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Averting Escalation and Avoiding War: Lessons from the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis

by Kristen Gunness and Phillip C. Saunders

Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs
Institute for National Strategic Studies
National Defense University

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Cover image: Grumman F-14A Tomcat of Fighter Squadron 154 "Black Knights" launches from Navy aircraft carrier USS *Independence* during operations east of Taiwan, March 10, 1996
(U.S. Navy)

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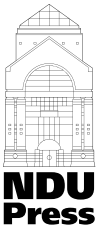

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Executive Summary

This study assesses information-sharing, communication, and policy coordination between U.S. and Taiwan decisionmakers in the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, derives key lessons, considers the implications for a future crisis, and makes recommendations to policymakers.

Crisis Origins

The crisis began with (1) the U.S. decision in May 1995 to reverse previous policy and grant Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui a visa to make a speech at Cornell University in June 1995, and (2) China's internal debate about how to respond.

Why Did China Adopt a Coercive Strategy?

- China and Taiwan had divergent objectives for cross-strait relations.
- Taiwan's democratization and "pragmatic diplomacy" were viewed by China as movements toward independence.
- China perceived a weakening of the U.S. commitment to its "one-China" policy.
- People's Republic of China President Jiang Zemin was politically weak relative to Taiwan policy hardliners.

China's strategic goals during the crisis included: (1) coercing the United States into ending tacit support for Taiwan independence and returning to its one-China policy, (2) coercing Taiwan into abandoning efforts to redefine its status and expand its international space, and (3) eroding political support for President Lee and pro-independence forces in Taiwan.

China's Actions During the Crisis

- Beijing suspended cross-strait dialogue, downgraded U.S.-China diplomatic contacts, and pressured the United States to set limits on future visits by Taiwan leaders.
- The People's Liberation Army (PLA) conducted six ballistic missile launches near Taiwan in July and live-fire exercises in the Taiwan Strait in August.
- After receiving assurances that future visits would be limited and a summit meeting between the U.S. and Chinese presidents on October 24, China intensified its focus on Taiwan.

- The PLA conducted a major naval exercise in October and an amphibious landing exercise on Dongshan Island in November, prior to Taiwan's legislative elections.
- The PLA conducted ballistic missile launches near Taiwan ports and a large joint amphibious landing exercise in the Taiwan Strait prior to the March 1996 Presidential election.

U.S. Responses to China's Actions

- The initial U.S. response consisted of restrained diplomatic criticism and a focus on restoring normal working relations with China, in the interest of pursuing various U.S. interests.
- Concerns about the potential impact of China's exercises on U.S. credibility led President Bill Clinton to deploy two aircraft carrier battle groups near Taiwan in March 1996 to send a strong military signal while managing escalation risks.
- Factors shaping the U.S. responses included: (1) bureaucratic disagreements and lack of one voice on China policy, (2) the need to maintain U.S. credibility in the region, (3) the intelligence consensus that China was conducting a show of force rather than preparing to use force, and (4) limited PLA capabilities.

Taiwan's Responses to Chinese Actions

- The initial response focused on downplaying the threat, increasing military readiness, rejecting Chinese demands, and publicizing Taiwan military exercises to reassure the public.
- Preparations for the PLA March 1996 exercises included resupplying and strengthening island garrisons, establishing a high-level crisis management group, reassuring the public, and stressing tight adherence to rules of engagement to control escalation risks.

U.S.-Taiwan Communications and Coordination

- Routine intelligence-sharing and security cooperation mechanisms functioned effectively.
- The United States and Taiwan employed three main communications channels:
  - A Foreign Ministry–State Department channel, via the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO)

        - The AIT Taipei end functioned effectively but had a limited ability to shape Lee Teng-hui's decisions.
        - There were significant challenges at the TECRO Washington end, especially after TECRO Representative Benjamin Lu's access was limited following Lee's visit.
    - A Pentagon-TECRO Military Mission channel, which included some information-sharing and one direct consultation about rules of engagement and escalation management
    - A new National Security Council–level "special channel," which involved secret consultations at the national security advisor level in March 1996.

- There was very limited U.S.-Taiwan policy coordination, which was achieved only at the end of the crisis through the special channel.

Lessons Learned from the Crisis

- U.S. and Taiwan security concerns sometimes diverged. Taiwan leaders worried about potential PLA seizure of outlying islands, which might require escalatory military responses, but U.S. policymakers did not fully understand or share these concerns.
- Having an authoritative high-level communications channel was important.
- Limited PLA capabilities made analytic consensus easier.
- Bureaucratic differences, including divergent agendas and priorities, can affect decisionmaking during a crisis.
- It can be dangerous to lose focus on the Taiwan issue.
- Distrust in the U.S.-Taiwan relationship negatively affected information-sharing and policy coordination during the crisis.
- China sought to exploit differences in U.S. and Taiwan interests.
- Chinese policymakers had a limited understanding of how domestic politics influence policymaking in democratic systems.
- Chinese policymakers felt that they had higher stakes and greater resolve in a crisis over Taiwan but did not fully understand how U.S. regional interests and alliance commitments would affect U.S. decisions.

Now Versus Then: Key Changes Since the 1995–1996 Crisis

- There is heightened U.S.-China strategic competition, and the United States is focusing more on China than it did in the past.
- The PLA has new capabilities at both the low and high ends of the spectrum, providing the Chinese Communist Party with many more military options.
- The PLA has developed counter-intervention capabilities.
- The arrival of informationized warfare has brought increased escalation risks.
- China has experienced a turn toward authoritarianism and a centralization of power.
- Taiwan has experienced a consolidation of democracy, intensification of a sense of separate identity, and declining interest in unification.
- There is a more open media and Internet environment in Taiwan.
- There is intense partisanship and an increase in isolationist sentiment in the United States.

Implications for Policymakers

- Improved and more diverse PLA capabilities will make it harder to determine China's intentions and are likely to result in delayed and ambiguous warning.
- Higher costs and risks of military action and ambiguous warning will make it harder for policymakers to decide when to act and to determine an appropriate response, even as time pressures to begin moving military forces mount.
- Incentives for consultation and policy coordination are stronger today, when the United States and Taiwan would be facing a credible PLA threat rather than a show of force.

There are significant impediments to consultations and policy coordination, including differences in U.S. and Taiwan interests, the degree of trust between U.S. and Taiwan leaders, and concerns about shared intelligence or plans being leaked for political reasons or obtained by Chinese intelligence.

Recommendations for Policymakers

- Discuss differences between broader U.S. regional interests and equities and Taiwan's narrower political, economic, and security interests frankly, and seek to limit China's ability

to exploit these differences in peacetime, crisis, and conflict. This may require sharing more information on each side's conversations with China, especially in a crisis.

- Consult in advance on major policy initiatives that may have a significant impact on Sino-U.S. relations or cross-strait relations. Both sides should practice the principle of "no surprises."
- Exercise great caution in lobbying efforts or contacts with the opposition party to pressure the government in power. Such actions can erode trust and impede cooperation in a crisis.
- Increase bilateral cooperation on cybersecurity, information warfare, and countering Chinese propaganda. Taiwan is on the front lines in confronting these threats; the United States should support and learn from Taiwan's defensive measures.
- Conduct regular intelligence consultations on Chinese strategic intentions and joint analysis of PLA force posture, exercises, and capabilities to improve assessments of Chinese military capabilities and identify potential indicators of military attack, especially in terms of intelligence and cyber preparation of the battlefield.
- Restore wargaming/crisis simulation exercises to the Monterey Talks to improve mutual understanding of the other side's security perceptions, crisis communications mechanisms, and decisionmaking procedures.
- Develop and maintain a common threat picture as a crisis begins to emerge, conducting regular discussion of assessments of Chinese intentions and of circumstances that might lead one side to consider unilateral military actions.
- Distinguish areas where active U.S.-Taiwan military coordination would be necessary in a crisis or conflict from areas where coordination is unnecessary or where deconflicting operations would be sufficient.
- Consider what types of additional military, policy, and intelligence information could be shared in a crisis and how that information should be protected.
- Identify trusted liaison officers in AIT and TECRO who would be conduits for information that each side's crisis management group decides to share.

Introduction

National Defense University's Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs was tasked by the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy to examine prospects for escalation control in a potential future Taiwan Strait crisis by revisiting the 1995–1996 crisis. This study assesses information-sharing, communication, and policy coordination between U.S. and Taiwan decisionmakers, as well as examining how both sides gauged China's intentions during the crisis and which indicators and information most shaped their decisions and responses. The study examines what has changed since 1996 to identify challenges and implications for U.S. and Taiwan policymakers in a future crisis.

Specifically, the study addresses the following topics:

- Key drivers leading China to undertake coercive diplomacy aimed at Taiwan
- How decisionmakers in the United States and Taiwan viewed China's intentions and differences in their perspectives or responses
- Barriers or challenges to information-sharing and communication between the United States and Taiwan during the crisis
- Coordination (or lack thereof) between U.S. and Taiwan decisionmakers on responses to China's actions
- Key changes since 1995–1996 that would influence responses to a future crisis
- Lessons learned, implications, and recommendations for policymakers should another crisis occur.

This study relies heavily on the perspectives and assessments of officials present in key government, intelligence, and military positions in the United States and Taiwan during the crisis, and experts who analyzed the crisis and who contribute to today's discussion of cross-strait relations. The authors drew upon oral histories and interviewed 17 former U.S. Government officials, intelligence officers, and academics to gather these perspectives, as well as 12 of their Taiwan counterparts. These interviews provide the foundation of the assessments in this report. This report does not include any classified information, but the authors reviewed contemporaneous U.S. diplomatic and intelligence reporting to confirm material from unclassified interviews and place it in context.

