

Michael D. Swaine

China Leadership Monitor, Winter 2021 Issue 70
Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Public Chinese sources affirm that the foundational elements of China's Taiwan policy have not changed fundamentally under Xi Jinping. However, many Chinese officials and elites regard the current situation as increasingly dangerous and precarious, requiring ever more energetic Chinese deterrence actions against both Taipei and Washington. And an increasing number of non-authoritative Chinese sources believe that eventual peaceful unification will most likely only occur under some form of non-violent PRC coercion of Taiwan, along with the acquisition of unassailable military deterrence capabilities directed at the United States. At the same time, public sources do not confirm the notion that Beijing is preparing to attack Taiwan by any specific date, and some Chinese sources continue to insist that time remains on China's side, given Beijing's growing power and influence. Nonetheless, since Washington seems to hold a similar deterrence-centered viewpoint toward the Taiwan issue, it is fair to say that the ingredients of a Sino-U.S. confrontation over Taiwan are in place, unless the two nations can agree upon verifiable *quid pro quos* designed to build trust and reduce open-ended military signaling.

The relationship between the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Republic of China on Taiwan, and the United States is by far the most sensitive and potentially volatile issue in Sino-American relations. Stability in that relationship is based to a great extent on an understanding reached between Beijing and Washington at the time of normalization, involving a U.S. acknowledgment of China's One China viewpoint and a Chinese assertion of the desire to achieve unification through peaceful negotiation as a first priority.¹ Since then, and despite frequent formal reiterations by both governments of these understandings, severe tensions over Taiwan have emerged at various times. This has happened largely as a result of actions taken by one side that are interpreted by the other as a *de facto* violation or weakening of the original understanding, such as the Clinton Administration's 1995 issuance of a visa to then Taiwan President Lee Tenghui to visit his alma mater in the United States, or various Chinese military displays intended to intimidate Taiwan and caution Washington.²

In recent years, Sino-American tensions over Taiwan have risen to arguably unprecedented levels, marked by larger-scale Chinese military activities near the island, intensifying U.S.

¹ Richard Bush, *Untying the Knot: Making Peace in the Taiwan Strait* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2005), 253–255.

² Liu Zhen and Kristen Huang, "How a Snub of the One-China Policy Almost Led Beijing and the US to War in the 1990s," *South China Morning Post*, December 13, 2016. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2054141/how-snub-one-china-policy-almost-led-beijing-and-us-war>; "China Threatens to Attack Taiwan," *The Guardian*, February 22, 2000. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/feb/22/china>.

signals of support for Taiwan, and increasingly acrimonious and ominous exchanges of deterrence-oriented rhetoric.³ These increased tensions have resulted from various developments, most notably including, among others, an overall increase in bilateral distrust and animosity, brought on by sharp differences (many ideological) over a host of issues, from trade and technology transfers to human rights, international norms, and a shift in the regional and/or global balance of power between the two nations.⁴ On Taiwan, the weakening and fragmentation of the previously dominant Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) and the strengthening of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (Minjindang) (DPP) have added to such tensions by motivating Beijing to increase signals of resolve toward Taiwan's citizens, an action made more urgent by DPP leader Tsai Ing-wen's election to the presidency of Taiwan in 2016.

The intensifying strategic competition reflected in these developments has unavoidably deepened each side's suspicions regarding the motives and intentions of the other toward Taiwan, thus undermining, some would say fatally, the above-outlined Sino-U.S. understanding. Increasingly, it seems, and despite U.S. statements to the contrary, many in Beijing view Washington as moving away from its One China policy toward a de facto One China, One Taiwan policy, presumably as part of an overall effort to contain and undermine the PRC. In the United States, and especially in Washington, D.C., a growing number of analysts and pundits are arguing or strongly implying that Beijing has in fact jettisoned its original commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue as a top priority and is preparing to use force against the island.⁵

Supporters of the latter argument cite a variety of supposed evidence to support it, including China's increased military activity near Taiwan (primary involving an unprecedented number of air sorties within Taiwan's air defense identification zone [ADIZ]), Xi Jinping's supposed declaration of the need to achieve unification within the timeline of his 2049 goal for Chinese national rejuvenation, and growing Chinese diplomatic, political, cyber, and other forms of pressure and attacks on the island.⁶

³Ben Blanchard and Yimou Lee, "Biden Says US Will Defend Taiwan If China Attacks," BBC News, October 22, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59005300>; "China Mounts Largest Incursion Yet Near Taiwan," Reuters, October 4, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-reports-surge-chinese-aircraft-defence-zone-2021-10-04/>.

⁴ Scott Kastner, "The Taiwan Issue in US-China Relations, in *After Engagement: Dilemmas in US-China Security Relations*, ed. Jacques Delisle and Avery Goldstein (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2021), 244–268.

⁵ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "China's Taiwan Temptation," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-03/china-taiwan-war-temptation>; Lara Seligman, "U.S. Warns of China's Growing Threat to Taiwan," *Politico*, March 15, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/03/15/china-growing-threat-taiwan-476170>.

⁶ Ibid.; Joshua Ball, "Expect Rising Tensions Between China and Taiwan for the Foreseeable Future," *Global Security Review*, June 10, 2019. <https://globalsecurityreview.com/expect-rising-tensions-between-china-taiwan-foreseeable-future/>.

Other observers do not necessarily assert or predict such a fundamental shift in the Chinese stance, but nonetheless they cite the increased danger of Chinese miscalculation under current conditions, and the supposed resulting need for the U.S. to focus almost exclusively on increasing its deterrence signals and capacity toward China, e.g., by openly declaring that it will defend China if attacked.⁷

This article takes a close look at open source Chinese views on the Taiwan issue. In so doing, it seeks to shed greater light on certain key questions that have emerged in recent months regarding Beijing's calculus, while recognizing that such sources cannot serve as conclusive indicators of Chinese leadership thinking or intentions. Such questions include the following: What, if any, predominant authoritative, semi-authoritative, and non-authoritative Chinese elite views exist today regarding the stability or instability of the U.S.-PRC-Taiwan relationship? Do most Chinese elites believe that the issue has become far more dangerous than in the past, and if so, why? What do Chinese elites think are the critical dangers or opportunities in the current situation? Has elite Chinese opinion clearly shifted to support the use of force against Taiwan and if so, what are seen as the major costs and risks of such an action?

