force.<sup>4</sup>

One analyst has described this strategy as:

An approach that seeks to exploit Taiwan's geographic and innovative advantages to create a painfully costly target for Beijing to seek to subdue. This approach moves Taiwan away from seeking to assert sea control, air superiority, and long-range strike capability toward an emphasis on preventing China's ability to occupy Taiwan with military force. In this concept, Taiwan forces would concentrate the battlefield on their geographic advantages by attacking invading forces at their points of maximum vulnerability near Taiwan's shores, rather than seeking to engage forces on the mainland or in the Taiwan Strait.<sup>5</sup>

As one Taiwanese parliamentarian explained, "We have to let Xi Jinping and the Chinese government understand: If they choose some military way to invade Taiwan, the cost will be so high that they can't afford it."<sup>6</sup> This is characterized as a deterrence "strategy of denial," that would seek to deny China the expectation of seizing or holding Taiwanese territory.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> As used here, the term "PLA" consists of the combined military forces of the Army (PLAA), Navy (PLAN), and Air Force (PLAAF).

<sup>2</sup> Ben Blanchard, "Taiwan won't start a war with China, defence minister says," *Reuters*, October 14, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/taiwan-defence-minister-says-china-will-have-ability-mount-full-scale-invasion-2021-10-06/>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, "Taiwan's army 'ill-prepared' for potential Chinese attack," *Deutsche Welle*, April 5, 2021, available at <https://www.dw.com/en/taiwans-army-ill-prepared-for-potential-chinese-attack/a-57102659>. Also see Ian Easton, "Why a Taiwan Invasion Would Look Nothing Like D-Day," *The Diplomat*, May 26, 2021, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/why-a-taiwan-invasion-would-look-nothing-like-d-day/>.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, "China's might is forcing Taiwan to rethink its military strategy," *The Economist*, January 24, 2019, available at <https://www.economist.com/asia/2019/01/26/chinas-might-is-forcing-taiwan-to-rethink-its-military-strategy>. Also see Iain Marlow, "To deter China, refined 'porcupine strategy' may be more crucial to Taiwan than high-profile arms," *The Japan Times*, January 16, 2020, available at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/01/16/asia-pacific/f-16s-trump-taiwan-looks-inward-deter-china-weighs-porcupine-strategy/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ryan Hass, "Taiwan's leaders need to coalesce around a defense concept," *Taipei Times*, November 1, 2021, available at <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2021/11/01/2003767097>.

<sup>6</sup> Marlow, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> This "denial" strategy is discussed by Elbridge Colby in *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021). The elements of such a strategy are also discussed in detail in Christopher A. Ford, *Defending Taiwan: Defense and Deterrence, Occasional Paper*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2022), available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Vol.-2-No.-2-Ford.pdf>. This paper can also be found at Appendix D of this study.

In extensive interviews for this study, subject matter experts outlined elements of a so-called “porcupine strategy.” The potential deterrent effect of a serious and manifest Taiwanese commitment to improving its defenses, and thereby making a CCP military action costly and time-consuming, could contribute to a victory denial deterrence strategy. The goal would be to compel China’s leaders to calculate that a military attempt to unify the island with the mainland would be prolonged and painful. As one U.S. defense official stated, “Without question, bolstering Taiwan’s self-defenses is an urgent task and an essential feature of deterrence.”<sup>8</sup> The deterrent effect of such actions would be strengthened when coupled with a clear and credible U.S. commitment to Taiwan’s defense. Nevertheless, given the local correlation of military forces favoring China, and China’s growing assertiveness both regionally and internationally, achieving a credible denial strategy in this fashion will be a challenge.

Implementing a “porcupine strategy” to make Taiwan “indigestible” would appear to require significant changes to Taipei’s current military practice and posture. Given the current political, cultural, economic, and social dynamics on the island, many of these changes may be difficult to implement. Above all, Taiwan must assume a greater burden of responsibility for its own defense, and in a way that does not suggest to either friends or adversaries a lack of resolve on the part of the United States (and possibly others) to come to Taiwan’s defense if attacked.

### **Making Taiwan “Indigestible”**

An amphibious assault against Taiwan would not likely be easy, quick, or without considerable risk. As the U.S. Department of Defense has noted:

Large-scale amphibious invasion is one of the most complicated and difficult military operations, requiring air and maritime superiority, the rapid buildup and sustainment of supplies onshore, and uninterrupted support. An attempt to invade Taiwan would likely strain PRC’s armed forces and invite international intervention. These stresses, combined with the PRC’s combat force attrition and the complexity of urban warfare and counterinsurgency, even assuming a successful landing and breakout, make an amphibious invasion of Taiwan a significant political and military risk for Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>9</sup>

Experts interviewed for this study suggested that to bolster Taiwan’s ability to resist military aggression, the Taiwanese military must focus its acquisition priorities on equipment and capabilities that can be used to complicate Beijing’s calculus in seeking a rapid military victory. The procurement from the United States of expensive, high-end systems like fighter aircraft is seen by some as a symbolic demonstration of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Statement by Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs, cited in Michael Martina and David Brunnstrom, “U.S. defense official says boosting Taiwan’s defenses an ‘urgent task,’” *Reuters*, December 8, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/senior-us-defense-official-says-boosting-taiwans-defenses-is-an-urgent-task-2021-12-08/>.

<sup>9</sup> See Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2021*, November 3, 2021, p. 117, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>.

government's commitment to protect the population and as necessary to police its own airspace—especially in light of extensive incursions by Chinese aircraft across the midline of the Taiwan Strait and circumnavigation of the island. However, many of those interviewed concluded that Taiwan should deemphasize large, costly capabilities that will have questionable utility in defeating a military invasion force and focus on the procurement of a greater number of smaller, cheaper, maneuverable, resilient, and more versatile systems for defense in depth of the island, particularly including defending against amphibious assault.

Currently, Taiwan relies extensively on military equipment procured from the United States as part of the U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. Typically, Taiwan has sought to purchase large and relatively expensive hardware, such as F-16 fighter aircraft, submarines, and main battle tanks—systems which may not be particularly useful against Chinese military forces on the island. While fighter aircraft provide important “steady state” capabilities, Taiwan also needs to focus on asymmetric capabilities, including electronic warfare and C4ISR capabilities.

