



The Heritage Foundation

Background

Executive Summary

No. 1328

September 28, 1999

TENSIONS ACROSS THE STRAIT: CHINA'S MILITARY OPTIONS AGAINST TAIWAN SHORT OF WAR

JAMES H. ANDERSON, PH.D.

The risk of an accidental or deliberate military clash between China and Taiwan is higher than at any time since March 1996, when China attempted to intimidate Taiwan with ballistic missile tests. This July, tensions escalated after Taiwan's President asserted that China and Taiwan should deal on a "state-to-state" level. China vehemently protested this formulation, interpreting it as a move by Taiwan toward independence.

China recently conducted military exercises in Fujian Province, across the Taiwan Strait. Even more provocatively, China has flown fighter aircraft sorties near the informal "centerline" that divides this waterway. These actions are troubling in light of China's steadfast refusal to rule out the use of force if Taiwan moves toward independence.

Although in the near term an outright invasion appears improbable, China has several other military options. China could conduct more provocative invasion exercises, wage information warfare, harass merchant shipping, test-fire more ballistic missiles near Taiwan, or seize one or more of Taiwan's offshore islands. Even limited aggression could pressure Taiwan politically, rattle its financial markets, risk a wider conflict, and test U.S. resolve to assist Taiwan.

China-Taiwan tensions will likely ebb and flow in the coming months, but there will almost certainly be more Taiwan crises. U.S. policymakers would be wise to consider carefully China's military options against Taiwan well in advance.

To increase the likelihood of a peaceful resolution to the China-Taiwan problem, the United States should unequivocally state its determination to defend Taiwan in the event of Chinese military aggression; maintain a robust military presence in the Pacific; increase surveillance of potentially threatening military activity by China; offer to sell Taiwan more defensive weaponry, including missile defense systems; and exercise its right of free passage by sailing U.S. naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait on a regular basis.

—James H. Anderson, Ph.D., is a Research Fellow in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis International Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.

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Table 1

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China's Military Options Against Taiwan

Options	Advantages for China	Disadvantages for China	Remarks
#1 Escalate Invasion Exercises	<p>1) Puts psychological pressure on Taiwan.</p> <p>2) Military training benefits.</p>	<p>1) China risks revealing operational capabilities.</p> <p>2) Mounting large-scale exercises is costly.</p>	<p>1) Psychological pressure lessens over time if war games became routine.</p> <p>2) Increasing size and scope of military exercises could provide cover for actual attack.</p>
#2 Mount Information Warfare Attacks	<p>1) Taiwan's economy relies heavily on computers.</p> <p>2) Could be used as a force multiplier with other military options.</p> <p>3) China could plausibly deny responsibility for hacker attacks.</p>	<p>1) China vulnerable to Taiwanese counterattacks.</p> <p>2) Most of Taiwan's sensitive financial and military networks appear well protected against intrusion.</p>	<p>1) Chinese hackers attacked U.S. government Web sites during Operation Allied Force.</p> <p>2) China's military has placed increased emphasis on developing information warfare capabilities.</p> <p>3) Full extent of Chinese information warfare capabilities unknown.</p>
#3 Harass Taiwan's Commercial Shipping	<p>1) Action would highlight Taiwan's dependence on international trade.</p> <p>2) Disruption could rattle Taiwan's stock market.</p>	<p>1) Action might interfere with international transit of other states.</p> <p>2) Taiwan could retaliate against China's ports.</p>	<p>1) China detained 975-ton Taiwan freighter in July 1999.</p> <p>2) China could encourage pirates to harass Taiwanese vessels.</p> <p>3) Disruption could prompt maritime insurance premiums to soar.</p>
#4 Test Ballistic Missiles Near Taiwan	<p>1) Tests could be conducted on short notice.</p> <p>2) Psychological pressure could disrupt Taiwan's financial markets.</p> <p>3) Tests would make Chinese missiles more attractive for export.</p> <p>4) Tests could temporarily shut down portions of the Taiwan Strait.</p>	<p>1) Tests might accelerate Taiwan's and Japan's missile defense efforts.</p> <p>2) Tests would allow U.S. to glean more intelligence regarding Chinese missile capabilities.</p> <p>3) Tests would reinforce China's image as a regional bully.</p> <p>4) Tests likely to prompt U.S. military show of force, as happened in 1996.</p>	<p>1) China conducted missile tests near Taiwan in December 1995 and March 1996, prior to the island's first direct presidential election.</p> <p>2) Missiles could be targeted to fall just short of Taiwan, or fly over the island, as North Korea did with its Taepo Dong 1 test launch over Japan in August 1998.</p> <p>3) Tests could serve as a prelude to more forceful military action.</p> <p>4) China might test cruise missiles in addition to ballistic missiles</p>
#5 Seize One or More of Taiwan's Offshore Islands	<p>1) Seizure of offshore islands much easier than invading Taiwan.</p> <p>2) Seizure of undefended offshore island could be done quickly and with relatively little preparation.</p>	<p>1) Likely to engender Taiwan military response.</p> <p>2) High risk of military escalation.</p> <p>3) International opinion likely to turn against China, particularly if the seizure involves bloodshed.</p>	<p>1) Possible variant of Matsu and Quemoy crises, in 1955 and 1958, which brought the U.S. and China to the brink of war.</p> <p>2) China would probably attempt to seize an undefended or lightly defended island</p>