In addition to interviews, the authors examined the open-source records on the crisis (which proved to be quite complete and accurate), including books, memoirs, and articles

written by prominent scholars or former U.S., Taiwan, and Chinese officials; archival materials and declassified intelligence reports; and articles in the Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwan presses. One important new source is Yuan Le Yi [亓樂義], *Defensive Action: A Record of the 1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis* [捍衛行動：1996台海飛彈危機風雲錄], which was supported by the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) and includes significant new information on Taiwan's perceptions and responses to China's military exercises. The authors also used two new primary sources from China: a book by Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and a biography of General Zhang Wannian that includes extensive details about his role in planning and executing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) exercises.

This report is divided into two sections. The first is a case study that examines the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, U.S. and Taiwan assessments and responses to China's actions, and information-sharing, communication, and coordination between U.S. and Taiwan leaders. This section concludes with a discussion of lessons for policymakers. The second section considers changes in the strategic situation and political developments in China, Taiwan, and the United States since 1995–1996, discusses their implications for a future crisis, and provides recommendations for U.S. and Taiwan decisionmakers.

The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis: A Case Study

The Taiwan Strait Crisis occurred between July 1995 and March 1996, during which time the People's Republic of China (PRC) conducted a series of ballistic missile tests and military exercises aimed at intimidating Taiwan and influencing U.S. policy in the months preceding Taiwan's first democratic presidential election, on March 23, 1996. The crisis began with the U.S. decision to reverse previous policy and grant Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui a visa to make a speech at Cornell University and China's internal debate about how to respond. The first phase of China's response sought to send a strong signal of dissatisfaction and resolve to oppose any movement toward Taiwan independence to leaders in both the United States and Taiwan. Beijing suspended cross-strait dialogue, downgraded U.S.-Chinese diplomatic contacts, and sought to pressure the United States to reaffirm its one-China policy and set limits on future visits by Taiwan leaders. The PLA conducted six ballistic missile launches in July and live-fire exercises in August 1995 as part of this effort, coupled with diplomacy efforts to influence U.S. policy toward Taiwan.

The second phase of China's response focused on influencing Taiwan's December 1995 legislative elections. The PLA conducted military exercises in October and November 1995 prior to the elections, and Chinese leaders appear to have judged the results successful. The

third phase involved a second set of ballistic missile launches and a major amphibious exercise prior to the March 1996 presidential election and the U.S. decision to send two aircraft carriers to waters near Taiwan in response. Although media sources speculated about additional Chinese military actions, the presidential election marked the end of the crisis. If China had not launched a second round of ballistic missiles that landed close to Taiwan ports in March 1996, the crisis might be remembered as having concluded earlier, with the summit meeting between President Bill Clinton and President Jiang Zemin on October 24, 1995. The chronology in the appendix provides details of the crisis timeline.

The following sections discuss the key drivers that led China to adopt a coercive strategy, China's goals during the crisis, and details of China's military exercises and diplomatic actions.

Why Did China Adopt a Coercive Strategy?

Why did China shift from the "peaceful reunification" strategy it had followed since 1979 in favor of displays of military force? While relations between the mainland and Taiwan were improving as of early 1995 and U.S.-China relations were contentious but relatively stable, underlying tensions in both relationships were inflamed by the Clinton administration's approval of a visa for Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui to visit and give a speech at his alma mater, Cornell University. There is broad consensus in the literature and interviews that although Lee's trip to the United States in June 1995 was the catalyst for the crisis, it was not the actual cause. Rather, Beijing interpreted the visit as the culmination of a series of Taiwan actions pushing toward independence and as an indicator of potential change in the U.S. one-China policy.[1]

Four factors influenced China's decision to adopt a coercive strategy.

Factor 1: Divergent China and Taiwan Objectives for Cross-Strait Relations

Under Deng Xiaoping, China had ended its policy of open hostility toward Taiwan in favor of a policy of pursuing peaceful reunification. In 1984, Beijing offered Taipei a "one country, two systems" formula like that applied in Hong Kong, but indicated that more generous terms would be available for Taiwan, including the right to maintain its own military.[2] By the early 1990s, cross-strait economic, cultural, and political contacts had grown extensively, with Taiwan trade and direct investment playing an important role in the mainland's economy. Semi-official political contacts were established between the mainland's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) and Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) based on the "1992 consensus," culminating in the historic Koo-Wang talks in Singapore in April 1993.[3] The two sides, however, had divergent objectives in these exchanges. Taiwan wanted to maintain the

political status quo of de facto independence and to obtain concessions from China, such as renunciation of the use of force and protection for investment in the mainland. China wanted to increase cross-strait contacts and make Taiwan more dependent on the mainland, deterring movement toward independence and making reunification easier or even inevitable.[4]

These conflicting objectives constituted part of a cross-strait political status quo that China had lived with for many years. The PRC's one-China principle holds that Taiwan is part of China, that the PRC is the only lawful representative of the Chinese government, and that Taiwan must eventually be unified with the mainland. While refusing to renounce the use of force, Beijing has pursued a policy of peaceful unification since 1979 and viewed expanded cross-strait contacts as a means of building support in Taiwan for unification. The Republic of China (ROC) constitution, in turn, formally states that ROC territory includes all the mainland as well as Taiwan and various islands in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait. As a practical matter, however, the Taiwan government has abandoned ambitions of overthrowing the PRC government and focused on maintaining Taiwan's de facto independence.[5] The third part of the political status quo is the U.S. one-China policy, under which the United States maintains official relations with the People's Republic of China and only unofficial relations with Taiwan under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. U.S. policy "acknowledges" Beijing's position that Taiwan is part of China but uses ambiguity to avoid endorsing that position.[6] This delicate framework met the minimal objectives of all three sides and allowed considerable political, economic, and even nontraditional security cooperation to take place.

Upon Clinton's taking office in 1993, the Clinton administration adopted a China policy focused on pressuring Beijing to make human rights improvements in return for renewal of its most-favored-nation (MFN) trade status. Negative U.S. views of China contrasted with Taiwan's improving image as democratization took hold. The Clinton administration conducted a Taiwan policy review from April 1993 to September 1994, which upgraded some aspects of U.S. unofficial relations with Taiwan but largely reaffirmed the existing U.S. one-China policy. A former U.S. Government official involved in the crisis noted, "Up until the Lee visit to the U.S., China felt that U.S. policy on Taiwan was okay."[7] In summer 1994, the Kuomintang (KMT)-funded Taiwan Research Institute signed a three-year, $4.5 million lobbying contract with Cassidy & Associates, which initiated a campaign focused on getting Lee Teng-hui a visa to speak at Cornell. The campaign focused on Congress, which came under Republican control after the November 1994 elections, and ultimately produced near-unanimous "sense of Congress" resolutions in early May 1995 supporting the visit.[8] In the face of this pressure, President Clinton reversed policy and

decided to issue Lee the visa. Both the substance and the form of the decision infuriated Beijing, which saw the visit as a significant weakening of the U.S. one-China policy.[9]

Factor 2: Taiwan's Democratization and "Pragmatic Diplomacy" Seen as Movement Toward Independence

Changes in Taiwan's domestic situation added to Beijing's concerns about Taiwan independence. Taiwan's democratization brought an end to martial law and one-party (KMT) rule. It also legalized other political parties, including the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and brought a new generation of politicians into power.[10] As the KMT adapted to a more democratic environment, Taiwan-born natives (including President Lee Teng-hui) began to reduce the political dominance of the mainlanders who had come to Taiwan in 1949. Beijing's concerns about the Taiwan independence movement were aggravated by its view that the KMT's political dominance was declining and fears that the KMT itself now leaned toward independence.[11]

In January 1995, Jiang Zemin gave a major speech on Taiwan and offered an eight-point proposal on reunification that called for negotiations on an even footing, in a nod to Taiwan's democratization.[12] Lee's six-point response, in April 1995, stated that the two sides were governed by "two sovereign entities" and called on Beijing to renounce the use of force before negotiations could begin. The lack of serious consideration from Lee disappointed Jiang and may have weakened his domestic position, giving hardliners in Beijing more reason to advocate a firmer policy toward Taiwan.[13]

Lee Teng-hui complicated Beijing's "peaceful reunification" strategy by embarking on what he called "pragmatic diplomacy," with the goal of securing greater international space for Taiwan.[14] In pursuit of this objective, Lee:

- embarked on a campaign to gain admission to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly
- launched an intensive lobbying campaign in the United States in 1994 to obtain an invitation from Cornell and to lobby the White House and Congress for a visa[15]
- sought increased contacts and connections with Southeast Asian nations through his "Go South" policy (which included "golf" or "vacation" diplomacy)
- offered foreign aid to countries in Africa, Central America, and the South Pacific in return for diplomatic recognition

- lobbied Japan to have top Taiwan leaders included in the 1995 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, to further reduce Taiwan's isolation from the global stage.[16]

In addition, Lee's speech at Cornell ended up being highly political in nature, repeatedly using the phrase "Republic of China on Taiwan," which further inflamed Beijing's ire. Despite Department of State efforts to keep the visit unofficial, Lee was greeted in Cornell by members of Congress and supporters waving ROC flags. Taiwan's successful effort to bypass the administration and appeal directly to Congress and violation of Clinton administration expectations of what a "private visit" entailed also strained U.S.-Taiwan ties.[17]

Factor 3: Tensions in U.S.-China Relations and Perceived Weakening of U.S. Commitment to Its One-China Policy

The third factor in Beijing's decision to turn to coercive force was increased friction in the U.S.-China relationship. The 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre severely damaged U.S.-China relations, and the November 1992 election of Clinton brought a U.S. administration to power that lacked President George H.W. Bush's personal ties to China and that was committed to pressuring the "butchers of Beijing" by linking renewal of China's MFN status to human rights improvements.[18] In this context, PRC leaders lost confidence that the United States would maintain its one-China policy and perceived the United States to be softening its stance against Taiwan independence. Several U.S. actions contributed to this misperception, including:

- U.S. conduct toward Taiwan in the years leading up to the crisis, which Beijing thought violated U.S. commitments in the Three Communiqués. For example, the Bush administration's 1992 sale of 150 F-16 fighter planes to Taiwan angered the PRC, which thought that the sales changed the military balance in the strait in Taiwan's favor.[19]

- President Clinton's 1994 Taiwan Policy Review's upgrades to a number of aspects of U.S. unofficial relations with Taiwan, which Beijing viewed as a violation of the spirit of the Three Communiqués. Among other things, the policy review stated that the United States would not issue visas to Taiwan officials except for short "transit" stops.

