



Obama's vs. Trump's Taiwan Policies: Understanding China's Military Incursions in the Taiwan Strait

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Obama's vs. Trump's Taiwan Policies:
Understanding China's Military Incursions in the Taiwan Strait

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

For decades, China has utilized credible threat as a means of coercive diplomacy to deter U.S. policies that indirectly support Taiwan's sovereignty (Ross, 2000). The growth of Chinese military capabilities, tension in the Taiwan Strait, and the U.S. grand strategy in the Asian region are important topics that have been analyzed by scholars, with the understanding that Taiwan is a ticking time bomb for military confrontation between the U.S. and China. Instead of viewing the U.S. as reacting to Chinese belligerence, this research examines whether U.S. Taiwan policies and statements have provoked China into forms of military intimidation toward Taiwan. With Chinese President Xi Jinping on a path to steering China's future indefinitely, an examination of whether Chinese military activity in the Taiwan Strait correlates with President Barack Obama's and President Donald Trump's policies and statements on Taiwan will provide insight into how Xi utilized military threats to manage U.S.–Taiwan relations. Such an examination also provides a foundation from which to understand current and future Chinese military aggression by the Xi regime toward Taiwan, shedding light on China's military incursions around the island.

This quantitative research utilizes content analysis to compare incursions by the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) into and around Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) against notable positive U.S. policies and statements on the issue of Taiwan. The enumeration of this data begins from Xi's succession to the position of General Secretary of the Chinese

Communist Party (CCP) on November 15, 2012 and extends to January 20, 2021, thereby evaluating most of Obama's second term to the end of Trump's presidency.

The data confirms my first hypothesis: China utilized credible military threat as third-party coercive diplomacy to deter the U.S.'s increasing support for Taiwan in order to prevent a moral hazard in which Taiwan is emboldened to take steps toward independence. This research refuted my second hypothesis: that President Xi Jinping's regime remained consistent in its response to different forms of U.S.–Taiwan interactions, regardless whether those actions were conducted by Obama or Trump, for example, similar responses to arms sales by both former U.S. presidents.

This research shows that PLA incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ is not reactionary to U.S. arms sales, diplomatic visits, or other positive U.S.–Taiwan interactions. Indeed, there is no consistency between the PLA incursions that took place during Obama and Trump's tenures for similar U.S.–Taiwan interactions. In addition, there is also no correlation between an increase in specific positive U.S.–Taiwan interactions and the frequency and number of military aircrafts employed by the PLA during incursions.

The lack of correlation between arms sales, diplomatic visits, positive U.S.–Taiwan interactions, and PLA incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ is evidence that the incursions are not a reaction to specific types of U.S. policies or engagements with Taiwan per se. Instead, the PLA incursions prove to be a stand-alone strategy utilized by Xi to signal a credible threat strong enough to deter deviation from the status quo as a whole.

Dedication

To my children Renée and Oliver, who are my greatest source of pride and joy.

To my husband, Jerry, who cheered me on to the finish line in the midst of our shared grief over losing loved ones, as well as all the challenges that have taken place in the last few years.

To my mom, Kitty Fong, whose lasting wisdom to treasure each day motivated me to keep pushing forward with gratitude. To my dad, Daydes Fong, whom I will forever look up to. The strong values and morals you both instilled in me are my saving grace—not a day goes by without my missing you both.

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All the good that this thesis holds is because of the generous help I received and any shortcomings present are mine alone.

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Glossary of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| ADIZ | Air Defense Identification Zone |
| AIT | American Institute in Taiwan |
| CCP | Chinese Communist Party |
| DCS | direct commercial sales |
| DPP | Democratic Progressive Party |
| FMS | foreign military sales |
| ICAO | International Civil Aviation Organization |
| MDE | military defense equipment |
| MND | Ministry of National Defense |
| PLA | People's Liberation Army |
| PLAAF | People's Liberation Army Air Force |
| PLAN | People's Liberation Army Navy |
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| QDR | Quadrennial Defense Review |
| ROC | Republic of China, Taiwan |
| TAIPEI | Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (Act) |
| TECRO | Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office |
| TRA | Taiwan Relations Act |

Chapter I

Introduction

On July 1, 2021, at the centennial celebration of the Chinese Communist Party's founding, President Xi Jinping cautioned:

No one should underestimate the strong determination, firm will, and strong ability of the Chinese people to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity (Xi, 2021)!

(任何人都不要低估中國人民捍衛國家主權和領土完整的堅強決心、堅定意志、強大能力!)

Xi's warning against interference in China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity is unsurprising, given years of similar reiterated threats (Ross, 2000). Among China's multiple territorial disputes, Taiwan remains the most likely to induce conflict between the U.S. and China (Tucker & Glaser, 2011). China has remained steadfast on the issue of reunification with Taiwan for decades as the U.S. also remained loyal to the One China policy, until Trump tried to use it as leverage toward U.S. interests (Sutter, 2017).

Notably, during a Fox News Sunday interview, Trump asserted: "I fully understand the One China policy but I don't see why we have to be bound by One China policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things including trade" (currency manipulation, China's building of "fortresses" in the South China Sea and on North Korea) (*Wall Street Journal*, 2016).

Today, with a new U.S. administration at the helm, both Xi Jinping and U.S. President Joe Biden were quick to signal their resolve on the issue of Taiwan. China's

prioritization of unification with Taiwan, and the importance of signaling their resolve on the issue to the U.S. was unmistakable when China sent 28 warplanes into the Taiwan Strait the first weekend after Biden’s presidential inauguration (Ramzy, 2021). Although Biden and Xi foster a relationship that dates back to over a decade ago when both leaders were vice presidents of their respective countries, Biden did not try to appeal to Xi by building on past relations. Instead, his administration wasted no time asserting its stance toward China, prioritizing the importance of the Asian region by swiftly using the March 2021 Alaska summit—the first official meeting between both countries—to posture a willingness to confront China on multiple issues, including its aggression toward Taiwan (Wright, 2021). Through the Alaska summit, both Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan signaled that their prior experience in the Obama administration would not mean a re-enactment of Obama’s policy of engagement with China. Instead, their bolder stance articulates that they are informed of China’s strategy of utilizing cooperation as bait, to tease the notion of warmer relations while remaining steadfast on Chinese core interests (Wright, 2021).¹ The intense exchange in Alaska was foreshadowed days earlier during Blinken’s and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin’s trip to Japan and South Korea (Price, 2021). By strategically choosing Tokyo and Seoul as their first and second destinations, respectively, the Biden administration demonstrated the significance of the Asian region as part of Biden’s promise to

¹ The Obama administration, which included Joe Biden, Anthony Blinken, and Jake Sullivan, began feeling frustrated with the PRC’s non-cooperation and intransigence on issues such as climate change and the Iran nuclear deal as early as Obama’s second year in office (Landler, 2012). Originally the U.S. wanted to engage with China on issues as a comprehensive whole rather than separately. Decades later the tables turned, and it is China that wanted to elicit cooperation with the U.S. based on a combined broad range of issues rather than separate issues like the U.S. would now prefer. Moreover, any policy shift with China under Biden would be disparaged by the Republican Party as going soft on the PRC, despite Biden maintaining Trump’s tariffs and calling out Beijing on human rights abuses (Haltiwanger, 2021).

strengthen alliances (Inaugural Address by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021).² The Biden administration gave Chinese leadership not only a preview of its strategy to reinforce Asian regional alliances and its assertive approach on the issue of Taiwan but also intensified rather than eased Chinese leadership’s concerns toward the new Biden administration (Myers & Qin, 2021).

The U.S.’s commitment to protecting democratic governance was further cemented with an invitation to Taiwan for the inaugural Democracy Summit (Leary & McBride, 2021). With severed U.S.–China communication channels to manage the risk of military miscalculations in the face of increasing Chinese military maneuvers in the Taiwan Strait and a bolder policy of engagement by the U.S. with Taiwan, the need to understand the role of U.S. policies on Taiwan and Chinese military activity in the Taiwan Strait has never been more important (Doshi, 2020; Hass, 2019).

Research Questions

In order to provide guidance for future U.S. diplomacy and policies on the issue of Taiwan, it is necessary to look to the past by examining the effects of U.S.–Taiwan policies from the two most recent former U.S. presidents—Donald Trump and Barack Obama. With President Xi on a path to steering China’s future indefinitely, examining whether Chinese military activity in the Taiwan Strait correlates with Obama’s and

² The U.S.’s prioritization of Tokyo is in keeping with the importance Washington has placed on Japan since the end of the Cold War regarding security alliances in the Asia-Pacific region (Xinbo, 2000). However, U.S.–Japan relations have also encountered challenges, such as in 2013 when the U.S. leaned more toward China during the Sino-Japanese sovereignty disputes over what the U.S. deemed as “insignificant islands” (Ross, 2017, p. 262).

Trump's policies and statements on Taiwan, will provide insight into how Xi utilized military threats in managing U.S.–Taiwan relations.

Although the dichotomy between Obama and Trump is stark, it is important to also identify instances of continuity in the U.S.'s Taiwan policies. By analyzing the time period where Xi's leadership overlaps with Obama's and Trump's tenures, it helps capture the impact of both former U.S. administrations on the issue of Taiwan against the one constant—the Xi regime. In doing so, it provides a foundation from which to understand current and future Chinese military aggression by the Xi regime toward Taiwan, shedding light on China's military behavior in and around Taiwan.

Even before Trump's inauguration ceremony on January 20, 2017, it was clear that he would take a different approach to U.S.–Taiwan relations as compared to Obama. What was uncertain was how China would respond. Obama's initial policy of strategic partnership with China had shifted toward a strategy of “rebalancing” during Obama's second term (Tellis, 2020). Trump kicked off U.S.–China relations by branding an “America first” policy and taking Obama's cooled relations with the People's Republic further by naming China (the U.S.'s largest trading partner and important ally on the issue of North Korea and climate change) as a strategic competitor.

The shift from cool to cold U.S.–China relations begs the question: How did Xi respond to Trump's and Obama's administration policies when it came to the issue of Taiwan? It was apparent to Xi that Trump's temperament was different from that of his predecessor, Obama. It is possible Xi even welcomed a different U.S. agenda and approach to foreign affairs (Palmer, 2016; Sutter, 2017). Yet, perhaps it went beyond Xi's wildest expectations when Trump initiated U.S.–China relations by taking

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's congratulatory call, coupled with his willingness to question the U.S.'s longstanding recognition of the One China policy (Hass, 2019; Sutter, 2017).³ Until Trump occupied the White House, U.S. foreign policy on the issue of Taiwan varied little since the 1970s when the U.S. terminated diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan, in favor of establishing ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in order to gain an ally in the Cold War with the Soviet Union (L. Chen, 2016).

Since then, U.S. policy toward Taiwan has been anchored in recognizing the One China policy, discouraging Taiwan's aspirations for statehood, while warning China against the use of force toward Taiwan—i.e., dual deterrence⁴—and encouraging both sides to aspire to an arrangement acceptable to both parties (Goldstein, 2018). Both U.S. Democratic and Republican presidents stayed close to those anchors for decades, both of which were grounded in the Taiwan Relations Act and the Three Communiqués.

The general consensus was that Trump was more willing to challenge China on the issue of Taiwan than was Obama. To be fair, Obama had inherited looming domestic and global economic crises, coupled with actions by Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou to

³ See "Bob Dole worked behind the scenes on Trump-Taiwan call" (Davis & Lipton, 2016), for information on Dole's role in facilitating Tsai's congratulatory call to Trump.

⁴ In the YouTube video "Critical issues confronting China, featuring Bonnie Glaser," (Fairbank Center, 2021b) Glaser discusses the Biden administration's strategies of dual deterrence and dual reassurance. Glaser explains the current status of these policies, i.e., that Blinken stated it would be a serious mistake to unilaterally change the status quo which entails strategic ambiguity, adherence to the One China policy, and not supporting Taiwanese independence. Yet, Biden's statement on May 23, 2022, contradicting the U.S.'s longstanding policy of strategic ambiguity, has become commonplace as he also made the same assertion in August and October 2021 (e.g., Factbase Videos, 2021; Kanno-Youngs & Baker, 2022; Stephanopoulos, 2021). The White House has backpedaled on all three occasions, reinstating the U.S.'s focus on strategic ambiguity by asserting that the U.S. stance had remained unchanged. This supposed discrepancy between Biden's genuine stance on defending Taiwan, and his administration's loyalty to the status quo, is a clear indication of the divergent views between the leader and his team on whether ambiguity or clarity is a better deterrent.

drastically lower tensions with China. As such, prioritization of the U.S. economy and China's supporting role in his endeavors represented not only paramount but pragmatic diplomacy (Sutter, 2009).

Meanwhile, Trump entered his presidency in 2017 taking a decidedly aggressive approach to China, including pressuring Xi for his lack of support against North Korean President Kim Jong-un (National Security and Defense, 2017). However, Trump's positive interactions with Kim in June 2018 may have convinced Trump he had established sufficient rapport with Kim to influence North Korea's diplomacy to meet U.S. interests. This notion can be supported by the fact that on the same day as the Trump–Kim meeting, several U.S. diplomats attended the “dedication ceremony” of the new American Institute of Taiwan (AIT), the *de facto* U.S. embassy in Taiwan (Dwyer, 2018). In spite of China's condemnation, Trump must have felt confident in his ability to manage U.S.–North Korea relations, as his administration was not concerned with staying in China's good graces in order to receive their support. Moreover, Trump's casual tweeting to Kim Jong-un regarding the U.S.'s “bigger & more powerful” nuclear button, seemed to convey at the very least that he felt comfortable that his direct aim at Kim might be helpful diplomacy despite an obvious souring of relations (Baker & Tackett, 2018). However, by 2019, both before and after the Trump–Kim meeting at the DMZ, Trump finally acknowledged and even gave credit to China's importance in aiding the U.S. on the issue of a nuclear North Korea (Remarks by President Trump, 2020; Remarks by President Trump, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2019).

By 2020, however, it was clear China would remain vital to maintaining dialogue with Pyongyang when Trump's openness to meeting with Kim was embarrassingly met

with North Korea's retort that it was not interested in meeting the U.S. president (Gallo, 2020). Trump, like his predecessors, ultimately acknowledged the One China policy—the foundational basis of all Chinese interstate relationships. Nonetheless, Trump's lack of grounding in political ideology or framework meant that he was not bound to any strategic stance regarding Taiwan, leading to Taiwan policies that seemed to provoke China more frequently than had Obama's policies.⁵ Since Trump was perceived to be more pro-Taiwan than Obama, how did the Chinese military exercises and acts of intimidation in and around the Taiwan Strait compare between the two U.S. administrations? Was Chinese military activity in the Taiwan Strait consistent when Obama and Trump made arms sales to Taiwan that were similar in scale and effectiveness? Or did China respond with a different level of intensity toward similar U.S. actions? When the Obama or Trump administration's leadership made diplomatic visits to the island, did the Taiwan Strait see similar Chinese military activity? A trend of consistent or inconsistent military maneuvers by China would prove insightful toward uncovering Chinese military strategy and its priorities on the use of credible military signaling toward different types of U.S. actions.

For decades, China has utilized credible threat as a means of coercive diplomacy to deter U.S. policies that indirectly support Taiwan's sovereignty (Ross, 2000). Instead of viewing the U.S. as reacting to Chinese belligerence, this research examines whether the U.S.'s Taiwan policies and statements have provoked responses from China in the form of military intimidation toward Taiwan. Do specific U.S. policies and statements

⁵ It can also be argued that Obama showed a shift in his approach to China, because he had begun U.S.–China relations with positive engagement. Yet, by 2011 then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's famous "pivot" to Asia strategy was interpreted by China as an act of containment toward China's rise (Clinton, 2011).

correlate with and precede atypical Chinese military aggression toward Taiwan in the Taiwan Strait? A correlation would provide grounds for the U.S. to review its Taiwan policies rather than focusing solely on deterring Chinese aggression (Tufts University Global Institute for Global Leadership, 2021). Measuring Xi's use of military threats with U.S. policies and statements along the same timeline gives insight into how China uses its military capabilities to signal and posture toward Taiwan and the U.S. on the issue of reunification and Taiwan's aspiration to continue as a democratically governed sovereign state.

Hypotheses

The Chinese Communist Party's "North Star" and its source of national pride are encapsulated in the oft-repeated phrase, *national rejuvenation*. While the history and strategic objectives of China's national rejuvenation are complex, a singular theme of restoring and exhibiting Chinese strength underlies its diverse objectives. The CCP views reunification with Taiwan as a fundamental component of national rejuvenation, while also identifying a divided China as weakness (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2020).⁶ As Oriana Skylar Mastro identified in a 2021 *Foreign Affairs* article, China is "thus tying Taiwan's future to his primary political platform." From China's perspective, Taiwan's declaration of independence would be more detrimental than the current status quo. Therefore, instead of supporting the notion that Taiwan faces the imminent danger of forceful reunification by China, this research provides data to support the argument that

⁶ Bonnie Glaser disagrees with the notion that Xi Jinping has tied reunification with Taiwan to China's national rejuvenation in the 100th CCP anniversary speech. Glaser asserts that Xi did not make new pronouncements and only reiterated assertions like his predecessors before him (Glaser, in Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, 2021b, YouTube video 20:54).

China is utilizing credible military threat as third-party coercive diplomacy to deter the U.S.'s increasing support for Taiwan in order to prevent a moral hazard in which Taiwan is emboldened to take steps toward independence.