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JAMES H. ANDERSON, PH.D. ¹

“To subdue the enemy without fighting is
the acme of skill.”

—Sun Tzu, Chinese Military Strategist,
The Art of War

The risk of an accidental or deliberate military clash between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan is higher than at any time since March 1996, when China attempted to intimidate Taiwan with ballistic missile tests. This July, tensions escalated after Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui asserted that China and Taiwan should conduct business on a “state-to-state” level. China vehemently protested this formulation, interpreting it as a move by Taiwan toward independence.²

Attempting to ratchet up psychological pressure on Taiwan, China announced on July 15 that it has “mastered the neutron bomb design technology.”³ In August, China conducted highly publicized military exercises in the Fujian Province, which

faces Taiwan across the Taiwan Strait.⁴ Even more provocatively, China has flown dozens of aircraft sorties near the so-called centerline, an informal boundary dividing this waterway.

These actions are troubling in light of China's long-term aim to reunify the island with the mainland. China considers Taiwan an “inseparable part of Chinese territory” and the dispute over Taiwan “entirely an internal affair of China.”⁵ China has steadfastly refused to rule out the use of force if Taiwan moves toward independence. In

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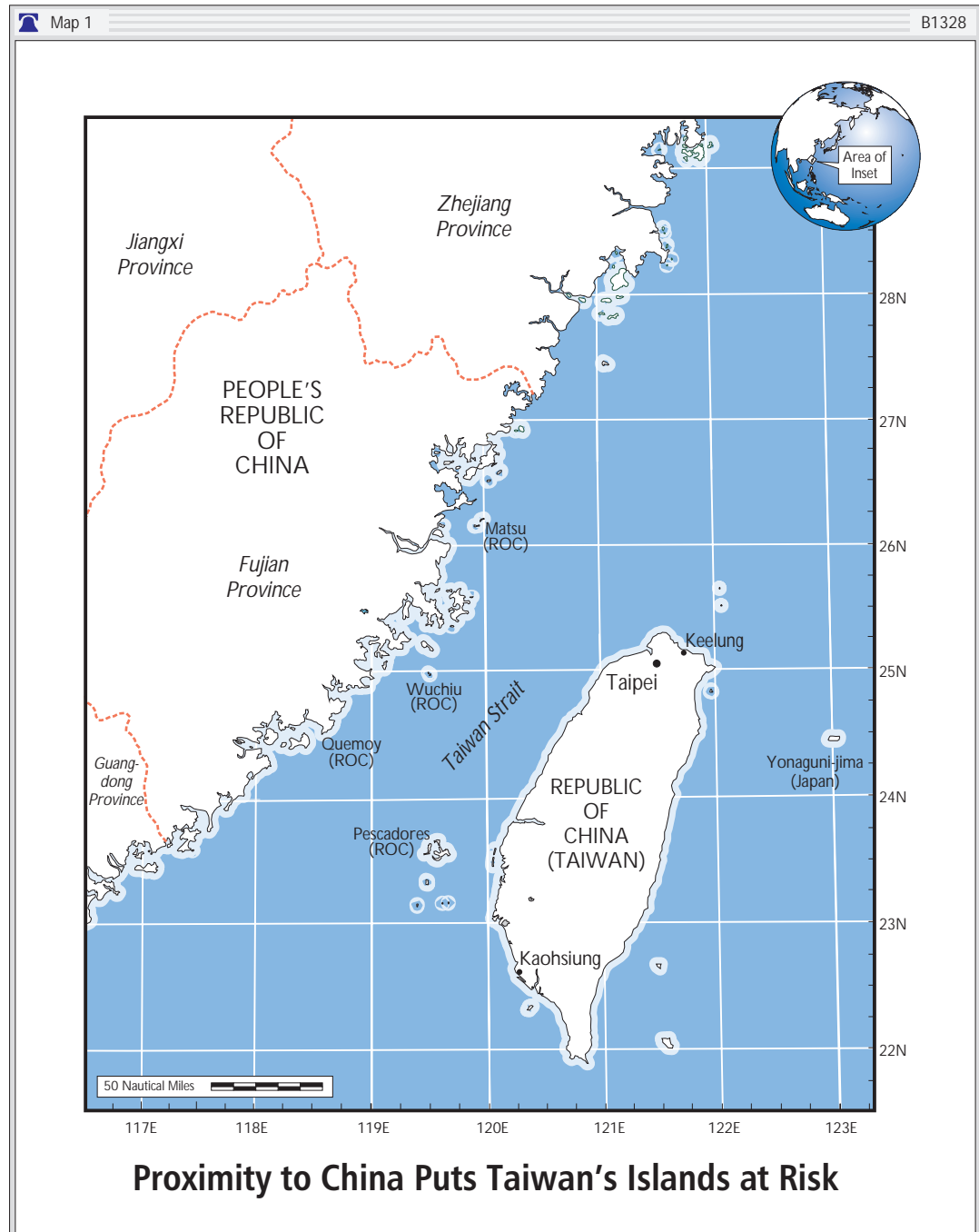


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1. The author thanks William Sands, an intern for The Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis International Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation, for his assistance researching this study.
 2. For an assessment of this statement, see Stephen J. Yates, “Punishing the Victim: The Clinton Administration's Rebuke of Taiwan,” Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 617, August 3, 1999.
 3. “Beijing can build ER bombs,” *Jane's Defense Weekly*, July 21, 1999, p. 5.
 4. Brian Mosely, “China 'ready to give up lives,’” *Sydney Morning News*, August 19, 1999.