- Stronger support for Taiwan in Congress, especially given the Republican sweep of the 1994 midterm elections. Congressional pressure would be a major factor in the decision to issue Lee Teng-hui a visa to visit Cornell, especially given the nonbinding but near-unanimous congressional resolutions to grant the visa.[20]

- President Clinton's decision to grant the visa despite assurances from Secretary of State Warren Christopher that the United States would not do so, which embarrassed Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and eroded Chinese trust.[21]
- China's lack of a clear go-to person in the Clinton administration, in contrast with Bush National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft (who had longstanding ties with China), which exacerbated China's other concerns.[22]

Factor 4: Jiang Zemin's Political Weakness Relative to Advocates of a Hardline Policy Toward Taiwan

PRC domestic politics also played a critical role in Chinese leaders' responses during the crisis. As one former senior official stated, "Domestic politics are everything. We need to keep an eye on domestic drivers that could impel either side to take actions."[23] According to press reports and declassified intelligence reporting, Jiang initially preferred a diplomatic response to Lee's visit to the United States, but hardliners in the PRC leadership and the PLA eventually drove China's policy toward a harsher approach. (However, some scholars argue that there ultimately was a civil-military consensus on the use of coercive military force.[24]) Jiang was also grappling with nationalist protests, including large groups of protestors at Tsinghua University and elsewhere opposing Lee's visit and demanding a harsher response toward Taiwan.[25]

These four factors support the conclusion that China's decision to use force was not simply a reaction to Lee's visit but also reflected the judgment of Chinese leaders that negative trends in U.S. and Taiwan actions demanded a strong response.[26] Although the U.S. decision to grant a visa to Lee was the spark for the crisis, Beijing viewed U.S. and Taiwan actions in the years leading up to the crisis as evidence that its conciliatory policy toward Taiwan was no longer working and that a change in course was needed. Having decided that China needed to send a strong signal to the United States and Taiwan, Chinese leaders discovered that PLA capability limitations constrained their options; ballistic missile launches were one of the few coercive military capabilities available for use on short notice.

China's Goals and Actions During the Crisis

What were China's goals for its military show of force? U.S., Chinese, and Taiwan scholars and former officials who have written about the crisis generally agree on China's overarching objectives throughout the crisis. In brief, they were to

- coerce the United States into ending its tacit support for Taiwan independence and returning to its one-China policy
- coerce Taiwan into abandoning its efforts to redefine its status as part of China and to expand Taiwan's international space
- erode support for President Lee and pro-independence forces in Taiwan.[27]

Phase 1: Sending a Message to Washington and Taipei

In the first phase of the crisis, China focused on using both diplomatic and military means to influence Washington and Taipei. During this phase, China's tactical objectives were to

- ensure that the United States understood the importance of the Taiwan issue and seek public assurances that the U.S. one-China policy remained unchanged[28]
- obtain a U.S. commitment to restrict future visits by Taiwan leaders[29]
- pressure the KMT to choose another, less pro-independence candidate[30]
- erode public support in Taiwan for independence by demonstrating China's determination and PLA capabilities.[31]

China used a variety of channels to express its concerns about the negative impact of U.S. policy on Taiwan independence forces and suggest that strong responses were being considered, while also communicating that China wanted a positive relationship with the United States. After the announcement of Lee's visa, China canceled planned visits to the United States by Defense Minister Chi Haotian, State Counselor Li Guixian, and Air Force Commander Yu Zhenwu. On June 16, Chinese Ambassador Li Daoyu was recalled to Beijing for consultations. China also cut off bilateral visits at the vice-ministerial level and above.[32] China took a number of other actions to signal its displeasure, including suspending expert consultations on the Missile Technology Control Regime, detaining U.S. citizen and human rights activist Harry Wu, and reopening factories that produced pirated compact discs.[33]

According to a declassified U.S. intelligence report, Beijing's initial decision to use military force was carefully considered. The DF-15[34] missile tests were selected from a "series of options" and were not the most aggressive choice presented by the PLA to the Chinese leadership. The PLA reportedly presented the options to a small group consisting of President Jiang Zemin, Premier Li Peng, and Central Military Commission (CMC) Vice-Chairmen Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen. This group then presented the options to the Politburo Standing Committee,

which decided on the missile-firing exercise, though the decision was reportedly not unanimous.[35] China's leadership (including the PLA) knew that a war across the strait would have very high costs and a small chance of success due to limited PLA capabilities and the likelihood of U.S. intervention. PLA sources say they provided Jiang and civilian leaders with a frank assessment of what the PLA could and could not do with its current capabilities.[36]

On July 18, 1995, China announced a closure area 80 miles northeast of Taiwan where it would conduct missile tests, which the PLA code-named "Blue Whale 5."[37] From July 21 to July 24, the PLA fired six DF-15 missiles with a range of 600 kilometers. The launches were conducted with relatively little warning and no direct communications with the United States or Taiwan.[38] The U.S. offered a low-key response. Secretary Christopher reiterated the U.S. commitment to its one-China policy but also criticized Chinese military activities as not contributing to "peace and stability in the area."[39] U.S. policymakers did not want to provoke Beijing or escalate the situation, and believed that China would not endanger its economic development with further military action.[40] Some post-crisis analysis also notes that U.S. policymakers wanted to minimize the impact of its shifts in Taiwan policy and lower tensions in bilateral relations.[41] In late July, in response to China's actions, Taiwan conducted its own missile and naval exercises, and announced its intention to conduct live-fire artillery tests in August.[42]

The missile launches took place a week before Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen was scheduled to meet Christopher at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Post-Ministerial Conference in Brunei. Prior to the August 1 meeting, a Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) spokesman stated, "What we are going to do is to make the U.S. government realize the importance of Sino-U.S. relations to prompt them to take the right track."[43] At the meeting in Brunei, Christopher gave Qian a letter from President Clinton reaffirming the U.S. stance on the one-China policy and reiterating that there was no change to U.S. policy on Taiwan. Christopher rebuffed PRC requests for a "fourth communiqué," stating that there was no need, because there had been no change to U.S. China policy. Christopher verbally assured Qian that future visas to Taiwan officials would be reviewed on a "case-by-case basis" and would be "personal, unofficial, and rare."[44] However, this commitment was not explicitly stated in the letter, and Qian regarded it as insufficient, even when coupled with the suggestion that Clinton would invite Jiang to visit Washington in the near future. The meeting ended with an agreement that Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff could visit Beijing in August to negotiate with Vice Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing.[45]

In August, PLA naval vessels and aircraft announced a closure area and conducted live-fire exercises off the coast of Fujian. The Shensheng-95 exercises, which ran from August 15

to August 25, included maritime offensive and defensive maneuvers, at least 59 naval ships, and 192 air sorties.[46] Li hosted Tarnoff for meetings from August 24 to August 27. In a move designed to appease the United States, Beijing sentenced Harry Wu to 15 years in prison and then expelled him from China right before Tarnoff's visit.[47] U.S. accounts of the Beijing meeting suggest that Tarnoff reiterated the assurances on transit visas that Christopher had offered in Brunei and discussed the timing of a possible summit meeting in more detail.[48] Qian Qichen's account claims that Tarnoff offered more concrete restrictions on future transit visits by Taiwan leaders that basically satisfied China's concerns, prompting a leadership decision to restore high-level contacts with Washington.[49] At the end of the day, Beijing did not achieve its objective of a ban on future transit visits. Negotiations over the summit proved difficult, but the Chinese eventually settled for an official summit meeting in New York on October 24 rather than the state visit in Washington that they wanted.[50] During the meeting President Clinton reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to its one-China policy and Secretary Christopher reiterated that future visits by Taiwan leaders would be "unofficial, private, and rare."[51] The summit marked a return to more normal, though still contentious, bilateral relations, with Chinese Ambassador Li Daoyu returning to Washington and Beijing accepting Senator James Sasser as the new U.S. ambassador to China. This marked an end to the first phase of the crisis, which had featured military coercion aimed at both the United States and Taiwan coupled with extensive diplomacy to produce a change in U.S. policy toward Taiwan.

