



## FOREWORD

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Today, the world's attention is focused on the war in Ukraine. Clearly, the United States and the West more broadly failed to deter Putin from initiating his brutal aggression. In particular, and perhaps not surprisingly, the threat of severe economic sanctions was not sufficient to deter Putin from the pursuit of his stated goal of restoring Russia as a great power. As a result, the bloody assault, accompanied by shocking images of Russian atrocities, may serve as a transformative event, one that could alter the course of modern history in Europe and beyond. Never before has there been a greater need for American leadership to shape the security environment in Europe, to manage the newly unified and potentially expanded NATO, and to restore the alliance's defense and deterrent posture.

But American leadership is equally imperative in the Pacific region where the United States faces an even more challenging adversary, an ascending China whose declared goal is to replace the United States as the preeminent power in Asia. In doing so, one essential step for Beijing is to absorb Taiwan through force if necessary. Success on China's part would have enormous negative political and military consequences for the United States, likely more consequential than a Russian victory in Ukraine. In short, the cost of deterrence failure could be greater than in Europe.

In this study, *Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait*, the authors present a comprehensive and sophisticated assessment of what can and should be done to improve the prospects for effectively deterring China from attacking Taiwan. This is not a class in deterrence 101. As the authors point out, the challenge is both complex and daunting as the deterrence circumstances in the region have fundamentally changed. There is no alliance structure similar to NATO; there is no formal U.S. commitment to Taiwan's security; there are no forward-deployed conventional and nuclear forces on the scale of those in Europe during the Cold War. The United States is no longer the undisputed dominant Asia-Pacific power. Chinese leaders may well believe U.S. options today are limited to escalation at the risk of self-destruction. Consequently, they may see current U.S. red lines, backed by current U.S. forces, as lacking in credibility.

While reaffirming the enduring principles for deterrence success, the study highlights the requirement to tailor our deterrence posture to account for China's current perspectives, interests, and capabilities. Given major changes in what the Soviets called the correlation of forces, including the decade-long expansion of China's conventional capabilities and its rapidly expanding nuclear forces, the United States can no longer rely on concepts of strategic ambiguity for deterrence success. In fact, uncertainty about the U.S. reaction to China's use of force may well undermine contemporary deterrence as Beijing may believe, for good reasons, that it now enjoys deterrence advantages in military and non-military options, risk tolerance, and determination.

So, what can be done to convince China's leadership that the status quo is preferable to running the risks and paying the costs of attacking Taiwan? On this question, the report provides a roadmap for future action across the diplomatic, economic, and military fields. Most important is what the report describes as a victory denial deterrence strategy, whereby China's leadership is denied the expectation of a quick victory and the belief that coercive



threats of nuclear use will result in the U.S. abandonment of Taiwan. The study is clear that this does not require U.S. conventional military superiority or escalation dominance in nuclear force capabilities. Instead, the strategy relies on the right mix of conventional and forward-deployed nuclear weapons, including the nuclear SLCM, on effective regional and homeland active and passive defenses, on reducing economic dependencies and vulnerabilities, and on sound diplomatic approaches to signal that opposition to China's aggression is shared by a broad coalition of states.

Dr. Payne, perhaps the most accomplished national authority on deterrence theory and practice, and his team deserve great credit for their insightful analysis of perhaps the most important national security challenge facing the nation. Their overall conclusion is that, while it is far from certain that deterrence will prevail, sound policy choices and effective action can improve the prospects for success. This balanced position reflects the hard realities and the many uncertainties of deterring an adversary that is prepared for conflict and is convinced that the asymmetry of interest weighs in its favor. But one thing is certain. If the United States continues to hold to outdated assumptions, especially concerning the efficacy of uncertainty in upholding deterrence, it will surely fail.