the short run, an outright Chinese invasion of Taiwan appears highly improbable. This would be a highly risky and costly operation for China, even with months of intense preparation.⁶ China lacks the amphibious lift capability to make an invasion threat credible, although it is working to remedy this deficiency.

China nonetheless has available several military options short of physical invasion. China could conduct more provocative invasion exercises, wage information warfare attacks, harass merchant shipping, test ballistic missiles near Taiwan, or seize one or more of Taiwan's offshore islands. These options could be pursued singly or in various combinations against Taiwan. Even limited aggression could pressure Taiwan politically, rattle its finan-

cial markets, risk a wider conflict, and, more broadly, test U.S. resolve to assist Taiwan.



5. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense*, July 1998, p. 3. Available at www.China.org.cn.
6. For a description of what an amphibious invasion might look like, see Secretary of Defense William Cohen, "The Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait," Report to Congress Pursuant to the FY99 Appropriations Bill, February 23, 1999, p. 12.

In recent weeks, Chinese officials have been informally asking their U.S. counterparts how Washington might react if China pursued limited military actions against Taiwan.⁷ Prudence dictates that U.S. policymakers carefully consider such possibilities. As a matter of law, moreover, the United States is obligated under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8) to help Taiwan defend itself.⁸ To honor this commitment, the United States must be prepared to assist Taiwan in the event of Chinese aggression, whatever its form.

To increase the likelihood of a peaceful resolution to the China-Taiwan problem, the United States should unequivocally state its determination to defend Taiwan in the event of Chinese aggression;⁹ maintain a robust U.S. military presence in the Pacific; increase surveillance of Chinese military activity; provide Taiwan with more defensive weaponry, including missile defense systems; and exercise its right of free passage by sailing U.S. naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait on a regular basis.