- *I hypothesize that President Xi's regime has remained consistent in its response to different forms of U.S.–Taiwan interactions* (regardless whether those actions were conducted by Obama or Trump) such as responding similarly to arms sales by both former U.S. presidents. Although Xi's predecessor, former Chinese President Hu Jintao's tenure overlapped with Obama's first term, my research focuses on Chinese military activity under Xi, as he is the present and currently indefinite Chinese president. It is self-evident that China strategically utilizes threats toward Taipei to signal the level of Beijing's displeasure with U.S.–Taiwan interactions.
- Beyond signaling condemnation of U.S. interactions with Taiwan in order to reinforce China's resolve on reunification with the island, *I hypothesize that China may increase military exercises in the Taiwan Strait to credibly deter Taiwan and the U.S. from pushing the boundaries of ambiguity surrounding statehood.*
- *I hypothesize that China's military intent is not to convey that war is imminent, but to posture a credible threat to ensure that the situation does not escalate to the extent that China would have no choice but to seek forceful reunification.* For example, this research may show an increase in Chinese military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in the wake of then newly elected President Trump's willingness to question the U.S.'s longstanding recognition of the One China policy (Oyen, 2018).

- *I hypothesize that the research will show that Trump's policy of diplomatic engagement with Taiwan will correlate to heightened Chinese military exercises in the Taiwan Strait.*
- *Although a study of game theory is beyond the scope of this research, I hypothesize that this research will reveal China's use of credible threats on ancillary actions, such as Taiwan's purchase of arms from the U.S., as Beijing's application of third-party coercion to deter the U.S. from creating the moral hazard of emboldening Taiwan toward independence.*

To determine whether specific U.S. policies led to increased Chinese aggression toward Taiwan, this research examines Chinese military exercises and excursions in the Taiwan Strait after notable U.S. policies or statements. The intent of this research is to reveal whether there is a correlation between certain U.S.–Taiwan policies and Chinese aggression toward Taiwan, with the goal of providing insight into how China utilizes threats in response to the U.S.'s Taiwan policies. My belief is that China possesses the patience, pragmatism, and wisdom to utilize credible threat to bide its time while maintaining the status quo with the aim of accomplishing reunification without war.

Definition of Terms

Coercive Diplomacy: Where one state attempts to influence another state to cease and refrain from behavior that the coercing state does not like. Coercive diplomacy relies on the ability of the coercive state to present a credible threat to the target state that the cost of its actions outweighs the benefits the target state may perceive (Ross, 2017).

Dual-Deterrence: The U.S. policy of deterring China's forceful reunification with Taiwan while also deterring Taiwan from declaring independence.

Gray-Zone Tactics: Military or use of other government assets "to gain an advantage" by employing tactics that are short of war or an attack. China's use of gray-zone tactics in the Taiwan Strait includes conducting military exercises meant to exhaust and lessen the readiness of Taiwan's military (U.S.-China Relations at the Chinese Communist Party's Centennial, 2021; Blanchard, et al., 2020).

Paramount Leader (Supreme Leader): Informal titles attributed to the position of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, which help reflect the notion that this position is the single most politically significant and powerful position within the Chinese government.

Strategic Ambiguity: A U.S. policy on whether it would intervene in the event of military conflict between China and Taiwan, whereby the U.S. employs ambiguity as to whether it would resolutely intervene. The significance of strategic ambiguity is that uncertainty as to whether the U.S. would intervene would cause China to pause its forceful reunification with Taiwan, and would cause Taiwan to not declare independence as it would be unable to deter the ramifications of doing so without U.S. military support.

Strategic Clarity: A strategy adopted as policy by the U.S. that would provide an unequivocal stance on whether it would or would not defend Taiwan in the event of an attack by the Chinese military.

Taiwan Relations Act (TRA): This is the policy in which the U.S. conducts unofficial relations with Taiwan. The TRA stipulates that relations between the PRC and

Taiwan are to be settled in a peaceful manner, and that the U.S. and the international community also has an interest in ensuring peace in the region. Moreover, the U.S. is committed to the “preservation of human rights” of the Taiwanese people, and in conducting arms sales to assist in Taiwan’s self-defense, while also maintaining the U.S.’s capacity to help Taiwan “resist” forces of aggression or “coercion” that would threaten Taiwan’s way of life (Zablocki, 1979).

Three Communiqués: Three separate joint statements between the U.S. and China, which help to inform part of the foundation of U.S.–Taiwan relations.

(1) The first U.S.–PRC Joint Communiqué took place in 1972 between President Nixon and Premier Chou En-lai, and recognizes the PRC as the “sole legal government of China; Taiwan is a province of China which has been returned to the motherland, the liberation of Taiwan is China’s internal affair,” and the U.S. recognizes that there is only one China, of which Taiwan is a part.

(2) The second U.S.–PRC Joint Communiqué was released in 1978, in which the U.S. and the PRC agreed to begin diplomatic relations on January 1, 1979; Taiwan would maintain “unofficial relations” with the U.S. while reaffirming the One China policy of which Taiwan is a part.

(3) The final U.S.–PRC Joint Communiqué in 1982 again recognized the One China policy while highlighting that the issue of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan “was not settled in the course of negotiations,” but that:

arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and that it intends gradually to reduce its sale of arms to Taiwan,

leading, over a period of time, to a final resolution. (*Three Communiqués Archives*, n.d.)

Third-Party Coercive Diplomacy: In the context of U.S.-China-Taiwan relations, China directs coercive policies toward Taiwan in order to influence the behavior of the U.S. The intent is to indirectly influence the great power by directing aggression toward the small-state ally (Ross, 2017).

Chapter II

Literature Review

The growth of Chinese military capabilities, tension in the Taiwan Strait, and U.S. grand strategy in Asia are important topics that have been analyzed for decades, with the understanding that Taiwan is a ticking time bomb for U.S.–China military confrontation. Like clockwork, China’s resolve to unify with Taiwan intensifies, then comes to the forefront of news, warranting further analysis of what such Chinese maneuvers might mean. Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen remains steadfast in her promise—which secured her election, then re-election—of not acquiescing to any notion of one China and reunification, which are China’s prerequisites for negotiations toward a peaceful resolution.

With Hong Kong stripped of any semblance of democratic institutions and freedoms, this foreshadowing of what could become Taiwan’s future after reunification is not lost on the Taiwanese people themselves, making it unlikely that future successors of Tsai will entertain Chinese rule, even if ambiguously as did Tsai’s predecessor Ma Ying-jeou did when he acknowledged the One China policy. As peaceful resolutions become moot, China’s threat of forceful reunification is seemingly the only remaining option for any cross-strait resolution. Yet, whether U.S. grand strategies, or China’s deterrence, or Taiwan’s handling of intensifying aggression—these ideas carry an underlying assumption that the U.S. and Taiwan are just reacting to China. My research seeks to determine whether it is in fact the other way around.

The incredible speed at which China's military capabilities have grown and modernized begs the question as to how it will be utilized. Previous discussion on the topic centered around grand strategy – whether China was expansionist. In *Long Shot and Short Hit*, Wei-chin Lee studied the implications of a strengthening Chinese military and concluded that China was “a revisionist state with an unwavering goal of eventual reunification with Taiwan by coercion” (W. Lee, 2008). In “Clash of the Titans”, Zbigniew Brzezinski and John Mearsheimer discuss China's grand strategy as well as U.S. and Chinese military capabilities. In the article, Brzezinski acknowledges China's growing military, but contends that the costs of war far outweigh the benefits for China (Brzezinski & Mearsheimer, 2005). Mearsheimer counters that China is expansionist, and views reunification with Taiwan as a foregone conclusion after China gains regional hegemony in the Asian region (Brzezinski & Mearsheimer, 2005). Rush Doshi analyzed China's grand strategy, and agrees that China is expansionist. He goes even further, suggesting that China seeks to overthrow U.S. global hegemony, and cautions the U.S. not to withdraw commitment from Taiwan for any notion of a grand bargain (Doshi, 2020). Susan Shirk argues that China is not necessarily motivated by expansionist tendencies; rather, that Chinese actions are dictated by the insecurity of its leadership that the CCP would not survive and maintain domestic credibility if Taiwan declared independence (Shirk, 2007). M. Taylor Fravel echoes Shirk's perspective, attributing a possible reason for China's increasingly aggressive posture vis-à-vis territorial disputes in Asia to preventive war theory whereby China potentially perceived a weakening stance on territorial claims (Fravel, 2007).

Current academic discourse focuses on China's shifting calculus on the cost-benefit analysis of forceful reunification with Taiwan, rather than a discussion of grand strategy. Most recently, Bonnie Glaser summarized this, positing that the argument for the risk of war being high is due to China's seeming "window of opportunity" due to a decline in "U.S. military advantages" where war games conducted by the Pentagon and the RAND Corporation showed a U.S. defeat in the case of a military confrontation with China (Glaser, in Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, 2021b, YouTube video 6:40). Glaser further posits that China is currently able to "impose significant costs to the U.S."; that Taiwanese citizens do not possess the resolve to resist; and that the island lacks effective military capabilities to defend its territory. China believes even a "protracted war" would be bearable, as the PLA deems the Chinese citizenry to be more willing to make sacrifices and its economy is less reliant on international trade. Glaser also stated: "Taiwan is existential to [China] but it is not vital to U.S. national interests" (Glaser, in Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, 2021b, YouTube video, 7:09). In the same discussion, Glaser asserts that China likely perceives the international community's potential reaction as insignificant, although Russia's recent attack on Ukraine has undoubtedly shifted China's perception of the unity of Western democratic nations against a nation-state deemed to be an aggressor. Glaser acknowledges that many support the notion that options for peaceful reunification with Taiwan is moot, and Xi's urgency to attack before the U.S. and Taiwan narrows the gap on China's military advantages—an urgency most notably based on the fact that reunification has been bound to Xi's legacy (Glaser, in Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, 2021b, YouTube video 11:09).

Despite these arguments, Glaser argues that the risk for war is in fact low. She argues that China aims to “prevent Taiwan independence” over reunification, emphasizing that the discourse often fails to acknowledge the historical context of the issue between Beijing and Taipei as a “political problem left over from the civil war” (B. Glaser, 2021). Ultimately, Glaser notes the actions by Xi as a continuation of previous leaders rather than a stark deviation.

Research on the issue of Chinese reunification with Taiwan is varied and spans decades. My aim in researching Chinese military threats in the Taiwan Strait is not new, and is preceded by authors such as Alastair Johnston’s article titled “China’s Militarized Interstate Dispute Behaviour, 1949-1992.” In it, Johnston examines the “patterns in Chinese conflict behavior and crisis management since 1949” (Johnston, 1998, p. 1). My research is similar in that Johnston also sought to uncover Chinese behavior by looking at past cases. Jones, Bremer, and Singer defined *militarized interstate disputes* as “the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member is explicitly directed toward the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state” (Jones, et al., 1996, cited in Johnston, 1998, p. 5). Where I diverge with these authors is that I am seeking to understand whether past aggressive military activity toward Taiwan correlates with U.S. policies and statements in the context of third-party coercive strategy. In order to gain insight into China’s strategy, like Johnston, I also look to the past to identify trends.

There is additional robust discourse centered on an American domestic debate of grand strategies that concerns U.S. interests. In “A U.S. China Grand Bargain,” Charles Glaser (2015) argues for U.S. accommodation on the issue of Taiwan. He reasons that

continued advancements in China's military capabilities would embolden Beijing to escalate the issue of Taiwan; hence, the U.S. should not intervene and risk war, but instead retrench in order to pave the way for greater U.S.–China cooperation (p. 69).

Thomas Christensen argues for a moderate U.S. strategy toward China, and calls for U.S. deterrence of Chinese aggression toward Taiwan (Christensen, 2006, pp. 111–112). Similarly, Ian Easton argues for the U.S. to engage with Taiwan to support its security and defense as well as political endeavors (Easton, 2019, p. 7). Among these varied discourses—grand strategies of engagement and retrenchment; whether America should stay committed to intervening in the event of a Chinese attack on Taiwan; how U.S. policies may impact China's response—lacking is an examination of whether Chinese aggression in the Taiwan Strait in fact correlates to U.S. policies and statements on Taiwan. My research seeks evidence of a grand strategy most suitable for the interests of the U.S. and other stakeholders.

There is also growing scholarship that examines Obama's and Trump's Taiwan policies. In “America First: US Asia Policy Under President Trump,” Ashley Townshend (2017) assesses whether Trump used Taiwan as a pawn for U.S. interests. She claims that Trump was calculated in his actions to bolster diplomatic relations with Taiwan, taking a “strongman” approach to China (p. 3). Surprisingly, however, Copper highlights continuity in Trump's policies, arguing that Trump was ultimately similar to Obama on the issue of Taiwan. Copper claims that Trump's policies shifted to align with his predecessor after his campaign ended, and that Trump sought to maintain stability in the East Asian region via a balance of power like his predecessors before him (Copper, 2017, p. v). On the other hand, political scientists mostly agree that Obama's foreign policy on

Taiwan was measured and steady. Dean Chen (2020) argued that Obama was steadfast in his recognition of the One China policy and maintenance of the status quo (pp. 401–402). Tellis emphasized Obama’s belief in a strategic partnership with China, where he quoted Obama as stating: “[It is] not only because it’s in China’s best interest, but because it’s in America’s best interest, and the world’s best interest. We want China to do well” (Tellis, et al., 2020, p. 5). Notably, Obama made that comment while the U.S. was still recovering from the Great Recession and dependent on China’s partnership in addressing “the global economic crisis and recession, climate change, nuclear weapons proliferation and terrorism” (Sutter, 2017, p. 72). Dean Chen, among others, viewed Obama’s Taiwan policy as similar to that of his Republican predecessor, George W. Bush (D. Chen, 2020, p. 404–405). In “Barack Obama, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump” Robert Sutter compared and contrasted Obama’s and Trump’s policies on China and analyzed the deterioration of U.S.–China relations (Sutter, 2017, p. 5). Lacking is a systematic comparative study that explores whether the policies and statements from the Obama and Trump administrations’ strategic approaches correlate with immediate Chinese threats toward Taiwan, and how both administrations compare against each other.

Dean Chen’s 2020 article titled “The End of Liberal Engagement with China and the New US–Taiwan Focus” comes closest to my research. Our research is similar in that Chen sought “to compare and contrast several notable policy/press statements on cross-strait matters, released by the White House and State Department” from the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations (p. 404). However, Chen’s goal was to argue that Trump’s hard-line approach toward China and his willingness to insinuate abandoning

recognition of the One China policy was the result of an “ideological change from liberal internationalism to conservative nationalism” (p. 404).

My research is different in that it focuses on all of the notable policies and press statements regarding Taiwan from the Obama and Trump administrations. Furthermore, my goal is to compare and contrast whether the timing of Chinese military maneuvers in the Taiwan Strait correlate with specific policies and press statements. For example, did Obama’s signing of the military exchange bill allowing senior military officials to visit Taiwan, and Trump’s announcement of the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, and U.S. leadership visits to Taiwan correlate with a spike in Chinese military activity in the Taiwan Strait?

My research provides data to corroborate or refute a correlation between Chinese threats and U.S. policies and statements toward Taiwan, to identify whether contrasts or continuity in Obama’s and Trump’s actions toward Taiwan warranted consistent trends in Chinese aggression. A correlation may show consistent responses to similar types of U.S.–Taiwan interactions, and the data may also uncover which U.S.–Taiwan interactions are perceived as more provocative to China based on the intensity of the Xi regime’s response.

The effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy on managing cross-strait tensions is paramount, and the stakes could not be higher. In 2007, M. Taylor Fravel argued that among China’s territorial disputes, the issue of Taiwan is the most likely to induce conflict. In 2015, a year prior to the Trump presidency, Charles Glaser furthered that

sentiment by stating that the U.S.'s active engagement in defending Taiwan might entice China to enter into conflict with the U.S. (C. Glaser, 2015).

At stake is the potential destabilization of the entire Asian region, international commerce, and world order. The U.S. will be forced to choose whether to intervene and defend Taiwan from forced reunification in the event of Chinese attack. In 1995, then Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye famously portrayed *strategic ambiguity* by responding to his Chinese hosts as to what a U.S. response would be if there were conflict in the Taiwan Strait: “We don’t know, and you don’t know” (Nye, quoted in Carpenter, 2006). Over a decade later, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick put a crack in the shield of *strategic ambiguity* when he acknowledged that the U.S. would intervene to prevent China’s forceful reunification with Taiwan regardless of how the conflict was initiated (Carpenter, 2006).

Under consideration was not only the need to protect Taiwan’s democracy, but also how neighboring allies might react if the U.S. did not intervene. For example, since the end of World War II, Japan has taken shelter under the U.S.’s “‘nuclear umbrella’ to deter threats” (Johnson, 2022). Since Japan and Taiwan cohabit in the air and sea, Japan is naturally concerned about China’s aspiration to reunify with Taiwan, as evidenced by former Japanese Prime Minister Abe’s support for the U.S. to adopt *strategic clarity* as a more effective policy of deterrence toward China (Johnson, 2022). Moreover, in the face of mounting tension resulting from China’s military incursions around Taiwan and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, Abe also brought up the notion of a “‘nuclear sharing’ program similar to that of NATO” (Johnson, 2022).

In essence, the U.S.'s policy of strategic ambiguity might also motivate allies like Japan to reevaluate their national security needs. Those needs could include the pursuit of nuclear arms or strengthened ties with China—both unfavorable outcomes for both the U.S. and Taiwan. Allies such as Japan and South Korea, among others, would also be forced to either affirm their loyalty to the U.S. and engage and support democratic norms in the region, or display neutrality to avoid Chinese retaliation. Moreover, a Chinese attack on Taiwan, regardless of intervention by the U.S. or neighboring states, would destabilize the entire Asian region. China's insistence on reunification with Taiwan—even if by force—necessitates stakeholders enacting effective foreign policies that will not entice China to realize its worst instincts.