Authoritative Sources

In general, Chinese leaders and authoritative documents regarding Taiwan have for many years displayed a high level of consistency in presenting China's basic stance. This is most reliably contained in the annual State Council Government Work Report (GWP), which always includes a paragraph or two on the topic. The language used is invariably some version of the 2020 GWP statement:

We will adhere to the major principles and policies on work related to Taiwan, uphold the one-China principle, and promote the peaceful growth of relations across the Taiwan Strait on the basis of the 92 Consensus. We will resolutely oppose and deter any separatist activities seeking "Taiwan independence." We will improve institutional arrangements, policies, and measures to encourage exchanges and cooperation between the two sides of the Strait, further cross-Strait integrated development, and protect the wellbeing of our fellow compatriots in Taiwan. We will encourage them to join us in opposing "Taiwan independence" and promoting China's reunification.

Within this framework, various other authoritative sources have consistently provided additional explanatory language. Among such examples are authoritative statements regarding peaceful reunification, the "one country, two systems" formula for the future, a unified Mainland-Taiwan relationship, and Beijing's refusal to renounce the use of force if necessary. A representative example of such embellishments is contained in the 2019 Chinese Defense White Paper:

China adheres to the principles of "peaceful reunification" and "one country, two systems," promotes peaceful development of cross-Strait relations and advances peaceful

⁷ Richard Haass and David Sacks, "American Support for Taiwan Must be Unambiguous," *Foreign Affairs*, September 2, 2020. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/american-support-taiwan-must-be-unambiguous>.

reunification of the country. Meanwhile, China resolutely opposes any attempts or actions to split the country and any foreign interference to this end. China must be and will be reunited. China has the firm resolve and the ability to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity and will never allow the secession of any part of its territory by anyone, any organization, or any political party by any means at any time. We make no promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary measures. This is by no means targeted at our compatriots on Taiwan, but at the interference of external forces and the very small number of “Taiwan independence” separatists and their activities.⁸

Such authoritative statements on China’s stance toward Taiwan predate the Xi Jinping era and have been more or less consistent up to the present day, with only slight word variations in emphasis and tone.

It is important to note that these and other similar statements do not imply that Beijing has altered or is considering altering its long-standing stress on peaceful unification as a first priority. To the contrary, authoritative sources (including Xi Jinping) routinely repeat that stance. For example, as recently as October 9, 2021, Xi stated:

To achieve the reunification of the motherland by peaceful means is most in line with the overall interests of the Chinese nation, including the Taiwan compatriots. We adhere to the basic policy of "peaceful reunification and ‘one country, two systems,’" adhere to the one-China principle and the "92 Consensus," and promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations.⁹

Although authoritative Chinese statements on the key elements of PRC policy toward Taiwan display remarkable consistency over time, some new features have emerged since Xi Jinping ascended to power in 2012. Perhaps most notable is the explicit linkage between reunification with Taiwan and Xi’s concept of the China Dream, associated with national rejuvenation (伟大

⁸ State Council Information Office of the PRC, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*, July 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm; Also see Xi Jinping’s January 2019 Speech at the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan, January 2, 2019. http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201904/t20190412_12155687.htm

⁹ Xi Jinping, “Speech at the General Assembly Commemorating the 110th Anniversary of the Revolution of 1911,” Xinhua News Agency, October 9, 2021. http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/13/c_1310242627.htm; Even more recently, one authoritative source stated: “We are willing to strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification with the utmost sincerity and do our utmost to achieve reunification in a peaceful manner, which is most in line with the overall interests of the Chinese nation, including the Taiwan compatriots.” See Ma Xiaoguang [马晓光], “The United States and Taiwan Have Recently Stepped Up Their Collaborating and Provocative Efforts to Hide the Evil Intentions of ‘Using Taiwan to Control China,’” State Council Taiwan Affairs Office Press Conference, October 27, 2021. <https://www.breakinglatest.news/news/taiwan-affairs-office-of-the-state-council-the-united-states-and-taiwan-have-recently-stepped-up-their-collaborating-and-provocative-efforts-to-hide-the-evil-intentions-of-using-taiwan-to-control-ch/>.

复兴). The linkage between reunification and national rejuvenation is not new. As early as 2002, Jiang Zemin stated that “China will be reunified, and the Chinese nation will be rejuvenated” (国家要统一，民族要复兴), and in 2007, at the 17th CCP Congress, Hu Jintao asserted:

The two sides of the Straits are bound to be reunified *in the course* of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (两岸统一是中华民族走向伟大复兴的历史必然).

Moreover, this linkage has been repeated many subsequent times in authoritative Chinese documents, e.g., in many PLA Defense White Papers and State Council GWPs.¹⁰ Thus, it is no surprise that Xi Jinping has echoed this linkage on several occasions, as in remarks to Taiwan president Ma Ying Jeou during the historic summit meeting between the two leaders in 2015, again in a January 2019 speech entitled “Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and Advance China’s Peaceful Reunification” (in which he stated that the Taiwan question “...will definitely end with China’s rejuvenation”), and again most recently in the above-mentioned speech on October 9, 2021.¹¹

What appears new, however, is the implied association that Xi has made between the idea of national rejuvenation and the ultimate realization in 2049 of the so-called China Dream. On November 29, 2012 (just after assuming power), Xi stated:

I firmly believe that the goal of bringing about a moderately prosperous society in all respects can be achieved by 2021, when the CPC celebrates its centenary; the goal of building China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious can be achieved by 2049, when the PRC marks its

¹⁰ State Council Information Office of the PRC, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*; Information Office of the State Council, *China’s Military Strategy*, May 2015. http://www.china.org.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_35661433.htm; Wen Jiabao, *2012 Report on the Work of the Government*, March 5, 2012. <http://en.people.cn/90785/7759779.html>; Li Keqiang, *2018 Report on the Work of the Government*, March 5, 2018. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0403/c90000-9445262.html>; Li Keqiang, *2019 Report on the Work of the Government*, March 16, 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/premier/speeches/2019/03/16/content_281476565265580.htm; Li Keqiang, *2020 Report on the Work of the Government*, May 22, 2020. http://english.www.gov.cn/premier/news/202005/30/content_WS5ed197f3c6d0b3f0e94990da.html.