Several additional factors appear to complicate Taiwan's ability to develop and deploy a credible defensive capability. First, Taiwan has been reluctant to request defense articles that many U.S. analysts believe would provide better defensive value than those articles normally requested. Second, the United States has been reluctant to press Taiwan on submitting purchase requests for those systems of greater defensive value. Third, other countries have been reluctant to engage in arms sales to Taiwan, including arms that are co-produced with the United States, for fear of antagonizing Beijing.<sup>10</sup> This reluctance extends to other countries' willingness to consider direct co-production agreements with Taiwan. However, co-production of systems would strengthen Taiwan's defense industrial base.

Some of the capabilities that could help enable a porcupine strategy for Taiwan include: sea mines; coastal defense cruise missiles (CDCMs); unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs); small patrol craft; and mobile, land-based munitions. As a former Chief of Taiwan's General Staff noted:

The procurement of advanced unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) will significantly augment Taiwan's target acquisition, early-warning and tactical reconnaissance capabilities, as will mobile radar platforms. Large inventories of low-cost, short-range precision-guided munitions and mobile coastal defense cruise missiles (CDCMs), including harpoon coastal defense systems (HCDS), can provide shore-based firepower support. Man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) and mobile anti-armor weapons, such as high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS), can strengthen guerrilla warfighting capabilities. Stealth fast-attack crafts and miniature missile assault boats can be dispersed among fishing boats across the island's over 200 fishing ports. Sea mines and fast minelaying ships can complicate enemy landing operations. Such asymmetric systems may not generate as much excitement when compared to the PLA's amphibious assault vehicles and

---

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, China has had some success in isolating Taiwan strategically, as the number of countries extending diplomatic recognition to Taiwan has now dropped to 14. See, for example, Lily Kuo, “Taiwan loses another diplomatic partner as Nicaragua recognizes China,” *The Washington Post*, December 10, 2021, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/nicaragua-taiwan-china/2021/12/09/741098d8-5954-11ec-8396-5552bef55c3c\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/nicaragua-taiwan-china/2021/12/09/741098d8-5954-11ec-8396-5552bef55c3c_story.html). A more forceful U.S. diplomatic effort to change this trajectory would be useful.

advanced aircraft, but they will enhance Taiwan's ability to respond effectively when its defenses are under attack.<sup>11</sup>

Sea mines would be useful to protect the maritime channel approaches to those beaches that are vulnerable to amphibious landings. Smart, artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled naval mines could be placed in the Taiwan Strait with capabilities that would not interfere with commercial shipping and normal commerce. Beyond what Taiwan produces itself, greater quantities and more sophisticated coastal defense cruise missiles, such as truck-mounted Harpoons, are mobile and flexible and would provide Taiwan with capabilities that their indigenously produced CDCMs lack.<sup>12</sup> These systems could help defend against amphibious assaults. Other advanced CDCM systems are co-produced with countries that appear reluctant to provide them to Taiwan. Unmanned aerial vehicles are useful for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, as well as for kinetic strike, while unmanned underwater vehicles are difficult to target due to their stealthiness. Small patrol craft that can carry ship-to-ship missiles, lay mines, and defeat amphibious landing vessels would be valuable as would large quantities of precision-guided munitions, including man-portable systems like the Javelin.

As one recent study concluded:

If Taiwan acquires, over roughly the next five years, large numbers of additional anti-ship missiles, more extensive ground-based air defence capabilities, smart mines, better trained and more effective reserve forces, a significantly bolstered capacity for offensive cyber warfare, a large suite of unmanned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and strike systems, and counterstrike capabilities able to hit coastal targets on the mainland, it will continually increase the price China will have to pay to win a war.<sup>13</sup>

The acquisition of these types of systems would provide Taiwan with greater anti-amphibious assault capability as well as a broader capability for island self-defense. Assuming that any Chinese attack on Taiwan would involve the launch of numerous missiles, the systems Taiwan procures should be numerous, mobile and survivable. Moreover, as one analyst has recommended, "Taiwan's leadership must prioritize the acquisition or production of asymmetric capabilities. Such systems are far less expensive to operate and maintain, and are more survivable, compared to more conventional platforms such as fighter aircraft or large naval vessels."<sup>14</sup>

Taiwan's armed forces are heavily reliant on an active component and an individual ready reserve that may be inadequately equipped and trained to support the active military's efforts to defend against an invasion. Training of the reserve force reportedly is focused on

---

<sup>11</sup> Lee Hsi-min and Eric Lee, "Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept, Explained," *The Diplomat*, November 3, 2020, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained/>.

<sup>12</sup> Some experts interviewed for this study suggested that greater information sharing with the United States on the capabilities of Taiwan's indigenously produced systems would also be beneficial.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Porter and Michael Mazarr, *Countering China's Adventurism over Taiwan: A Third Way*, Lowy Institute, May 2021, available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/PORTER%20MAZARR%20Taiwan%20Third%20Way%20COMPLETE%20PDF%20V1.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Heino Klinck, "Taiwan's Turn – Deterring and Derailing an Existential Threat," National Institute for Public Policy Information Series, No. 508, November 11, 2021, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/IS-508.pdf>.

defending Taiwan's beaches from amphibious landings, i.e., forward defense, rather than adopting a "defense in depth" strategy. One analysis concluded that many reservists have a "just passing through" mentality.<sup>15</sup> The apparent reluctance of the Taiwanese military to move beyond the approach of defending the beaches is thought to be related to concerns that doing so would be a tacit admission that China will be successful in the initial stages of its invasion plans.

Some modest organizational reforms have occurred within the Taiwanese military, including an effort to restructure its armed forces into regional commands with asymmetric capabilities,<sup>16</sup> but additional efforts may be critical to improve the fighting capability of the overall armed forces. One commentator referred to the Taiwanese armed forces as a "hollow shell," noting that "Taiwan's military is in a crisis it can barely admit exists.... Taiwan's Ministry of Defense always says they have no problem whatsoever, everything is working, everything is fine. Even when reports surface that is not the case. They do not want to face the reality."<sup>17</sup>

Experts interviewed suggested that Taiwan needs to focus its military efforts on territorial defense, and that adapting the reserve system in a way that parallels that of the Israeli or Swiss reserve system, where reservists keep their weapons at home and act as a type of militia, would provide additional military capability and be consistent with a true territorial defense. Some have called for the establishment of "shooting clubs, similar to those popular in Central and Eastern Europe."<sup>18</sup> Others have called on Taiwan to pursue an approach whereby the Taiwanese population adopts measures to resist occupation by stockpiling food and reinforcing communications capabilities—similar to the approach Sweden has taken—should China cut off utilities and essential means of sustenance.<sup>19</sup> However, political considerations appear to have stymied attempts to refocus Taiwan's organizational approach to its national defense.