The significance of understanding how China responds to U.S. stimuli is that up-to-date quantitative data will yield information on Chinese foreign policy strategies specifically on the issue of Taiwan, but more generally on China's foreign policy approach toward its core national interests. My research provides policymakers with data and quantitative evidence on whether Chinese aggression toward Taiwan coincided with U.S. policies and statements. President Biden has been written off as likely to enact policies more aligned with Obama's since he was previously Obama's vice president. Yet, the U.S.–China meeting in Alaska showed that the Biden administration is more willing to confront China than was Obama (Wright, 2021). Viewed in the context of Republican support for Trump policies, and Biden's developing approach toward Taiwan, it is helpful to determine whether Trump and Obama's interactions with Taiwan coincided with immediate increased risks toward the island nation.

Methods

I used content analysis to conduct my research, which consisted of collecting data regarding Chinese military activity in the Taiwan Strait, as well as notable U.S. policies and statements on the issue of Taiwan. A potential variance between Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping's approach to military strategies has been removed by enumerating Chinese threats beginning from Xi's accession to the position of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party on November 15, 2012 through to January 20, 2021. This meant evaluating most of Obama's second term to the end of Trump's presidency.

Military threats in and around the Taiwan Strait are measured by: (1) the number of military ships and aircrafts deployed into Taiwan's ADIZ; (2) abnormalities that stand out, such as incursions coming from the southeast—the most likely point of origination for a Chinese invasion; and (3) the number of consecutive days the PLA maintained its force in the Taiwan Strait. Data showing PLA incursions into and around the Taiwan Strait ADIZ were collected from the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) website, Taiwan and Japan MND reports, and online news media. These data were compared against the dates of notable policies and statements on Taiwan from the Obama and Trump administrations. My aim is to determine whether a correlation could be shown between the timing of PLA incursions and positive U.S. policies and statements on Taiwan.

Regardless whether a correlation is identified, this quantitative research is unable to support a causal argument. Notably, Taiwanese policies and statements by leadership may also correlate with Chinese military activity. My research assumes that Taiwan would not declare independence at the risk of certain war with China only for symbolic

gains. Thus my research is focused on the impact of U.S. policies and statements on Taiwan.⁷

Limitations

It must be acknowledged that there are two other categories of stimuli that may correlate with Chinese threats toward Taiwan, other than U.S. policies and statements on Taiwan: (1) there may have been domestic Chinese stimuli, such as nationalistic pressures (Hughes, 2006); and (2) stimuli from Taiwan, such as its bid to join the World Health Organization (WHO), or the election of President Tsai Ing-wen who, unlike her predecessor, refuses to acknowledge the “1992 consensus” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2020). Lin Chen-yi (2013) argues that stimuli from Taiwan may be more significant in cross-strait tensions compared to stimuli from the U.S., stating:

Before President Obama announced his arms sales package for Taiwan in January 2010, Taiwan had already inked 12 agreements with China. One could argue that progress on cross-strait relations depends more on the KMT [Kuomintang, a Taiwan Nationalist party], than U.S. arms sales. (p. 419)

My research focuses on a narrow spectrum of stimuli directly related to U.S.–Taiwan interactions. The reason for this narrow focus is to answer two specific questions: (1) Does data show a correlation between specific U.S. policies or statements toward Taiwan and Chinese military incursions around the island? (2) If such a correlation is shown, which types of U.S. policies or statements correlate with increased Chinese threats toward Taiwan? My research is limited by the assumption that China’s domestic

⁷ Note: All applicable protocols and policies of Harvard University’s Institutional Review Board for the use of human subjects in research was complied with in this thesis research.

considerations and independent Taiwanese provocations do not consistently take place simultaneously with U.S. policies and statements toward Taiwan. Therefore, my assumption is that if a trend appears, it will be attributed as a direct correlation between U.S.–Taiwan policies and Chinese threats toward Taiwan.

It must also be acknowledged that Chinese leadership's responses to U.S.–Taiwan arrangements such as arm sales are not limited to repercussions incurred solely by Taiwan. For example, Sutter (2017) states that in 2010, Hu Jintao's government (Xi's predecessor) made economic threats toward the Obama administration, such as ceasing investments in U.S. government securities and abandoning the use of the American currency in international transactions—all in response to China's disapproval of U.S. policies and actions, including arms sales to Taiwan. My research does not examine China's full response in the form of threats to other states or institutions due to a particular event, but will focus on only China's military intimidation tactics toward Taiwan in order to isolate China's strategy on the issue of reunification with Taiwan.

Chapter III

Evolving Stances: Obama's and Trump's U.S.-Taiwan Policies and Xi's View on Sovereignty

Foreign Affairs magazine published a survey of 68 experts on U.S.–China relations in October 2021, asking whether they agreed with the statement “U.S. foreign policy has become too hostile to China.” Survey responses showed that 31% agreed and 35% disagreed, with similar split among those who felt strongly on either side (Is U.S. Foreign Policy Too Hostile to China?, 2021). Among those who agreed were Robert Jervis and Avery Goldstein; those who disagreed included Bonnie Glaser and Robert Keohane—thereby illustrating the divided view that exists even among experts regarding the path the U.S. administration should follow. While the survey did not focus solely on U.S. policies related to Taiwan, the divided opinion is indicative of pressures facing the Biden administration and its U.S.–China policies. Biden sent mixed signals about increasing engagement with Taiwan while simultaneously backpedaling on answering *yes* to the question of the U.S.’s commitment to defending Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack on the island (Haass & Sacks, 2021).⁸ Meanwhile, Xi struck a less aggressive tone, moving from threatening force in 2019, to calling for peaceful reunification with Taiwan during the centennial celebration in 2021—although reiterating it as an inevitable

⁸ Most recently while in Seoul on May 23, 2022.

endeavor (Garcia & Tian, 2021).⁹ The evolution of foreign policy is common, thus implying that a review of the evolution of Obama's, Trump's, and Xi's policies on the issue of Taiwan is important for providing context as to how current tensions in the Taiwan Strait came to be.

At the moment, the Biden administration is continuing the U.S.'s longstanding legacy of *strategic ambiguity* on the issue of Taiwan. In spite of Biden's three separate statements of commitment to defending Taiwan (as of the time of this writing), the White House has nonetheless backpedaled on all such statements (Sanger, 2021). However, experts like Ryan Hass argue that the U.S. needs to embark on a new policy of *strategic clarity*, that is, a clear commitment to defend Taiwan in the face of a Chinese attack, to meet evolving aggressive behaviors from the PRC (Hass, 2019). China has been consistent and unwavering on the issue of reunification with Taiwan, although previous mentions of reunification seemed more like an eventual goal, without conveying the current sense of urgency as the news media have interpreted it to be, based on increasing PLA exercises in the Taiwan Strait. Chapter IV provides data and an analysis of what such PLA activity around Taiwan may mean.

This chapter identifies the evolution of the U.S.'s Taiwan policy from the Obama to Trump presidencies during the time period from November 15, 2012 to January 20, 2021. It also touches on Xi's evolving internal policies on sovereignty during the same period in an effort to examine the environment leading up to increased PLA activity

⁹ David Sacks analyzes Xi's 2021 centennial celebration speech in "What Xi Jinping's Major Speech Means for Taiwan," positing that China's strategy toward Taiwan remains unchanged, and that Xi's speech leaves room for flexibility regarding the timeline of reunification with Taiwan, meaning there is less urgency than PLA activity in the Taiwan Strait might suggest. Sacks also stated that Xi's speech showed that China still views a peaceful resolution as possible, and that the U.S. should tread with caution on the issue of supporting Taiwan's independence.

around Taiwan. Next I examine notable shifts in policy by all three leaders later in their terms, together with concurring domestic and international events.

Obama began his first term in office pursuing a policy of strategic engagement with China, which led his administration to feeling frustrated with China's unwillingness to cooperate on issues such as North Korea, climate change, and claims of expansion in the South China Sea (Bader & Barboza, 2020). Combined with greater economic domestic stability in the U.S., this resulted in an increased willingness to engage with Taiwan in the form of arms sales during Obama's second term. What began as President Trump's willingness to continue arms sales (like his predecessors) to support Taiwan's defense, despite China's condemnation, was taken to provocative levels early in the Trump administration due to his willingness to challenge the One China policy.

Meanwhile, Xi pushed a more aggressive stance on PRC interests, such as cementing reunification with Taiwan as part of his campaign of national rejuvenation. Since Xi set 2049 as the year when national rejuvenation will be complete, there is much debate regarding whether China will become a rule maker¹⁰ by 2050, thereby setting 2049 as the deadline for reunification with Taiwan as well.

By examining shifts in U.S. policy and Xi's evolved stance on sovereignty as it pertains to Taiwan, the groundwork will be laid for insight into the current state of China's intensified pursuit of reunification with Taiwan, as well as intensified PLA

¹⁰ See Goodman's 2018 article "From Rule Maker to Rule Taker," in which he states: "Beijing's newfound role as global rule maker extends beyond trade to its ambitious plan for Sino-centric connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In late June, the Supreme People's Court in Beijing enacted provisions to establish two courts to mediate BRI-related disputes, one based in the southern city of Shenzhen to handle disputes arising along the maritime 'Road,' the other in Xi'an, to handle cases along the overland 'Belt.' No doubt a legal mechanism to manage inevitable commercial disputes in BRI projects is necessary, but the fact that Beijing opted to set up its own courts rather than rely on existing international arbitration centers in Hong Kong, London, and New York shows that there is a powerful new rule maker on the global stage" (p. 2)

activity in the Taiwan Strait. Background on the evolution of Obama's, Trump's, and Xi's policies will provide context when comparing the timeline of notable U.S.–China policies with PLA activity in the Taiwan Strait.

Barack Obama

Barack Obama entered his first term as President of the United States keen to remain low key on issues related to Taiwan's defense capabilities and to prevent any actions that would unsettle China. Mentions of Taiwan were almost nonexistent, except in the context of Obama's assurances to China regarding the U.S.'s continued adherence to the One China policy. Obama, like Xi, inherited a country facing a multitude of issues, and saving the U.S. economy from the brink of a disastrous crisis was Obama's top priority. Sutter (2009) aptly summarized Obama's first term:

American preoccupation with the global economic recession and conflicts in Southwest Asia and the Middle East indicated that US relations with the rest of the Asia-Pacific region were likely to be of generally secondary importance at the start of the Obama administration. (p. 189)

Notably, there were arms sales to Taiwan in February 2010 and September 2011—both during Obama's first term. However, there was a four-year pause until the next and final major sale was announced during the end of his presidency. The fact that China responded more strongly to the 2010 arms sale than the Obama administration had anticipated—despite it being timed to take place after Obama visited China in November 2009, and with the intention of strengthening relations to enable cooperation—caught Obama off guard (Sutter, 2017). This may help explain the Obama administration's consistent strategy of bundling arms sales: five military items were sold on January 29, 2010 (USTBC, 2010); another bundle 21 months later on September 21, 2011 (DSCA,

2011), and finally 11 major defense pieces of equipment on December 16, 2015 (DSCA, 2015)—three announcements of arms sales to Taiwan during his two-term presidency.¹¹ Given the four-plus year gap between the sale on 2011 and the last one on 2015, it seems likely that the timing was coordinated.

Perhaps one of the biggest distinctions between Trump and Obama on the subject of arms sales to Taiwan was that Trump discontinued Obama’s strategy of bundling arms sales to Taiwan. Based on a tally of the data (shown in Chapter IV), Trump made 11 separate arms sales announcements to Taiwan during his four years in office. This aligns with various U.S.–China policies imposed by both former leaders. Obama aimed to foster a relationship of strategic cooperation with China, i.e., better to provoke China less frequently by bundling arms sales to Taiwan rather than frequently irritating a much-needed alliance when it came to issues such as the global economy, climate change, and North Korea, among others. Moreover, timing the largest bundled sale just as China was anticipating a reset of U.S.–China relations with the new Trump administration, may have worked to soften the fallout. Obama conveyed his view on U.S.–China relations at the U.S./China Strategic and Economic Dialogue in July 2009 when he suggested that bilateral relations between both nations “will shape the 21st century, which makes it as

¹¹ The USTBC issued a press release on December 16, 2015, which not only included an announcement of the arms sales to Taiwan but also argued for an end to the bundling of arms sales to Taiwan (USTBC, 2015).

important as any bilateral relationship in the world” (Remarks by the President at the U.S./China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, 2009).¹²

Yet, despite Obama’s belief that engagement and cooperation was the best way to address a rising China, there was a shift in his approach to Beijing in his second year in office. What began as Obama’s accommodation for China, such as declining to meet with the Dalai Lama a month prior to his first scheduled visit to China in November 2009, turned to “disillusionment” when the PRC began “flexing its muscles on trade and military,” while also proving uncooperative on climate change and Iran’s nuclear program (Landler, 2012). China did not feel compelled to compromise with a U.S. that it saw not only in decline, but where China was also rising, with double-digit growth for over a decade and where the U.S. was dependent on China for economic stability (Bader & Barboza, 2020).

After the Obama administration’s first year, they realized China would not be reciprocating Obama’s positive engagement and goodwill (Landler, 2012). As recounted by Jeffrey Bader, Obama’s then chief advisor on China, “Obama pulled back the veil,” by suggesting to then Chinese leader Hu Jintao that the U.S. would send warships into Chinese waters as a countermeasure to North Korea’s nuclear threat—a calculated step that would not bode well with Chinese nationalism. Hu was subsequently persuaded to place pressure on Kim Jong-il (Bader, quoted in Landler, 2012). As Alastair Ian Johnston and Mingming Shen write in their 2015 book, *Perception and Misperception in American*

¹² In “Assessing China relations under the Obama administration,” Li Cheng (2016) states: “[Obama] characterizes the U.S.-China relationship as the most important bilateral relationship of our time.” This is contrary to, “as important as any bilateral relationship,” from the official transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary. Obama’s choice of words was noted as an important distinction by Richard Bush (2011) in “The United States and China: A G-2 in the Making?” where Bush highlights Obama’s use of “as important as any bilateral relationship” to support why establishing a G-2 is unrealistic.

and Chinese Views of the Other, “Credible reassurance signals from the United States may be well received if aimed at individuals in the Chinese government, even if said individuals espouse a strong belief in Chinese exceptionalism” (p. 2).

While Obama was criticized for being too soft on China, with some observers lamenting the shift as lesson learned, previous officials such as Jeffrey Bader argued that, “the Chinese behaved differently in 2010, and what we did reflected their behavior” (Bader, quoted in Landler, 2012). The Obama administration became more willing to intervene in China’s displays of strength, as exemplified by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s pronouncement during a 2010 summit meeting in Hanoi that the U.S. was interested in a peaceful resolution of territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Clinton, 2010). However, the fact remains that Obama’s decision to bundle Taiwan’s military purchases to avoid arms sales announcements from 2012 to 2014 is telling of his pragmatic approach to the issue of China: it is a formidable nation and a U.S.–China alliance on numerous issues, including the economy, was significant to Washington.¹³ Obama’s balancing act—cooperating with China on issues of interest, and condemning Beijing for human rights violations and not adhering to international rules and norms—ended with him addressing China as a rival during his farewell address, one that “cannot match our influence around the world . . . unless we give up what we stand for . . . (applause) . . . and turn ourselves into just another big country that bullies smaller neighbors” (Obama, 2017).

¹³ Note, per Section 36(b) of the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, Congressional notification is required for foreign military sales (FMS) and direct commercial sales (DCS) beyond a certain threshold. In the case of Taiwan, “MDE [military defense equipment] of \$14M or more; any defense articles and services of \$50M or more; or design and construction services of \$200M or more” (DSCA, n.d.). This suggests there may have been FMS and DCS transactions between the U.S. and Taiwan that did not meet the threshold and therefore are not on record between 2012 and 2014, although they would be in keeping with Obama’s aim to not provoke China.

Donald J. Trump

Following eight years of Obama's measured approach of seeking cooperation with China where needed, the U.S. government transitioned to the Trump administration's transactional mindset of leveraging anything at Trump's disposal in an attempt to influence China toward U.S. objectives. Trump was viewed as a disruptor, most famously when he took Taiwan President Tsai's congratulatory call and questioned the One China policy. Ashley Townshend argues that it was a calculated step, pushed forward by Trump's inner circle with the intention of motivating Beijing to be more willing to engage with Trump on issues that needed their cooperation (Townshend, 2017, p. 3). It did not take long for Trump to realize that this step was a miscalculation. During a February 17, 2017, press briefing, when Press Secretary Sean Spicer was asked by a reporter what Trump got from China for reaffirming the One China policy, Spicer avoided the question by answering, "The President always gets something." When asked to clarify what that was exactly, Spicer moved on to the next question (Press Briefing by Press Secretary Sean Spicer, 2017).

By mid-April 2017, Trump backpedaled on calling China a currency manipulator, one of his harshest public critiques of the PRC (Tao, 2017, p. 6). On April 28, 2017, when asked by Reuters to comment on President Tsai's interview, she was prompted by the interviewer about whether she would engage in another call with Trump. She replied that she would not rule it out. Trump asserted, "I really feel that he [Xi] is doing everything in his power to help us with a big situation [referencing Pyongyang] so I wouldn't want to be causing difficulty right now for him" (Mason, et al., 2017).

These statements by Trump came on the heels of a Mar-a-Lago meeting that took place just weeks prior, where both Trump and Xi agreed to a “100-Day Action Plan to resolve trade differences” (Denmark & Hass, 2020). However, barely two months after the Reuters statement, Trump placed sanctions on a Chinese financial institution, Bank of Dandong, with alleged business ties to North Korea, while also announcing a \$1.42 billion arms sales to Taiwan, most likely employing the “stick approach” once again, due to dissatisfaction with Xi’s lack of progress with North Korea (M. Lee, 2017).

By the end of 2018, the trade deficit with China had reached \$418.2 billion, a new record that broke ranks with the \$300+ billion deficits going back to 2011—which by 2019, returned to previous similar levels at a deficit of \$342.6 billion (US Census Bureau Foreign Trade, n.d.).¹⁴ Trade negotiations came to a standstill when Washington pressed Beijing for more favorable terms and Beijing refused. At that point, the U.S.-China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue “was declared dead by the Trump administration four months later” (Denmark & Hass, 2020).