CHINA'S MILITARY OPTIONS AGAINST TAIWAN

OPTION #1: Increase the Size and Scope of Invasion Exercises

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) periodically holds military exercises in the Fujian Province, near Taiwan.¹⁰ These exercises are often

highly publicized to exert psychological pressure on Taiwan. China conducted major exercises in conjunction with ballistic missile tests in March 1996, just prior to Taiwan's first direct presidential election. During the past two months, China has been conducting air, ground, and naval exercises along its coastline, including mock amphibious assaults. In August, Chinese fighters flew dozens of sorties close to the so-called centerline in the Taiwan Strait. Reports indicate more exercises are likely in the near future, possibly around the 50th anniversary of communist rule in China on October 1.¹¹

China considers war games attractive for several reasons. As long as the maneuvers stay within its borders, China can claim that it is simply exercising its sovereign right to self-defense. Over time, major war games will better prepare China's armed forces should they be ordered to attack Taiwan directly. It is expensive for Taiwan to mobilize its forces every time China conducts major exercises.¹² Finally, provocative war games could be used to gauge U.S. resolve and military responsiveness.

Despite these advantages, China will incur additional risks if it increases the intensity and scope of its exercises. It is expensive to conduct major military exercises, even for a major regional power. Large-scale military exercises would allow Taiwan and the United States to glean valuable intelligence about Chinese military capabilities. Finally, Beijing

7. Peter Hartcher, "China may be moving for another shot at Taiwan," *The Australian Financial Review*, September 4, 1999; Michael Laris and Steven Mufson, "China Mulls Use of Force Off Taiwan, Experts Say," *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1999, p. A1.
8. Sec. 2(b)(5) of the Taiwan Relations Act requires the United States "to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character."
9. Sec. 2(b)(6) of the Taiwan Relations Act requires the United States to "maintain the capacity to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan." This statement should be interpreted to mean the United States has a legal obligation to assist Taiwan in the event of aggression by China.
10. The Fujian Province is part of the Nanjing Military Region.
11. Matt Forney, "With a Bark Far Worse Than Its Bite, China Lacks Ships, Jets to Take Taiwan," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 1999, A22; "Large Scale Mobilizations Reported on China Fujian Coast Across from Taiwan," *Apple Daily* (Hong Kong) September 4, 1999.
12. Prior to the 1973 October War, Israel could not afford to mobilize its forces every time Egypt conducted training exercises across the Sinai Peninsula. This dynamic helped Egyptian forces achieve surprise.

China's Military Options Against Taiwan

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#1 Escalate Invasion Exercises	1) Puts psychological pressure on Taiwan. 2) Military training benefits.	1) China risks revealing operational capabilities. 2) Mounting large-scale exercises is costly.	1) Psychological pressure lessens over time if war games became routine. 2) Increasing size and scope of military exercises could provide cover for actual attack.
#2 Mount Information Warfare Attacks	1) Taiwan's economy relies heavily on computers. 2) Could be used as a force multiplier with other military options. 3) China could plausibly deny responsibility for hacker attacks.	1) China vulnerable to Taiwanese counterattacks. 2) Most of Taiwan's sensitive financial and military networks appear well protected against intrusion.	1) Chinese hackers attacked U.S. government Web sites during Operation Allied Force. 2) China's military has placed increased emphasis on developing information warfare capabilities. 3) Full extent of Chinese information warfare capabilities unknown.
#3 Harass Taiwan's Commercial Shipping	1) Action would highlight Taiwan's dependence on international trade. 2) Disruption could rattle Taiwan's stock market.	1) Action might interfere with international transit of other states. 2) Taiwan could retaliate against China's ports.	1) China detained 975-ton Taiwan freighter in July 1999. 2) China could encourage pirates to harass Taiwanese vessels. 3) Disruption could prompt maritime insurance premiums to soar.
#4 Test Ballistic Missiles Near Taiwan	1) Tests could be conducted on short notice. 2) Psychological pressure could disrupt Taiwan's financial markets. 3) Tests would make Chinese missiles more attractive for export. 4) Tests could temporarily shut down portions of the Taiwan Strait.	1) Tests might accelerate Taiwan's and Japan's missile defense efforts. 2) Tests would allow U.S. to glean more intelligence regarding Chinese missile capabilities. 3) Tests would reinforce China's image as a regional bully. 4) Tests likely to prompt U.S. military show of force, as happened in 1996.	1) China conducted missile tests near Taiwan in December 1995 and March 1996, prior to the island's first direct presidential election. 2) Missiles could be targeted to fall just short of Taiwan, or fly over the island, as North Korea did with its Taepo Dong 1 test launch over Japan in August 1998. 3) Tests could serve as a prelude to more forceful military action. 4) China might test cruise missiles in addition to ballistic missiles
#5 Seize One or More of Taiwan's Offshore Islands	1) Seizure of offshore islands much easier than invading Taiwan. 2) Seizure of undefended offshore island could be done quickly and with relatively little preparation.	1) Likely to engender Taiwan military response. 2) High risk of military escalation. 3) International opinion likely to turn against China, particularly if the seizure involves bloodshed.	1) Possible variant of Matsu and Quemoy crises, in 1955 and 1958, which brought the U.S. and China to the brink of war. 2) China would probably attempt to seize an undefended or lightly defended island