Phase 2: October–November 1995 Exercises and Taiwan Legislative Elections

The second phase of the crisis would focus more squarely on Taiwan and its December legislative elections. Although couched in terms of broad goals of providing a "severe warning" to Taiwan independence forces, PLA exercises were also intended to influence Taiwan elections.[52] Zhang Wannian has stated that one objective was to "remind and educate the people of Taiwan as well as encourage and support pro-peaceful unification forces on the island."[53] From September 5 to October 20, the PLA conducted another round of exercises—this time focused on amphibious landing maneuvers—in the Yellow Sea. The "Invincible Might" [*Shenwei*] exercises sought to demonstrate the PLA's naval prowess.[54] Beijing explicitly declared that these exercises were aimed at Taiwan and designed to maintain China's unity and to resist "splittist" activities of pro-independence forces on Taiwan. The exercises were observed personally by Jiang and Liu Huaqing, along with six other CMC members, and Chinese authorities released photographs of the exercises to magnify their political impact.[55]

The PLA conducted additional military exercises codenamed "Success" [*Chenggong*] from October 31 to November 23, which were timed to influence Taiwan's December 2 legislative elections. The exercises were conducted to the south of the Taiwan Strait and included a simulated amphibious landing on Dongshan Island with two PLA Air Force divisions, 300 navy vessels, and 17,000 troops participating.[56] The PLA also established a "Headquarters for Operations Targeting Taiwan" and declared that the Nanjing War Zone was responsible for conducting the exercises, suggesting movement from the peacetime Nanjing Military Region to a wartime footing.[57]

The KMT suffered setbacks in the December elections, barely holding on to a majority in the Legislative Yuan. Its share of the popular vote was only 46 percent—the first time it had failed to win a popular majority. The DPP increased its representation in the legislature, but not by as much as DPP leaders had hoped for. The New Party, which had split from the KMT in 1993 and leaned toward unification, won 23 seats.[58] There was very little negative reaction to the Chinese exercises from other countries, including the United States, which maintained a low-key reaction similar to its reaction to the July missile tests.[59] These results appeared promising given China's objectives.

Phase 3: March 1996 Exercises and Taiwan's Presidential Election

In January 1996, the PLA received orders from Jiang to begin planning for large-scale military exercises timed to influence the March 23 Taiwan presidential election.[60] U.S. intelligence analysts had expected the PLA to conduct a large-scale exercise sometime in 1996 to test PLA joint operations capabilities; these plans were accelerated and adapted to fulfill Jiang's orders.[61] China's goals were similar to those in the legislative elections. Having failed to prevent Lee Teng-hui from winning the KMT nomination for the presidency, China sought to frighten pro-independence forces and force Lee to be more circumspect in his behavior after the elections, which it expected him to win.[62] The PLA also had military objectives for the exercises, including to test PLA joint operations capabilities and to train in a realistic environment.[63]

China faced a structural challenge in achieving its political goals on Taiwan, because the alternative candidates had little chance of defeating Lee, the incumbent and KMT nominee. Former Taiwan Provincial Governor Lin Yang-kang was the closest thing to a pro-unification candidate in that he supported the one-China principle and favored direct links with the mainland; he was expelled from the KMT and endorsed by the New Party after declaring his candidacy.[64]

On March 5, 1996, Beijing announced that it would begin another round of missile tests and exercises from March 8 to March 25, codenamed "Strait 961" by the PLA. This was the

largest of the PLA's exercises and simulated an invasion of Taiwan. The PLA had already been deploying troops to Fujian Province by early February.[65] This exercise occurred in three parts:[66]

- *Part 1 (March 8)*. The PLA fired three DF-15 short-range ballistic missiles into two previously announced closure areas less than 50 miles from the northern port of Keelung and the southern port of Kaohsiung. Two missiles landed near Kaohsiung and one landed near Keelung. A fourth missile was launched toward Kaohsiung on March 13.[67] According to Robert Ross's interviews with Chinese policy analysts, the missiles were fired close to Taiwan ports to increase their effectiveness in opposing "splittism."[68]
- *Part 2 (March 12)*. The PLA practiced air and sea superiority scenarios with live-fire exercises and surface attack activities at the southern end of the Taiwan Strait, near Dongshan and Nan'ao Islands.
- *Part 3 (March 18–25)*. This part centered on a joint amphibious assault exercise involving army, navy, and air force units landing near the city of Pingtan on Haitan Island, at the northern end of the Taiwan Strait. Adverse weather ultimately limited the exercise to small-scale amphibious rehearsals and simulated operations. Troop insertions by helicopters, artillery firing, flights by IL-76 transport aircraft, and amphibious assault drills also occurred, though on a smaller scale than originally intended. The PLA marshaled approximately 150,000 troops and 300 aircraft and navy vessels, though not all these assets wound up participating in the exercise.[69] The PLA finished its military exercises and stood down after Taiwan's presidential election on March 23.

To the extent that support for pro-unification forces in the presidential election was an important Chinese goal, Beijing's efforts were unsuccessful. Lee ultimately won a landslide victory (54 percent of the vote) in the election. Many observers judged that China's vilification of Lee had likely strengthened his electoral support. DPP candidate Peng Mingmin won 21 percent of the vote and Lin won only 15 percent.[70]

U.S. Responses to China's Actions

The U.S. Government's focus during the first part of the crisis was on repairing bilateral relations with Beijing, partly to obtain Chinese cooperation on a range of other international issues. U.S. officials were angry at Taiwan's manipulation of U.S. domestic politics and embarrassed at the policy reversal on the visa issue. They appeared to interpret the July missile tests and subsequent military exercises as an effort by China to send a warning message to Taiwan's

pro-independence forces and to emphasize the importance and sensitivity of the Taiwan issue in U.S.-China relations. The decision to launch missiles was interpreted partly as a product of Jiang's domestic weakness on the Taiwan issue following Lee's rejection of the eight-point speech and visit to the United States. A tougher policy that included military shows of force, it was thought, was intended to reduce criticism from the PLA, hawkish Politiburo members such as Qiao Shi, and nationalists among the Chinese public.[71]

Early U.S. Reactions

The initial U.S. reaction reflected this focus and the desire to get beyond the tensions as quickly as possible. U.S. responses to China's July, October, and November exercises were low-key and sought to avoid escalation, mainly consisting of statements by official spokespeople accompanied by private reassurances to Beijing that U.S. China policy had not changed. U.S. officials reacted to the July missile tests by stating that "they do not contribute to peace and stability in the region," while assuring Beijing privately that the United States did not support Taiwan's UN membership bid or any move toward independence.[72] U.S. leaders responded similarly to the October and November exercises, but added private statements on Washington's disapproval to Chinese interlocutors and warnings that the United States might respond under some unstated circumstances. During a November visit to China, Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye reiterated to Chinese officials the U.S. view that China's exercises were counterproductive.[73] Nevertheless, the PLA proceeded with its late-November Dongshan amphibious exercise and may have concluded that it had a positive political impact on the Taiwan legislative elections.

Deeper Concerns about PLA March 1996 Exercise Plans

By early December 1995, U.S. officials had a general idea of PLA plans for a series of March 1996 military exercises timed to influence the presidential election, and contingency planning began for U.S. responses to the various actions China might take. The process began with informal meetings between National Security Council Asian Affairs Director Bob Suettinger, State Department Office of Chinese Affairs Director Jeff Bader, and Brigadier General Robert "Doc" Foglesong, the Joint Staff J5 deputy director for Asia. However, the Pentagon soon took over the military planning, involving U.S. Pacific Command and the Seventh Fleet in Yokosuka, Japan.[74] In late February, President Clinton was briefed by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Shalikashvili on a range of U.S. military options to respond to various degrees of Chinese military aggression, up to and including the possible use of nuclear weapons.[75] Several participants

recall President Clinton contemplating the risks of escalation to the nuclear level and saying, "We've got to do all we can to avoid this."[76]

As U.S. understanding of Chinese March 1996 exercise plans became clearer, U.S. officials began including warning messages in their talking points with Chinese interlocutors. These included references to the Taiwan Relations Act and its statement that the United States would "consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means . . . a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States."[77] These warnings prompted China to intensify intelligence collection on potential U.S. intervention and to redouble efforts to persuade the United States to stay out of Taiwan issues, including threats that the PLA might use force.[78] However, the PLA appeared to conclude that the U.S. military was unlikely to respond to its planned exercises.

In February, the PLA amassed sizable troop and equipment deployments to Fujian Province in preparation for the exercises. Although U.S. officials did not believe that the exercises were a prelude to an attack, they warned Beijing "not to adopt provocative actions."[79] A State Department spokesman called the tests "an irresponsible effort to intimidate Taiwan's voters" and warned there would be "consequences" if Chinese missiles went off target.[80]

The PLA's second round of DF-15 missile launches began in the early morning hours on March 8, although it was still March 7 in Washington where National Security Advisor Anthony Lake and Secretary of State Christopher were preparing to meet with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu.[81] Over a working dinner that evening, Secretary of Defense William Perry warned that any military action against Taiwan would have "grave consequences." Liu assured U.S. leaders that China had no intention to use force against Taiwan.[82] However, given the missile launches, discussions were heated, and U.S. officials were unsure whether to believe Liu.[83]After discussions with Liu on March 8, senior administration officials including Perry, Christopher, and Lake gathered for a breakfast meeting in Perry's office on March 9 to discuss a U.S. response.

The group recommended that President Clinton send two carrier battle groups (CBGs) into the region, a recommendation that Clinton accepted later that day. The deployment was intended to deter further use of coercive force by Beijing and to signal U.S. willingness to respond to military provocations. The group also believed that the United States needed to act to maintain its reputation and credibility with allies and partners. Perry stated that sending the CBGs would send a signal: "The U.S. has a national interest in the security and stability of the Western Pacific region. We have a powerful military force there to help us carry out our national interests."[84]

The USS *Independence* CBG, which had been conducting a port visit in the Philippines, redeployed to waters east of Taiwan. On March 10, the United States announced that the USS *Nimitz* CBG was sailing from the Persian Gulf to join the *Independence*. The deployment was intended as a show of force rather than preparation for combat; the political aspect is indicated by the fact that the *Independence* had more than 100 members of the press on board, some of whom broadcasted reports from the carrier.[85] The *Nimitz* proceeded slowly and ultimately deployed near the Philippines. U.S. officials persuaded Taiwan to cancel its planned post-election military exercises to help deescalate the situation.[86] In addition to the two carriers, media reporting mentioned the Aegis cruiser USS *Bunker Hill* and its capability to track and collect information on the DF-15 missile flights. The press also referenced the use of the RC-135 aircraft by the U.S. Air Force to monitor data transmissions from the DF-15 missiles to Chinese ground stations. The Chinese media reacted strongly to the carrier deployment and to reports of U.S. capabilities aimed at PLA assets.[87]

According to interviews, Taiwan asked the United States to keep the *Nimitz* in the area after election day as a precaution against possible Chinese military moves.[88] Bad weather curtailed the last phase of the PLA exercise, and Chinese forces returned to garrison. Although reports in the Hong Kong press continued to speculate about Chinese military action against Taiwan, the crisis was over.

