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## On "Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan" and Authors' Response

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## On “Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan”

Eric Chan  
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This commentary responds to Jared M. McKinney and Peter Harris’s article “Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan” published in the Winter 2021–22 issue of *Parameters* (vol. 51, no. 4).

**Keywords:** Taiwan, Chinese Communist Party, diplomacy, deterrence, cabbage strategy

In the last issue of *Parameters*, authors Jared M. McKinney and Peter Harris proposed a novel method of deterring the People’s Republic of China (PRC) from invading Taiwan without the latent threat of a great-power war. From their point of view, the best solution would be if Taiwan, with US assistance, could keep the peace in the event of an invasion by threatening to target both Taiwan and PRC semiconductor facilities. By threatening high, lasting economic costs, complemented by conciliatory outreach to “ease China’s cost of restraint,” the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would have no rational reason to invade.

Unfortunately, the “broken nest,” scorched-earth solution badly misjudges the primary reasons behind the CCP’s desire for unification and domestic Taiwanese politics. Such a solution would not only fail to deter China, it would be an enormous boon to the CCP’s “United Front” propaganda. In this brief response, I address the three main problems presented by the broken nest strategy and why it should not be implemented in its current form.<sup>1</sup>

The first issue I identify is the belief US/Taiwan attempts to restore a semblance of deterrence by denial would *result* in an arms race. Rather, the Chinese Communist Party has engaged in a single-handed arms race for over a generation despite remarkably favorable geopolitical conditions.<sup>2</sup> Over the last few years, the United States has begun shifting its defense posture and increasing security cooperation with Taipei, and Taiwan has significantly boosted defense

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1. Jared M. McKinney and Peter Harris, “Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan,” *Parameters* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2021–22), 33, italics in original.

2. Paul Huang, “Taiwan’s Military Is a Hollow Shell,” *Foreign Policy* (website), February 15, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/15/china-threat-invasion-conscription-taiwans-military-is-a-hollow-shell/>.

spending as part of a defense reform program.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note the People's Liberation Army (PLA) aggressiveness toward Taiwan (and for that matter, across the region) *significantly predates* the American and Taiwanese defense shifts.

Since the mid-1990s, the PLA has enjoyed double-digit annual budget increases, while the United States was preoccupied with the war on terror and Taiwan's military atrophied during the pro-PRC engagement administration of Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou (2008–16). As seen in the PRC's identified "window of strategic opportunity" (roughly 2002–2020), the PLA received some of its highest budget increases while testing out gray-zone warfare concepts now being used against Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> For instance, PLA Air Force incursions into air defense identification zones in the mid-2010s, as a method of operational attrition/political intimidation, were heavily tested against the Japan Air Self-Defense Force.<sup>5</sup> China integrated Chinese Coast Guard, PLA Navy, and maritime militia units in a "cabbage strategy" of power projection against both the Philippines in the 2012 Scarborough Reef incident and Vietnam in the 2014 Hai Yang Shi You 981 incident.<sup>6</sup> These events occurred in an era when the United States was pursuing engagement with China. At the same time, the United Kingdom and PRC were discussing a so-called golden era of economic partnership, and the EU was openly debating lifting the post-Tiananmen arms embargo. During a period where the strategic environment was particularly favorable for China, the CCP took a completely opposite tack to the US peace-dividend era of the 1990s. It is unlikely US or Taiwanese attempts to restore some semblance of deterrence by denial would *result* in an all-out arms race because the PRC has been single-handedly participating in an arms race for quite some time.

The second point of contention is the driving factor behind Xi Jinping's focus on Taiwan. McKinney and Harris identify an increasing "cost of restraint" for China, as "Taiwan moves further away from the mainland, particularly in terms of its core national identity."<sup>7</sup> This is an argument directly taken from propaganda the Chinese Communist Party uses to justify the PRC's aggressive gray-zone

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3. Ben Blanchard and Yimou Lee, "Taiwan Plans \$9 Bln Boost in Arms Spending, Warns of 'Severe Threat,'" Reuters (website), September 16, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-proposes-extra-87-bln-defence-spending-over-5-years-2021-09-16/>.

4. Christopher K. Johnson, "Thoughts from the Chairman: Xi Jinping Unveils His Foreign Policy Vision," Center for Strategic & International Studies (website), December 8, 2014, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/thoughts-chairman-xi-jinping-unveils-his-foreign-policy-vision>.