¹¹ “Leaders Across Taiwan Straits Meet for First Time in 66 Years,” Xinhua, November 7, 2015. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-11/07/content_22397292.htm; Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and Advance China’s Peaceful Reunification,” January 2, 2019. http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201904/t20190412_12155687.htm; Xi Jinping, “Speech at the General Assembly Commemorating the 110th Anniversary of the Revolution of 1911.”

centenary; and the dream of the *rejuvenation* of the Chinese nation will then be realized.¹²

This statement has been taken by many observers to indicate that Xi has set a firm deadline of 2049 for national reunification, given the existing link made between rejuvenation and reunification.¹³ Moreover, beyond such a supposed linkage, Xi has also appeared to reinforce the impression of a reunification timeline of sorts by remarking at times that the unresolved Taiwan issue cannot be delayed indefinitely.¹⁴

Even though these authoritative sources suggest the possibility of a 2049 deadline for Taiwan reunification, it is important to recognize two related points. First, at least one previous Chinese leader (Jiang Zemin) has also expressed a sense of urgency over the Taiwan issue, asserting, as Xi Jinping did many years later, that "...the Taiwan question must not be allowed to drag on indefinitely," and even adding:

We are convinced that with the concerted efforts of all sons and daughters of the Chinese nation, the complete reunification of the motherland will be achieved *at an early date*.¹⁵

Jiang reportedly at one point even favored a firm timeline for reunification.¹⁶ And yet that idea was never formalized into a clear policy stance and was subsequently abandoned entirely. Today, Beijing has much greater military and economic power vis-à-vis Taiwan and the United States, of course. But the risks of uncontrollable escalation in a Taiwan conflict are arguably also higher because of this shift. Thus, all in all, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Xi sees the need to repeat the message of his predecessor, but most likely for domestic political purposes.

¹² Xi Jinping, "Achieving Rejuvenation is the Dream of the Chinese People," November 29, 2012.

<http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/c23934/202006/32191c5bbdb04cbab6df01e5077d1c60.shtml>.

¹³ Mastro, "China's Taiwan Temptation"; Seligman, "U.S. Warns of China's Growing Threat to Taiwan"; Ball, "Expect Rising Tensions Between China and Taiwan for the Foreseeable Future."

¹⁴ For example, as early as 2013, at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, the official Xinhua News Agency paraphrased Xi as remarking to a Taiwan envoy that "these issues cannot be passed on from generation to generation..."; "China's Xi Says Political Solution for Taiwan Can't Wait Forever," Reuters, October 6, 2013. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asia-apec-china-taiwan/chinas-xi-says-political-solution-for-taiwan-cant-wait-forever-idUSBRE99503Q20131006>. He repeated this remark in the above-mentioned January 2019 speech.

¹⁵ Jiang Zemin, *Report to the 16th Party Congress*, November 8, 2002. EN: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3698_665962/t18872.shtml. CH: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zyjh_674906/t10855.shtml.

¹⁶ Ray Cheung, "Jiang Zemin Sets 2020 Deadline for Return of Island to Mainland," *South China Morning Post*, July 16, 2004. <https://www.scmp.com/article/463299/jiang-zemin-sets-2020-deadline-return-island-mainland>.

Second, even under Xi Jinping, no authoritative Chinese source has explicitly linked the 2049 “national rejuvenation” goal of the China Dream concept with reunification to form a clear deadline for the latter. Of course, publicly making such a linkage has its downsides. It could damage Xi’s legacy if it were not attained (even though he will probably not be alive in 2049). And a firm deadline would make conflict with the United States much more likely, or at the very least prove humiliating to Beijing, if 2049 were to approach without any real progress being made on reunification. Nonetheless, one might expect some evidence of such an explicit deadline to appear if Xi had turned it into a clear policy and primed the party-state system to achieve it. Yet no such evidence exists.

Given such considerations, there remains some doubt as to whether Taiwan reunification is truly viewed within the Chinese leadership as a development that must be completed by 2049, or instead it is merely aspirational, as part of a largely domestically directed propaganda message.

We should note that this doubt is even greater with regard to the notion, expressed by some in the West (including Admiral Davidson and the recently published 2021 Department of Defense China Military Report),¹⁷ that China’s leaders are preparing to use force against Taiwan by 2027, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the PLA and the date by which China is destined to have made major progress on the path to building a world-class military by mid-century, according to authoritative Chinese sources.¹⁸ The same above-outlined cautions would apply even more for a 2027 deadline. Moreover, no authoritative Chinese sources (and very few non-authoritative sources) hint at such a deadline for the use of force against Taiwan.¹⁹

Another notable element of authoritative PRC policy toward Taiwan emerging during the Xi Jinping era is an increased level of stress on the threat posed by supporters of Taiwan independence. Of course, this theme has been in evidence for many years, and it was

¹⁷ “China Could Invade Taiwan in the Next 6 Years, Assume Global Leadership Role, U.S. Admiral Warns,” NBC News, March 10, 2021. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-could-invade-taiwan-next-6-years-assume-global-leadership-n1260386>; Kevin Rudd, “Short of War,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-05/kevin-rudd-usa-chinese-confrontation-short-of-war>; “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2021,” Department of Defense. <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>.

¹⁸ Brian Hart, Bonnie Glaser, and Matthew Funaiolo, “China’s 2027 Goal Marks the PLA’s Centennial, Not an Expedited Military Modernization,” *China Brief*, 21:6 (March 26, 2021). <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-2027-goal-marks-the-plas-centennial-not-an-expedited-military-modernization/>.