The seriousness of the threat posed by China has resulted in some modest changes to improve training of reserves. For example, the Taiwanese Ministry of Defense has announced an increase in mandatory training for approximately 13 percent of the reserve force and Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng has called for an increase in funding for what has been described as "home-made weapons."<sup>20</sup> In addition, a new All-Out Defense Mobilization

---

<sup>15</sup> Joyu Wang and Alastair Gale, "Does Taiwan's Military Stand a Chance Against China? Few Think So," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 2021, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwan-military-readiness-china-threat-us-defense-11635174187> (paywall).

<sup>16</sup> See Ministry of National Defense, R.O.C., *Quadrennial Defense Review: The Republic of China, 2021*, available at <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2021-Taiwan-Quadrennial-Defense-Review-QDR.pdf>. Also see Mike Yeo, "Taiwan to continue strengthening asymmetric capabilities, reserve force," *Defense News*, November 16, 2021, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2021/11/16/taiwan-to-continue-strengthening-asymmetric-capabilities-reserve-force/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Taiwan's army 'ill-prepared' for potential Chinese attack," op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Robert C. O'Brien and Alexander B. Gray, "How to Deter China From Invading Taiwan," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 2021, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-invade-taiwan-strait-pla-missile-mines-counterinsurgency-biden-xi-tsai-ing-wen-11631721031> (paywall).

<sup>19</sup> Kathleen C. Bailey, *Maintaining Taiwan's Democracy*, Information Series, No. 479 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, February 11, 2021), p. 5, available at <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/IS-479.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> "Taiwan to boost reserve training amid China tension," *Reuters*, November 2, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-boost-reserve-training-amid-china-tension-2021-11-02/>.

Agency has been established to improve training and mobilization plans for the reserve forces.<sup>21</sup>

Taiwan's defense budget has increased by roughly 5 percent from 2020 to 2021.<sup>22</sup> Taipei has sought to avoid constraints imposed on the normal budget process by funding the acquisition of indigenously produced defense equipment through "special budgets."<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Taiwan's defense spending accounts for less than 3 percent of Taiwan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), an amount that one analyst has noted "falls short for a nation that is facing an existential threat and has almost daily incursions into its air, sea, and cyber space by an openly hostile foreign power."<sup>24</sup>

Taiwan's 2021 *Quadrennial Defense Review* acknowledges that China poses "the major threat to our national security," noting, "Aside from posing threats of conventional military invasion and continuous war preparation, the PRC has been (sic.) imposed new security challenges on us, including the using of gray zone tactics, such as the intrusion and provocation by aerial and maritime assets, waging cognitive warfare by verbal intimidation, saber-rattling, and initiating cyberattacks." Yet, it notes that the island's armed forces "respond cautiously to those threats to our national security."<sup>25</sup> As one expert has observed:

Taiwan's previous Overall Defense Concept (ODC), widely supported by U.S. defense officials, appears to be abandoned by Taiwan's military leadership in the face of overwhelming evidence that such an asymmetric approach is exactly what is needed to deter, and if necessary, derail Chinese aggression. In fact, there is not a single reference to ODC in Taiwan's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) published in early 2021. This perpetuates the growing view that Taipei is not being truly serious about its own defense despite the almost universal assessment that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its PLA pose an existential threat to democratic Taiwan.<sup>26</sup>

## Other "Quills"

In addition to the defensive preparations discussed above, experts interviewed suggested that Taiwan could usefully strengthen its overall defensive capabilities to make itself less vulnerable to missile strikes, including surface-to-surface missile strikes from the mainland. This could be done in several complementary ways, e.g., through passive measures such as distributed basing of military assets on the island and the dispersion and hardening of

---

<sup>21</sup> Matt Yu and Joseph Yeh, "New mobilization agency formed to show Taiwan's resolute all-out defense: Tsai," *Focus Taiwan*, December 30, 2021, available at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202112300004>.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence Chung, "Taiwan's biggest defence budget includes US\$1.4 billion for new warplanes," *South China Morning Post*, August 26, 2021, available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3146510/taiwans-biggest-defence-budget-includes-us14-billion-new>.

<sup>23</sup> Fang Cheng-hsiang and Teng Pei-ju, "Legislature approves special budget for weapons purchases," *Focus Taiwan*, January 11, 2022, available at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202201110016>.

<sup>24</sup> Heino Klinck, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> See "Minister's Foreword" in Ministry of National Defense, R.O.C., *Quadrennial Defense Review: The Republic of China, 2021*, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> See Heino Klinck, op. cit. Other experts, however, believe that although there is some resistance to the ODC within the Taiwanese military, there is generally strong support within the various military services.

targets; as well as by implementing active measures like improving Taiwan's missile defense posture.

Although deployment of missile defense systems in Taiwan would incur the wrath of Beijing, Taiwan's Air Force reportedly has already decided to purchase a number of Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC-3) Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE) missiles, which are expected to be deployed in 2026.<sup>27</sup> However, other missile defense capabilities could improve Taiwan's ability to defend against Chinese missile attack, including the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system and the sea-based Aegis missile defense system. U.S. forward-based missile defense capabilities could also have an important role to play in defending Taiwan against what is likely to be a severe missile threat. Increased rotational deployments of U.S. forces could help bolster missile defenses in the region.<sup>28</sup>

Hardening and increasing the resiliency of U.S. assets in the region also is suggested as necessary, given the possibility that China might launch attacks on U.S. forces to prevent the United States from coming to Taiwan's defense. This includes strengthening U.S. active and passive defenses in the region to enhance deterrence by complicating Chinese actions intended to degrade U.S. military capabilities.<sup>29</sup> In particular, Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall has stated, "They [China] have noticed it's quite obvious that we depend on a small number of assets, including forward air bases, to conduct operations.... Because they're fixed, they're easily targetable, and they've built the assets to come after them. So we have got to respond to that."<sup>30</sup> Secretary Kendall called on DoD to exercise "a sense of urgency" in order to "change the equation fundamentally" in ways that increase China's "uncertainty about how successful" any attack might be.<sup>31</sup>

Information operations, including cyber warfare and other so-called "gray zone" tactics, can also be employed to counter aggressive actions against Taiwan. Taiwan has cited China's use of such tactics, noting, "the PRC [People's Republic of China] has been frequently using gray zone tactics, such as cognitive warfare, IW [information warfare], and incursion by aircraft and vessels, aiming at weakening morale, depleting the resources of the ROC [Republic of China] Armed Forces, and eroding the national security, which urgently require precautions and responds (sic)."<sup>32</sup> This approach by Beijing has been referred to as a

---

<sup>27</sup> Yimou Lee, "Taiwan to buy new U.S. air defence missiles to guard against China," *Reuters*, March 31, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-defence/taiwan-to-buy-new-u-s-air-defence-missiles-to-guard-against-china-idUSKBN2BN1AA>.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see "Don't Let Taiwan Become the Next Ukraine," *Bloomberg Opinion*, March 22, 2022, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-03-22/u-s-should-learn-from-ukraine-invasion-to-defend-taiwan-from-china>.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Rebecca Heinrichs, "How The United States Needs To Start Deterring China From Taking Over Taiwan," Hudson Institute, January 21, 2022, available at <https://www.hudson.org/research/17488-how-the-united-states-needs-to-start-deterring-china-from-taking-over-taiwan>.