What Shaped the U.S. Response to the Crisis?

Interviewees and the literature cite several reasons the Clinton administration responded the way it did. These include:

Bureaucratic Disagreements and Lack of One Voice on China Policy. Several interviewees and academic studies on the crisis highlight the influence of bureaucratic infighting and the lack of a unified China policy on the U.S. response. For example, the 1994 debate about renewing China's MFN status highlighted differences between agencies, such as the Department of Commerce and the Office of the United States Trade Representative, that saw major economic opportunities in China, and the State Department, which had concerns about human rights and nonproliferation.[89] In the immediate aftermath of the U.S. decision to delink human rights and MFN renewal in June 1994, State Department Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Winston Lord was reluctant to engage Beijing directly and U.S. policy drifted.[90] This lack of direction complicated discussions on how to react to Beijing's provocative behavior. The administration had other equities with China that it did not want threatened by the Taiwan issue, including efforts to end Chinese proliferation of ballistic missiles and ongoing economic and trade discussions.

At the same time, pro-Taiwan sentiment in Congress was stronger than ever—a stance strengthened by China's military demonstrations. According to one interviewee, "[The Chinese] saw our China policy going totally off the track, with no one able to enforce any parameters."[91] The U.S. response to the crisis was described as "better" once National Security Advisor Lake began to take the lead and after President Clinton focused on the Taiwan issue and understood the danger of escalation.[92] One U.S. interviewee stated that a key lesson is "avoiding or managing tensions in the years prior to the crisis, so that we avert the next one before it occurs."[93]

There were some efforts to get all the different bureaucracies on the same page during the crisis. Beginning in December 1995, the National Security Council (NSC) took the initiative to institute a mini review of U.S. China policy. These meetings produced an agreement in mid-February to have Lake take a larger role in China policy, including setting up a dialogue with Liu Huaqiu, who also headed the Central Committee's Foreign Affairs Committee. The NSC also developed a small group that met two to three times a week to discuss China policy, but this group was not specifically focused on the crisis.[94] As discussed above, Liu arrived in Washington right after the PLA's March 8 missile launches.

The Need to Maintain U.S. Credibility in the Region. The decision to send two CBGs to the region was driven by the scale and scope of the PLA's March 1996 exercises and by the realization of top U.S. leaders that the situation could escalate quickly if something went wrong, particularly with the missile firings. Policymakers also realized that a failure to respond to Chinese efforts to intimidate Taiwan militarily would have severe negative consequences for U.S. reputation and credibility as a security partner and ally in the region. Chinese coercion—and especially its missile launches close to Taiwan's harbors—had crossed a line. Senior U.S. leaders, including Clinton, Lake, Perry, and Shalikashvili agreed on the need to show resolve to deter further Chinese coercive actions. However, they also agreed on the need to use means that did not feed into an escalatory spiral or result in a direct U.S.-PRC confrontation.[95] The challenge was to send a strong signal while controlling escalation risks.

U.S. leaders decided that sending two carriers rather than just one conveyed a message of presence, resolve, strength, and deterrence. However, they decided to send the carriers to waters near Taiwan but not directly into the Taiwan Strait, which was deemed to be too provocative.[96] The *Independence* was already deployed near the Philippines and wound up east of Taiwan, while the *Nimitz* steamed slowly from the Philippines Sea and stayed south of Taiwan.[97] The *Nimitz* stayed in the area until after the Taiwan presidential election and the end of the PLA exercises, then returned to the Persian Gulf through the South China Sea.

Agreement Within the Intelligence Community on China's Intentions Throughout the Crisis. There was broad agreement in the U.S. intelligence community that China was preparing a show of force rather than a use of force, and this assessment was conveyed to U.S. decision-makers. In January 1996, Director of Central Intelligence John Deutch stood up an interagency intelligence task force specifically focused on the Taiwan Strait crisis, which was chaired by senior CIA China analyst Dennis Wilder.[98] The task force integrated collection and analysis to directly support senior U.S. policymakers and military planners at the Joint Staff, Pacific Command, and Seventh Fleet.[99] Although the task force was nominally a community-wide body, members recall the CIA dominating its analysis, partly because the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) was slow to assign analysts to participate.[100] The National Intelligence Council did not produce a National Intelligence Estimate or other coordinated assessment during the crisis, partly because of staff limitations and partly because at the time it was structured to produce estimates rather than directly support policymakers with current intelligence.[101] The intelligence task force played this role during the crisis, although DIA and other intelligence agencies also produced independent analyses to support their policy customers.

One interviewee noted that the "CIA, DIA, and [the National Intelligence Council] all agreed with the assessment that the show of force was political and not indicative of imminent attack."[102] Another interviewee said that everyone agreed with this assessment except for the National Intelligence Officer for Warning, who thought that the March exercises might indicate that the PLA was aiming to undertake port closure operations.[103] A third interviewee recalls "no big disagreements within the [intelligence community]" during the crisis.[104] China conducted a harsh propaganda campaign against Lee, which was considered in intelligence reports at the time but was assessed to be mainly aimed at the Chinese public to respond to nationalist sentiment, at Taiwan leaders to discourage any moves toward independence, and at the Taiwan public to influence the legislative and presidential election results.[105] Despite the inflammatory PRC rhetoric, the intelligence community's consensus that China was unlikely to attack contributed to the administration's decision to maintain a low-key response up until the March 1996 exercises, when the decision to deploy the two CBGs was made.

The PLA's Limited Capabilities. Although the intelligence community had detailed intelligence on the PLA's exercise plans, assessments of Chinese intentions were heavily influenced by the limited PLA capabilities at the time, which restricted what the PLA could do and when and where it could do it. One interviewee said that the crisis "exposed that the PLA was not in a position to take Taiwan."[106] The PLA used a variety of public and private channels to communicate threats to use force against Taiwan, but analysts discounted these reports because the PLA

lacked the capability to follow through on its threats.[107] One interviewee stated, "They basically had missiles at their disposal. They didn't yet have the robust naval capability that the majority of [today's] Taiwan-related contingency plans require."[108] When the March 1996 exercises commenced, some U.S. analysts noted that there was a possibility that China might use the exercises as cover to stage a limited military action, such as seizing one of Taiwan's offshore islands. U.S. analysts agreed that the PLA had the capabilities to seize a small offshore island such as Wuqiu or Dongju, but judged that China was unlikely to pursue this course of action.[109]

Taiwan's Response to China's Actions

Taiwan's response to the July 1995 missile launches focused on maintaining public confidence in the face of Chinese pressure. Premier Lien Chan gave a statement after a cabinet meeting discussing the missile closure area, describing the government's readiness to deal with the crisis on the basis of "pragmatic policy" and "sound preparedness."[110] During the run-up to the presidential elections, Taiwan established a high-level crisis management team consisting of officials from the Office of the President, Taiwan's National Security Council, and the Executive Yuan. This team met eight times in February and March 1996 under the leadership of Lien; its meetings were publicly discussed as a means of reassuring the Taiwan public. Under guidance from the presidential office, the NSC also set up a staff-level team focused on the crisis, the military established an intelligence support team, and the National Security Bureau (NSB) set up a team to collect and evaluate intelligence on the crisis.[111]

According to interviews, Taiwan's assessments of PRC intentions were shaped heavily by limited PLA capabilities and largely mirrored those of their U.S. counterparts. Taiwan's general assessment was that the PLA lacked the military capability to invade or blockade Taiwan but could conduct limited air and ballistic missile strikes and take action against some of Taiwan's islands off the China coast and in the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan intelligence assessed that China intended to conduct a show of force to intimidate Taiwan leaders and the Taiwan electorate rather than to initiate a military conflict. Taiwan had the benefit of two high-level human sources inside the PLA General Logistics Department, who detailed both the political guidance given to the PLA and the PLA plans for the fall 1995 and March 1996 exercises.[112]

Within this broad understanding of limited PLA capabilities, different bureaucracies in Taiwan had different perspectives on China's intentions during the crisis. According to one interviewee, the NSC believed China had three levels of objectives for the March exercises: The most ambitious goal was to force Lee to step down from office, the second-tier goal was to force Taiwan to postpone the presidential election, and the fallback goal was to minimize turnout and

votes for Lee if the election went forward. The NSB, for its part, judged that China's overarching objective was to disrupt Taiwan's first democratic presidential election; it shared the NSC analysis of Chinese tactical goals. The NSB thought that the March exercises were also intended to test U.S. readiness and reactions and to assess PLA combat readiness for coercive actions against Taiwan.[113]

In terms of possible Chinese actions, the NSB saw three levels of intensity. The lowest level would consist of propaganda and bluster. Medium-intensity actions would include limited military actions against Taiwan, such as ballistic missile exercises announced in advance, disrupting resupply to offshore islands, and PLA Air Force flights over the midpoint line in the Taiwan Strait to force Taiwan's air force to respond. High-intensity actions might include a blockade of Taiwan or the offshore islands or attacks on some of the islands coupled with a demand for Taiwan to cancel the elections.