¹⁹ “中华人民共和国国民经济和社会发展第十四个五年规划和 2035 年远景目标纲要” [Outline of the People’s Republic of China 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives for 2035], Xinhua News Agency, March 12, 2021. http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-03/13/content_5592681.htm; Liu Caiyu, “China’s Centennial Goal of Building a Modern Military by 2027 in Alignment with National Strength: Experts,” *Global Times*, October 31, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1205238.shtml>.

particularly notable during the previous presidencies of Lee Tenghui and especially Chen Shui-bian²⁰ as well as during the Hu Jintao era.²¹

But it has again been given prominence during the Xi era, possibly reflecting Xi Jinping's more assertive, nationalist rhetoric, the serious deterioration of Sino-U.S. relations occurring since at least 2017, and in particular the rise of Tsai Ing-wen to the presidency of Taiwan in May 2016. For example, in his March 2016 speech to a delegation of the National People's Congress, Xi asserted:

We will resolutely contain the separatist path of any form of Taiwan independence, protect state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and absolutely not allow a repetition of the historical tragedy of national separation.

His language became even sharper in his October 2017 speech to the 19th CCP Congress, when he stated:

We have the resolve, the confidence, and the ability to defeat separatist attempts for "Taiwan independence" in any form. We will never allow anyone, any organization, or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China!²²

²⁰ Information Office of the State Council. "China's National Defense," July 1998. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/5/index.htm>; "China's National Defense in 2000," October 2000. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/2000/index.htm>; Zhu Rongji, "China's Bottom-Line on the Taiwan Issue," PRC Foreign Ministry, March 15, 2000; "China's National Defense in 2002," December 2002. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20021209/index.htm>; "Mainland Warns Chen Shui-bian to Stop Separatism," Xinhua News Agency, March 17, 2003. <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceno/eng/ztxw/twwt/t110659.htm>; "China's National Defense in 2004," December 2004. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/index.htm>; "China's National Defense in 2006," December 2006. <http://en.people.cn/whitepaper/defense2006/defense2006.html>.

²¹ See, for example, Hu Jintao's Report to the 18th CCP Congress on November 8, 2012. http://www.china.org.cn/china/18th_cpc_congress/2012-11/16/content_27137540.htm.

²² Xi Jinping, "Report at the 19th CPC National Congress," October 18, 2017. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm.

Xi and other senior Chinese leaders have repeated such strong language several times since then, including most notably in January 2019, March 2021, and July 2021.²³ And authoritative PLA sources have been particularly virulent in their criticisms and expressions of resolve.²⁴

In addition to such sharp criticism of Taiwan independence elements, Chinese authoritative sources indirectly criticize interference in the Taiwan issue by unnamed “external forces” (meaning primarily the United States) as an important source of instability. For example, see the above-cited January 2019 speech by Xi Jinping.²⁵ Even though this reference to external forces is also by no means unprecedented for Chinese statements on the Taiwan issue, it has again become particularly notable in recent years, along with the commonly expressed notion of Washington playing the “Taiwan card” to contain and balance against China.²⁶

Perhaps the sharpest examples of such language have come from lower-level authoritative sources. For example, on October 22, 2021 a spokesperson of the PRC embassy in Washington stated:

...the US side, while claiming to adhere to the one-China policy, keeps using different tactics to upgrade its relations with Taiwan, help Taiwan expand its “international space,” and embolden the “Taiwan independence” forces. This has fully exposed its Cold-War mentality and sinister schemes of “using Taiwan to contain China.”²⁷

²³ Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation”; Premier Li Keqiang Meets the Press,” March 12, 2012.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1860396.shtml; Xi Jinping. “Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the CPC,” July 1, 2021. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c_1310038244.htm.

²⁴ Ren Guoqiang, “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense,” June 24, 2021. http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-06/28/content_4888346.htm; Zhao Lijian, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s Regular Press Conference,” October 14, 2021. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1914536.shtml; Zhong Sheng [钟声], “‘以台制华’注定徒劳” [“Using Taiwan to Contain Mainland China” Is Doomed to be in Vain], *People’s Daily*, August 6, 2021.

²⁵ Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation”; Also see “Premier Li Keqiang Meets the Press.” State Council Information Office of the PRC, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*; Ma Xiaoguang, “The United States and Taiwan Have Recently Stepped Up Their Collaborating and Provocative Efforts.”

²⁶ For an example of the latter, see “Minister Le Yucheng’s Exclusive Interview with the Associated Press,” April 18, 2021. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1869649.shtml.

²⁷ “Remarks by Spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the US on the EAP Official’s Erroneous Comments on China ‘Misusing’ UNGA Resolution 2758,” October 22, 2021. <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceus/eng/sgxw/t1916397.htm>.

A final important aspect of authoritative Chinese views on the Taiwan issue involves recent Chinese military exercises and flights near Taiwan. These activities, most notably including live-fire drills and other exercises undertaken near the island in April and August 2021 and increased air sorties undertaken since October 1, 2021 (primarily to the southwest of Taiwan within its very large ADIZ) are largely unprecedented, adding to speculation in some quarters that Beijing is preparing to attack the island.²⁸

In commenting on such activities, Chinese authoritative sources have taken the unusual move of identifying Taiwan and “external forces” (read the United States) as their specific targets.²⁹ For example, in April Ma Xiaoguang, a spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, reportedly stated that recent PLA exercises were “...a response to [the] Democratic Progressive Party authority's stepped up provocative actions seeking ‘Taiwan independence’ in collusion with external forces. ...”³⁰ In mid-August, a PLA spokesperson reportedly stated that live-fire assault drills were necessary

...based on the current security situation in the Taiwan Straits and the need to safeguard national sovereignty, and [they] are a solemn response to foreign interference and the provocations of “Taiwan independence” forces. ...³¹

²⁸ Ramy Inocencio, “Taiwan ‘Very Concerned that China Is Going to Launch a War’ to Take Over, Foreign Minister Says,” CBS News, October 5, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/taiwan-china-war-us-warning-record-number-chinese-military-flights/>; David Axe, “War Fears Rise as the Chinese Air Force Sends Another 56 Warplanes Towards Taiwan,” *Forbes*, October 4, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2021/10/04/possible-war-looms-as-the-chinese-air-force-sends-another-56-warplanes-toward-taiwan/?sh=7063846258e4>.

²⁹ As a *People’s Daily* article stated on August 18: “The PLA usually does not name the targets of its exercises and it used to say exercises were not related to any situation and were not pointed at a third party...”; “PLA Holds Joint Live-Fire Assault Drills Near Taiwan Island in Direct Response to Collusion, Provocations by US Secessionists,” *People’s Daily*, August 18, 2021. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0818/c90000-9885119.html>.