Trump continued to lean into U.S.–Taiwan relations into early 2018, with the passing of the Taiwan Travel Act, which was intended to enable high-level diplomatic visits between the U.S. and Taiwan, as well as another bill supporting Taiwan’s participation in the World Health Organization (Oyen, 2018, p. 130).¹⁵ By October 2018, Vice President Mike Pence was back to the “carrot approach,” reassuring China by

¹⁴ The timeline for Trump’s trade war with China is originally sourced from the Brookings Institute 2020 article by Hass and Denmark. Note: The article states that the deficit for 2018 reached \$419.2 billion, which seems to be a typo, since the U.S. Census Bureau, which the authors reference, has the 2018 deficit at \$418.2 billion.

¹⁵ The original bill received unanimous support on May 11, 2020, and passed the House of Representatives the next day. An updated version of this bill was reintroduced in the Senate on March 17, 2021, with no further progress since that reintroduction.

reinforcing the U.S.'s longstanding recognition of the One China policy from the three joint communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act. He also emphasized that “America will always believe that Taiwan’s embrace of democracy shows a better path,” ending that note by conceding that it was for the betterment of “all the Chinese people,” seemingly grouping Taiwanese as Chinese together (Remarks by Vice President Pence, 2018).

However, Robert Ross points out that third-party coercive diplomacy is a two-way street, and it took place during Obama’s tenure, too, when Sino-Japanese territorial disputes led the U.S. to relax support for Japan in early 2013 in an effort to not jeopardize U.S.–China cooperation (Ross, 2017, p. 61). As such, there may have been continuity from Obama to Trump regarding a willingness to compromise U.S. allies and lesser interests to maintain U.S.–China relations.

Nonetheless, Trump set the tone for U.S.–China relations by antagonizing China right from the beginning of his candidacy, which contrasts with Obama, who seldom mentioned China during his 2008 campaign, and unlike Trump, did not seek to put a bullseye on Beijing to which he could shoot blame for America’s challenges (Landler, 2012). Specifically on the issue of Taiwan, Obama recognized that it was sensitive and complex, which manifested in actions such as deciding against Taipei’s involvement in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, ultimately deeming it better to avoid endangering U.S.–China relations (Boon & Sworn, 2020, p. 1493). In contrast, Trump was unconcerned with the potential gravity of challenging China’s patience on the issue of reunification with the island (D. Chen, 2020, p. 404).

Despite Trump's perceived provocative Taiwan policies, his administration showed continuity in the sense that the key aspects of strategic ambiguity were maintained, in spite of advisors like John Bolton, who wrote an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* arguing for the U.S. to "revisit the 'One China Policy'" (Bolton, 2017).¹⁶ Trump had inherited a rather stable U.S. economy, although the nation was politically divided after the contentious 2016 election.

He began his presidency not only engaging China on the issue of Taiwan, but also on North Korea. The Trump administration highlighted a strong stance on needing China's help with North Korea soon after he entered the White House, and continued to lament China's lack of help despite Trump and Xi's three phone calls in 2017, where both leaders acknowledged a need for cooperation in managing Pyongyang (Oyen, 2018, pp. 121-122). Trump soon shifted his assessment of Beijing's help, however. On February 28, 2019, at a press conference in Hanoi, Trump said, "I think China has been a big help. Bigger than most people know," while at the same time acknowledging:

93 percent of the goods coming into North Korea come through China. So there's a great power there. At the same time, I happen to believe that North Korea is calling its own shots. They're not taking orders from anybody. (Remarks by President Trump, Vietnam, 2019)

Trump ended that note by reiterating that China still had a lot of leverage due to the majority of goods entering North Korea from China, while simultaneously saying China

¹⁶ For more discussion on Trump's policy continuity from Obama on the issue of China, see "China-U.S. relations under Trump: More continuity than change" by Zha Daojiong (2017, p. 13), where Daojiong argues that Trump pursued a continuance of Obama's policy toward China. See also, "Sitting outside the network – Reassuring the stability of the Taiwan Strait under the Trump administration" by Chen Ping-Kuei (2018, pp. 32-35), in which Chen argues that the U.S.'s increased military presence in Asia motivated allies to also increase their commitment to regional security.

has been very helpful. This back and forth of condemnation and praise regarding China's cooperation on issues of U.S. interest was common during Trump's tenure.

At the same time, issues were reviewed independently, as opposed to Obama's more holistic approach. For example, while Trump was praising China for its help with North Korea, the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019 was introduced to Congress in October 2019 (Curtis, 2019), and signed into law by Trump in March 2020 (White House, 2020). The Trump administration's approach contrasts with Obama's comprehensive approach of treading carefully around PRC's core interests, especially regarding Taiwan, to avoid jeopardizing Beijing's cooperation on other issues. In January 2020 Fox News Host Laura Ingraham questioned Trump regarding his views on the human rights violations against the Uyghurs. He replied: "Well, I'm riding a fine line, because we're making . . . great trade deals" (Denmark & Hass, 2020).

Notwithstanding these comments, by March 2020, with his re-election campaign underway and the pandemic ravaging the U.S., Trump routinely used and defended his use of the term "China virus" to describe the coronavirus (Rogers, et al., 2020). In August 2020, his administration called out Beijing on human rights issues, such as during a press briefing where China was acknowledged as becoming increasingly bold in its human rights violations rather than more democratic as the U.S. may have hoped for, highlighting the Uyghurs and Hong Kong, and also "the bullying of Taiwan" (Press Briefing by Ambassador O'Brien, et al., September 4, 2020). Trump did not believe in exporting liberal democratic values, and as a result did not see a need to tread lightly on the issue of Taiwan in an effort to entice goodwill on other issues. Pompeo had

articulated the era of “America First,” where “the old paradigm of blind engagement with China simply won’t get it done. We must not continue it and we must not return to it” (D. Chen, 2020, p. 416). This sentiment is echoed by Richard Bush in an article where he asserts that Taiwan should not be sidelined for other U.S. interests such as North Korea. Furthermore, Bush identifies Taiwan leadership’s standstill with Xi, and increased negative perceptions of China as Beijing’s own failing rather than Trump or the U.S.’s policies regarding regional security (Bush, 2017, p. 35). However, Tellis takes the opposite position that if Trump sought to solidify “strategic advantages” over China, then his administration should make “significant correctives to its current strategy for confronting China” (Tellis, et al., 2020, p. 4).

Like Obama, Trump also ended his presidency by taking a tougher stance toward China. In particular, there are parallels in Obama’s authorization of top military exchanges between the U.S. and Taiwan less than a month before the end of his presidency, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s upending of “decades-old agreements between Beijing and Washington” by enabling future U.S. diplomats and their Taiwanese counterparts to engage in official meetings on January 17, days before Biden would enter the White House (Shinkman, 2021). Both actions aimed to deepen U.S.–Taiwan cooperation and engagement. Boon and Sworn (2020) provide an apt summary of Trump’s Taiwan policy, asserting that his approach

increases Beijing’s sense of insecurity without necessarily improving Taipei’s sense of security, and heightens the risk of miscalculation and escalation that could ignite a conflict as pressure builds across the straight (pp. 1507–1508).

Trump took a carrot-and-stick approach to U.S.-China relations while maintaining strategic ambiguity, whether intentional or not. Boon and Sworn argue that although

Trump diverged from his predecessors by not readily reassuring Beijing that Washington respected their sovereignty on the Taiwan issue, Trump's America First policy provided the ambiguity needed to maintain the U.S.'s non-commitment to intervening if Taiwan were to be attacked by China, which was a different type of reassurance that could satiate Beijing (Boon & Sworn, 2020, p. 1507).

Xi Jinping

In China, sovereignty and reunification with Taiwan were not at the forefront of Xi's agenda when he first came to the position of General Secretary of the CCP in 2012, and later as President of China in 2013. Xi was confronted by a multitude of domestic challenges despite inheriting a China that was characterized as a formidable "export powerhouse," leading the world as the largest trading nation, with countries seeking China's wealth in the form of outward direct investment, and China itself an indisputable attraction for foreign direct investment, second only to the U.S. (Bader, 2016, p. 6). Instead of aiming to capitalize on China's economic clout relative to territorial sovereignty, Xi was focused on other equally critical issues: overcoming a government rife with corruption, an urgent need to secure energy sources for the country's ever-growing economy, and fostering technological advances to combat an aging population (Bader, 2016, p. 8-9).

Moreover, Xi was navigating the *middle income trap*, as rising middle income threatened China's ability to compete as the world's most labor-intensive manufacturer. Xi was not complacent with the gains that China had made, instead acting with urgency to consolidate control as a means to overcoming the domestic challenges that threatened

the CCP's legitimacy and support among its people (Saich, 2021, pp. 391, 399). One of Xi's first actions to consolidate power was to create and head the National Security Commission and the Central Leading Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reform.

Although authoritarian regimes often are assumed to be immune from public opinion, research by Jessica Weiss refutes this claim. She argues that the centralization of power under Xi meant that the CCP would sustain most of the criticism when its citizens faced economic and/or other hardships, which explains Xi's heavy-handed approach to dictating the media and news narrative (Weiss, 2019, p. 694). Weiss further dispels the notion that China would employ "adventurism" to distract its citizenry from economic frustrations, instead arguing that scholarship shows China historically choosing to make concessions internationally when facing domestic challenges (Weiss, 2019, p. 694-695). These assertions help to dispel the notion that China would use increased incursions in the Taiwan Strait in an effort to divert attention away from China's mounting domestic issues. Weiss's research lends credence to my research aim of gaining further insight into intensified Chinese military activity in the Taiwan Strait. Do U.S. policies correlate with increased PLA aggression toward Taiwan? Chapter IV lays out my data and provides an analysis of that data.

To understand Xi Jinping's evolution on the issue of sovereignty as it relates to Taiwan, it is clear at the beginning of his presidency that he was sufficiently preoccupied with domestic challenges as to decide against disrupting the status quo by engaging with Taiwan, which was by then under the Chinese-friendly leadership of Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou. Since cross-strait relations were robust early in Xi's presidency, the Xi government seemed only to pay lip service to the issue of Taiwan. Weeks after Xi began

his tenure as president, the PRC's state council published its first white paper in April 2013: "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces." Taiwan was mentioned twice, first calling "'Taiwan independence' separatist forces and their activities . . . the biggest threat to the peaceful development of cross-strait relations" (Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces, 2013.).

Taiwan was next mentioned when discussion of the Chinese Navy escorting national operations lumped Taiwanese ships along with those from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macao. This standard Chinese narrative of Taiwan was inconsequential, to say the least. More indicative of China–Taiwan relations during this time were policies highlighted in articles such as, "China unveils 31 measures to promote exchanges with Taiwan" from *Focus Taiwan*, the national news agency of Taiwan. In another instance, China's strategy for reunification with Taiwan in 2013 was articulated clearly during a speech given by Wang Yi, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the Brookings Institution. Wang established that "Gradual integration of the two sides through two-way interactions and cooperation will lead to ultimate reunification. This is a historical trend that no one can stop" (Yi, 2013). It is clear that China would prefer reunification without war, but the question is: How long will that patience last?

Nevertheless, Xi continued to emphasize cooperation between Beijing and the Obama administration. On September 22, 2015, he gave a speech in Seattle where he famously referenced the Thucydides trap, claiming that it did not exist unless "major countries time and again make the mistakes [sic] of strategic miscalculation" (Xi, 2015). During the same speech Xi noted that the U.S. and China should focus on cooperation

despite their differences, still linking “mutual accommodation of each other’s interests and concerns” as the foundation for such cooperation (Xi, 2015).

After three-plus years as China’s president, in 2017 Xi began to witness Washington’s transition to Trump’s “America First” policy. Xi sought to balance political stability and resolve on the issue of Taiwan before China’s 19th Party Congress took place in 2017 (Townshend, 2017). President Xi not only faced a new Taiwanese President, Tsai Ing-wen, who won the presidency on a platform of Taiwanese sovereignty, but now China’s sovereign dignity was being challenged by Trump’s provocative telephone call with Tsai and his uncalled-for challenge of the One China policy. In February 2017, Xi requested Trump’s formal recognition of the One China policy during a phone call—which Trump subsequently conceded (Press Briefing, Sean Spicer, 2017).

By January 2019, Xi’s rhetoric on Taiwan had begun to shift taking on a more aggressive tone. Not only did he leave the military option on the table, but he also tied reunification with Taiwan to China’s national rejuvenation, setting 2049 as the deadline (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2020). Moreover, China’s New 2019 Defense White Paper was published, which stated that “by sailing ships and flying aircraft around Taiwan, the armed forces send a stern warning to the ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces” (Cordesman, 2019). Unlike past white papers, this one focused on showcasing the PLA’s military might, and boasting that China’s military rivaled that of the U.S.

To be clear, China’s aggression in the Taiwan Strait dates back decades before Trump’s and Tsai’s presidencies. In “The contemporary security dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan conflict,” T. J. Christensen (2002) identified an increase in the PLA’s military

aggression across the Taiwan strait. He urged the U.S.'s continued commitment to Taiwan's democratic governance and a measured but "enhance[d]" U.S. military presence in the area (p. 20). The question is: Had PLA aggression as a result of Xi's evolving ideas on sovereignty and internal policies resulted in a more aggressive stance on PRC interests? Or did PLA military excursions in the Taiwan Strait coincide with U.S. policies on Taiwan? When Obama was focused on the U.S. economy in his first term, were there fewer PLA excursions compared to Obama's second term when he increased arms sales to Taiwan? Trump branded himself as being "tough on China." Yet, how did Trump's support for Taiwan evolve after taking Tsai's congratulatory call?

Chapter IV

Data

This chapter presents data on PLAAF and the PLAN activity around Taiwan during the tenures of Chinese President Xi, U.S. President Barack Obama, and U.S. President Donald Trump. Their respective tenures overlapped from November 15, 2012, to January 20, 2021. The data shown in Table 1 compares Obama's and Trump's tenure.

Table 1. Comparing the Frequency of PLA Activity In and Around Taiwan.

| | Period of Xi Jinping's tenure as General Secretary then President, overlapped with Obama and Trump | Number of days China conducted military exercises | Frequency of military exercises (air + sea) |
|--------------|--|---|---|
| Barack Obama | November 15, 2012 to January 20, 2017 | Air force: 10 Navy: 5 | Once every 101.7 days |
| Donald Trump | January 20, 2017 to January 20, 2021 | Air force: 141 Navy: 5 | Once every 10 days |

Note: Xi's tenure overlapped with Obama 1,526 days, and with Trump 1,461 days.

Sources: Caravanserai & AFP, 2021; Chen, Kao, & Li, 2021; Chen & Su, 2022; Cwgrouptw/data, n.d.; Hong, 2020; Ministry of National Defense Republic of China, n.d.; MND, 2018; @MoNDefense, 2020; Ou & Huang, 2018.

The data in Figures 1 to 10 is presented by year, and includes the number of Chinese military planes, ships, and carrier. They also highlight abnormalities in the data, and compare U.S. policies, statements, arms sales, and diplomatic visits to Taiwan. The reviewed U.S.-Taiwan interactions are innately positive because those interactions are viewed as a provocation by China.

2012 Data

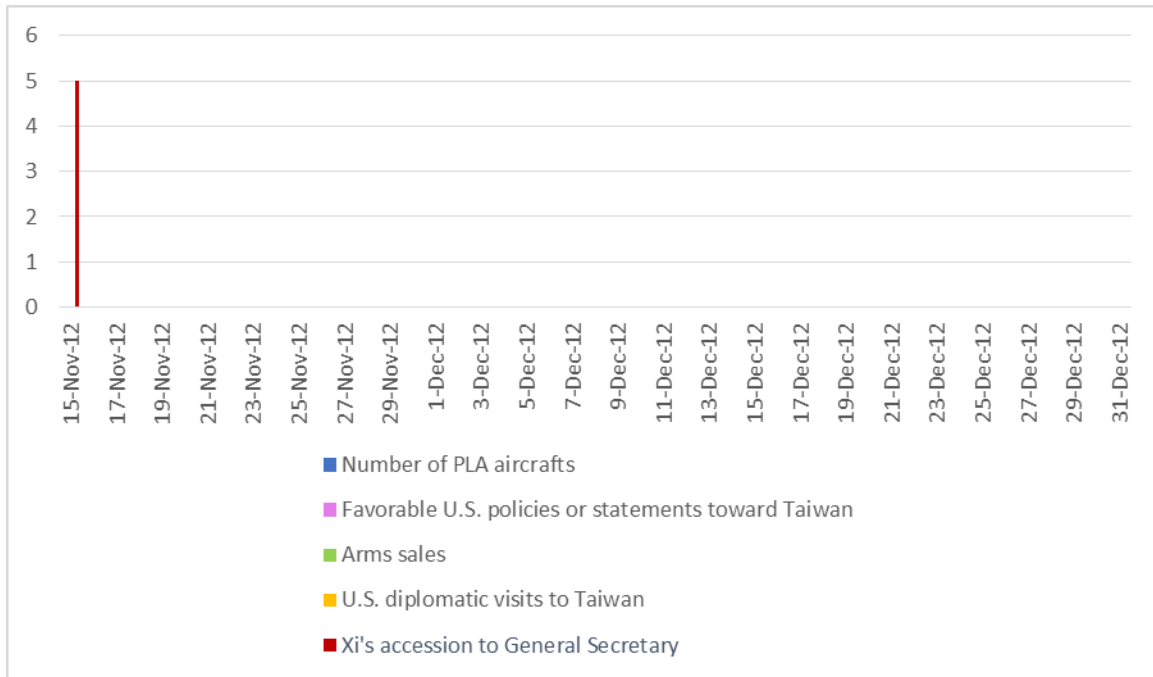


Figure 1. 2012 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.–Taiwan Interactions, and Other Notable Events.