5. Franz-Stefan Gady, "Japan Intercepted Chinese Military Aircraft 675 Times in Fiscal Year 2019," *Diplomat* (website), April 10, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/japan-intercepted-chinese-military-aircraft-675-times-in-fiscal-year-2019/>.

6. Eric Chan, "Escalating Clarity without Fighting: Countering Gray Zone Warfare against Taiwan (Part 2)," *Global Taiwan Brief* 6, no. 11 (June 2, 2021): 1, <https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GTB-PDF-6.11.pdf>.

7. McKinney and Harris, "Broken Nest," 27.

actions and various anti-secession laws. Taiwanese domestic politics, however, demonstrates this claim is false. Taiwanese politics center on maintaining the *status quo*, and given the deterrent power from the vast expansion of PRC military capabilities, this stance has become truer over time. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the nominally proindependence party, has shifted more and more toward status quo over the last two decades: the party's 2008 presidential nominee, Frank Hsieh, was considered more moderate than Chen Shui-bian, and the party's 2012 nominee, Tsai Ing-wen, was considered more moderate still—and she continued this policy of moderation even after two landslide victories in 2016 and 2020.<sup>8</sup> Without the CCP's brutal crackdown on the 2019–20 Hong Kong anti-extradition law protests, the 2020 Taiwan presidential election would have likely gone to the Chinese Nationalist Party candidate Han Kuo-yu, who favored greater economic and political engagement with the PRC.<sup>9</sup>

It is true the Taiwanese populace is gradually moving toward a more Taiwan-centric identity given the passing of the *waishengren* (the mainland Chinese migrants who fled to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949). Those same polls, however, also demonstrate a remarkable consistency and overwhelming public support for the status quo—some 87.4 percent support in July 2021 polling, in the midst of an aggressive PRC coercion campaign.<sup>10</sup> The CCP shift from a hearts-and-mind strategy of economic enticements to gray-zone coercion/threat of invasion mirrors their actions in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, where Xi concluded exerting control via a velvet glove over an iron fist was unnecessary. In Hong Kong and Xinjiang, the Chinese Communist Party did not face serious threats to its power prior to the crackdowns. Instead, Xi defined down the cost of restraint to make any challenges, no matter how minor, unacceptably high. Thus, the authors' prescriptions to reduce the cost of restraint for China is meaningless for the Party. The only concession the Party would appreciate would be the US abandonment of Taiwan and Taiwan agreeing to unification with the PRC.<sup>11</sup>

The final point of contention is the proposed stick portion of the authors' strategy that is based on a misinterpretation of the CCP's interest in Taiwan.

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8. David G. Brown, "Is Frank Hsieh a Moderate?," *Japan Times* (website), July 19, 2007, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2007/07/19/commentary/world-commentary/is-frank-hsieh-a-moderate/>; and Ryan Hass, "Taiwan's Tsai Ing-wen Enters Second Term with a Strong Political Mandate, but No Room for Complacency," *Brookings* (blog), May 13, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/05/13/taiwans-tsai-ing-wen-enters-second-term-with-a-strong-political-mandate-but-no-room-for-complacency/>.

9. Chris Horton, "The Taiwanese Populist Advancing China's Interests," *Atlantic* (website), April 16, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/04/taiwanese-populist-han-kuo-yu-china/587146/>.

10. Russell Hsiao, "Taiwanese Preference for Status Quo Remains Constant Even as Views Harden," *Global Taiwan Brief* 6, no. 15 (July 28, 2021): 1, <https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GTB-6.15-draft-2-PDF.pdf>.

11. Derek Grossman, "Biden Administration Shows Unwavering Support for Taiwan," *RAND Blog*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/10/biden-administration-shows-unwavering-support-for-taiwan.html>; and McKinney and Harris, "Broken Nest," 33.

McKinney and Harris propose the “United States and Taiwan lay plans for a targeted scorched-earth strategy” to include the destruction of the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Taiwan targeting of Shanghai’s Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation, and US evacuation of highly skilled Taiwanese semiconductor engineers. The strategic value of Taiwan for the CCP, however, is political, not economic.<sup>12</sup> The authors reference the historical precedent of Swedish deterrence of Nazi Germany in World War II through the Swedish scorched-earth threat to its iron-ore mines. The biggest error with this analogy is that Hitler’s interest in Sweden as a target largely disappeared once Sweden and Germany reached an economic agreement for iron-ore exports, given Hitler’s focus on an impending showdown with the Soviet Union.