must consider that such military posturing lowers investor confidence in China's stability as a trade or joint-venture partner.

OPTION #2: Information Warfare Attacks

The PLA took special interest in U.S. intelligence-gathering and electronic warfare capabilities employed against Iraq during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. China has since worked hard to develop similar capabilities. According to a 1998 U.S. Department of Defense report, the "PLA has shown an exceptional interest in information warfare (IW) and has begun programs to develop IW capabilities at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels as part of its overall military modernization effort."¹³

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense has warned its citizens about China's ability to penetrate government-run World Wide Web sites and to spread rumors via the Internet.¹⁴ America caught a glimpse of China's information warfare potential after the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, during Operation Allied Force. Chinese hackers, allegedly acting on their own initiative, gained unauthorized access to several U.S. government Web sites.

China's interest in developing information warfare capabilities flows naturally from Taiwan's growing dependence on computers. China could encourage limited assaults on these systems and then disclaim any responsibility for the activities of "independent" hackers.

Of course, waging information warfare against Taiwan would involve risks for China. Apparently, Taiwan possesses some sophisticated information warfare capabilities of its own, which would make China's own computer networks vulnerable to potential counterattacks. Taiwan also has taken

extensive measures to protect its most sensitive government and financial information systems against intruders.

OPTION #3: Harass Commercial Shipping

If China decided to pursue a more ambitious strategy, it might consider harassing Taiwan's commercial shipping traffic. On July 31, China seized and detained the 975-ton *Shin Hwa*, a Taiwanese freighter delivering supplies to Matsu, one of Taiwan's offshore islands near the mainland. Chinese authorities alleged that the freighter was smuggling goods to China.

As an island, Taiwan is heavily dependent on commercial shipping for its economic well-being; 99 percent of its trade comes by sea. Short of a full-blown war, though, China probably would not attempt to impose a conventional naval blockade because that almost certainly would lead to a wider conflict. Instead, it is more likely China would pursue a more incremental approach. A recent Pentagon assessment states, "Beijing probably would choose successively more stringent quarantine-blockade actions, beginning with declaring maritime exercise closure areas and stopping Taiwan-flagged merchant vessels operating in the Taiwan Strait."¹⁵ As part of a creeping blockade, China might try to clog vital sea lanes with hundreds of commercial fishing vessels, forcing Taiwan to consider escalation.

Even limited Chinese action along these lines could disrupt Taiwan's commerce.¹⁶ This would affect the United States as well, because Taiwan is its seventh largest trading partner. China might try an even subtler form of disruption, such as encouraging piracy against smaller Taiwanese vessels. A Center for Strategic and International Studies report reveals that "Between 1990–1995 there were over 120 incidents of Taiwanese fishing boats

13. Secretary of Defense William Cohen, "Future Military Capabilities and Strategy of the People's Republic of China," Report to Congress, Pursuant to Section 1226 of the FY National Defense Authorization Act, September 1998, p. 5.

14. "MND Warns Taiwan of Beijing's Information War," *China Times*, August 10, 1999.