<sup>30</sup> Marcus Weisgerber, "Air Force Must Harden Pacific Bases Against Missiles, Secretary Says," *DefenseOne*, January 19, 2022, available at <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2022/01/air-force-must-harden-pacific-bases-against-missiles-secretary-says/360924/>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of National Defense, R.O.C., *Quadrennial Defense Review: The Republic of China, 2021*, op. cit., p. 54.



“cabbage strategy’ of layered envelopment, forcing opponents to deal with the increasing strategic, operational, and public relations costs of penetrating each layer.”<sup>33</sup>

Taiwan plans to develop asymmetric capabilities to counter China’s gray zone pressure tactics. For example, the *2021 Quadrennial Defense Review* notes that, “coastal mobile asymmetric anti-ship capabilities are to be strengthened against the enemy vessels in transit.”<sup>34</sup> Taiwan has also commissioned a new flagship for its Coast Guard and plans to build more than 140 such ships by 2028 to counter China’s provocative maritime activity.<sup>35</sup> One analysis has suggested that the United States “should prioritize efforts aimed at asymmetrically undermining China’s confidence in the PLA’s ability to achieve its desired end state” by “significantly increasing intelligence collection not only on China but also regional host countries’ receptivity to Beijing’s overtures, the Achilles’ heel of China’s strategy.”<sup>36</sup> Another expert has argued that the United States should help “prepare Taiwan to put up an intolerable degree of irregular, non-conventional resistance to any PLA invasion and occupation. We need, in other words, to turn Mao Zedong’s theories of ‘People’s War’ back against the People’s Republic of China (PRC).”<sup>37</sup> This would include preparing Taiwan to conduct guerilla-type insurgency operations should China establish a foothold on the island.

Stronger collaboration between Taiwanese forces and the U.S. Coast Guard, including in the areas of training, vessel protection and security, and bilateral exercises would be consistent with the Coast Guard’s history of deployments to regions of potential conflict and could bolster the defense of the island,<sup>38</sup> and thus contribute to deterrence.

The United States has long encouraged Taiwan to do more for its own defense; adopting a defense-in-depth posture would enhance Taiwan’s ability to defend itself against all means of Chinese aggression. Above all, Taiwan’s commitment to its own defense needs to be manifest to have a credible deterrent effect on Beijing’s calculations of gain and cost.

U.S. congressional actions have also sought to prompt greater efforts by Taipei to bolster its own defenses. For example, the *Arm Taiwan Act of 2021* would condition U.S. military assistance on Taiwan’s actions to spend more on its own defense and on “undertaking the defense reforms required to maximize the effectiveness of an asymmetric defense against an invasion by the People’s Republic of China.”<sup>39</sup> The proposed legislation notes that “historically, the Government of Taiwan has prioritized the acquisition of conventional

---

<sup>33</sup> Eric Chan, “Escalating Clarity without Fighting: Countering Gray Zone Warfare against Taiwan (Part 2),” *Global Taiwan Brief*, Global Taiwan Institute, Vol. 6, Issue 11, June 2, 2021, available at <https://globaltaiwan.org/2021/06/vol-6-issue-11/>.

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of National Defense, R.O.C., *Quadrennial Defense Review: The Republic of China, 2021*, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> “Taiwan’s new coast guard flagship to counter China’s ‘gray zone’ threat,” *CNN*, April 30, 2021, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/29/asia/taiwan-new-coast-guard-ship-intl-hnk/index.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Craig Singleton, “Flip the gray zone script: How the US can customize its approach to China,” *Defense News*, February 26, 2021, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2021/02/26/flip-the-gray-zone-script-how-the-us-can-customize-its-approach-to-china/>.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher A. Ford, “A ‘People’s War’ against the People’s Republic: Deterring an Invasion of Taiwan (in three parts),” *New Paradigms Forum*, *The SCIF*, October 7, 2021, available at <https://www.newparadigmsforum.com/a-people-s-war-against-the-people-s-republic-deterring-an-invasion-of-taiwan-in-three-parts>.

<sup>38</sup> Adam Stahl and Bradley A. Thayer, “The Coast Guard is vital to defending Taiwan against China,” *The Hill*, October 31, 2021, available at <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/578615-the-coast-guard-is-vital-to-defending-taiwan-against-china>.

<sup>39</sup> *S.3131 – Arm Taiwan Act of 2021*, available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/3131/text>.

weapons that would be of limited utility in deterring or defeating an invasion by the People's Republic of China at the expense of the timely acquisition of cost-effective and resilient asymmetric defense capabilities" and declares that future U.S. arms transfers "should be conditioned on meaningful progress by the Government of Taiwan on the acquisition of appropriate asymmetric defense capabilities."<sup>40</sup>

Another bill, the *Taiwan Deterrence Act*, includes a reporting requirement on "a priority list of defense and military capabilities that Taiwan must possess" and conditions U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) on various commitments, including that the United States and Taiwan agree "to conduct joint long-range planning for capability development."<sup>41</sup> These legislative vehicles, however, do not enjoy universal support among those who believe Taiwan should do more for its own defense. For example, as one analyst has noted, there is no "shared strategy" between the United States and Taiwan for addressing the threat posed by China and, therefore, such congressional legislation "could be counterproductive."<sup>42</sup>

Another approach that has been suggested and is consistent with these legislative efforts is to foster greater senior-level engagement between U.S. and Taiwanese government officials. This could include direct contacts between the U.S. Secretary of Defense and the Taiwanese Minister of Defense, as well as interactions between various senior OSD-level officials and their counterparts in Taipei. The former Chief of Taiwan's General Staff has called for the establishment of a U.S.-Taiwan Joint Working Group to implement and institutionalize Taiwan's ODC, noting:

Through conducting contingency simulations and exercises, U.S. officials could offer their operational experience and expertise to guide Taiwan's force restructuring and doctrinal reforms, with an emphasis on military doctrine, force planning and logistical support, as well as operational tactics. The Joint Working Group would be composed of policy and working-level officials from each country. Policy-level exchanges would include active duty flag officers as well as senior defense officials to provide expertise and guidance on restructuring Taiwan's force and weapon systems acquisition process, as well as operational support for developing Taiwan's joint doctrine, joint operational planning and joint training. Frequent exchanges by working-level officials would focus on innovative solutions to implement policy-level decisions and account for current conditions on the ground.<sup>43</sup>

Sharing threat intelligence information along with recommendations for appropriate action could help align U.S. and Taiwanese approaches. In short, the U.S. policy of limiting official engagements with Taiwan should be reassessed, as greater bilateral engagement could have positive deterrent effects on China's calculations vis-à-vis the island, as well as helping to overcome current domestic Taiwanese political and bureaucratic impediments to making Taiwan an "indigestible porcupine."

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> S.3192 - *Taiwan Deterrence Act*, available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/3192/text?r=1&s=1>.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Mazza, "Limits to proposed US security assistance measures to Taiwan," American Enterprise Institute, December 15, 2021, available at <https://www.aei.org/articles/limits-to-proposed-us-security-assistance-measures-to-taiwan/>.

<sup>43</sup> Lee Hsi-min and Eric Lee, op. cit.

As a recent war game reportedly concluded, a Chinese move on Taiwan may be preceded by an attack on the smaller islands near Taiwan that are more difficult to defend. Therefore, the United States and Taiwan should “plan, coordinate, and above all communicate their deterrence policies in advance of a crisis rather than improvising a response after China has acted.”<sup>44</sup> Turning such offshore islands into “poison frogs” would make aggression “so militarily, economically, and politically painful from the outset that the costs of coercion or aggression would be greater than the benefits.”<sup>45</sup>

There are other non-military elements to a porcupine strategy as well. These include, for example, an international communications strategy and a diplomatic strategy. Identifying Chinese aggression against Taiwan as an unjustifiable assault by a large authoritarian regime on a much smaller free and democratic society should be part of any communications strategy and should help generate international condemnation of Beijing’s actions. Diplomatically, any Chinese attack on the island should also lead to growing international solidarity with Taiwan and support from other countries that may have been reluctant to provide it previously due to a desire to avoid antagonizing Beijing. The international community needs to “band together diplomatically in order to multi-lateralize risk” and to consolidate opposition to China’s policies within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>46</sup> Strengthening the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad—consisting of India, Australia, Japan, and the United States—through intensified military exercises, coordination, and cooperation would also contribute to deterrence by sending a strong message of support for Taiwan’s autonomy.

Japan, in particular, has expressed solidarity with Taiwan and has indicated that any Chinese aggression against the island would be met with a strong reaction from Tokyo. Japan has territorial disputes with China over the Senkaku Islands (which China refers to as the Diaoyu Islands) and has increased its defense budget to record levels as a result of the growing threat from China.<sup>47</sup> Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has stated, “A Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency, and therefore an emergency for the Japan-U.S. alliance. People in Beijing, President Xi Jinping in particular, should never have a misunderstanding in recognizing this.”<sup>48</sup>

One Japanese defense policy expert has highlighted the advantages that accrue to China as a result of its geographic proximity to Taiwan, the fact that its forces are concentrated on the Chinese mainland whereas U.S. forces are globally dispersed, and the “temporal

---

<sup>44</sup> Chris Dougherty, Jennie Matuschak, and Ripley Hunter, *The Poison Frog Strategy: Preventing a Chinese Fait Accompli Against Taiwanese Islands*, Center for a New American Security, October 2021, p. 8, available at [https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/TaiwanWargameReport\\_Formatted-1-1.pdf?mtime=20211025143441&focal=none](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/TaiwanWargameReport_Formatted-1-1.pdf?mtime=20211025143441&focal=none).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Heino Klinck, “Deterring The Dragon – What China’s Neighbors Can Do To Hem In Its Adventurism And Aggression,” *MEMRI*, January 12, 2022, available at <https://www.memri.org/reports/deterring-dragon-%E2%80%93-what-chinas-neighbors-can-do-hem-its-adventurism-and-aggression>.

<sup>47</sup> Kosuke Takahashi, “Japan Approves Record Extra Defense Budget,” *The Diplomat*, November 26, 2021, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/japan-approves-record-extra-defense-budget/>.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Blanchard, “Former PM Abe says Japan, U.S. could not stand by if China attacked Taiwan,” *Reuters*, November 30, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/former-pm-abe-says-japan-us-could-not-stand-by-if-china-attacked-taiwan-2021-12-01/>.

dimension of mobilization [that] magnifies the risk of deterrence failure.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, he notes that the lack of a standing combined headquarters to coordinate contingency planning among regional allies prior to any Chinese military action is a sign of “unpreparedness” that could exacerbate a “de-coupling” effect between U.S. goals and objectives and those of its regional partners.<sup>50</sup> Published reports suggest Japan and the United States have developed joint contingency plans that would include the deployment of U.S. forces on Japanese islands in the event of a Chinese attack on Taiwan.<sup>51</sup> And Japan’s ambassador to the United States has reportedly stated that Tokyo is open to the possibility of deploying U.S. intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles on Japanese territory as a counter to China, declaring, “We are starting to see an increasingly troubling security picture. Our security environment is getting very severe.”<sup>52</sup>

Australia, too, has expressed a willingness to come to Taiwan’s defense should China engage in military aggression that prompts a U.S. response. As Australian Defense Minister Peter Dutton stated, “It would be inconceivable that we wouldn’t support the U.S. in an action if the U.S. chose to take that action.”<sup>53</sup> Prime Minister Scott Morrison also declared that Australia would “stand up to any form of coercion that occurs,” leading Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs “to express its sincere gratitude for this.”<sup>54</sup> Recognizing the growing threat posed by China, Australia and Japan signed a defense treaty in early 2022.<sup>55</sup> And the recent Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) agreement to provide nuclear-powered attack submarines to Australia is clearly a reflection of concern over China’s growing military might in the region, prompting Beijing to accuse Canberra of being “a running dog of the US” and threatening to “punish [Australia] with no mercy” if it participates in a “US-led strategic siege of China.”<sup>56</sup>