Note: No U.S. arms sales, diplomatic visits, or notable favorable U.S. policies or statements toward Taiwan took place from November 15 to the end of 2012.

Source: Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Namibia, 2012.

On November 15, 2012, Hu Jintao passed the reins of General Secretary of the CCP to Xi Jinping, marking the beginning of a new era not only for China but also for U.S.–China relations. As “Paramount Leader,” Xi needed to hit the ground running to calm rising discontent with corruption at the local level that had become normalized, as well as an aging population, shrinking workforce, and the need to find sustainable energy for a growing middle class—to name a few of the challenges he faced.

Meanwhile, Barack Obama was beginning his second term, having barely dodged a deep economic recession that seemed all but certain. Nonetheless, the U.S. still relied

on China, its largest trade partner, to help restore a much-weakened economy and to ensure no disruption to Chinese foreign direct investment or Chinese-made goods. Such actions would lessen the strain on families still struggling from the aftermath of the 2008 housing bubble of a few years earlier.

The U.S. and China also continued their symbiotic relationship due to Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou's re-election on January 4, 2012. Cross-strait tensions were low due to Ma's recognition of the One China policy and his unabashed willingness to engage with China in order to reap the economic benefits of a friendly relationship with Beijing. In doing so, cross-strait relations improved, calming the waters after eight years of former Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian's brash statements of sovereignty. Due mainly to President Ma's engagement with China, and Obama's recognition that Taiwan is a core priority for Xi, cross-strait relations were stable and integrated as never before, and seemed to be a non-issue in 2012. Pressing domestic issues were naturally at the forefront of the U.S., China, and Taiwanese governments.

It is not so surprising, then, that there are no accessible public records of monitoring incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ from November 15 to the end of 2012. The Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense (MND) did not compile any reports on whether there were PLA incursions into or around Taiwan's ADIZ in 2012. A search for online news in Traditional Chinese and English also did not yield any reported incursions. There were also no U.S. arms sales, diplomatic visits, or other positive U.S.–Taiwan interactions from November 15 to the end of 2012.

This lack of U.S.–Taiwan interactions is consistent with Obama's prioritization of his own re-election campaign. As Glaser (2011) noted, it was expected that cross-strait relations would not be an important issue in the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign. China

would likely only be an issue brought up by Republican candidates in the context of the U.S. economy (B. Glaser, 2011). Obama secured his re-election on November 6—nine days before Xi’s accession as general secretary of the CCP. And because Xi was also preoccupied with a host of domestic issues ranging from the economy to systemic issues, the end of 2012 was uneventful as far as Taiwan was concerned.

2013 Data

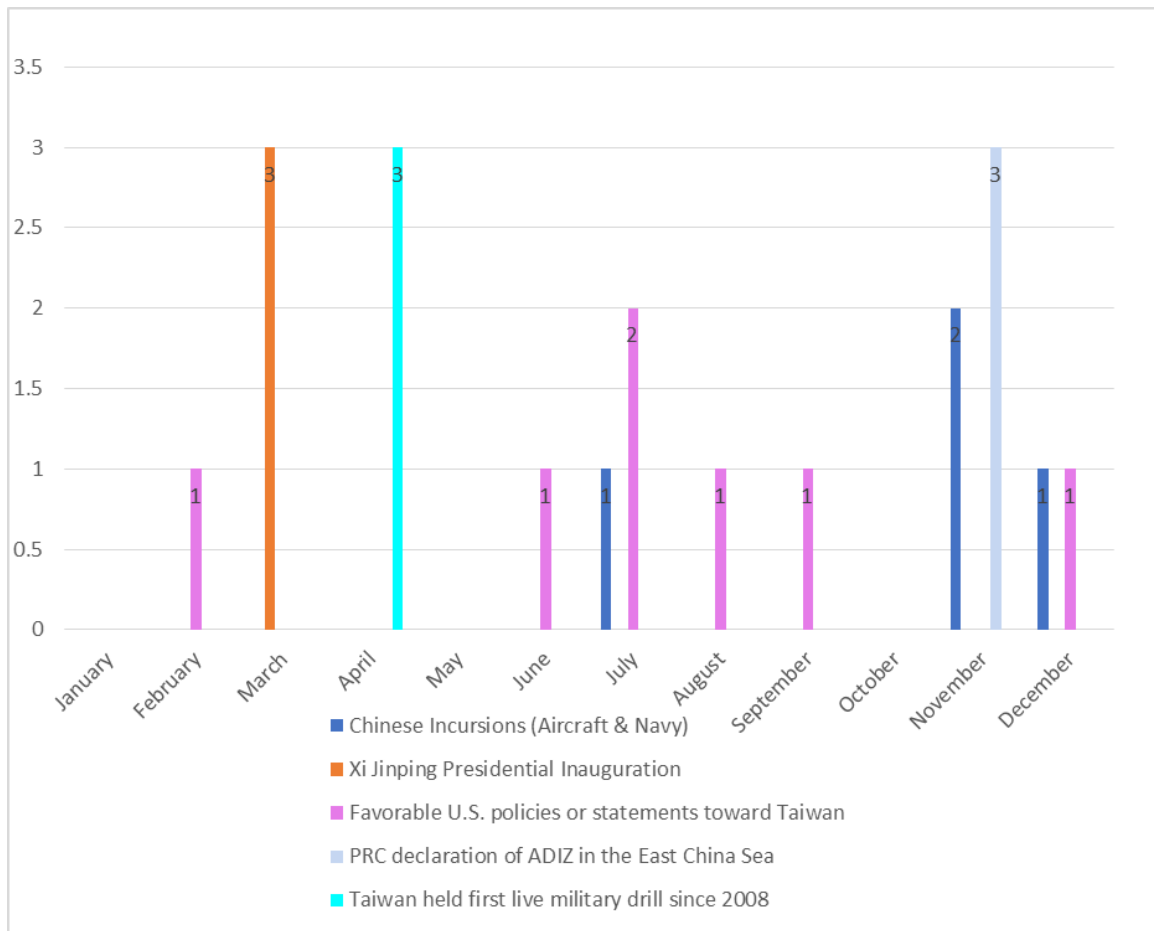


Figure 2. 2013 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

No U.S. arms sales or diplomatic visits to Taiwan took place in 2013.

Sources: Central News Agency, 2013; Cole, 2013; U.S. House of Foreign Affairs, 2013; Embassy of the PRC, 2013; Ou & Huang, 2018; Mishkin, 2013; Osawa, 2013; Ros-Lehtinen, 2013; Presidential Determination–Taiwan, 2013; Psaki, 2013; White House Office of Barack Obama, 2013; Statement by the President on H.R. 1151, 2013; Xiang & Xu, 2016.

Despite strengthened cross-strait relations, China, Taiwan, and the U.S. were acutely cognizant of China's unwavering stance on reunification with Taiwan—each taking necessary measures to support their respective agendas. Notably, there are few publications regarding Chinese military incursions, and publicly accessible information on 2013 PLA activity around Taiwan is limited. At the time of this writing, the Taiwan MND's real-time military updates of PLA incursions into the Taiwan ADIZ date back only to September 17, 2020, and there is no publicly accessible archive available for reference (MND R.O.C., n.d.). Moreover, the MND's 2013 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) lists only the types of PLA joint exercises conducted, but no quantitative data on PLA incursions (QDR, 2013).

The 2013 MND Annual Report lists the PLA's capabilities, and identifies the PRC's emphasis on actions such as “mobilizing fighters and air defense missile forces to [Taiwanese] borders” (National Defense Report Editing Committee, 2013). The report does not elaborate or provide quantitative data on those PLA incursions beyond acknowledgment. However, “[Taiwan MND] senior management revealed that as early as the second half of 2013, the PLA Air Force circled the stage in formations of bombers and reconnaissance aircraft, with a maximum frequency of 2 times a month” (Xiang & Xu, 2016). Ou & Huang (2018) note: “In the eastern region of Taiwan, the *Yun-8* early warning aircraft and the *Yun-9* electronic reconnaissance aircraft were launched in July 2013 to carry out long-sea long-haul training flights.” Jun Osawa's (2013) Brookings Institution op-ed, “China's ADIZ over the East China Sea: A ‘Great Wall in the Sky’?,” notes 10 PLAN incursions “beyond the first island chain (including, loosely, Borneo, the Philippines, Taiwan the Ryukyu Islands, and mainland Japan)” between January and

August, 2013. To verify these claims, I conducted a Google search in both English and Traditional Chinese of news reports, also an English language search for peer-reviewed academic journal articles in the Harvard Library (via HOLLIS) on the topic of Chinese military exercises and incursions around Taiwan in 2013. None of those searches yielded any information beyond the four noted previously in Figure 1.

The year 2013 began on a positive note between the governments of Barack Obama and Ma Ying-jeou, but ended with increased tensions in the East China Sea region. On February 4, 2013, two weeks into Obama's second term and just before Xi was set to begin his presidency on March 14, the U.S. and Taiwan passed a new accord guaranteeing "new diplomatic immunity" for diplomats stationed in each other's respective nations—similar to those offered to other foreign diplomats (CNA, 2013). Just over a month after Xi was inaugurated, the Taiwanese military conducted exercises aimed at deterring a PLA invasion—notably Taiwan's "first live-fire military drill" since President Ma came to power in 2008 (Mishkin, 2013).

Contrary to Ma's reputation as pro-China, the fact that this live-fire drill took place prior to any reported PLA incursions (as senior MND officials had only disclosed PLA incursions beginning as early as the second half of 2013), this push-and-pull strategy regarding cross-strait relations is telling. Moreover, a bill introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives on the day of Xi's presidential inauguration, argued for Taiwan's observer status at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) assembly. This bill subsequently received unanimous consent and became public law on July 12 (White House, Office of Press Secretary, 2013a).

On July 25, the news reported a Chinese military incursion when four Chinese coast guard vessels ventured near the Senkaku and Diaoyu islands, territory that China, Taiwan, and Japan each claim to own (Cole, 2013). By August, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Taiwan Policy Act aimed at strengthening U.S.–Taiwan relations. The U.S. continued its support for Taiwan in September when the Obama administration welcomed the ICAO’s invitation to Taiwan as an observer in October (Psaki, 2013). This was followed by two more Chinese military incursions in November and one in December. On November 23, China unilaterally declared a new ADIZ in the East China Sea, which overlapped with the boundaries of Taiwan and other nations in the region (Osawa, 2013).

During then-Vice President Joe Biden’s trip to China, a U.S. senior administration official acknowledged that China needed to “clarify its intentions” for mapping this new ADIZ. At the same time, the U.S. sought to downplay the significance of Chinese military incursions by suggesting that flying over airspace was a routine and common global occurrence, such as the case with Taiwan’s “overlap in the ADIZ” (*Background Press Briefing*, 2013).

Notably, Taiwan’s live-fire drill and the U.S.’s bill to help Taiwan gain observer status at the ICAOA came before China’s first incursion. Later, three more U.S.–Taiwan engagements took place before China ended 2013 with three more incursions and an intentional remapping of the ADIZ to overlap with Taiwan and other nations in the East China Sea. In light of these incidents, the PLA incursions seem to be reactions to actions taken by the U.S. and Taiwan.

It is important to note that the above analysis lacks quantitative data to corroborate the senior MND's disclosure that the PLA made incursions as often as two times a month in the second half of 2013. Thus, this analysis is based on the two PLAAF and two PLAN military exercises that were verified during Obama's tenure from March 14, 2013 to December 31, 2013.

In spite of the limitations of this research, the above data reveals four significant details:

1. The U.S.'s willingness to show support for Taiwan after Ma Ying-jeou's provocative live-fire drill early in Xi's presidency showed that both Obama and Ma were not afraid to provoke China, despite their pragmatic approach to economics.
2. The Chinese military aircraft traveled northward along the eastern part of Taiwan, according to Xiang & Xu (2016). That flight path, approaching the eastern part of Taiwan, is noteworthy because any invasions are likely to come from the southeastern part of the island (Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University, 2021a). As such, any Chinese military exercises on this path could be interpreted as an exercise of invasion into Taiwan. Although Ma recognized the One China policy, this PLA exercise was consistent with China's stance that reunification by force, although not preferred, was not off the table.
3. Third, the naval exercises in November were conducted by China's first aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, which had just entered service in September 2012 (BBC News, 2012).

4. Fourth, *Liaoning* departed its base on November 26, passing through the Taiwan Strait on November 28, mere days after China unilaterally declared an ADIZ in the East China Sea (Osawa, 2013). The *Liaoning*'s exercise into the Taiwan Strait may have been a literal testing of the waters to observe the response from Taiwan, other actors in the region and/or the U.S. after China's provocative ADIZ declaration.

2014 Data

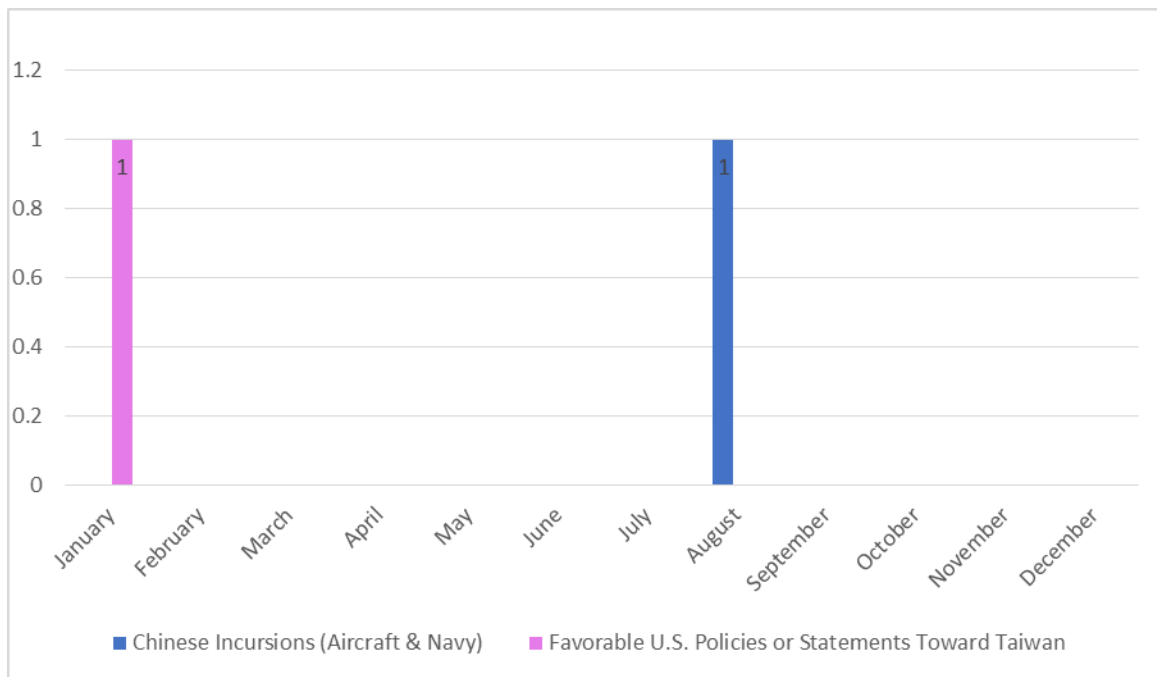


Figure 3. 2014 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

No U.S. arms sales or diplomatic visits to Taiwan took place in 2014.

Source: Message to Congress, 2014; Zhang, 2014.

After the Obama administration's positive 2013 Taiwan policies, 2014 proved to be rather quiet as far as U.S.-Taiwan relations were concerned. The only notable

engagement took place on January 7 when the White House Press Secretary announced cooperation with Taiwan on “peaceful uses of nuclear energy.”

Only one Chinese military incursion, on August 25, was reported in the online news media, although the likelihood of there being more is high. An August 25 flight incursion by a Y-8 transport aircraft made four separate “intrusions” (Cole, 2014). Notably, these intrusions took place merely days after the August 19 confrontation between an American surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter aircraft in the South China Sea (Erickson & de La Bruyere, 2014).

The year ended with a joint press conference between Obama and Xi. Although the ADIZ was not mentioned during this meeting, Obama articulated that “the United States does not take a position on competing claims in the East and South China Seas,” while reiterating peaceful territorial resolutions, thus reaffirming U.S. adherence to the One China policy based on the Three Joint Communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act (*Remarks by President Obama and President Xi*, 2014). The notable lack of U.S.-Taiwan policies and PLA incursions reported in and around Taiwan seems to suggest that Xi’s 2013 PLA incursions and remapping of the ADIZ had successfully employed third-party coercive diplomacy.