In Taiwan’s case, the semiconductors for Xi are a secondary concern at best; they are an important but not critical part of the Chinese economy precisely *because* Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation chips are considered relatively primitive (compared to the chips of their Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, Samsung, and Intel competitors), which prevents the PRC from being a major player in the global chip supply chain.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the threat to destroy Taiwan’s semiconductor industry while targeting Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation is relatively weak, especially compared to the enormous economic damage any cross-Strait war or blockade would cause by specifically targeting the semiconductor industry. The fact that the PLA continues to develop specific capabilities for an amphibious invasion demonstrates the CCP has “baked in” and will tolerate significant economic costs to take Taiwan.

In addition to the weakness of the threat, consider how Taiwan would perceive advice from the United States when asked to be prepared to blow up its most valuable industry. Such advice would imply the United States considers Taiwan to be a lost cause, showing the United States as unwilling to fight for its partners and instead prioritizing the evacuation of those Taiwanese who would be able to help build up the US semiconductor industry. Past the operational absurdity of such an evacuation—imagine the panic in Taipei as the US Air Force attempted to evacuate engineers just before or during the PLA Joint Firepower Strike campaign—this action would destroy the morale of the Taiwanese population and armed forces at the most critical point. Any Taiwan president who cooperated with such a plan would be run out of office (rightfully), and the CCP’s United Front propaganda apparatus would have a field day showing how the Americans and the “evil Taiwan independence separatists” were

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12. McKinney and Harris, “Broken Nest,” 30.

13. Arjun Kharpal, “How Asia Came to Dominate Chipmaking and What the U.S. Wants to Do about It,” CNBC (website), April 11, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/12/us-semiconductor-policy-looks-to-cut-out-china-secure-supply-chain.html>.

prepared to blow up Taiwanese industry while the CCP tried to protect the livelihood of the Taiwanese people.

The rest of the article's proposed punitive measures all fail along similar lines. Guerrilla warfare in a Taiwan context is only useful *in support* of an active US/Taiwan counterinvasion campaign, but would hold no deterrent power postwar, where the People's Armed Police has decades of experience with concentration camps, group punishment, forced resettlement, and now the integration of AI-powered facial recognition and biometric systems to control populations. The United States threatening sanctions and political isolation *do* represent some deterrence, but these actions would be seriously, if not fatally, weakened if Taiwan fell, as that failure would show Chinese power now eclipsed the United States, that US willpower had collapsed, or both.

Moreover, these threats are not new. The *Made in China 2025* program, the monopolization of the global supply of rare earth elements, and recent domestic ideological rectification campaigns all indicate the Chinese Communist Party is aware of the economic-political pressures the United States could effect—and are already implementing mitigation measures. Finally, the threats the United States would signal to its allies—that these countries could now develop their own nuclear arsenals—are also weak and would be an admission the US nuclear umbrella represented insufficient protection. In any case, following a US defeat or abandonment of Taiwan, US allies would probably be discussing the topic anyway.

In the end, I agree with McKinney and Harris that a traditional US deterrence-by-denial strategy for the defense of Taiwan is weakening, and deterrence-by-punishment is more compelling. I also agree with their point that Chinese strategic thinking “emphasizes the possibility and utility of limited wars and projects confidence in the ability of war handlers to bring such an engagement to a favorable political outcome,” though I must note CCP leadership considered the Sino-Indian War and the Sino-Vietnamese Wars *not* as political failures, but as worthy successes that should be emulated.<sup>14</sup>

Deterrence by threat of economic punishment alone is vastly insufficient. China does not care about the “ire of its Asian neighbors” because the Chinese Communist Party views neighbors as tributary states that will, sooner or later, fall into PRC economic domination.<sup>15</sup> Nor does it care about temporary economic disruption in the absence of US military action. Chinese leaders feel they now have the political and economic tools to counteract the

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14. Howard Wang, “The Ideal Tool of Nations: War Control in Chinese Military Thought,” *Georgetown Security Studies Review* 7, no. 1 (January 2019): 6–26, <http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/GSSR-7.1-final-text-updated.pdf>; and McKinney and Harris, “Broken Nest,” 26.