Given the shifting correlation of forces in favor of China, the United States should consider additional measures, such as naval ship visits to Taiwan and more visible combined training exercises with Taiwanese armed forces. Although some analysts argue that a restoration of U.S. military dominance over China is “simply no longer attainable,” and “would likely be counterproductive” because of China’s economic capacity and geographic

---

<sup>49</sup> Sugio Takahashi, *Pitfalls in Deterring a Taiwan Strait Conflict: “Unpreparable War,” Information Series*, No. 516 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 1, 2022), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/sugio-takahashi-pitfalls-in-deterring-a-taiwan-strait-conflict-unpreparable-war-issue-no-516-march-1-2022/](https://nipp.org/information_series/sugio-takahashi-pitfalls-in-deterring-a-taiwan-strait-conflict-unpreparable-war-issue-no-516-march-1-2022/).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> “Japan, U.S. draft operation plan for Taiwan contingency: sources,” *Kyodo News*, December 23, 2021, available at <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/12/f5ed60ab6502-japan-us-draft-operation-plan-for-taiwan-contingency-sources.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Statement of Tomita Koji, reported in Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, *Politico National Security Daily*, January 31, 2022, available at <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/01/31/japan-not-closing-door-on-hosting-american-inf-missiles-00003840>.

<sup>53</sup> “‘Inconceivable’ Australia would not join U.S. to defend Taiwan - Australian defence minister,” *Reuters*, November 12, 2021, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/inconceivable-australia-would-not-join-us-defend-taiwan-australian-defence-2021-11-12/>.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Hurst and Helen Davidson, “Taiwan thanks Australian PM and defence minister for grim warning over China,” *The Guardian*, November 29, 2021, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/30/taiwan-thanks-australian-pm-and-defence-minister-for-grim-warning-over-china>.

<sup>55</sup> “Japan, Australia sign defence treaty with eyes on China,” *Agence France-Presse*, January 6, 2022, available at <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220106-japan-australia-sign-defence-treaty-with-eyes-on-china>.

<sup>56</sup> “AUKUS to bring ‘nuclear-powered submarine fever’ across globe: Global Times editorial,” *Global Times*, September 16, 2021, available at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234459.shtml>.

proximity to Taiwan,<sup>57</sup> restoring a degree of balance does not imply an exclusive focus on the military dimension or an effort to regain dominance. Nevertheless, implementing the steps outlined here systematically over time could help restore conditions more favorable to a victory denial deterrence strategy.

Importantly, however, it remains critical for Taiwan to bear the brunt of the burden for its own defense. Reforming its military acquisition policies, revising the organizational structure and defensive focus of its armed forces, and updating its doctrinal concepts to align better with the security threat China poses so as to make the island truly “indigestible” to Beijing are essential first steps toward a potentially credible and effective deterrent posture.

### **The Possible Impact on China of a Prolonged Conflict**

Successful implementation of a “porcupine strategy” would mean that any Chinese military aggression against Taiwan will inevitably be prolonged and costly. This could lead to internal dissent that undermines the legitimacy of the CCP. The prospect of this outcome could contribute to a victory denial deterrence strategy.

The CCP believes internal forces—which it claims are either funded or controlled by external states—threaten its continued grip on political power in China. The theme of “Western” or “liberalism” threats to regime security is a regular feature in CCP official documents and speeches, and the sprawling domestic surveillance network within China is one—if only the most striking—manifestation of China’s fears concerning civil unrest and a “color revolution.” In fact, the CCP has “judged that ideological threats to the regime were at least as severe as traditional national security challenges.”<sup>58</sup> If left unaddressed, CCP leaders warn external threats could merge with or initiate internal threats to the CCP’s continued political dominance—thus placing a premium on retaining “political security” as the ultimate CCP priority.<sup>59</sup>

Can the United States and its allies utilize the CCP’s apparent fear of internal dissent as an element of a victory denial deterrence strategy? Traditional deterrence theory suggests that the United States should hold at risk that which the opponent values most—in this case, continued CCP political rule in China. The following discussion addresses this question.

### **Evidence the CCP Greatly Values Political Control**

The CCP has amassed perhaps one of the most pervasive and technologically sophisticated domestic surveillance systems in the world to further its primary goals of staving off domestic unrest and retaining sole political power in China. The myriad of organizations in China with internal security missions—including the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), People’s Armed Police (PAP), Ministry of Public Security (MPS), Ministry of State Security

---

<sup>57</sup> Elbridge Colby, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>58</sup> Carolyn Bartholomew and Robin Cleveland, Chairman and Vice Chairman, U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2021 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2021), p. 292, available at [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-11/2021\\_Annual\\_Report\\_to\\_Congress.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-11/2021_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291-294.

(MSS), and others—is testament to how highly Chinese officials prioritize regime survival.<sup>60</sup> In fact, as Susan Shirk, an expert on Chinese domestic politics notes, “... Chinese leaders have shown themselves more worried about regime stability than about any international threat.”<sup>61</sup> Some analysts have noted that China spends more on domestic security measures than on external security threats.<sup>62</sup> What, therefore, are the roots of the CCP’s fears concerning domestic unrest?

It appears that 1989 was perhaps the most formative year for Chinese threat perceptions relating to internal instability—a year in which both the Tiananmen Square crisis nearly brought down the regime and where popular uprisings did bring down other communist regimes in the Soviet Union. Deng Xiaoping, after 1989, began describing the United States as a threat—particularly one that wanted to cause social unrest in China by rhetorically supporting democracy and liberal values.<sup>63</sup> These threat perceptions continue to this day under Xi Jinping. As Rush Doshi documents in his book, *The Long Game*:

Under Xi Jinping, Beijing has continued to promote these ideological lines... in October 2013, the PLA released a popular documentary, *Silent Contest*, intended for military indoctrination that argued that Washington sought to use liberal values to undermine the CCP and China’s national rejuvenation. This sentiment not only finds expression in the hawkish corners of Chinese officialdom, it even finds expression among those retired diplomats who often serve as the reassuring face of Chinese diplomacy in the United States.<sup>64</sup>

Even seemingly innocuous trade agreements, including China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, appeared to China’s elite politicians not to be a sign of Western good faith, but rather as a nefarious tactic to “peacefully evolve” the CCP out of power.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Chinese leaders have, according to one commentator, drawn three primary conclusions about how they can stay in power: “... prevent large-scale social unrest, avoid public leadership divisions, and keep the military loyal. As China’s leaders make their foreign policy decisions, these domestic imperatives are very much on their minds.”<sup>66</sup>

What then are some of the indicators that Chinese officials view internal security as their main priority? First, there are an increasing number of senior officials in charge of domestic stability within the CCP’s leadership. “As domestic security challenges have risen in importance over the past two decades, and the *weiwen* [“stability maintenance”] apparatus

---

<sup>60</sup> For more in-depth discussions of these organizations and their responsibilities, see, U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2021), pp. 73-75, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>.; and, Xuezhong Guo, *China’s Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>61</sup> Susan Shirk, “The Domestic Context of Chinese Foreign Security Policies,” chapter in, Saadia Pekkanen, John Ravenhill, and Rosemary Foot, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 401.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, C.K. Tan, “China spending puts domestic security ahead of defense,” *Nikkei Asia*, March 14, 2018, available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/China-People-s-Congress-2018/China-spending-puts-domestic-security-ahead-of-defense>.