2015 Data

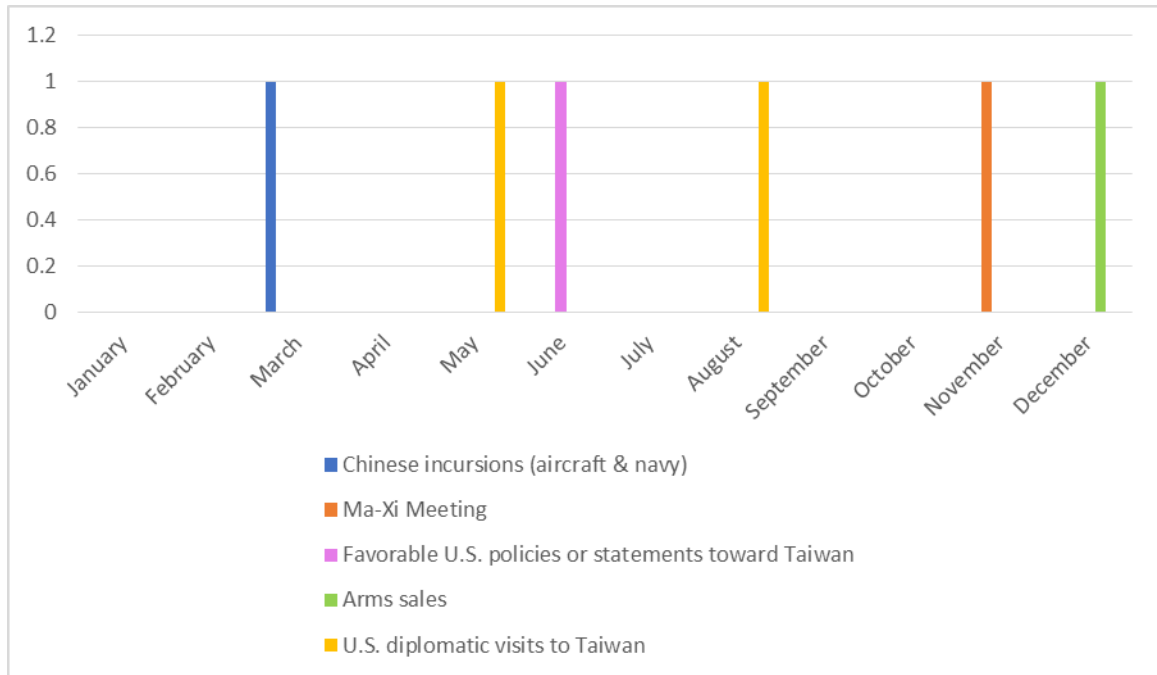


Figure 4. 2015 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

Sources: Bush, 2015; CNA, 2017; Gibbons-Neff, 2015; Ma lauds robust Taiwan-US ties, 2015; U.S. Department of State, 2015; U.S. Department of State, 2022.

According to an investigative report by an online independent Taiwanese public news media, 台海成美中角力戰場 (“Taiwan Strait becomes U.S.-China battleground”), the Taiwan and Japan Ministries of Defense cited four Chinese military exercises in 2015, although no dates were provided (Lin, 2020). Beyond this report, there were no Chinese exercises mentioned in Chinese, American, or Taiwanese government websites or other news media. Therefore Figure 4 presents only the publicly accessible data: a single PLAAF incursion on March 30 (CNA, 2017). Although 2015 includes U.S. diplomatic visits and the first U.S. arms sales to Taiwan since 2011, no Chinese exercises

were reported in the news media around those seemingly provocative interactions (Gibbons-Neff, 2015).

The year began with China unilaterally declaring the M503 aviation route over the Taiwan Strait (Pan, 2015). Then, sandwiched between two U.S. diplomatic visits to Taiwan, two other incidents took place: (1) the U.S. and Taiwan expanded their joint cooperation on social and economic issues through the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO), which established the Global Cooperation and Training Framework; and (2) on July 22, Chinese state media broadcasted footage of its military practicing an attack on a mock Taiwan presidential palace (Rosen, 2015).

Following the U.S. diplomatic visit to Taiwan in August, where Ma stated his hope to strengthen U.S.–Taiwan relations, in September Susan Rice reaffirmed the One China policy along with its usual caveat: the three Joint Communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act (*Taiwan Today*, 2015).

In spite of these transgressions, a milestone was set between the cross-strait leaders in November, when Ma Ying-jeou and Xi Jinping met in Singapore, creating the most politically symbolic notion of eased tensions since 1949 (Bush, 2015). On December 16, Obama appeared to capitalize on the Ma-Xi meeting by conducting the U.S.'s first arms sales to Taiwan since 2011—also Obama's last arms sale before Trump took office (Taiwan Defense & Security, n.d.). Obama's strategy regarding arms sales to Taiwan was unique in that he only authorized three sales in total during his eight years in office: 2010, 2011, and 2015 (Agencies—Defense Department, n.d.). The amount of each sale indicated that Obama had bundled the arms sales rather than making multiple,

smaller sales every year, as did his predecessors dating back to 1990, other than an exception in 2006 when no sale was made. Obama's strategy of bundling arms sales was consistent with the U.S. need to maintain a strong trade relationship with China, as bundles meant fewer provocations. Furthermore, China would only need to announce three condemnations for the three sales during those Obama years, which would not be conducive to an escalation of cross-strait tensions if there were more frequent arms sales. By way of comparison, Obama's three arms sales transactions to Taiwan totaled \$13.96 billion; George W. Bush's eight transactions totaled \$15.62 billion; and Trump's 11 transactions totaled \$18.27 billion (List of US arms sales to Taiwan, 2022). It is apparent that Obama wanted to uphold the U.S.'s commitment to strengthening Taiwan's ability to defend itself against external military aggression via arms sales while minimizing negative repercussions from China.

2016 Data

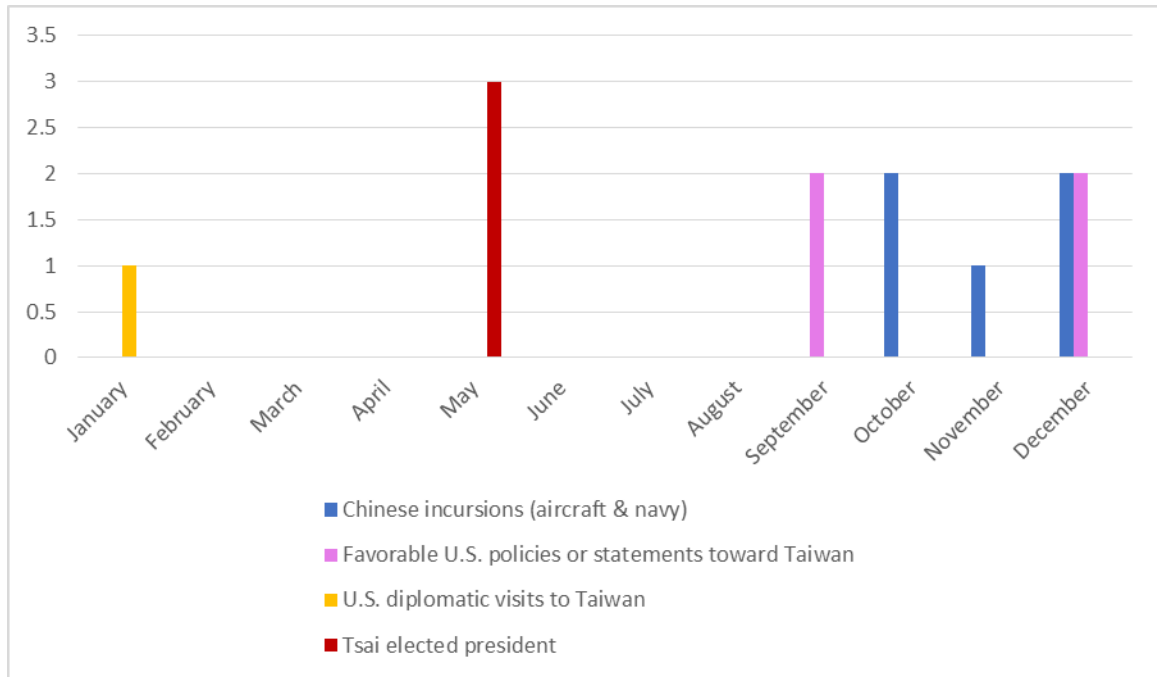


Figure 5. 2016 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

Note: No U.S. arms sales or diplomatic visits to Taiwan took place in 2014.

Sources: Chen & Su, 2022; Davis & Lipton, 2016; Ou & Huang, 2018; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of China (Taiwan), 2016; Office of the President of the Republic of China (Taiwan), n.d.; Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2022; Remarks of President Obama to the People of Laos, 2016; White House Office of the Vice President, 2016; U.S. Department of State, 2016; MND, 2018.

The year 2016 was marked by significant milestones, including U.S. recognition of Taiwan as a collaborator on an array of issues, as well as aggressive Chinese military incursions toward the end of the year. The year began with a U.S. diplomatic visit to Taiwan by Randy Berry, Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons, from January 30 to February 13 (U.S. Department of State, 2020). This visit symbolized Taiwan's and the U.S.'s shared values and democratic freedoms.

In March, in a *Fact Sheet*, the U.S. highlighted Taiwan separately as a territory but included it along with a group of 14 countries as being free of all nuclear material from their territories (Nuclear Security Summit, 2016; Press Briefing on the Nuclear Security Summit, 2016). The mention of Taiwan being nuclear-free seemed purposeful, and emphasized Taiwan's "David-and-Goliath" relationship with China, a recognized nuclear power.

Arguably the most significant event occurred in May when Tsai Ing-wen, leader of the Democratic Progressive Party, was elected as President of Taiwan. On September 6, during remarks in Laos, President Obama recognized Taiwan along with Japan and South Korea as democratic success stories in Asia (Remarks of President Obama, 2016). On September 21, as part of then-Vice President Biden's Cancer Moonshot initiative, Taiwan was included as part of the scientific collaborative effort (*Fact Sheet*, 2016).

This apparent strengthening of U.S.–Taiwan relations set off four verifiable Chinese military incursions into and around Taiwan, including paths around the Miyako Strait and Bashi Channel near Japan. After Obama recognized Taiwan as a democratic success story in Laos in September, on October 27 an unspecified number of Chinese aircraft traveled around the Miyako Strait and Bashi Channel—the first time in 2016. Thereafter, six Chinese military aircraft circled Taiwan on November 25. Most infamously, on December 2, President Tsai extended her congratulations to Donald Trump for his election as U.S. president. On December 8, Obama signed a bill enabling "high-level military exchanges between Taiwan and the U.S." ("US president signs bill backing military exchanges with Taiwan," 2016). Two days later, on December 10, more than ten Chinese aircraft circled Taiwan for the second time in the year (106 National

Defense Report Compilation Committee of the Republic of China, 2017). The last verifiable incursion of 2016 was by the Chinese *Liaoning* aircraft carrier, which had gone on an expedition from December 23 to January 11, 2017 during which it entered Taiwanese territory southwest of the ADIZ (Ou & Huang, 2018). Noteworthy is the fact that Obama's Press Secretary, Josh Earnest, had reaffirmed the U.S.'s commitment to the One China policy four times in December alone, perhaps meant to cushion the impact of the numerous positive U.S.–Taiwan policies that were sure to be viewed as provocations by China. The 10+ Chinese aircraft incursions on December 10 marks an all-time high for number of aircraft during a single incursion since Xi's accession to “Supreme Leader” of the CCP.

These aggressive shows of force by China were followed one day later, on December 11, by President-elect Trump's questioning of the U.S. need to adhere to the One China policy. That notable incursion by China on December 10 can be viewed in hindsight as foreshadowing China's increasingly aggressive behavior in the waters around Taiwan. It also coincides with Trump's no-holds-barred approach to provoking China.

2017 Data

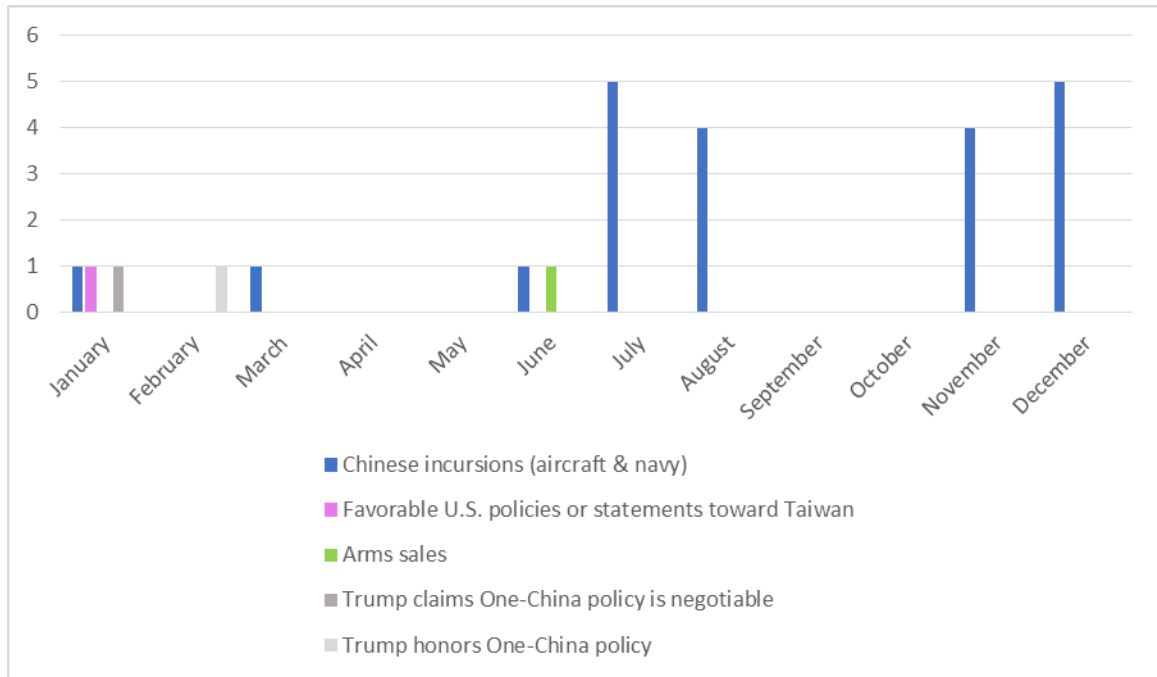


Figure 6. 2017 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

Note: No U.S. diplomatic visits to Taiwan took place in 2017, however, President Tsai Ing-wen met with U.S. Senator (R) Ted Cruz and Texas Governor Greg Abbott in January.

Sources: Associated Press, 2017; Chen & Su, 2022; Ou & Huang, 2018; 2017 National Defense Report Editorial Committee, 2018; USTBC, 2017; Yuhas, 2017.

The Taiwan MND made a notable shift in policy by providing detailed quantitative data on PLAAF and PLAN incursions in and around Taiwan beginning in 2017. Although information of incursions in 2017 were not combined into a single, publicly accessible source at the time of this writing, the information ultimately was published by the MND. Unlike previous periodic MND reports published from 2013 to 2016, the 14th issue, published in December 2017, with the theme “Guarding the Borders, Defending the Land—The ROC Armed Forces in View,” covers the timeframe from May 2016 to November 2017, and details the direction, dates, and types of aircrafts and vessel

involved in Chinese military incursions. Moreover, the *Air Force Officer Bimonthly*, an MND-published journal that discusses PLAAF incursions around Taiwan, also provided detailed information on the dates, types, and quantity of PLAAF aircraft involved during incursions (Issue 223, 2017).

The Taiwan government-funded think tank, the Institute for National Defense and Security Research, published a report in December 2018 that provided detailed PLAAF and PLAN incursions for both 2017 and 2018. These reports revealed Chinese military exercises throughout the year, as well as an increase in the overall frequency of Chinese military incursions around Taiwan. Furthermore, although a news article published in August 2020 reported the Taiwan and Japan Ministries of National Defense as recording a total of 34 Chinese military incursions around Taiwan in 2017,¹⁷ my research has verified only the dates of 18 PLAAF and 3 PLAN incursions (see Lin, 2020). Notably, the number of incursions by China began to increase during Trump's first year in office.

The timeline of notable events and incursions does not support a correlation between PLA incursions and U.S.–Taiwan interactions. President Tsai began the year with a January 9 meeting with U.S. Senator (R) Ted Cruz and Texas Governor Greg Abbott in the U.S. (Yuhas, 2017). On January 11, the Chinese carrier *Liaoning* “sailed north along the west side of the Strait Central Line”; there was a PLAAF incursion on March 2 after Trump recanted his statement that the One China policy was negotiable, instead agreeing to honor the One China policy following a phone call with Xi on February 9 (Associated Press, 2017; 2017 National Defense Report Editorial Committee,

¹⁷ The August 2020 news article, titled 台海成美中角力戰場 (Taiwan Strait Becomes US-China Battleground) does not list dates for the 34 incursions mentioned. Consequently, the number of incursions analyzed for this research is based on incursions where sources include dates.

2018). Another PLA incursion took place after a provocation by Tsai but also after Trump conceded to Xi's request. Although the *Liaoning* carrier had passed through Taiwan on the southwest direction along the central line of the ADIZ on July 1 and July 12, it became apparent that this was due to the vessel being open for public view at Hong Kong in celebration of Hong Kong's 20-year anniversary of its handover from Britain to China (2017 National Defense Report Editorial Committee, 2018).

Six months after Trump's inauguration, his administration made its first arms sales to Taiwan on June 29. Following this sale, the PLAAF conducted incursions in July, August, November, and December on 17 separate days. This is a notable increase in the frequency of incursions—a clear departure from the PLA's previous non-response to arms sales—and highlighted the fact that a correlation does not exist; rather, the increase in PLA incursions was part of another strategy.