The Taiwan defense intelligence group considering potential PRC reactions to Lee Teng-hui's visit to the United States identified five likely PRC courses of action.[114] The first was an acceleration of routine exercises to signal displeasure over the visit. The second was an increase in incursions by PRC fighters and bombers to apply pressure and overwhelm Taiwan's air defense systems. The third was targeted naval exercises, including possible restricted zones for live-fire exercises. The fourth was sending agents to infiltrate the main island of Taiwan. The fifth possibility involved actions against Taiwan-controlled islands off the mainland coast and in the Taiwan Strait. These include Jinmen [金门], Matsu/Mazu [马祖], the Pescadores/Penghu [澎湖], Pratas/Dongsha [東沙], Wuqiu [烏坵], and Dongju [東莒]. Although some larger islands, such as Jinmen and Matsu, were relatively well-defended, others were lightly garrisoned and considered vulnerable, given their proximity to the PRC. Taiwan planners also worried about possible action against Itu Aba, an island in the South China Sea occupied by Taiwan. According to interviewees and media reports, Taiwan officials obtained PLA intelligence reports that proposed seizing outlying Taiwan islands if Taipei retaliated during the crisis.[115]

Taiwan military planners considered and planned for a range of potential actions against Taiwan's islands, including a coordinated mobilization of PRC civilian fishing boats to "provoke military tensions" [制造军事紧张情势] and potentially initiate a conflict with Taiwan naval vessels or fishing boats.[116] Planners also considered contingencies such as disruption of supply lines to the islands, a blockade of one or more islands, and the use of small ships to transport undercover operatives to attack the islands closest to PRC shores.[117] This focus on PLA threats to Taiwan-occupied islands is the one significant divergence between U.S. and Taiwan intelligence analysis during the crisis. The possibility of PLA actions to seize some of Taiwan's islands

was reported in the Taiwan and Hong Kong press, but U.S. analysts do not remember this as a significant concern.[118] Conversely, Taiwan analysts at one point believed they had specific intelligence indicating PLA plans to invade and occupy Dongju Island.[119]

Taiwan's responses to China's military actions during the crisis were relatively low-level and restrained. The Taiwan military sought to be prepared while avoiding actions that might escalate tensions or precipitate the PRC's use of force. During the July 1995 missile tests, the Taiwan military was put on 24-hour alert, meaning they could be ready to mobilize within 15 minutes, but no other military response, including movement of troops or equipment, occurred.[120] Taiwan's leadership appeared determined to send the message that it was not cowed by Beijing's initial show of force: the KMT chose Lee as its presidential candidate, and the day after Beijing announced the missile closures, Taiwan's minister of foreign affairs, Frederick Chien (Chien Fu), reiterated Taiwan's intention to seek UN membership and stated that cross-strait talks on reunification would produce constructive results only if they occurred under UN auspices.[121]

On December 30, 1995, after the PRC's October–November exercises, the Taiwan military decided to bolster its forces on its outlying islands.[122] Its actions included increasing the manning level on its island garrisons, upgrading the light weapons deployed on the islands, increasing stockpiles of supplies to guard against blockades, and hardening communications equipment to guard against PLA jamming. Senior officers also visited the islands to raise morale and ensure that local commanders understood their rules of engagement and would not inadvertently initiate a conflict.[123] Taiwan maintained the troop and equipment deployments on the outlying islands until well after the PLA's final exercise in March.[124] Interviewees noted that PLA and Taiwan aircraft were flying close to each other while conducting combat patrols and surveillance missions, and they did not want the Taiwan pilots to "get nervous and fire a shot at the PLA aircraft."[125] According to one interviewee, Taiwan's air force turned off encryption so that the PLA could intercept some of its communications and know that it was ready to respond to any intrusions. Another interviewee suggested that Taiwan ground controllers communicated directly with PLA pilots to warn them.[126]

The military's concern over the PLA's seizing of an outlying island appeared to be greater than U.S. concern at the time. U.S. analysts agreed that the PLA could take an outlying island but did not think that China would risk the chance of a broader conflict.[127] A Taiwan-published book detailing the crisis highlights Taiwan officials' concern over the outlying islands and the potential for escalation: "The guidance to the soldiers was to maintain self-control and avoid escalation—such as not practicing with heavy artillery because of concerns of misfiring or creating a misunderstanding." The book also notes, "The most difficult situation would be a surprise

attack on the islands by the PLA. If the PLA intended to attack one outlying island, then Taiwan would have to counterattack. . . . The troops stationed on that island would counterattack with full force, but those stationed on the other outlying islands and the main force would stand by for an order from the General Staff to avoid escalation and the potential of being drawn into a larger conflict by the PLA."[128] The book further states that the "Taiwan Ministry of National Defense decreased the number of [military] supply ships to the outlying islands, instead renting civilian commercial ships to avoid being targeted by the PLA. They also ensured that Wuchiu had a yearlong supply of all necessary provisions—including well water—so that the island had enough supplies to fight for longer if necessary."[129]

Beyond raising the level of military readiness, Taiwan's political leadership provided statements throughout the crisis meant to send a message of calm to the public. In July, Taiwan government officials stated that the missile closure area was a political signal and "does not directly threaten the island."[130] Similarly, in November 1995, China's amphibious exercises were described in Taiwan's press as "a routine military drill" that was no cause for alarm for Taiwan's military authorities.[131] In a March 1996 campaign appearance, President Lee said, "The [military] exercise is only a show which is meant to scare you . . . to see whether you will be confused or frightened. The missiles will not have warheads."[132] These remarks appear to have surprised the MND, which hastily organized a press conference that described the capabilities of the DF-15 missile, including the fact that one variant was equipped with an instrumentation warhead. Some have alleged that Lee's remarks about "dummy warheads" drew upon sensitive reporting from Taiwan sources inside the PLA and resulted in their eventual exposure and capture.[133] This interpretation raises serious concerns about the ability of Taiwan leaders to protect sensitive information in the face of the need to reassure the Taiwan public or to derive domestic political advantage. However, several interviewees dispute this interpretation, and Zhang Wannian's biography claims that both the July 1995 and March 1996 missiles carried warheads that could explode.[134] A book by the Taiwan Military Intelligence Bureau officer who recruited and handled the PLA sources blamed their exposure on operational mistakes by his successor.[135] This suggests an alternative interpretation that is concerning for different reasons: that Lee Teng-hui simply lied to the Taiwan public about the PLA missiles carrying dummy warheads.

U.S.-Taiwan Communications and Coordination

Although routine intelligence-sharing and diplomatic consultations continued throughout the crisis, there was very little policy coordination between the United States and Taiwan. U.S. policymakers were wary of sharing too much with Taiwan because of concerns about leaks,

tensions in the bilateral relationship from Lee's U.S. visit, and worries that high-level public contacts would offend China and escalate tensions.[136] The United States generally did not consult or coordinate with Taiwan on its decisions or actions during the crisis. Even the deployment of the USS *Nimitz* and USS *Independence* to the region was conveyed to Taipei post-decision and "just prior to" the press announcement.[137] With one exception, Taiwan did not coordinate its military plans and responses with the United States, with interviewees citing the lack of communications opportunities and limited U.S. desire for more robust interactions or coordination as reasons.[138]

The United States and Taiwan had established security cooperation mechanisms for arms procurement and military training; these continued uninterrupted throughout the crisis but do not appear to have had much if any impact on high-level decisionmaking. The United States and Taiwan also reportedly had joint programs to collect and process intelligence on the PRC, which presumably continued throughout the crisis.[139] Interviewees report that this information-sharing was valuable but that efforts to compare assessments of Chinese intentions and likely PLA courses of action were very limited.[140] However, because intelligence experts on both sides independently assessed that PLA military options were hampered by lack of capability, and accurately judged that China was not preparing to use force against Taiwan, this lack of analytic consultation did not have a major impact on the crisis.

According to interviewees, the United States and Taiwan had three main communications channels. The most important channel was between the U.S. State Department and Taiwan's MOFA, working through the American Institute in Taiwan and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO). The second channel was between Pentagon officials and the Taiwan military mission in Washington. This mostly dealt with routine arms sales and security cooperation issues, but also included one substantive meeting in Washington.[141] In March 1996, a higher-level third channel was established between the U.S. and Taiwan NSCs via a secret meeting in New York.

State Department–Ministry of Foreign Affairs Channel

The first channel was between Taiwan's MOFA (represented in the United States by TECRO) and the State Department (represented in Taiwan by the American Institute in Taiwan, AIT). The Taipei end of this channel functioned effectively throughout the crisis. According to interviewees, AIT Director Lynn Pascoe "could see anyone he wanted to in Taiwan" and had regular interactions with President Lee Teng-hui, Foreign Minister Fred Chien, and NSC Secretary General Ding Mou-shih.[142] The AIT Liaison Affairs Section, whose representatives served as de facto defense attachés, had good access to the Taiwan military and reported on its military

preparations and perceptions of PLA actions.[143] The AIT Technical Section managed arms sales and security cooperation with Taiwan but did not play a large policy or information-sharing role during the crisis.[144] According to U.S. and Taiwan interviewees, the CIA station chief in Taipei had an excellent liaison relationship with Taiwan's National Security Bureau, which both sides highly valued.[145]

AIT was able to pass messages directly to President Lee when necessary and to senior levels of the Taiwan government on a routine basis. According to interviewees, the biggest issue was not access or communications, but the fact that Lee kept his own counsel on how to deal with the PRC and was guided more by his personal policy and political considerations rather than by outside advice. Senior officials such as Chen and Ding, both mainlanders, received a respectful hearing, but Lee had a different perspective because of his experiences and background as a native of Taiwan. For sensitive issues, Lee preferred to rely on his own trusted advisors rather than working through government channels.[146] This sometimes meant that the foreign minister and TECRO were not fully aware of his thinking and plans.[147]