<sup>63</sup> As documented amply in Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 50-53.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>66</sup> Shirk, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

has ballooned in size, the Chinese bureaucratic state may have found it necessary to task ever-increasing numbers of senior officials with responsibility for domestic security work.”<sup>67</sup> In addition, not only are the number and seniority of officials in charge of domestic security growing, but so too are the financial and career incentives that are tied to keeping domestic protests at a minimum. As China scholars Yuhua Wang and Carl Minzer document, “Faced with increasingly tough career sanctions whenever outbreaks of citizen petitioning occur within their jurisdictions, local Chinese authorities have resorted to both the widespread use of hired thugs to intercept petitioners seeking to reach higher authorities and the calculated application of pressure on petitioners’ families and friends (‘relational repression’) to convince them to give up their petitioning efforts.”<sup>68</sup>

China’s investment in an extensive and highly-sophisticated domestic surveillance network—targeted both at political elites as well as potential political dissidents among ethnic minorities—is a credible indicator that the CCP highly values its continued sole rule of China. This domestic surveillance network reportedly incorporates both publicly and privately-owned security cameras, facial recognition software, data on social interactions, information on financial transactions, and even perhaps some level of artificial intelligence (AI) technology.<sup>69</sup> There are also reports that the CCP has incorporated the use of biometric and genetic data to identify potential political dissidents.<sup>70</sup> In addition to China’s “Great Firewall” that blocks or censors media deemed to be against the Party’s interests, these technologies aid the CCP’s ability to track individuals or groups that could undermine its political rule—something the CCP identifies as akin to an existential threat.

### **Domestic Dissent and a Potential Taiwan Invasion**

It is unclear how much Chinese leaders have considered the domestic security implications of a failed, or stalled invasion of Taiwan—but it may complement a victory denial deterrence strategy to either make those connections in the minds of the Chinese leadership or reinforce the existing connections. A Chinese invasion of Taiwan could spark domestic dissent on the Chinese mainland for a number of different reasons—some of which may be more plausible than others depending on such factors as the length of the conflict, the amount and type of destruction or disruption to the mainland, the number and visibility of military casualties, etc. For deterrence purposes, what matters is not whether the United States or its allies believe the possibility of domestic Chinese unrest is plausible in the event of a failed or stalled attempt to conquer Taiwan; what matters is the CCP’s perception of the possibility and its potential effect on CCP calculations of prospective cost and gain.

---

<sup>67</sup> Yuhua Wang and Carl Minzer, “The Rise of the Chinese Security State,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 222 (2015), p. 355.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 351-352.

<sup>69</sup> For some useful overviews of these technologies, see, Dahlia Peterson, “How China Harnesses Data Fusion to Make Sense of Surveillance Data,” *Brookings Institution*, September 23, 2021, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-china-harnesses-data-fusion-to-make-sense-of-surveillance-data/>.

<sup>70</sup> Bartholomew and Cleveland, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

### ***Economic Damage Could Threaten Regime Survival***

There is a real possibility of widespread and long-lasting damage to the Chinese economy, even if an invasion is successful. Given that the CCP has tied its legitimacy to broad-based economic prosperity in China, in addition to nationalism, a failed or stalled invasion of Taiwan that threatens not only nationalist sentiment but also economic prosperity and prospects for future improvement, could spark internal dissent. Such dissent may lead to another major CCP fear, a split in its leadership, where one faction seeks to hold the line of current policies while another faction—sensing the opportunity to take power—sides with dissenters. In either case, the CCP cannot expect easily or quickly to rebuild the economic prosperity its citizens enjoyed prior to an invasion of Taiwan, possibly entailing a threat to regime survival.

The advantage of this deterrence threat is that the United States has a history of imposing sanctions—although not to this prospective level—which increases the potential for China’s leaders to find the threat at least partially credible. Additionally, given that the CCP already perceives the United States and its allies as seeking to subvert CCP authority through economic liberalization, it may also believe that the United States and its allies would seek to punish China economically in the event of a Taiwan invasion—a plausible complement to an overarching victory denial deterrence strategy.

### ***The CCP’s Ability to Control Information Would be Compromised***

During an invasion of Taiwan, the CCP will likely be on high alert for the possibility of domestic unrest or coup attempts should the conflict go poorly. If the United States became involved, along with other potential allies, U.S. leaders could opt to send a deterrence message to the CCP that continuing the conflict would risk its hold on power. For example, the United States may be able to conduct cyber attacks to disrupt or deny the CCP’s ability to access its social surveillance network for a time. Alternatively, the United States could attempt to provide Chinese citizens with a way around the “Great Firewall” of internet censorship, presenting the CCP with the prospect of its citizens gaining greater access to information—particularly Western information sources.

It is unknown just how credible Chinese leaders would perceive the threat of the United States compromising its access to social control tools—although existing Chinese paranoia about Western influences penetrating its society supports prospects for some level of influencing Chinese decision making. The United States may or may not have the ability to substantively affect China’s control of its domestic surveillance network, but the CCP perception of that possibility could contribute to deterrence.

### ***International Support for Internal “Threats” Would Grow***

One final potential deterrent threat related to internal dissent is the prospect for international support growing for groups the CCP leadership view as threatening—such as ethnic minorities or religious groups: “The CCP believes that China is threatened by ‘Western hostile forces,’ led by the United States, and that those forces are attempting to Westernize, divide, and overthrow the CCP by supporting democracy activists, religious groups (including practitioners of *falun gong*), separatists (Tibetans, Uighurs, and Taiwan), and



political dissidents.”<sup>71</sup> Should China use force to reunify Taiwan with the mainland, international attention may be directed at other groups that have been the victims of Chinese oppression—potentially leading to third states supporting those groups that the CCP fears could threaten its hold on power.