15. McKinney and Harris, “Broken Nest,” 32.

resulting discontent, especially if they could credibly proclaim to their populace this step was a necessary sacrifice for the reunification of China and for breaking the perceived US strategic noose around the country. For good reason, since his ascension in 2012, Xi has incessantly exhorted the CCP cadre to *take more risks* and to *accept struggle* as a necessary part of China's national rejuvenation.<sup>16</sup>

If the goal of the United States is to deter Beijing from invading Taiwan, then we should *seek to deter the CCP*. US leadership should clearly state an armed attack on Taiwan without provocation will be seen as the CCP moving beyond an "issue of cross-Straits relations" to an all-out challenge of American power to extinguish a democratic partner, collapse the US presence in the Western Pacific, and overturn the rules-based world order.<sup>17</sup>

The only response to such an existential challenge must be a US demonstration of its ability to destroy the invasion fleet while systematically grinding the rest of the armed wing of the CCP, also known as the PLA, to dust. Only then will the threat of economic devastation turning into unresolvable political turmoil become real. Mao's dictum that "*political power grows out of the barrel of a gun*" holds true for the CCP today with a Mao-era cult of personality—especially with a leader who has sought to revive Mao-era organizations (the United Front) and Mao-era vocabulary ("Yan'an rectification campaign").<sup>18</sup> In short, the United States must force the CCP to consider that a Taiwan invasion would *not* be a limited war, but a global, great-power war of indeterminate length, potentially threatening the CCP's hold on power and the Politburo Standing Committee, all for the hubris of Xi.<sup>19</sup>

That is deterrence.

What is not deterrence, is telling our partners we are prepared to help them blow up the one industry that makes them economically relevant on the international stage.

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16. Jun Mai, "Don't Expect an Easy Life and Be Ready to Struggle, Chinese President Xi Jinping Warns Officials," *South China Morning Post* (website), September 2, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3147337/dont-expect-easy-life-and-be-ready-struggle-chinese-president>.

17. McKinney and Harris, "Broken Nest," 26.

18. Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, 1964.

19. "China's Domestic-Security Agencies Are Undergoing a Massive Purge," *Economist* (website), March 1, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/china/2021/03/01/chinas-domestic-security-agencies-are-undergoing-a-massive-purge>.

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# The Authors Reply

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## Goliath No More: Why Taiwan Should Not Rely on American Threats of War

Keywords: Taiwan, deterrence, punishment, semiconductor, China

A basic rule of international affairs is for David not to challenge Goliath to a duel.<sup>1</sup> Absent luck, divine intervention, or a brilliant strategy, weak combatants rarely prevail over their much stronger adversaries. In situations where one side is vastly more powerful than the other, the laws of power suggest a stable formula for deterrence. As the Athenians explained to the Melians long ago, “The best recipe for success is to stand up to equals, defer to superiors, and be moderate towards your inferiors.”<sup>2</sup>

In his reply to our article, “Broken Nest,” Eric Chan drew on these intuitions to suggest a simple method of deterring China from invading Taiwan: the United States should merely establish incontrovertible military superiority over China and then explain the logic of the Athenians to the Chinese side.<sup>3</sup> If such a solution were possible, we would naturally be all for it. We remain unconvinced, however, such a solution *is* possible. On the contrary, we are highly skeptical the United States can practicably regain military superiority in East Asia such that Washington can ensure Taiwan’s security by simply cowing Beijing into passivity. In turn, this leads us to doubt the credibility and long-term effectiveness of any strategy of deterrence that depends entirely upon US threats of military reprisals. Nothing Chan presented in his reply has moved us from this position.

In our article, we sought to articulate not just an alternative strategy for deterring a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, but also an alternative logic—one better suited to a world in which the United States is no longer Goliath. More specifically, we developed a first-cut proposal for deterrence focused on *punishment* (costs to be levied against Beijing in the event of an invasion) rather than *denial* (military threats to prevent an invasion from being successful). To be more precise, we suggested a package of punishments that, if threatened, might “convince

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1. Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

2. Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Mynott, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 384.

3. Jared M. McKinney and Peter Harris, “Broken Nest: Deterring China from Invading Taiwan,” *Parameters* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2021–22): 23–26.