³⁰ “Mainland Voices Firm Opposition to Taiwan Independence,” *People’s Daily*, April 15, 2021. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0415/c90000-9839471.html>.

³¹ “PLA Holds Joint Live-Fire Assault Drills Near Taiwan Island”; This explicit linkage also appeared in previous years. See, for example, the 2019 Defense White Paper (<https://www.andrewerickson.com/2019/07/full-text-of-defense-white-paper-chinas-national-defense-in-the-new-era-english-chinese-versions/>), which states: “Aiming at safeguarding national unity, China’s armed forces strengthen military preparedness with emphasis on the sea. By sailing ships and flying aircraft around Taiwan, the armed forces send a stern warning to the ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces.”

Similar such authoritative remarks linking PLA activities to Taiwan have been made since then, most recently on October 27th, again by Ma Xiaoguang.³² However, there are no indications, among authoritative sources, that recent Chinese military activities are in some sense a prelude to an attack on Taiwan or even other less provocative actions, such as the seizing of small islands occupied by Taiwan forces or closer exercises or flights over Taiwan. Such activities are invariably depicted as warnings taken in response to provocations.

Semi-Authoritative Sources

Unsurprisingly, semi-authoritative (and also non-authoritative, see below) Chinese sources, such as Zhong Sheng, routinely repeat all of the above elements of official PRC policy and attitudes toward Taiwan, including both long-standing PRC positions and the more recent variations noted.³³

As might be expected, such sources are often blunter and more confrontational than most authoritative commentaries, especially regarding U.S. behavior and Beijing's commitment to countering both Washington and Taipei as well as China's military exercises near Taiwan and the shifting cross-Strait power balance in China's favor.

For example, one important Zhong Sheng article of August 6, 2021, states:

If the U.S. insists on acting recklessly and arbitrarily, China will resolutely take proper and necessary countermeasures in accordance with the development of the situation. (如果美方执意妄为，一意孤行，中方将根据形势发展坚决采取正当、必要反制措施). The U.S. must understand that the Chinese government has no room for compromise or concession on the Taiwan issue. The Chinese military has firm will, full confidence, and sufficient capabilities to thwart any form of external interference and separatist acts of "Taiwan independence," firmly safeguard national sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, and firmly maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.³⁴

³² Ma Xiaoguang, "The United States and Taiwan Have Recently Stepped Up Their Collaborating and Provocative Efforts."

³³ For example, see Zhong Sheng [钟声], "祖国完全统一的历史任务一定要实现，也一定能够实现" [Historical Task of the Complete Unification of the Motherland Must be Fulfilled, and Will Definitely be Fulfilled], *People's Daily*, October 11, 2021. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2021/10-11/9583426.shtml>: "Unification by peaceful means is most in line with the overall interests of the Chinese nation, including Taiwan compatriots. We adhere to the basic policy of 'peaceful unification and one country, two systems,' adhere to the one-China principle and the '1992 Consensus,' and promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations.... The 'Taiwan independence' split is the biggest obstacle to the reunification of the motherland and a serious hidden danger to national rejuvenation."

³⁴ Zhong Sheng [钟声], "'以台制华'注定徒劳" ["Using Taiwan to Contain Mainland China" Is Doomed to be in Vain], *People's Daily*, August 6, 2021. http://www.xinhuanet.com/tw/2021-08/06/c_1211321316.htm

This article went on to refer to the shift in the power balance regarding Taiwan, asserting:

...the dominant power in the development of cross-Strait relations have become more and more firmly held in the hands of the mainland. Any act that undermines the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait, and of dreaming of “foreigners will save you,” will inevitably face serious consequences.³⁵

Equally bluntly, an earlier, September 2020, Zhong Sheng article states:

The U.S. has stepped up its ties with DPP authorities and has frequently created incidents, seriously violating its commitments on the Taiwan issue. It is a blatant provocation to China and serious damage to Sino-U.S. relations. China must counteract it as it should.³⁶

Unsurprisingly, as with authoritative sources, many semi-authoritative comments also stress U.S. playing of the “Taiwan card” against China. One particularly detailed analysis of this behavior states:

Out of the needs of the United States’ containment strategy against China, the Biden Administration’s willingness and momentum to play the “Taiwan card” has increased unabated. The overall goal and direction of the Biden Administration continues the policy trajectory of the past few years.³⁷

³⁵ Another semi-authoritative source states: “‘Taiwan independence’ separatists should not try to find a ‘sense of security’ by relying on the verbal promises of the United States and the West.” Guo Yongjun [郭拥军] (Executive Director of CICIR Taiwan Research Center), “‘大陆威胁台湾’台湾安全靠西方’等谬论可以休矣” [Fallacies such as ‘Mainland Threatens Taiwan’ and ‘Taiwan’s Security Depends on the West’ Shall Stop], July 19, 2021. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2021-07/16/content_3058352.htm

³⁶ Zhong Sheng [钟声], “中国内政不容任何外来干涉” [China’s Internal Affairs Will Not Tolerate Any Outside Interference], *People’s Daily*, September 21, 2020. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0921/c1001-31869063.html>.

³⁷ Xie Yu [谢郁], “拜登政府‘台湾牌’的变与不变” [The Changed and Unchanged Understanding of the “Taiwan Card” for the Biden Administration], *China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations*, August 18, 2021. <http://www.cicir.ac.cn/NEW/opinion.html?id=32ddb384-3cf8-4484-aff4-f76b697e3c48>.

Examples of the U.S. playing the “Taiwan card” mentioned by Xie Yu include: the strengthening of U.S.-Taiwan ties, Taiwan-related anti-China bills in the Congress, the repeated expression of U.S. military power in the Taiwan Strait, continued arms sales to Taiwan, and greater support for Taiwan’s diplomatic presence in the world.