The other side of this channel was in Washington between TECRO and the State Department, especially the State Department's Office of Taiwan Coordination and the AIT Washington office. According to U.S. and Taiwan interviewees, the Washington end was much more problematic for a variety of reasons, especially during the crisis.[148] Under the revised guidelines governing U.S. unofficial relations with Taiwan, Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord was the most senior State Department official that TECRO Chief Benjamin Lu was allowed to see, and meetings took place in hotels and restaurants outside the State Department. Lord stated, "I worked very hard at maintaining good relations with Taiwan. I met with their representative [Benjamin Lu], as well as visiting officials very frequently, probably more than any Ambassador in my region. . . . I kept Taiwan closely briefed on trips and meetings with China—my own, the President's, Secretary Christopher's, etc. . . . I always supported a robust arms package. Except for the Lee visit interlude, my relations were very cordial, especially with Ding Moushi [*sic*] and Jason Hu."[149] Other interviewees recall regular interactions between the State Department's Taiwan Coordination Office and members of the TECRO mission prior to Lee's visit to Cornell, although some suggest there was reluctance on the U.S. side to routinely brief Taiwan in detail about U.S. meetings with China.[150]

Consultations through TECRO were more problematic after Lee's visit. Although it took some time for State and AIT to understand the nature of the lobbying campaign Cassidy & Associates was conducting for Taiwan, the results were evident in Lee's invitation to speak at Cornell and the nonbinding congressional resolutions to grant Lee's visa.[151] The State Department

sought to consult on the content of Lee's speech to take out provocative language, but TECRO provided a copy only the day before delivery, too late for any changes. The State Department also tried to limit the display of ROC flags in order to emphasize the unofficial nature of the visit, but Lee's supporters ignored these requests.[152] Howard Lange, director of the State Department's Office of Taiwan Coordination, noted that once the visa was granted the State Department had "no leverage" in seeking changes in the speech. State could control Lee's itinerary but had very limited ability to control the visual trappings of the visit and which members of Congress met with him at Cornell.[153] Lee delivered a fiery and political speech that repeatedly used the phrase "Republic of China on Taiwan," a formulation that highlighted Taiwan's status.

Some members of the State Taiwan desk felt that the lobbying campaign, speech, and atmospherics of the visit were driven by Lee and his KMT political allies, and that Benjamin Lu and TECRO were largely outside the loop, with minimal ability to influence Lee's decisions.[154] However, Lord felt that the provocative content of Lee's speech aggravated the crisis; he blamed Lu for the outcome. "As a result, on my own, I just refused thereafter to receive Benjamin Lu, the Taiwan representative. . . . For a few months he had absolutely no access to me." Lord believed that curtailing Lu's access ultimately resulted in Taiwan's decision to replace him as representative in June 1996.[155] Lord's decision to cut off Lu's access limited TECRO's potential role in policy coordination, although he did meet with Lu at least once during the crisis.[156] Interviewees report that lower level contacts with TECRO continued throughout the crisis.[157]

U.S. and Taiwan interviewees agree that other issues inside the TECRO mission also limited its role during the crisis. Unlike most past representatives, Lu was not a career foreign service officer and had challenges managing the TECRO staff. He sometimes communicated directly with Lee without keeping TECRO or MOFA informed. Representatives of the Taiwan military mission did not share their conversations with the Pentagon with others in the TECRO mission. As a result, there were considerable internal tensions inside TECRO that limited its effectiveness.[158] Even before the tensions over Lee's visit, State Department officials had concerns about whether messages passed through TECRO were being accurately transmitted to Taipei, and began to rely more heavily on AIT as a communications channel.[159]

Pentagon-TECRO Military Mission Channel

The second communications channel was between the two militaries. This channel mostly involved the TECRO military mission meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Kurt Campbell and Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) China country director Karl Eikenberry to discuss arms sales and security cooperation. Air Force Major General Shih-kuan "Kent" Feng

headed the Taiwan military mission during the crisis. The Taiwan military mission received some briefings about U.S. assessments of the PLA force posture and intentions through this channel during the crisis.[160] The military mission kept TECRO representative Benjamin Lu informed about its conversations with the Pentagon, but information from this channel was not shared with MOFA. According to one interviewee, MOFA instructed TECRO to build its own channel of communications to the Pentagon, but this request was refused because OSD preferred to deal directly with the Taiwan military.[161] As U.S. concerns increased in early 1996, Campbell asked the Taiwan military to send a senior operations officer to Washington for direct consultations. Taiwan J-3 Lieutenant General Shuai Hua-min traveled alone to Washington to meet Campbell. Shuai briefed Campbell on the Taiwan military's rules of engagement and also met with Deputy Secretary of Defense John P. White, who conveyed the message that Taiwan needed to avoid accidental escalation and specifically told Shuai to "not fire the first shot."[162] This channel does not appear to have been used for consultations on U.S. or Taiwan military contingency plans.

National Security Council "Special Channel"

The third channel, between the U.S. and Taiwan NSCs, was established in March 1996, toward the end of the crisis, in the form of a secret meeting between Deputy National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, Undersecretary of State Tarnoff, and Taiwan NSC Secretary General Ding Mou-shih in New York on March 11, 1996. The meeting was arranged without the knowledge of AIT or TECRO, although TECRO Deputy Director Andrew Hsia reportedly knew about the meeting; he brought food to the meeting room.[163] Berger sought to ensure that the rationale for the U.S. carrier deployments was understood by Taiwan's leadership, to reiterate U.S. support for Taiwan, and to persuade Taiwan's leaders to cancel military exercises planned for March.[164] He also conveyed U.S. requests that Taiwan avoid provoking PRC hardliners into escalating the crisis, that Taiwan carefully coordinate cross-strait relations with the United States, and that Taiwan leaders curtail efforts to join the UN and lobby U.S. Congress.[165]

Ding agreed that Taiwan would delay the exercises, diminishing U.S. concern about further coercive or escalatory actions after the PLA's March exercises concluded. According to a Taiwan source, Ding asked the United States to keep an aircraft carrier near Taiwan after the PLA amphibious exercise concluded, as a precaution.[166] President Lee also sent Ding to discuss possible Taiwan initiatives to improve cross-strait relations: (1) resuming talks between the SEF and ARATS, (2) conducting an internal study on how to end the state of hostilities and negotiate with Beijing, (3) exploring ways to increase cross-strait economic ties, (4) increasing cooperation on

agriculture issues, (5) promoting cross-strait educational and cultural exchanges, and (6) engaging in government-to-government discussions.[167]

The Ding-Berger meeting was important for moving the U.S-Taiwan relationship beyond the tensions over the visa issues. It highlighted the importance of having a trusted interlocutor who could speak for the Taiwan president in a time of crisis. Ding was well regarded in Washington from his previous tour as TECRO representative. One interviewee stated that the secret meeting could be successfully arranged because Ding was a trusted advisor to President Lee and could have conversations without involving other parts of the Taiwan bureaucracy.[168] The NSC-to-NSC communications channel continued after the crisis was over as the "special channel," with the principals meeting periodically outside Washington with the knowledge of the AIT and TECRO offices.

Lessons Learned from the Crisis

Although there are limits to what can be learned from a single case study, the crisis highlights some important lessons for policymakers should another such crisis occur.

U.S. and Taiwan Security Concerns Sometimes Diverged

U.S. and Taiwan leaders were both concerned about the potential for escalation, stressed adherence to conservative rules of engagement, and cautioned the Taiwan military against any actions that could be construed as "firing the first shot." However, whereas Taiwan military and intelligence officials were concerned about a potential PLA seizure of an outlying island (either Wuqiu or Dongju) and at one point had specific intelligence suggesting that the PLA was actively planning for such an attack, U.S. policymakers did not share their concerns. The Taiwan officials believed that a PLA effort to seize an island would require a military defense by Taiwan troops on the island and that the political consequences of losing territory might require a counterattack to retake the island.[169] (It is not clear that Lee himself shared this belief.) According to interviews, the United States assessed that the PLA could have taken a small outlying island "overnight" with little or no warning, but U.S. analysts judged this scenario unlikely given the minimal military value and the escalation risks.[170] The possibility was discussed in the Taiwan and Hong Kong press, but U.S. policymakers and analysts do not appear to have focused on the potential for Taiwan to respond militarily in ways that would escalate the crisis.[171] In a future crisis, it would be important for U.S. and Taiwan leaders to talk in advance about potential PLA actions that would necessitate military responses to understand each other's perspectives and concerns.

Having an Authoritative High-Level Communications Channel Was Important

The secret meeting between Ding and Berger helped move the U.S.-Taiwan relationship past the visa issue and produced coordinated U.S. and Taiwan policies to help end the crisis. It highlighted the importance of a trusted interlocutor who could speak directly to and for President Lee and was not beholden to the broader Taiwan bureaucracy. The NSC "special channel" allowed direct high-level communications at a point when a public high-level meeting might have exacerbated the crisis. (According to one U.S. interviewee, the Chinese embassy was informed about the rationale for the secret Ding-Berger meeting and did not complain.[172]) Maintaining an authoritative communications channel is critical to high-level communications and policy coordination both in peacetime and, especially, during a crisis.

Understanding the Domestic Context Is Critical

For both China and Taiwan, domestic politics played a significant role in actions and reactions leading up to and during the crisis. President Lee's adjustments in policy toward China, efforts to bolster Taiwan's international presence, and aggressive pursuit of a trip to the United States all played to an emerging sense of Taiwan identity in a democratizing society and were intended to benefit his campaign. During the crisis, Lee and senior officials sought to reassure the public via regular meetings of the interim task force and through statements expressing confidence in Taiwan military readiness and that the crisis was not headed toward war. In China, a relatively weak Jiang was confronted by PRC hardliners and an increasingly hawkish PLA, domestic protests over the Taiwan issue, and tense relations with the United States. Understanding domestic trends and changes was critical for U.S. assessments and policy calculations and would be equally important in a future crisis.