15. Cohen, "The Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait," p. 11.

16. In 1987–1988, the spillover from the Iran–Iraq war proved costly and risky to U.S. shipping in the Persian Gulf, forcing the U.S. to reflag Kuwaiti tankers and provide them with naval escorts.

being robbed or subjected to inspection by China's public security police or Chinese pirates in the South China Sea."¹⁷ China could encourage piratical attacks—possibly by offering financial inducements—and then claim some measure of deniability.

In the event of a deepening conflict, China could always attempt to sever Taiwan's sea arteries by direct military means. The Pentagon study on Chinese military capabilities reports that the "Chinese Navy maintains a large inventory of naval mines and is capable of conducting mining operations within the country's coastal seas."¹⁸

The PLA could lay mines in Taiwan's ports and navigational channels, or attack shipping vessels with its submarine fleet. China has 63 submarines, including four Russian-built Kilo-class submarines. These assets could threaten Taiwan's navy and wreck havoc on commercial shipping.¹⁹

Table 2 B1328

Chinese Ballistic Missiles Threatening Taiwan

U.S. Designation	Alternative Names	Range	Payload	Inventory
CSS-8 ¹	M-7*	94 miles/150 km.	418 lbs/190 kg.	Up to 500 ²
CSS-7	DF-11/M-11*	175 miles/280 km.	1,763 lbs/ 800 kg.	200 ³
CSS-6 ⁴	DF-15/M-9*	372 miles/600 km.	1,102 lbs/500 kg.	650 ⁵
CSS-5 ⁶	DF-21	1,100 miles/1,770 km.	1,322 lbs/600 kg. 250 kt. nuclear	35-50 ⁷

Note: * Export name.
Sources:
1 China has exported over 100 CSS-8s to the Middle East. See *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems*, 1999.
2 *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems*, 1999.
3 *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems*, 1999.
4 China recently deployed up to 200 of these nuclear-capable missiles along the Taiwan Strait. See *Jane's Defense Weekly*, February 24, 1999.
5 China recently deployed up to 200 of these nuclear-capable missiles along the Taiwan Strait. See *Jane's Defense Weekly*, February 24, 1999.
6 The CSS-5 is the land-based version of the JL-1 SLBM. Two CSS-5 missiles were tested near Taiwan in 1995.
7 *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems*, 1999.

OPTION #4: Provocative Missile Tests

China already has used its missile fleet to pressure Taiwan. In July 1995 and in March 1996, China bracketed Taiwan with ballistic missile tests. Some missiles landed close to Kaohsiung and Keelung, Taiwan's two largest commercial ports, temporarily closing vital shipping lanes.²⁰ The tests sent Taiwan's stock market into a tumble and led the government to spend \$15 billion to prop up the currency.²¹

China is unlikely to conduct identical tests, because the shock value of such action would be

17. Ralph Cossa, "Security Implications of Conflict in the South China Sea: Exploring Potential Triggers of Conflict," A Pacific Forum CSIS Special Report, Honolulu, Hawaii, March 1998, p. C-4.

18. Cohen, "Future Military Capabilities and Strategy of the People's Republic of China," p. 14.

19. China also could harass Taiwan's commercial airliners, though this would be a high-risk option. Clearly, any attempt to harass Taiwan civilian aircraft would risk a direct military confrontation with Taiwan. Any interference with international air traffic would likely turn international opinion against China.

20. For details on these missile tests, see Richard Fisher, Jr., "China's Missile Over the Taiwan Strait: A Political and Military Assessment," in James Lilley and Chuck Downs, eds., *Crisis in the Taiwan Strait* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1997), pp. 168-174.

21. James Cox, "Uncertainty Batters Taiwan Market," *USA Today*, March 26, 1996, p. 3B.

diminished by repetition. To ratchet up the pressure, China might design future tests to fly over Taiwan, just as North Korea fired its Taepo Dong-1 missile test over Japan on August 31, 1998. In addition to more ballistic missile exercises, China could conduct cruise missile tests near Taiwan or its offshore islands.