Such semi-authoritative sources also more directly assert why Beijing has taken a tougher stance toward Taipei since Tsai Ing-wen became president of Taiwan.³⁸

One other semi-authoritative source criticized the Taiwan-related actions of other nations (described as a “small circle” of countries), including statements made by the G7 and the U.S.-EU summit. These statements are described as “...the ‘talisman’ and ‘protective umbrella’ of the ‘Taiwan independence’ forces and their activities.”³⁹

Non-Authoritative Sources

As indicated above, non-authoritative sources routinely repeat many of the above standard elements of PRC Taiwan policy found in the authoritative public record, including the One China policy, the “one country, two systems” formula for reunification, the 92 Consensus, and a primary stress on peaceful reunification and a willingness to engage in cross-Strait dialogue based on the One China policy, etc. Although a few such sources have adopted a moderate overall tone in, e.g., assessing U.S. Taiwan policy and cross-Strait relations,⁴⁰ and generally believe that Beijing remains more focused on preventing independence than achieving

³⁸ See, for example, Zhong Sheng [钟声], “一个中国原则不容任何挑战” [The One-China Principle Brooks No Challenge], *People’s Daily*, May 26, 2021. <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0526/c1003-32113295.html>; “[S]ince the DPP came to power, it has placed political self-interest above the well-being of the people in the Taiwan region, stubbornly adhered to the separatist stand of ‘Taiwan independence,’ and refused to recognize the ‘1992 Consensus’ that embodies the one-China principle.” For a more recent, similar semi-authoritative statement, see Guo Yongjun [郭拥军], “‘大陆威胁台湾’ ‘台湾安全靠西方’等谬论可以休矣” [Fallacies such as “Mainland Threatens Taiwan” and “Taiwan's Security Depends on the West” Shall Stop], *People’s Daily Overseas Edition*. July 19, 2021. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrhwb/html/2021-07/16/content_3058352.htm.

³⁹ See Guo Yongjun, “Fallacies such as ‘Mainland Threatens Taiwan’ and ‘Taiwan's Security Depends on the West’ Shall Stop.”

⁴⁰ Shao Yuqun [邵育群] (Director of Institute for Taiwan, Hongkong & Macao Studies at SIIS), “特朗普政府台海政策的“确定性”与“不确定性” [“Certainties” and “Uncertainties” of the Trump Administration’s Taiwan Policy], *Cross-Taiwan Strait Studies* [台海研究], June 12, 2018. Shao describes U.S. thinking regarding Taiwan as “...cautious and meticulous....”

unification,⁴¹ some observers are nonetheless becoming pessimistic,⁴² and many Chinese observers believe that peaceful unification likely will only occur under some level of coercion.⁴³

Moreover, many others are now far blunter and at times fiercely critical of Taiwan and the United States than either the authoritative or the semi-authoritative sources. For example, many non-authoritative sources excoriate Washington for endorsing the Tsai Ing-wen government's destabilizing behavior in departing from the previous, supposed "One China" understanding between Beijing and Taipei reflected in the so-called 1992 Consensus, or in allowing itself to be pulled by Taipei into a confrontation with Beijing. As one very recent *Global Times* article states:

Although Taiwan has become Washington's "wild card," U.S. policy toward the island of Taiwan will likely be held hostage by radical Taiwan secessionists. By saying one thing and doing another, the U.S. now has sent the wrong signals of conniving or inciting Taiwan secessionist forces. This has [caused it to be] dragged into the escalating cross-strait tensions.⁴⁴

When Tsai took office in 2016, one non-authoritative source set the tone of many subsequent statements (and most likely conveyed a very common Chinese viewpoint) by asserting:

In the foreseeable future, it is not ruled out that the United States will tacitly allow or even condone the DPP authorities to cause trouble, so that the "Taiwan card" can more

⁴¹ Qiang Xin, "Having Much in Common? Changes and Continuity in Beijing's Taiwan Policy," *The Pacific Review*, 34:6, 926–945, DOI: 10.1080/09512748.2020.1773908.

⁴² One expert recently wrote: "...the key feature of the trilateral relationship between Mainland China, the United States and Taiwan is that uncertainty is rising, and the probability of conflict is increasing. The fundamental reason is that all three parties have all entered new understandings of the regional dynamic. All believe that the status quo is not beneficial to themselves." Zuo Xiying, "Unbalanced Deterrence: Coercive Threat, Reassurance and the US-China Rivalry in Taiwan Strait," *The Pacific Review*, 34:4, 547–576, DOI: 10.1080/09512748.2019.1697353. Also see "Mainland Decides War or Peace across Taiwan Straits," *Global Times*, November 2, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1237955.shtml>; and

Li Yan, "Reading Between the Lines on Taiwan," *China US Focus*, August 3, 2021. <https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/reading-between-the-lines-on-taiwan>.

⁴³ The editor of *Global Times* states that reunification will be "...based on the condition that the DPP authority feels cornered and will perish if they do not accept reunification." Hu Xijin, "As Reunification is Inevitable, Most Important Is Not Timetable, But Timing," *Global Times*, November 1, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1237834.shtml>; Also see "Military Pressure Essential for Reunification with Taiwan: Experts," *Global Times*, December 6, 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202012/1209125.shtml>.

⁴⁴ Xin Qiang, "US Military Support Cannot Make Up for Weakness of Taiwan Island," *Global Times*, November 2, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1237935.shtml>.

effectively serve the United States' Asia-Pacific strategic goals and jointly contain and check and balance the Chinese mainland.⁴⁵

In contrast with authoritative sources, many non-authoritative sources directly link PLA exercises and flights near Taiwan not only to deterrence signaling against Taipei and Washington but also to specific features of a potential future conflict. For example, China's military activities on different sides of the island are interpreted as intending to show that China is capable of "...surrounding the island of Taiwan, isolating its troops and leaving them nowhere to run and no chance to win if circumstances arise..." and to "seal off foreign intervention when necessary."⁴⁶

Many other non-authoritative sources similarly stress the importance of such PLA activities for deterring and, if necessary, defeating Taiwan independence elements and foreign intervention, in some cases explicitly referencing the United States and Japan. In several cases, various exercises and flights are specifically identified as a response to certain "provocations" by Taipei and Washington.⁴⁷

In a particularly notable comment, one military affairs expert has indicated that:

⁴⁵ Xin Qiang, "On Tactical 'Three No's' Policy: US Taiwan Policy Constrained by the 'Dual Strategic Dilemma,'" *Taiwan Research Journal*, no. 5 (2016).