Chinese leaders invading Taiwan will come at the cost of core national objectives: economic growth, domestic tranquility, secure borders, and perhaps even the maintenance of regime legitimacy.”<sup>4</sup> Our wager was that, because the Chinese Communist Party has staked its legitimacy on achieving its ambitious “China Dream” goals by 2049, CCP leaders will be forced to pursue the “balance between development and security” their official statements already call for.<sup>5</sup> If it were clear an invasion of Taiwan would destroy any such balance and jeopardize the core goals, then such an action would only be taken in the most extreme circumstances.

Our specific proposal comprised four key elements. First, we called for a robust Taiwanese defense effort that would make Taiwan costly for Beijing to attack, defeat, and occupy. Second, we argued Taiwan should threaten China with a preplanned resistance campaign that would drain Beijing of resources, lives, and prestige even in the event of a successful invasion. Third, we proposed an organized effort to undermine China’s access to semiconductors, including the self-destruction of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company facilities and other assets associated with semiconductor manufacturing, the use of Taiwanese cruise missiles against related targets on the Chinese mainland, and the enactment of global sanctions aimed at limiting China’s ability to recover and advance its chip industry. Fourth, we called for a regional response from US allies that would severely worsen China’s security environment.

The third pillar of this strategy has attracted more criticism than the others. Chan, for example, insists China does not value Taiwan because of its semiconductors and so threatening to destroy Taiwan’s semiconductor industry is no deterrent whatsoever. Nowhere have we argued China desires Taiwan because of its semiconductor industry. Rather, our argument is that China has become so dependent on Taiwan’s semiconductors that Beijing can now be made to fear being denied access to these technologies. Of course, we are open to debate about how costly it would truly be for China to be deprived access to Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company chips. We note that according to some news reports,

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4. McKinney and Harris, “Broken Nest,” 32.

5. “Full Text of the Chinese Communist Party’s New Resolution on History,” Nikkei Asia (website), November 19, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Full-text-of-the-Chinese-Communist-Party-s-new-resolution-on-history>.

US intelligence officials believe China's leaders are concerned about the impact a war over Taiwan would have on China's access to semiconductors.<sup>6</sup>

Chan bristles at the idea the Taiwanese should threaten to “blow up the one industry that makes them economically relevant on the international stage.” Yet at the same time, Chan is at ease with the United States threatening all-out war with China in the event of an invasion. In any case, we disagree that remaining relevant on the international stage after a successful Chinese invasion is—or should be—more important to Taiwanese than deterring a Chinese invasion in the first place. While we accept a willingness to engage in self-harm may signal desperation, we submit Taiwan's situation vis-à-vis China is increasingly desperate and such a signal may actually be necessary to demonstrate the credibility of Taiwan's commitment to deterring an invasion. By contrast, refusing to contemplate threatening targeted economic self-harm, as Chan urges, telegraphs to Beijing and the rest of the world a dangerous unwillingness to take risks in pursuit of self-defense—a signal already suggested by the inadequate condition of Taiwan's military readiness.<sup>7</sup>

What about the other three pillars of our proposed strategy? Chan does not address the first element, aside from arguing “Taiwan has significantly boosted defense spending.” To buttress this claim, Chan cites an article that details \$9 billion in additional spending to be spent over five years. This works out as around .002 percent of Taiwan's GDP over the same period. If Taiwan is intent on deterring a Chinese attack today, it should be spending in the realm of 5 percent of GDP on its defense, as it did in the 1980s and 1990s, not the approximately 2 percent it spends today.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, it should not waste these funds on prestige weapons but instead invest in a large number of small things.<sup>9</sup>

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6. David E. Sanger et al., “Senate Poised to Pass Huge Industrial Policy Bill to Counter China,” *New York Times* (website), June 7, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/us/politics/senate-china-semiconductors.html>; see also Craig Addison, *Silicon Shield: Taiwan's Protection against Chinese Attack* (Irvington, TX: Fusion Press, 2001); Elena Yi-Ching Ho, “Semiconductors as a Shield for Taiwan?,” *Strategist* (website), March 16, 2021, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/semiconductors-as-a-shield-for-taiwan/>; and Joyce Huang, “Can Taiwan's Silicon Shield Protect It against China's Aggression?,” *Voice of America News* (website), May 10, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific-can-taiwans-silicon-shield-protect-it-against-chinas-aggression/6205660.html>.