In 1998, Taiwan purchased U.S. Patriot antimissile batteries to help defend its territory, and has deployed these systems around Taipei. However, China has more than enough missiles to overwhelm Taiwan's limited antimissile capabilities. "Taiwan's most significant vulnerability is its limited capacity to defend against the growing arsenal of Chinese ballistic missiles," states a recent U.S. Defense Department assessment.²²

Missile tests might prove risky for China. Taiwan weathered Chinese missile tests in 1995 and 1996. International opinion frowned on these tests, considering China's actions unduly provocative, and the crisis prompted the United States to dispatch two carrier battle groups to the region. Additional Chinese missile tests could spur Taiwan and Japan to accelerate development of their anti-missile systems, something Beijing has vigorously opposed.

OPTION #5: Seize One or More of Taiwan's Offshore Islands

China currently lacks the amphibious and airborne capability to threaten Taiwan credibly with outright physical invasion.²³ China has the amphibious lift to move one reinforced infantry division, and another division of paratroopers by air.²⁴ Although not enough to threaten Taiwan with an outright invasion, China's military capabil-

ity, nonetheless, poses a threat to many of its offshore islands.

The Pescadores lie 25 miles off Taiwan's coast. Taiwan also has 20 islands much closer to China's coastline. Some of these islands, such as Quemoy and Matsu, are heavily defended; others are not. If China were to attack an offshore island, they would probably seize one that is uninhabited or lightly defended.²⁵

China could seize such an island on relatively short notice, thus putting the onus of escalation on Taiwan. Taiwan's aircraft probably would have to penetrate China's airspace to attack occupying forces. To complicate a potential naval response, China could use commercial fishing vessels to surround any island it seized.

As with China's other possible military options, invading Taiwan's offshore islands would include some significant political and military risks. The United States and China went to the brink of war in 1955 and 1958 over two of those islands, Quemoy and Matsu. A Chinese military blunder would be a major political setback. And international opinion probably would turn against any unprovoked land grab by China.

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

Although it currently lacks the ability to threaten Taiwan credibly with outright invasion, China nonetheless has a wide range of military actions at its disposal. China could combine two or more of these options, simultaneously or sequentially. For example, China could execute more missile tests in tandem with provocative ground, air, and sea maneuvers; or China could harass commercial shipping while seizing one of

22. Cohen, "The Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait," p. 3.

23. China has the potential to mobilize commercial vessels for invasion purposes, though these would be highly vulnerable to Taiwanese air and naval attacks. For an assessment of China's potential to use merchant ships to transport troops, see Tai Ming Cheung, "Chinese Military Preparations Against Taiwan Over the Next 10 Years," in Lilley and Downs, *Crisis in the Taiwan Strait*, pp. 65-66.

24. Cohen, "The Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait," p. 9; and "Future Military Capabilities and Strategy of the People's Republic of China," pp. 15-16.

25. Philip Finnegan, "Isolated Taiwan Islands May Tempt Chinese," *Defense News*, Vol. 14, No. 34 (August 30, 1999), p. 1.

Taiwan's offshore islands. China might feign one (or more) of these options to provoke a Taiwan or United States response that would appear rash.

In the event of outright hostilities, China would employ an even wider range of military options against Taiwan, to include, for example, direct missile attacks. A missile barrage could inflict thousands of civilian casualties, even if China limited itself to conventional warheads. Or, as a prelude to an attempted invasion, China might attempt to destroy critical military targets. According to Colonel Wang Baoqing, a researcher at China's Academy of Military Sciences, China would "first use missiles to paralyze Taiwan's command system and important military targets in order to gain air superiority and command of the sea."²⁶

In the event of war, China probably would attempt to intimidate Taiwan with nuclear threats as well. In extreme circumstances, China might consider using such weapons to coerce Taiwan or gain some military advantage, notwithstanding its pledge never to employ nuclear weapons against the island. Some commentators have speculated on China's ability to black out the majority of Taiwan's electronic circuits with an airburst nuclear detonation near the island.²⁷ Such an explosion would generate a massive electromagnetic pulse.

Chinese military literature has discussed the potential to fuse conventional and unconventional forms of warfare, often described as a "people's war under high-tech conditions."²⁸ Intelligence officials on Taiwan claim that at least 12,000 main-

land Chinese spies have infiltrated the island.²⁹ While this claim cannot be independently confirmed, it is reasonable to assume that China has some pre-positioned "Fifth Column" elements in Taiwan, including agents capable of sabotage, for use in extreme circumstances.