⁴⁶ "PLA Carrier, Warplanes Surround Taiwan in Drills, in Show of Capability to Cut Off Foreign Intervention," *People's Daily*, April 7, 2021. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0407/c90000-9836569.html>.

⁴⁷ See Liu Xuanzun, "PLA Sent Nearly 200 Aircraft Near Taiwan in Record Month," *Global Times*, November 1, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1237849.shtml>; Chen Zhuo, "Containing 'Taiwan Independence' Precondition of Ensuring Peace Across Strait: Spokesperson," *PLA Daily*, October 27, 2021. http://www.81.cn/jwywzd/2021-10/27/content_10102903.htm; Yang Sheng, Liu Xuanzun, and Leng Shumei, "PLA Presence Around Taiwan Targets Secessionism, Foreign Forces," *Global Times*, October 7, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1235761.shtml>; "Record Number of PLA Warplanes Flying Over Taiwan Straits as Form of National Day 'Military Parade,'" *Global Times*, October 3, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1235605.shtml>; "PLA Holds Joint Live-fire Assault Drills"; Liu Xuanzun, "PLA Holds Large Drills Amid Military Threats," August 5, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1230715.shtml>; "Record PLA Exercise 'Warns Taiwan Secessionists, US Carrier Activity,'" *People's Daily*, June 17, 2021. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0617/c90000-9862106.html>; Liu Xuanzun, "PLA Conducts Amphibious Landing Drills Amid Latest US Provocation on Taiwan Question," *Global Times*, June 8, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202106/1225733.shtml>; Liu Xuanzun, "PLA Fighter Bombers Cross Taiwan Straits 'Middle Line,' Deter Secessionists Following US Warship Transit: Analysts," *Global Times*, May 21, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1224124.shtml>; "PLA Exercise Could Be a Rehearsal of Combat Plan Over the Island: Expert," *Global Times*, April 13, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1220962.shtml>.

[t]he number of our live-fire drills, like that of our carrier battle groups, depends to a certain extent on the level of threats and provocations we face, he said. Those who instigate tension and antagonism in our seas had better get used to more exercises by the Chinese military taking place alongside theirs, and if they can't get used to that fact, they might as well stop their irresponsible, provocative actions on our doorstep and go back home to mind their own business.⁴⁸

Although at times strident and shrill, non-authoritative sources do not indicate that Taipei and/or Washington have already crossed some critical red line that would presumably trigger an actual attack on Taiwan. As one might expect, given the official position, non-authoritative sources continue to stress Beijing's commitment to peaceful reunification. In fact, one prominent scholar at Fudan University has recently argued that, despite the possible association of reunification with the 2049 date for completing rejuvenation (as discussed above),

...Beijing will continue to prioritize...the fulfillment of comprehensive modernization rather than resolve the Taiwan issue by force, unless the Taiwan administration pursues a radical de jure independence policy that is intolerable to Beijing in the near future.⁴⁹

Indeed, some non-authoritative sources have indicated that, given China's growing strength and overall just stance and superior commitment, the Chinese people should understand that time is on Beijing's side concerning the Taiwan situation.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, the often bellicose editorial pages of the *Global Times* have recently raised the serious prospect of conflict over Taiwan, albeit still in the context of an initial provocation by Taipei, Washington, or Tokyo. In an October 4, 2021 editorial, it stated:

The strategic collusion between the US and Japan and the DPP authorities is becoming more audacious, and the situation across the Taiwan Straits has almost lost any room for maneuver, teetering on the edge of a face-off, creating a sense of urgency that the war may be triggered at any time. ...The PLA's military drills in the Taiwan Straits are no

⁴⁸ "PLA Exercises Help Ensure Sovereignty," *People's Daily*, August 31, 2021. <https://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0831/c90000-9890054.html>.

⁴⁹ Xin Qiang, "Having Much in Common? Changes and Continuity in Beijing's Taiwan Policy," *The Pacific Review*, 34:6, 926–945, DOI: 10.1080/09512748.2020.1773908. In 2018, two other Chinese experts argued that "...[Regarding Taiwan], Beijing's military objectives serve the political ones with a clear hierarchical order: domestic stability, workable Sino-U.S. relations, and sovereignty concerns. Unless the last is under grave threat, war remains a low priority." Ji You and Yufan Hao, "The Political and Military Nexus of Beijing-Washington-Taipei: Military Interactions in the Taiwan Strait," *The China Review* 18.3 (August 2018), 89–120.

⁵⁰ "Redline: US Troops Must Not Station in Taiwan. Editorial," *Global Times*, October 28, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1237587.shtml>; Xin Qiang, "US Military Support Cannot Make Up for Weakness of Taiwan Island." Xin asserts: "However, the US does not have the will to engage in a direct military collision with the Chinese mainland. It will never sacrifice itself for the sake of Taiwan."

longer limited to declaring China's sovereignty over the island but to implementing various forms of assembly, mobilization, assault, and logistical preparations that are required to take back the island of Taiwan. Without giving up efforts for a peaceful reunification, it has increasingly become the new mainstream public opinion on the Chinese mainland that the mainland should make earnest preparations based on the possibility of combat.⁵¹

The paper has also advocated in favor of flying PLA fighters over Taiwan, asserting that this should be part of an overall

...showdown that gives the DPP authority two choices: either accept the patrol and refrain from the extreme anti-mainland line of colluding with the US and Japan or start a war by firing at military aircraft of the Chinese mainland and face the consequence of being destroyed and eliminated by the PLA.⁵²

This type of reckless non-authoritative commentary—along with incorrect non-authoritative media interpretations of recent Chinese government statements indicating a need to prepare for conflict with Taiwan—have prompted official media outlets to issue clarifications that any war rumors are incorrect.⁵³

⁵¹ “Time to Warn Taiwan Secessionists and their Fomenters: War is Real: Global Times Editorial,” *Global Times*, October 4, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1235638.shtml>.

⁵² “PLA Jets Will Eventually Patrol Over Taiwan: Global Times Editorial,” *Global Times*, September 13, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234177.shtml>; In fact, one even more recent source has stated that “...it is likely the People's Liberation Army (PLA) will send military aircraft to fly over the island.” Yan Sheng and Cui Fandi, “China Warns US on Taiwan Question in Rome Amid Tensions, Subversive Damage to Ties Includes a War Between,” *Global Times*, November 1, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1237779.shtml>.