7. Paul Huang, “Taiwan's Military Has Flashy American Weapons but No Ammo,” *Foreign Policy*, August 20, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/20/taiwan-military-flashy-american-weapons-no-ammo/>; Joyu Wang and Alastair Gale, “Does Taiwan's Military Stand a Chance against China? Few Think So,” *Wall Street Journal* (website), October 26, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwan-military-readiness-china-threat-us-defense-11635174187>; Kathrin Hille, “Taiwanese Shrug off China Threat and Place Their Trust in ‘Daddy America,’” *Financial Times*, September 22, 2021; and Yimou Lee and David Lague, “T-Day: The Battle for Taiwan,” *Reuters* (website), December 20, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/taiwan-china-espionage/>.

8. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Military Expenditure by Country as Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, 1988–2020,” n.d., <https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988-2020%20as%20a%20share%20of%20GDP%20%28pdf%29.pdf>.

9. James Timbie and James O. Ellis Jr., “A Large Number of Small Things: A Porcupine Strategy for Taiwan,” *Texas National Security Review* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2021/2022), <https://tnsr.org/2021/12/a-large-number-of-small-things-a-porcupine-strategy-for-taiwan/>; and Heino Klinck, *Taiwan's Turn – Deterring and Derailing an Existential Threat*, Information Series no. 508 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2021).

Regarding the prospect of a resistance movement, Chan states such an effort would “hold no deterrent power postwar.” This is obviously true. If the Chinese invade Taiwan then deterrence will have failed by definition. It is also true, however, that making a credible threat of resistance now might lessen the chances of an invasion taking place in the future. We agree with Chan that Taiwanese resistance against an invading Chinese army would be costly, but we would gently point out threats of war between the United States and China (Chan’s preferred means of deterrent) would also be enormously costly—including for the people of Taiwan—if ever carried out. Advocates of a great-power war in defense of Taiwan frequently overlook this point.

Finally, with respect to our proposals for a stiff regional reaction to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, Chan counters that relying on such a response would admit the United States is not omnipotent in East Asia. This point is not so much a criticism of our argument as it is a restatement of it. We do indeed fear the United States lacks the capacity to impose its will unilaterally on Beijing. This is why we call for a strategy of deterrence enacted in collaboration with allies and partners, including Taiwan, whose leaders Chan seems to treat as helpless, scared of bad press, and lacking all agency.

We note with interest that Chan agrees with one of our major arguments when he writes “a traditional US deterrence-by-denial strategy for the defense of Taiwan is weakening, and deterrence-by-denial punishment is more compelling.” If we can put aside the idea the United States can stop an invasion of Taiwan in its tracks, the question becomes one of what sort of punishments should be threatened against Beijing so it is deterred from invading Taiwan. We have been clear about what we would propose in this regard. To his credit, so is Chan. But we found his answer troubling: “The only response to such an existential challenge,” he writes, “must be a US demonstration of its ability to destroy the invasion fleet while systematically grinding the rest of the armed wing of the CCP, also known as the PLA, to dust.” He goes on to argue the United States must threaten China with “a global, great-power war of indeterminate length.”

People in Taiwan and the United States alike should find these words chilling. Chan argues the only way to deter China from invading Taiwan is to threaten the total destruction of the People’s Republic of China as a party-state. How does Chan expect Beijing would act if this strategy were implemented? He does not say. If he did, Chan would be forced to spell out the apocalyptic consequences of what he is proposing—including for the people of Taiwan, whose island would be turned into a hellscape.

Whatever conclusions policymakers draw about our proposals—and we accept reasonable people can disagree on the points raised in our article—

we strongly urge them to reject Chan's proposals. We remain unconvinced that threatening China with World War III is a credible means of deterrence. As Keith Payne, a former deputy assistant secretary of state, has convincingly argued, even a latent threat the United States might escalate a conflict over Taiwan via an uncontrollable chain of events (the threat that "leaves something to chance") would only be credible if the United States held a "perceived advantage" over China, whether in terms of political will, risk tolerance, or superior military options.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the United States does not hold these advantages over China across the Taiwan Strait. If Chinese leaders—not unreasonably—come to the same conclusion, they may judge the invasion of Taiwan to be rational in the near term.

This is why, in the final analysis, incredible threats of war are just another form of abandoning Taiwan. If adopted, Chan's proposals would make a Chinese invasion more likely, not less. We urge policymakers in Washington and Taipei to focus less on the threat of a ruinous superpower war and more on different forms of punishment that might be threatened against Beijing to truly reduce the chances of an invasion.

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