China's calculations no doubt consider the ability and willingness of the United States to assist Taiwan in the event of hostilities. China might attempt to exploit any major diversion of U.S. naval assets dispatched to deter aggression elsewhere in the world, such as the Persian Gulf or the Korean Peninsula.

WHAT THE U.S. SHOULD DO

To reduce the chances that China will pursue any type of aggressive action against Taiwan, the United States should:

- **Clarify U.S. commitment to defend Taiwan in the event of Chinese aggression.** The United States should forthrightly declare its intentions to meet its obligation to help defend Taiwan. A posture of strategic ambiguity might tempt China to take aggressive action it would not otherwise consider. A clear statement of U.S. resolve to defend Taiwan will help strengthen deterrence and thus increase the likelihood of a peaceful resolution.³⁰
- **Increase surveillance of Chinese military activities.** The United States should be alert to the possibility of Chinese feints aimed at concealing potential military action. The Pentagon

26. "Military Expert Wang Baoqing Envisages War With Taiwan," *Beijing Zhongguo Xinwen She*, September 7, 1999, reprinted in FBIS-CHI-1999-0908.

27. It also is possible to generate electromagnetic pulses without nuclear explosions.

28. Lonnie Henley, "China's Capacity For Achieving A Revolution In Military Affairs," in Bates Gill and Lonnie Henley, *China and the Revolution in Military Affairs*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Penn., May 1996, p. 54.

29. Agence France-Presse "More Than 34,000 Taiwanese Work for Chinese Intelligence: Report," August 17, 1999.

30. On August 24, 1999, The Heritage Foundation and Project for the New American Century issued a statement along these lines. Signed by 23 leading conservatives and foreign policy experts, the statement deemed it "essential that the United States make every effort to deter any form of Chinese intimidation of the Republic of China on Taiwan and declare unambiguously that it will come to Taiwan's defense in the event of any attack or a blockade against Taiwan, including against the offshore islands of Matsu and Kinmen." Statement available at www.Heritage.org/news/99/nt082499_letter.html

warns that “The PLA’s modernization program includes improving military denial and deception doctrine and capabilities for use against potential adversaries at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.”³¹ The United States should therefore allocate naval, air, and space intelligence-gathering assets, as appropriate, to reduce the chances that China might surprise Taiwan with military action.

- **Maintain a robust U.S. military presence in Asia.** Any reduction of U.S. military presence in Asia would likely threaten regional stability and embolden China toward more aggressive action. A strong and visible military presence in Asia also will allow the U.S. Navy to exercise its transit rights through international waters. The United States should sail Navy ships through the Taiwan Strait on a regular basis. This action would reassure Taiwan and strengthen deterrence by signaling U.S. resolve to the mainland.
- **Provide Taiwan with defense weaponry, including antimissile systems capable of offsetting the Chinese missile threat.** Taiwan clearly lacks the means to defend itself adequately against the Chinese missile threat. The United States should offer to sell Taiwan additional Patriot antimissile batteries. More broadly, Congress should consider carefully the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act introduced by Senators Jesse Helms (R–NC) and Robert Torricelli (D–NJ). This legislation includes numerous constructive measures to promote Taiwan’s defensive capabilities.

CONCLUSION

China would suffer economically if it took aggressive action against Taiwan. At a minimum, the U.S. Congress certainly would invoke tough economic sanctions. But it would be a mistake to conclude that China will decide its Taiwan policy solely on the basis of economic calculations. Chinese officials were not deterred by international opinion or the prospect of sanctions when they decided to repress democratic activists at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Nationalism remains a potent force in China, and China’s resolve regarding reunification with Taiwan should not be underestimated. In late 1995, General Xiong Guangkai, the deputy chief of staff for intelligence, informed Charles Freeman, former assistant secretary of defense, that Taiwan was “a matter of vital interest to us. It is a matter of national unity. We are ready to sacrifice a million people for Taiwan.”³²

Tensions between China and Taiwan likely will ebb and flow in the coming months. But since reunification remains a principal objective of China’s foreign policy, there will no doubt be more Taiwan crises in the future. U.S. policymakers would be wise to consider carefully China’s military options against Taiwan well in advance.

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31. Cohen, “The Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait,” p. 7.

32. Quoted in Bill Gertz, *Betrayal: How the Clinton Administration Undermined American Security* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1999), pp. 90–91.