⁵³ For example, a recent Ministry of Commerce statement urging families “...to store a certain number of daily necessities according to their needs to meet the needs of daily life and emergencies” and a supposed government directive for reserve veterans to be “...recalled at any time” created some speculation on Chinese websites that a war over Taiwan was imminent. Yet Chinese sources confirmed that the former statement was ordinary and the latter a pure rumor. See “The Ministry of Commerce Deploys Work of Ensuring Supply and Price Stabilization for Vegetables and Other Daily Necessities Market for This Winter and Next Spring,” November 1, 2021. <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/syxfwb/202111/20211103213485.shtml>; Shanghai Observer [上观新闻] (Online Media Department of *Jiefang Daily*), “商务部发通知鼓励家庭储存生活必需品？不应过度解读，更无需盲目囤物” [Ministry of Commerce Encouraging Households to Store Necessities? No Need for Overinterpretation and No Need to Blindly Hoard Things], November 5, 2021. <https://www.jfdaily.com/news/detail?id=420261>; Jun Zhengping [均正平], “人武部给预备役退伍军人发召回短信？谣言！” [Ministry of People's Armed Forces Sending Text Messages to Call Up Veterans? Rumor!], November 2, 2021. <https://weibo.com/n/%E9%92%A7%E6%AD%A3%E5%B9%B3?layerid=4699187500026783>.

Conclusion

As clearly indicated above, the basic elements of China's long-standing stance toward the Taiwan issue have not changed under Xi Jinping, including the One China principle and support for cross-Strait talks based on that principle, the "one country, two systems" formula for reunification, peaceful reunification, and a linkage between reunification and the overall rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

At the same time, in recent years all types of PRC sources have expressed growing concern over the deterioration of the Taiwan situation. This has led to ever more strident and sharp statements, especially by semi- and non-authoritative sources, of China's determination to prevent Taiwan independence and to achieve the ultimate unification of the island with the mainland.

For virtually all sources, growing tension over Taiwan is viewed as the result of the move away by the current Taiwan government from anything resembling a One China perspective, along with U.S. movement toward greater support of the island in various ways. The latter involves what is regarded by many sources of all types as greater efforts by Washington to play the so-called "Taiwan card" in order to pressure and contain Beijing and "embolden" forces supporting Taiwan independence. Criticism of such U.S. actions regarding Taiwan has arguably become increasingly sharp among all sources, but in particular among semi- and non-authoritative ones.

While authoritative sources rarely, if ever, address how the changing power balance across the Taiwan Strait influences Chinese actions, some semi- and non-authoritative sources explicitly state that Beijing's growing power and influence mean that time is on China's side. Other sources, however, convey a sense of an impending crisis and possible conflict between Beijing and Washington over the Taiwan issue. Thus, while authoritative Chinese sources invariably express resolve and confidence that the Taiwan issue will ultimately be resolved successfully, other sources express a growing sense of pessimism.

In addition, it seems that an increasing number of non-authoritative Chinese sources believe that eventual peaceful unification will most likely only occur under some form of presumably non-violent coercion of Taiwan, along with unassailable military deterrence efforts directed at the United States. If reflective of broader views within China, this notion should be a source of considerable concern to all parties.

Also particularly notable is the explicit description by all types of Chinese sources of recent PLA exercises and flights near Taiwan as constituting a direct response to supposed provocations by the U.S. and Taiwan. As noted above, this is in contrast to the usual language occurring in the past (with some exceptions during the Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian presidencies) describing military exercises as part of ordinary training activities and not aimed at any particular target. Some particularly bellicose non-authoritative Chinese sources (such as the *Global Times* editorial page) even encourage highly dangerous military actions in response to Taiwanese and American actions, such as flights over Taiwan by PLA fighter aircraft.

Taken together, even though the foundational elements of China's policy approach to Taiwan have not changed fundamentally under Xi Jinping, Chinese officials and elites, on balance, regard the current situation as increasingly dangerous and precarious, requiring ever more energetic Chinese deterrence actions against both Taipei and Washington. At the same time, public Chinese views do not conclusively confirm the notion, expressed by some Western analysts, that Beijing is preparing to attack Taiwan in any manner by any specific date. As indicated above, based on such sources, the link between the achievement of reunification and the year 2049, as suggested in Xi Jinping's China Dream concept, is tenuous at best; this is even more so regarding the supposed 2027 deadline. No public Chinese sources clearly link reunification with such dates, although some non-authoritative sources suggest that further unspecified U.S. or Taiwanese actions could and indeed should prompt military action at some point.

Since a similar deterrence-centered viewpoint toward the Taiwan issue also seems to predominate in Washington, it is fair to say that the ingredients of an eventual deterrence-driven Sino-U.S. confrontation over Taiwan are in place, despite the repeated issuance by both sides of statements expressing continued support for a peaceful resolution of the issue. To avert such a confrontation at some unforeseeable point in the future, both sides will need to counter existing worst-case assumptions of the other's intentions regarding Taiwan (for use of force by Beijing, and support for Taiwan's independence by Washington) by agreeing to take genuinely credible actions to affirm the original understanding reached at the time of Sino-U.S. normalization. This will likely require an unprecedented conversation of specific, verifiable quid pro quos that each side is prepared to take—both to build trust in the overall relationship and to reduce open-ended deterrence signaling.

About the Author

Michael D. Swaine, director of QI's East Asia program, is one of the most prominent American scholars of Chinese security studies. He comes to QI from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he worked for nearly twenty years as a senior fellow specializing in Chinese defense and foreign policy, U.S.-China relations, and East Asian international relations. Swaine served as a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation. Swaine has authored and edited more than a dozen books and monographs, including *Remaining Aligned on the Challenges Facing Taiwan* (with Ryo Sahashi; 2019), *Conflict and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Strategic Net Assessment* (with Nicholas Eberstadt et al; 2015) and many journal articles and book chapters.

(The author is deeply indebted to Syrus Jin and Yu Fuyang for their invaluable research assistance.)