2018 Data

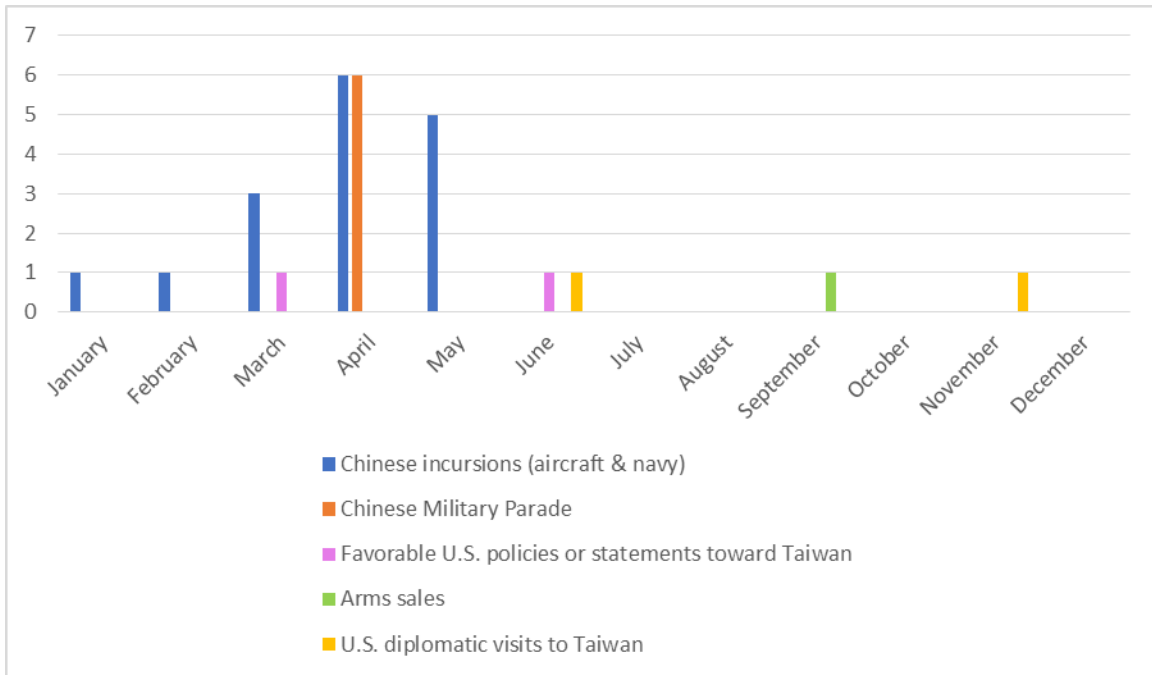


Figure 7. 2018 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

Sources: Chen & Su, 2022; Dwyer, 2018; Institute for National Policy Research, n.d.; Ou & Huang, 2018; MND, 2018; Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan), 2018; U.S. House of Foreign Affairs, 2018; USTBC, 2018.

In 2018 there were 13 Chinese military aircraft exercises that took place in and around Taiwan: e.g., in and around the Miyako Strait; passing by the Bashi Channel heading west to the Pacific Ocean; circling Taiwan. The carrier *Liaoning* also passed the Central Taiwan Strait twice (Ou & Huang, 2018).

Noteworthy events included Trump signing the Taiwan Travel Act into law on March 16, thus enabling U.S. officials to meet with their Taiwanese counterparts and vice versa (Lynch, 2018). May 11 marked the first time an SU-35 multi-role fighter aircraft and H-6K long-range strategic bomber passed through the Bashi Channel together,

circling Taiwan (Ou & Huang, 2018). This was followed by a PLAAF exercise on May 25, which marked the first time the H-6K long-range strategic bomber flew at night (Ou & Huang, 2018). However, no further Chinese military exercises were published after May despite U.S. arms sales to Taiwan in July and September, as well as a U.S. diplomatic visit in November by Ambassador James Moriarty, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of AIT. Moreover, in 2018 the number of 13 PLAAF and 2 PLAN incursions decreased compared to 2017 when there were 18 PLAAF and 3 PLAN incursions.

The data indicates that military incursions do not necessarily take place after arms sales or diplomatic visits. Yet, it is important to consider Defense Minister Feng Shih-kuan's announcement on December 21, 2017, which stated that the Taiwanese MND would not indulge China in its "psychological warfare" and "will no longer issue reports on movements of Chinese military aircraft or naval vessels near Taiwan unless something unusual occurs" (*Focus Taiwan*, 2017). However, the Taiwanese MND reported more incursions beginning in 2019, and therefore it will be necessary to assess whether the increased incursions are noteworthy, or whether the Taiwanese MND has shifted its strategy on reporting incursions.

2019 Data

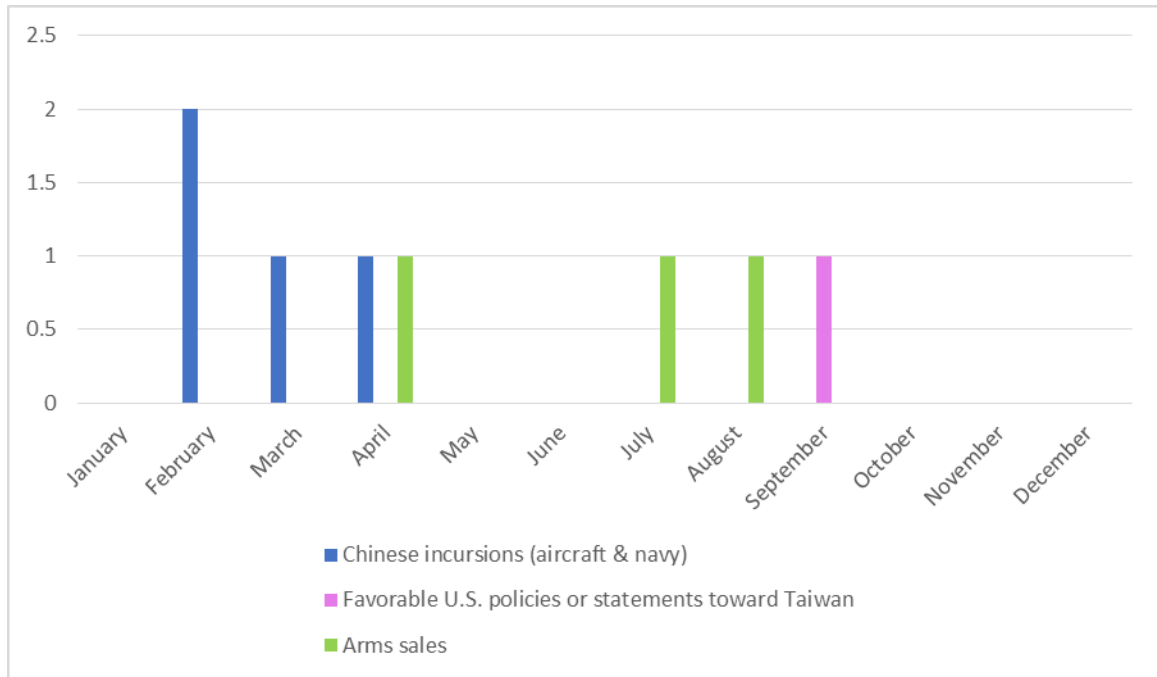


Figure 8. 2019 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

Note: No U.S. diplomatic visits to Taiwan took place in 2019.

Sources: American Institute in Taiwan, 2019, cited in Burke, 2019; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2019; Lu, 2019; Xin, 2019; Yang & Cai, 2019.

According to the news report 台海成美中角力戰場 (“Taiwan Strait Becomes U.S.-China Battleground”), Taiwan’s and Japan’s MND tracking of Chinese military aircraft activity around Taiwan counted 20 flight exercises in 2019 (Lin, 2020). However, after researching academic articles, government websites and documents, and news articles, I could confirm only five dates.

The most striking incursion took place on March 31, when two J-11 fighters flew across the center line of the Taiwan Strait (an event that last occurred in 1999)—at the time declared to be “the most serious provocation between Taiwan and China in this

century” (Xie, 2021). This incursion may have been a response to the Trump administration’s potential approval of the sale of F-16V fighters to Taiwan (Jacobs, et. al, 2019). On April 15, following the PLAAF incursion by J-11 fighters, not only did the U.S. Eastern Theatre respond, but Trump also authorized an arms sale to Taiwan to include training for Taiwan pilots on Taiwan-owned F-16 fighters (Taiwan Arms Sales 1990-2020 | Taiwan Defense & Security, n.d.; Xin, 2019).

The U.S. was aware that China viewed U.S. vessels crossing the Taiwan Strait as highly provocative, and it is apparent that the Trump administration knowingly risked escalating tensions further. Although Trump was viewed as pro-Taiwan compared to Obama, as of July 2019 the Trump administration cruised fewer times than the Obama administration’s frequency, although that number was expected to increase (Xiying, 2021). Further arms sales took place in July and August, and in September AIT “formalized what already occurs in practice: routine consular functions” (Burke, 2019).

2020 Data

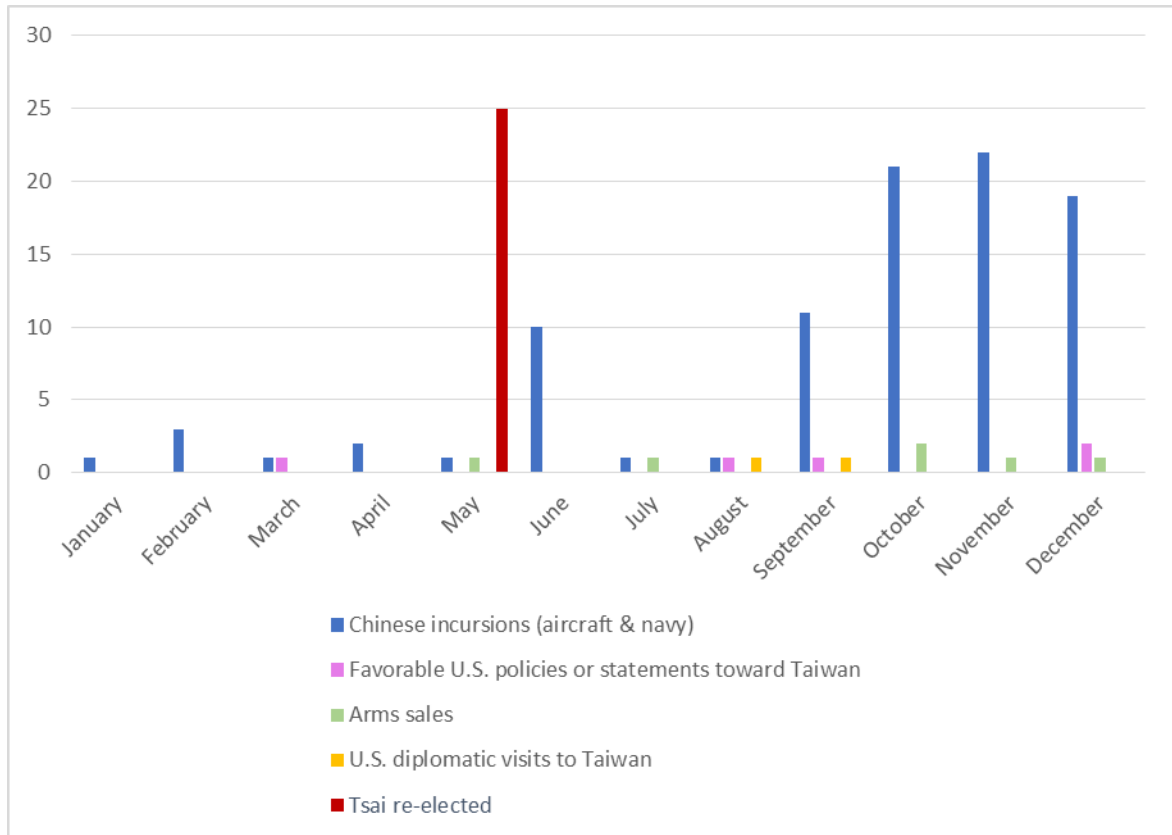


Figure 9. 2020 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.–Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

Sources: Chen, Kao, & Li, 2021; Chen & Su, 2022; CW group w/data, n.d.; Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2020; Everington, 2020; Hong, 2020; Lederer, 2020; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020, cited in Public Diplomacy Coordination Council, n.d.; Office of the Spokesperson, 2020; Ou & Huang, 2018; Ministry of National Defense, 2020; @MoNDefense, 2020; Office of the President, R.O.C. (Taiwan), 2020; Political Military Affairs, U.S. House of Foreign Affairs, 2020; Reuters, 2021; Stilwell, 2020.

In 2020, Trump’s last full year in office, Taiwan saw more days of military exercises by the PLAAF than the last seven years combined. There were 91 flight drills and one naval incursion by the Chinese aircraft carrier *Liaoning*, where the vessel sailed through the east end of Taiwan and continued down the south side of the island (Hong, 2020). Since a Chinese attack on Taiwan would likely come from the southeastern side of

Taiwan, this singular navel incursion held considerable significance as a practice drill for an invasion rather than a simple show of force to communicate displeasure on a particular issue. The PLAAF incursions in 2020 represented an 18-fold increase in frequency compared to 2019, while the frequency of arms sales doubled, from three in 2019 to six in 2020. There were also two diplomatic visits and three positive U.S.–Taiwan policies. Still, these numbers were not unusual compared to previous years.

The year 2020 began with a total of seven PLAAF and PLAN incursions prior to President Tsai's re-election to another four-year term in May, while 84 additional incursions took place over the remainder of the year. Moreover, Taiwan MND's decision to publish all Chinese military incursions on its official Twitter account beginning in September 2020, indicated the Taiwanese government's change of strategy: it would now relay China's outsized aggressive behavior to Taiwan citizens, allies, and the international community.

As expected, a high-level U.S. diplomatic visit to Taiwan, from April 9 to 12, by U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar, was highly condemned by China in the media (Reuters, 2021). Yet, there was only one incursion on April 10 by the PLAAF during Azar's visit, although more aggressive J-11 and J-10 fighters were utilized, rather than the more common Y-8 fighters (Ministry of National Defense, n.d.). U.S. Under Secretary of State Keith Krach's visit to Taipei on September 16 was followed by one PLAAF incursion with two fighters on the same day, and seven separate PLAAF incursions by 42 fighters over the rest of September.

What is striking is that the Taiwanese MND had predicted this potential increase in PLA aggression as far back as its 2013 National Defense Report. The report warned:

The PRC plans to build comprehensive capabilities for using military force against Taiwan by 2020. In the future, the PRC will continue to use joint operations as the basic form of operations, and aims to effectively prevent foreign forces from intervening in its operations against Taiwan, posing a growing threat (National Defense Report Editing Committee, 2013).

This foretelling of PLA aggression in and around Taiwan was realized in 2020, and seems to show that the frequency of incursions had more to do with China's military readiness and its strategy of communicating displeasure to other global actors, than with a consistent response to arms sales or diplomatic visits. Meanwhile, the types and numbers of aircraft, and the flight or vessel paths of incursions, are more indicative of China's third-party coercive strategy of using aggression toward Taiwan to dissuade the U.S. from strengthening ties and further promoting the island's prominence on the global stage.

2021 Data

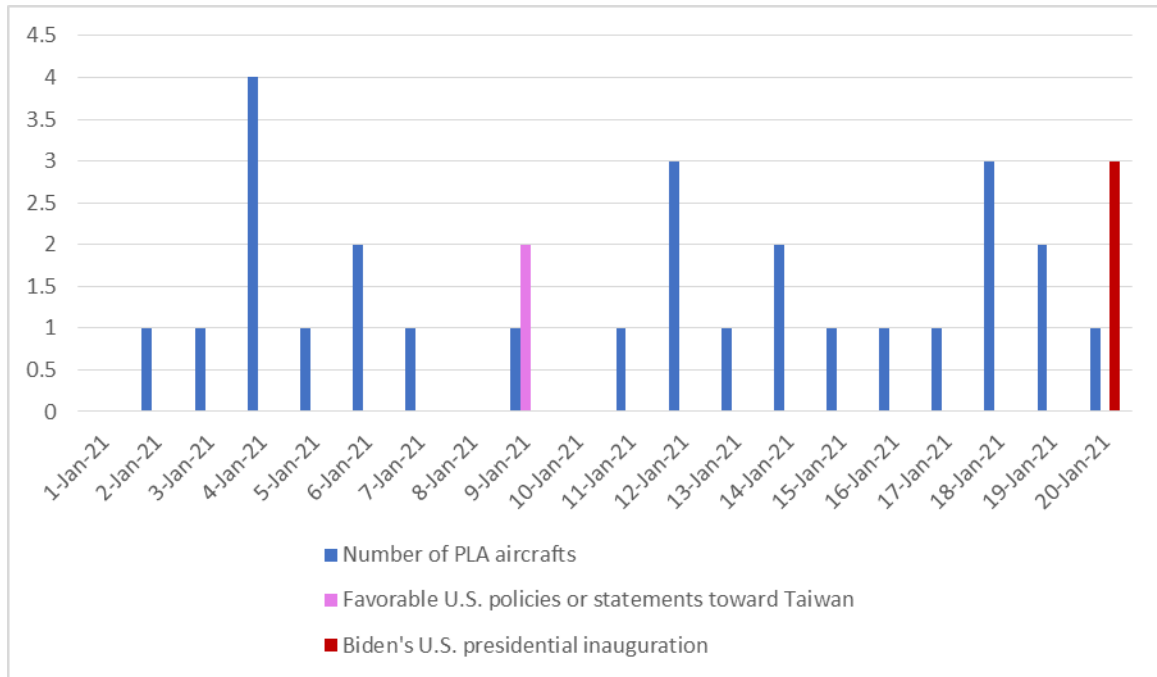


Figure 10. 2021 PLA Exercises, Positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions, and Other Notable Events.

No navy exercises took place during this period.

Sources: Caravanserai & AFP, 2021; Ministry of National Defense, 2020; @MoNDefense, 2020; Pompeo, 2021; Biden Jr., J.R., 2021.

A total of 27 Chinese military aircraft conducted exercises in and around Taiwan during the first 20 days of 2021, compared to zero PLA aircraft exercises from 2013 to 2020. China’s *Liaoning* carrier entered the Taiwan Strait once in 2017 and 2018. Joseph Biden was inaugurated U.S. President in January 2021, ending the Trump administration’s one-term presidency, and bringing with it a multilateral approach to foreign policy.

Days before Biden moved into the White House, China began to lay the groundwork for its stance on the issue of Taiwan. On January 6, Secretary of State

Pompeo had announced a visit to Taipei by Kelly Craft, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, on January 13 (K. Chen, 2021). The visit was harshly condemned by China in the *Global Times*, the CCP mouthpiece on international affairs. A January 11 article warned that it was imperative for China to “strike back firmly and hard” when the issue of Taiwan was challenged beyond what China deemed as acceptable—that there was a purported “line” that could not be crossed (K. Chen, 2021). The Xi regime’s view on escalation with Taiwan can be summarized thus:

We would rather face a Taiwan Straits crisis, even a storm, in the next 10 days if Pompeo and his likes become more aggressive and provocative before leaving office. The crisis will teach Taiwan secessionists a lesson and nail Pompeo and his likes to the pillar of shame. Even if this will cause a shock to China–US relations during the period of power change in the US, it will bring more benefits to the normal development of bilateral relations in the long term. (K. Chen, 2021)

The *Global Times* stated outright China’s strategy of using third-party coercive diplomacy to deter both the U.S. and Taiwan from “crossing the line,” to discourage them from taking actions beyond the normalized arms sales and other non-consequential U.S.–Taiwan interactions. Ultimately, China succeeded, because on January 13, Craft’s visit to Taipei was cancelled (BBC News, 2021). This event further supported the notion of Xi’s strong stance on adherence to the status quo rather than urgency toward reunification.