The possible deterrent effect of this threat may be minor in shaping CCP calculations of cost and gain as Beijing has likely concluded that oppressing these groups has had no unmanageable consequences. On the other hand, oppressed groups could believe that their best prospect for success is drawing attention to their plight during an invasion of Taiwan, when an international spotlight will be on China and its malevolent actions.

## Prospects for Success

Ultimately, the question is not whether each of these potential deterrent threats of internal unrest will succeed in isolation from each other; rather, it is whether each of these deterrence signals will have the cumulative effect of affecting CCP decision making. The CCP has made clear in both its official speeches and in the investments it makes in domestic surveillance that it highly values its continued hold on power. Thus, the main issue facing the United States is whether it can successfully convey to China’s leaders that the risk of social unrest following a decision to invade Taiwan is both real and severe enough to help make postponing an invasion the least intolerable choice. Whether doing so can contribute to deterrence is unclear, but as some research has concluded, “Chinese citizens distrust the ruling CCP, at least at the local level, and believe party cadres do not care about their material interests.”<sup>72</sup> Additionally, even the most trusted military groups in China have failed to implement previous political decisions—e.g., during the Tiananmen Square crisis—where some military officials refused to impose martial law.<sup>73</sup> These factors suggest that China’s leaders may fear the prospect of social unrest—a possibility that the United States and allies may be able to exploit to strengthen the chances of deterrence success.

## Conclusion

For a victory denial deterrent to be successful, it must prevent China from achieving an easy *fait accompli* as a critical part of an overall deterrence strategy to deter China at each level of potential escalation. As this chapter has discussed, the Taiwanese military must prioritize its acquisition strategy to focus on equipment and capabilities that will complicate Beijing’s ability to achieve a rapid military victory. This includes procurement of a greater number of smaller, cheaper, maneuverable, resilient, and more versatile systems for defense in depth of the island, including defending against amphibious assault. It also requires attention to asymmetric capabilities, such as electronic warfare and C4ISR. Moreover, Taiwan must deploy systems that are mobile and survivable against a likely Chinese missile threat. This

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 418.

<sup>72</sup> Daniel C. Mattingly, *The Art of Political Control in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 182.

<sup>73</sup> Xuezhong Guo, *China’s Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 411.

could be done in several ways, e.g., by improving Taiwan’s missile defense posture; through distributed basing of military assets on the island; and by dispersing and hardening targets.

The United States must also seek to make its assets in the region resilient, as China may launch attacks on U.S. forces to prevent the United States from actively defending Taiwan. Strengthening U.S. active and passive defenses in the region has the potential to enhance deterrence significantly. Moreover, stronger collaboration between the U.S. military and Taiwanese forces—including greater senior-level engagement and sharing threat intelligence information—may reinforce both deterrence and defense.

A comprehensive “porcupine strategy” should include non-military elements as well, e.g., an international communications strategy and a diplomatic strategy. For example, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad—consisting of India, Australia, Japan, and the United States—could strengthen deterrence of any Chinese aggression and send a strong message of support for Taiwan’s autonomy by broadening joint military exercises, coordination, and cooperation. Importantly, however, Taiwan must bear the brunt of the burden for ensuring its own defense.

To be successful, a “porcupine strategy” must help to convince China that any military aggression against Taiwan will not be easy or quick. Preventing China from obtaining an *easy fait accompli* should cause the leadership in Beijing to calculate carefully the potential costs and gains of any aggressive moves to eliminate Taiwan’s autonomy. A victory denial approach to deterrence, with the “porcupine strategy” outlined here, appears to be a plausible way to strengthen overall deterrence and prevent conflict.

## Recommendations

- Deny China any anticipation of an *easy fait accompli*. Taiwan must—with the help of the United States and like-minded partners—bolster its own self-defense capabilities such that the island becomes “indigestible” and that any military action taken by China will result in a prolonged and costly endeavor—one that might lead to internal dissent and call into question the legitimacy of the ruling Communist Party.
- Focus Taiwanese military acquisition priorities on equipment and capabilities that can be used to complicate Beijing’s calculus in seeking a rapid military victory.
- Consider ways to strengthen Taiwan’s defense industrial base through direct co-production agreements with other nations.
- Focus Taiwan’s organizational approach to its national defense in ways that bolster a true territorial defense posture. Taiwan should consider increasing its defense budget and work to improve the readiness and capabilities of its reserves and Special Forces.
- Examine measures to lessen Taiwan’s vulnerability to missile strikes from the mainland through passive measures such as distributed basing of military assets on the island and the dispersion and hardening of targets, as well as by implementing active measures like improving Taiwan’s missile defense posture with THAAD and the sea-based Aegis missile defense system with SM-3 interceptors.
- Consider forward basing and hardening of U.S. missile defense assets in the region, including strengthening both active and passive missile defenses to enhance

deterrence by complicating any Chinese military action intended to degrade U.S. military capabilities.

- Develop options to employ information operations, including cyber warfare and other so-called “gray zone” tactics and consider actions that would allow Taiwan to conduct guerrilla-type insurgency operations should China establish a foothold on the island.
- Evaluate measures to encourage stronger collaboration between Taiwanese forces and the U.S. Coast Guard, including in the areas of training, vessel protection and security, and bilateral exercises. Consider other measures, such as naval ship visits to Taiwan and more visible combined training exercises with Taiwanese armed forces.
- Seek to foster greater senior-level engagement between U.S. and Taiwanese government officials, including direct contacts between the U.S. Secretary of Defense and the Taiwanese Minister of Defense, as well as interactions between various senior OSD-level officials and their counterparts.
- Share threat intelligence information along with recommendations for appropriate action to help align U.S. and Taiwanese approaches. In short, reassess the U.S. policy of limiting official engagements with Taiwan, as greater bilateral engagement could have positive deterrent effects on China’s calculus for action against the island.
- Formulate an international communications strategy and a diplomatic strategy that identify CCP aggression against Taiwan as an unjustifiable assault by a large authoritarian regime on a small, free and democratic society.
- Strengthen multilateral security fora, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad—consisting of India, Australia, Japan, and the United States—through intensified military exercises, coordination, and cooperation.
- Portray the risk of social unrest following a CCP decision to invade Taiwan as both real and severe.
- Develop capabilities to disrupt or deny the CCP’s ability to access its social surveillance network and to provide Chinese citizens with a way around the “Great Firewall” of internet censorship.