Summary

With the data acquired regarding PLA incursions that occurred during the time frame of the Obama and Trump administrations, I undertook an analysis of apparent trends from November 15, 2012 to January 20, 2021. Several facts can be deduced from the timing of PLA incursions and U.S. arms sales, diplomatic visits, and or other positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions or policies:

- Within the timeframe of this research, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan took place in 2015, and from 2017 to 2020.
 - In 2015, a single arms sale took place on December 16 following the November Ma–Xi meeting in Singapore. However, no incursions took place in December following the sale; in fact, no verifiable PLA incursions took place until almost a year later in October 2016.
 - In 2017, Trump made his first arms sales since his inauguration, and the only one for the year on June 29. Following this sale, the PLAN and PLAAF conducted a combined total of five days of incursions for July. Furthermore, the PLA conducted four days of incursions in both August and November, and five days in December. There were no other U.S.-Taiwan arms sales, diplomatic visits positive interactions, or statements during this time.
 - In 2018, there were two arms sales, one in July and the other in September. However, all verifiable PLA incursions took place in the first five months of 2018, the last one occurring on May 25, almost two months before the July 17 arms sale.
 - In 2019, PLA incursions took place in February and March, with an incursion and arms sale taking place on the same day on April 15. There were two more arms sales in July and August, but no other verifiable incursions for the rest of the year.
 - In 2020, each arms sale was followed by multiple incursions the following month. Due to this notable difference in 2020, it is important to examine each arms sale in detail to understand if the type of sale was unique from previous

arms sales, justifying the increased number of incursions. The arms sale on May 20 was worth \$180 million and did not include any controversial items, although it coincided with Tsai's re-election on the same day. This sale was followed by incursions on 10 separate days in June. The next arms sale took place on July 8, totaling more than \$2,224 million, including similar items as sold in 2015; the sale was followed by one incursion in August, whereas the sale in 2015 was not followed by any incursions. A major arms sale worth \$8,000 million, took place on August 20, and consisted of 66 aircraft fitted with the latest technology. Following this sale, 11 separate days of incursions took place in September. Notably, there were two arms sales, on October 22 and October 26, which included items for the controversial F-16 fighter and asymmetric warfare weaponry intended to defend Taiwan long enough until the U.S. could supposedly intervene. This was followed by PLA incursions on 22 separate days in November. There was another arms sale on November 3, although relatively smaller, totaling \$600 million, which also included asymmetric weaponry. The last arms sale for 2020 took place on December 7 totaling \$280 million and was rather non-controversial since it focused on communications. Nonetheless, PLA incursions in December took place on 19 separate days.

- The data do not show any trends or a correlation in PLA incursions following arms sales. Therefore, the data proves my hypothesis to be false, since there is no consistency regarding the frequency of incursions and the amount or type of arms

sales. In fact, the only standout observation was a tremendous increase in the frequency of incursions in 2020, totaling 92 days in total.

- Within the timeframe of this research, there was at least one favorable U.S. policy or statement toward Taiwan from 2012 to 2021. However, there is no consistency, such as from 2013 to 2016 and in 2019 when there were at least one instance where positive U.S.–Taiwan policies and statements were not followed by PLA incursions. Of course, not all positive U.S.–Taiwan policies and statements carry the same level of provocation toward China. For that reason, it was necessary to explore instances where incursions took place the month following a positive U.S.–Taiwan policy or statement.
 - The first instance took place on September 6, 2016 where during remarks in Laos, Obama recognized Taiwan, along with Japan and South Korea, as democratic success stories in Asia (*Remarks of President Obama to the People of Laos*, 2016). Obama’s remarks highlighting Taiwan’s democratic governance drew a PLAN incursion on October 27.
 - The second instance took place on March 16, 2018 when Trump signed the Taiwan Travel Act into law, enabling U.S. officials to meet with their Taiwanese counterparts and vice versa (Lynch, 2018). This policy intended to strengthen U.S.–Taiwan relations; however, it was followed by ten days of separate incursions for the rest of March and April combined.
 - The third instance took place on March 26, 2020 when Trump signed the TAIPEI Act. This policy was intended to not only strengthen U.S.–Taiwan relations, but also to strengthen Taiwan’s official or unofficial ties with other

nations and international organizations, thus giving Taiwan more prominence in the international community. This policy elicited two PLA incursions in April.

- The fourth instance took place on August 31, 2020, in remarks by David R. Stilwell, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, during which Taiwan was touted as an important U.S. partner. The remarks produced ten separate days of incursion in the month of September, totaling 46 different Chinese military aircrafts.
- The fifth instance took place on January 9, 2021 when the White House issued a press statement titled “Lifting Self-Imposed Restrictions on the U.S.-Taiwan Relationship” (Pompeo, 2021). With the exception of January 10, an incursion took place every single day, totaling 17 Chinese military aircrafts.

At first glance these episodes seem to suggest that China reacts to each instance where Taiwan’s prominence is promoted in the international community. However, such a conclusion would be misleading as there were five favorable U.S.–Taiwan policies and statements in 2013 and none were followed by incursions. There was one instance each year from 2014 to 2019 where a favorable U.S.–Taiwan policy or statement took place that did not incite a PLA incursion.

What is apparent, however, is that PLA incursions took place overwhelmingly more often during Trump’s tenure, therefore confirming that there was a lack of consistency in the PLA’s reaction toward favorable U.S.–Taiwan policies and statements

between Obama and Trump. This analysis negates my hypothesis that the PLA would react similarly regardless of the U.S. presidential administration.

Diplomatic visits to Taiwan or other diplomatic-level meetings between the U.S. and Taiwan officials took place in 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2020. Of these diplomatic meetings, only the two occasions in 2020 were followed by PLA incursions. Again, the data shows that there was no consistent PLA aggression toward diplomatic meetings between the U.S. and Taiwan officials that took place either in Taiwan or the U.S. However, Kelly Craft's cancelled visit to Taipei following China's open threat of willingness to enter a "storm" with Taiwan to deter challenges to the status quo, lends support for research into the Taiwanese domestic political landscape and its foreign policy actions and whether there is a correlation to PLA incursions. However, Taiwan's domestic political stance would need to be examined, together with U.S. policies on Taiwan, as China views the combination of policies from Taipei and Washington as significant when viewed together and not separately. In this way, China is seemingly enacting its own form of dual-deterrence. My research showed that specific U.S. policies do not show a trend of increased PLA incursions in and around Taiwan. As a result, I found no correlation between certain U.S.-Taiwan policies and Chinese military aggression toward Taiwan.

Furthermore, it seems that China utilized threats overwhelmingly during Trump's tenure compared to Obama's tenure. This revelation raises three questions as to whether the tremendous increase in PLA activity during Trump's tenure was: (1) due to greater Chinese military capabilities, (2) a sign of China's waning patience toward peaceful reunification, or (3) whether China was forced to present an increasingly aggressive

posture in and around the Taiwan Strait in order to discourage Trump's frequent provocations regarding Taiwan, so that China's credibility toward reunification would not be questioned.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Chinese military incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ were used to convey China's displeasure with U.S. policies and statements that supported Taiwan, or actions that China believed would push the boundaries of the status quo vis-à-vis Taiwanese independence. Accordingly, the marked increase in the frequency and number of military aircrafts employed for incursions during Trump's presidency have been attributed to provocative and strengthened U.S.–Taiwan relations during his tenure. Yet, the Obama administration also sold arms to Taiwan, and recognized the island as a role model for democratic governance in Asia among other U.S.–Taiwan cooperation. The level of PLA incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ was not a point of tension after those similarly provocative U.S.–Taiwan policies or interactions.

In fact, Xi's strategic use of PLA incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ were determined by a combination of factors, and not a reaction to any single variable such as arms sales by the U.S. If it was in Xi's interest to secure peaceful reunification with Taiwan, to minimize the collateral damage to decades of economic growth and political clout, then it was perplexing why he would alienate the Taiwanese citizenry and other stakeholders in the region via intensified military incursions that instead motivated greater support for Taiwan's sovereignty.

While there is debate surrounding Xi's timeline and level of patience for peaceful reunification, the PLA incursions helped shed insight into Xi's strategy on the issue. The

marked increase in PLA activity beginning in 2017 took an extraordinary leap to new heights in 2020, and cast attention on Xi's resolve and urgency toward reunification. Yet the data provides evidence of his efforts to slow down the issue and avoid being forced to show his hand.

Furthermore, aside from the difference in Obama and Trump's approach to Taiwan, it is arguably even more important that Xi did not face any real threat of Taiwan seeking *de jure* independence during Obama's tenure. Taiwanese President Ma recognized the 1992 Consensus for the first time since its insistence by China, and cross-strait engagement was at an all-time high, culminating in the Ma-Xi meeting in Singapore.

In addition, despite challenges to U.S.–China relations, Obama proved a preference for engagement with Xi, and showed pragmatism by only conducting one sale during Obama and Xi's overlapping time in office, bundling and transacting in December before he left the White House. Despite Obama's arms sale or positive interactions and statements regarding Taiwan, Obama excelled at strategic ambiguity; it was also clear that time was on Xi's side, since actions by Taiwan and the U.S. exemplified adherence to the status quo. Trump assumed the U.S. presidency and quickly tried to strong-arm Xi in order to bolster U.S. interests using Taiwan as ransom. Evidently there were four verifiable PLA incursions at the end of 2016 just before the end of Trump's first year in office, compared to six incursions during the three years Obama and Xi's tenures overlapped.

The most notable provocative issue at play—one that was not of Trump's doing—was the election of pro-Taiwan-sovereignty President Tsai Ing-wen. The combination of

what Tsai represented and Trump's actions was a turning point in the stability of the status quo. The increase to 21 verifiable separate days of incursions during Trump's second year in office, despite only one arms sale and three provocative U.S.–Taiwan interactions, especially following Trump's resumption of the One China policy, indicates there is no correlation between incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ and singular events such as arms sales, diplomatic visits, or U.S. positive statements toward Taiwan.

In the absence of U.S. provocation on the issue of Taiwan, Xi nonetheless took the opportunity to exert third-party coercive diplomacy. By intimidating Taiwan after Trump's recognition of One China, Xi reinforced a message to the Trump administration as to the importance China placed on the island while also warning Tsai of China's capabilities, thereby incentivizing maintenance of the status quo to quell tensions. The lack of correlation between arms sales, diplomatic visits, provocative U.S.-Taiwan interactions and PLA incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ is evidence that the incursions are not a reaction to specific types of U.S. policies or engagements with Taiwan per se. Instead, the PLA incursions prove to be a stand-alone strategy employed by Xi to signal a credible threat strong enough to deter deviation from the status quo as a whole, rather than directed toward a particular type of U.S.–Taiwan interaction.

What does China's military behavior toward Taiwan mean for future U.S. diplomacy and policies on the issue of Taiwan? This research has shown that PLA incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ are not undertaken in reaction to U.S. arms sales, diplomatic visits, or other positive U.S.-Taiwan interactions. There was no consistency between the PLA incursions during Obama and Trump's tenures for similar U.S.–Taiwan interactions.

In addition, there is also no correlation between an increase in specific positive U.S.–Taiwan interactions and the frequency and number of military aircrafts utilized by the PLA during incursions. The PLA clearly showed a dramatic increase in the frequency and number of military aircraft used during incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ during Trump’s tenure. The lack of correlation between specific U.S.–Taiwan interactions and PLA incursions does not mean China is indifferent to those perceived provocations. Instead, it confirms Xi as a measured leader, one who contemplates the risks of changes in the status quo based on multiple variables, including Taiwan’s leadership, and the U.S.’s commitment to maintaining the status quo by not emboldening Taiwan through atypical interactions, such as Trump questioning the One China policy.

The fact that Xi had a phone call with Trump, where Trump subsequently recognized the One China policy, is indicative of Xi’s preference for diplomacy to ensure the status quo is maintained. Xi could have chosen to further castigate Trump’s support for Taiwan, and thus increase tensions to the point where he could argue Taiwan was unilaterally changing the status quo to legitimize and justify a forceful reunification. But the fact that Xi aimed to reassert the status quo with Trump is further evidence that PLA incursions are used as a tool to communicate a credible threat as per third-party coercive diplomacy, to maintain the status quo, rather an indication of China’s urgency toward reunification. Research fellow Chieh Chung, from the Taiwanese think tank Association of Strategic Foresight, also assessed PLA incursions as indicative of China’s “displeasure” rather than a serious urgent threat (Chin, 2021). Therefore, going forward, it will be important for the U.S. and Taiwan to not engage in atypical interactions beyond

the decades of normalized arms sales, inconsequential mentions of Taiwan and non-symbolic diplomatic visits.

While this thesis argues for the U.S. and Taiwan's need to provide unequivocal reassurance regarding adherence to maintaining the status quo, the thesis also provides evidence that supports the U.S.'s continuation of the grand strategy of engagement with China and Taiwan, rather than the opposite stance of retrenchment. Insofar as China may seek to maintain the status quo, the PRC will not accept the status quo as an indefinite solution. Therefore, while the Xi regime displays no immediate signs of forceful reunification, the U.S. should remain engaged in order to maintain pressure on the potential costs involved for the PRC.

Bonnie Glaser identifies Jessica Matthews as part of a group of pundits who support the notion that PLA aggression toward Taiwan usually takes place after provocative U.S. diplomatic policies toward China. However, based on Glaser's own assessment and her discussions with both active and retired PLA officers, Chinese military incursions are more generally scheduled military training exercises rather than strategic intimidation or punishment tactics. For example, Glaser concedes that the PLAAF crossed the median line on March 31, 2019, the first time in 20 years, but not all incursions pass the median line, and intruding the ADIZ which she identifies as international air space needs to be analyzed as distinct from "flying over Taiwan [or] within Taiwan territorial airspace" (Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University, 2021b).

The notion of international space came to the forefront recently during Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's regular press conference on June 13,

2022, when China unilaterally declared “sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the Taiwan Strait” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2022). This claim of sovereignty by China contradicts Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin’s assertion in 2017 when he claimed that “the Taiwan Straits [sic] are an international waterway shared by the mainland and Taiwan, so it is normal for CNS Liaoning to pass through in training” (Zhang, 2017). China’s most recent claim to the Taiwan Strait seems to be an effort to prevent the U.S. Navy from passing the strait, which it routinely does a few times a year.

At first glance, China’s sovereignty claim seems to be a further act of aggression in an effort to reunify with Taiwan. However, this claim can also be interpreted as China seeking to present a credible and uncertain threat to U.S. and Taiwan policymakers. China’s announcement may be an effort to deescalate tensions by discouraging increased U.S. naval activity around Taiwan, as well as to prevent a moral hazard whereby Taiwan may feel emboldened to push the limits of its stance in the international community, especially against the backdrop of Biden’s multiple Freudian slips regarding guaranteed intervention in the event of a Chinese attack on Taiwan. China’s claims to the Taiwan Strait can also be interpreted as an attempt to push the boundaries of the status quo, in which case U.S. engagement would be necessary to maintain pressure on China and also to prevent Taiwan’s need to assert its sovereignty in the face of PLA incursions in the Taiwan Strait.

Postscript

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and the Relevance to Cross-Strait Relations

Soon after Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, many began to draw comparisons to China's unwavering stance on reunification with Taiwan. Thus far, from China's perspective, a cost-benefit analysis of forceful reunification with Taiwan remains unchanged at best; however, the unity the international community has shown in support of Ukraine has conveyed that the costs China would incur may be greater than previous calculations. At the same time, Biden appears to prefer strategic clarity as opposed to strategic ambiguity as a more effective measure for deterring forceful reunification by China—as evidenced on May 23, 2022, when Biden earnestly confirmed for the third time in his presidency that the U.S. would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack (Reuters, 2022).

The real impact on Taiwan is three-fold: (1) a strengthened urgency to procure the military means for self defense in the event of an attack until help arrived; (2) communicating and enforcing the notion of maintaining the status quo; and (3) to emphasize not only Taiwan's significance to the international community, but also the cost in non-interference.

This research reveals that there is no correlation between PLA aggression toward Taiwan and U.S. arms sales, positive statements and policies, and diplomatic visits that took place either on Taiwan or on U.S. soil. The conclusion that I have drawn is that China's effort to intimidate or exert aggressive behavior in the Taiwan Strait reflects Xi's

own considerations on the issue, rather than a response to specific examined external factors as they pertain to U.S.–Taiwan interactions. Instead, aggressive PLA overtures in the Taiwan Strait have a positive correlation to the potential threat of disrupting the status quo.

The relevance of this research can be drawn to the argument that Russia invaded Ukraine due to a perceived threat in the power dynamics, i.e., a looming change to the status quo on Russia's border in the event that Ukraine becomes a member of NATO. The war in Ukraine is relevant to Taiwan and this research because the maintenance and perception of the durability of the status quo between China and Taiwan is vital to sustaining peace and stability in the Asian region. The importance Xi places on immortalizing his legacy, and Biden's occasional slip of strategic clarity, means that Xi places even greater care on weighing the variables and impact of forceful reunification.

As such, for now, cross-strait relations remains unchanged, while Taiwan may focus more on defensive capabilities, and China will revisit the cost-benefit analysis on the issue of forceful reunification with Taiwan.

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