Limited PLA Capabilities Made Analytic Consensus Easier

China's limited military capabilities made it easier for the U.S. intelligence community to reach consensus that China's actions were a show of force for political purposes and did not signal an imminent attack on Taiwan.[173] Policymakers were persuaded by this assessment and considered responses to the PLA March 1996 exercises in terms of sending a strong enough deterrent signal without undue escalation risks.[174] For example, Secretary Perry said that attacking Taiwan would be "a dumb thing" for China to do. China did "not have the capability" to invade Taiwan, although decisionmakers did believe that it had the ability to "harass" Taiwan.[175] Taiwan's intelligence agencies reached similar conclusions about Chinese intentions, and Taiwan policymakers were persuaded by their assessments.[176] The PLA's limited capabilities at the time

left much less room for disagreement on China's intentions and signaling than would occur today, when the PLA has a much greater range of capabilities and could give Chinese leaders more military options. The PLA exercises in August 2022 following Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan provided a window into this expanded range of military options and the associated challenges in assessing China's intentions.

Bureaucratic Differences Can Affect Decisionmaking During a Crisis

There was disagreement within the U.S. Government about the relative priority that should be accorded to human rights, economic interests, and security concerns in U.S. China policy. In the absence of clear priorities, different parts of the U.S. Government were pursuing different agendas, especially after the Clinton-Jiang summit in October 1995. NSC Director for Asian Affairs Sandra Kristoff stated, "Since there was no single voice in the [Clinton] administration, the players that are influencing China policy change. It's no longer the diplomats or even the intelligence people or the military. . . . It's the whole economic issue in the business community and the U.S. Congress and the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and human rights. Those become voices that the administration then begins to respond to in terms of trying to set China policy."[177] This bureaucratic dynamic influenced U.S. decisionmaking before and during the crisis and might be even more prominent in a future crisis.

It Can Be Dangerous to Lose Focus on the Taiwan Issue

During times of relative calm, Taiwan tends to fade into the background for senior U.S. policymakers, making it difficult for regional experts and the intelligence community to get leadership attention. The crisis illustrated that cross-strait tension can flare up quickly and unexpectedly, with potentially devastating consequences. One interviewee stated, "We didn't understand the salience of Taiwan as an issue that can pop up on you suddenly and be important, then fade into the background."[178] This problem is less likely today given China's increasing focus on Taiwan and the PLA's growing capabilities, but the U.S. Government should seek to maintain effective communication channels and cultivate good relations with Taiwan counterparts even when cross-strait tensions are low. As one U.S. interviewee noted, "We're much better off when we hold Taiwan friends close and cultivate understanding of our position. We need to maintain as much access as we can."[179]

Distrust in the U.S.-Taiwan Relationship Negatively Affected Information-Sharing and Policy Coordination During the Crisis

Lee Teng-hui's campaign to secure a visa by lobbying Congress and his provocative speech at Cornell created resentment and distrust of Taiwan in the White House and State Department. This impeded coordination between State and TECRO during the crisis and made U.S. policymakers reluctant to share information about U.S. actions and plans for fear that Taiwan would leak the information for political advantage.[180] There was very little policy coordination during the crisis, with the significant exception of the Ding-Berger talks in March 1996. Although AIT had direct access to Lee and senior government officials, Lee ultimately made key decisions based on his own judgments and political calculations, sometimes at the expense of U.S. interests. The two sides should strive to regularly share information on their intentions to build the confidence and trust that would be essential in a future crisis.

China Sought to Exploit Differences in U.S. And Taiwan Interests

Lee and "pro-independence" forces on Taiwan were targets of Chinese coercion throughout the crisis, but in the first phase of the crisis China emphasized pressuring the United States to reiterate its one-China policy and place limits on future visits by Taiwan leaders as the price of restoring normal diplomatic relations.[181] Taiwan officials feared the United States might sign a fourth communiqué at Taiwan's expense to settle the transit visa issue and resume cooperation with Beijing on issues such as nonproliferation and foreign investment. In the second and third phases of the crisis, China's focus shifted to influencing the outcome of the Taiwan legislative and presidential elections and deterring pro-independence actions by Lee. Beijing resumed bilateral cooperation with Washington, while seeking to deter the United States from intervening in cross-strait relations. Although U.S. and Taiwan interests will sometimes differ, policymakers on both sides should be aware of these differences and seek to limit Chinese opportunities to exploit them.

Chinese Policymakers Had a Limited Understanding of the Ways Domestic Politics Influence Policymaking in Democratic Systems

Chinese analysts and policymakers consistently misunderstood the ways domestic politics influenced policymaking in Taiwan and the United States during the crisis. Chinese leaders viewed Lee as leading Taiwan independence forces but failed to recognize the broader impact of "Taiwanization" and democratization, which shifted the political center of gravity in Taiwan away from interest in unification. Chinese leaders were used to negotiating with the

U.S. executive branch and counting on Washington to implement bilateral agreements about Taiwan, sometimes without much consideration of Taiwan's interests. A democratic Taiwan was viewed much more favorably in the United States, leading a Republican-controlled Congress to take a much more active and pro-Taiwan stance. Chinese leaders and the Chinese MOFA did not understand these domestic dynamics and were surprised when domestic political considerations led Clinton to reverse policy on the visa issue.

Chinese Policymakers Did Not Fully Understand the Ways U.S. Regional Interests and Alliance Commitments Would Affect U.S. Decisions

During the crisis, Chinese leaders felt that they had higher stakes and greater resolve in a crisis over Taiwan. They appeared to view U.S. policy toward Taiwan through the lens of U.S.-China bilateral relations and did not recognize the broader U.S. regional interests that underpinned the decision to deploy two aircraft carriers during the crisis. This was also reflected in the comments of a senior Chinese official that the United States would not intervene in a Taiwan crisis "because you value Los Angeles more than you value Taipei."[182] This view of asymmetrical stakes and limited U.S. resolve, which was widespread in the PLA, may have contributed to China's misjudgment of the U.S. response. Chinese leaders have a better understanding of U.S. regional interests today, but PLA officers and Chinese academics continue to argue that China's higher stakes would give it an advantage in a future crisis over Taiwan.[183]

Now Versus Then

The 1995–1996 crisis contains some important and enduring lessons for policymakers. However, there have also been significant strategic and political changes over the past 25 years that will affect how Taiwan and U.S. leaders assess and respond to a future crisis. This section highlights key changes since 1996, and the following section discusses implications for policymakers should another crisis occur.

Key Changes Since the 1995–1996 Crisis

Changes in the strategic environment since the 1995–1996 missile crisis include:

Heightened U.S.-China Strategic Competition

The United States and China are engaged in a strategic competition for influence and leadership in the Indo-Pacific. China's rise means that the United States no longer enjoys clear economic and military superiority within the region. The U.S.-China bilateral relationship, which involved an ambiguous mix of cooperation and competition in 1995–1996, is increasingly characterized as

a strategic competition in official documents such as the Biden administration's National Security Strategy.[184] U.S.-China competition is most intense in the Indo-Pacific, but it is increasingly evident in other regions and in competition over global rules, norms, and values.[185] This situation has increased U.S. focus on military threats posed by the PLA, including the risk of military action against Taiwan, and made U.S. policymakers less concerned about Chinese sensitivities to contacts between the U.S. and Taiwan militaries.

Improved PLA Capabilities at Both the Low and High Ends of the Spectrum

The PLA has accelerated its modernization, vastly increased its capabilities, and conducted a major organizational restructuring focused on developing the ability to conduct integrated joint operations. The cross-strait military balance has shifted decisively in China's favor, with Taiwan hard-pressed to defeat a Chinese attack without U.S. intervention.[186] Assessments differ about whether the PLA has the capability to conduct a successful amphibious invasion of Taiwan at an acceptable level of cost and risk to Beijing, but it is clear that Chinese leaders have many more military options than they did in 1995.[187] Moreover, the PLA can now provide options at all steps of the escalation ladder, ranging from low-level cyber attacks and gray zone operations to high-end military campaigns. This expanded range of options will allow Chinese leaders to calibrate military actions based on their specific goals at a given phase of the crisis. The PLA is more forward deployed, making a large and visible mobilization such as occurred prior to the March 1996 exercises less necessary. The PLA is also regularly employing some of its new capabilities in its ongoing military pressure campaign against Taiwan, including near-daily air incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone. The August 2022 PLA exercises have also normalized an increased PLA air and maritime presence around Taiwan. These factors may reduce strategic warning of a Chinese attack. Political and budgetary constraints have limited Taiwan's response to these significant improvements in PLA capabilities.

PLA Development of Counter-Intervention Capabilities

The U.S. carrier deployment in March 1996 convinced Chinese leaders that they needed to plan for the likelihood of U.S. military intervention in a future conflict over Taiwan. They increased military budgets to fund an ambitious modernization effort, and PLA leaders began planning based on the assumption of U.S. military involvement in a future conflict over Taiwan. The PLA has invested heavily in the development of a range of antiaccess/area-denial capabilities to raise the costs and risks of U.S. intervention, which will both complicate the U.S. decision calculus and increase the time pressure on decisionmakers.[188]

Increased Escalation Risks of Informationized Warfare

Both the U.S. military and PLA visions of future warfare focus on achieving information dominance to produce decisive advantage on the battlefield, via operations in domains including space and cyber, and in the electromagnetic spectrum. Control of information in a conflict and targeting an adversary's decision cycles have become key tenets of PLA operational doctrine.[189] There are no real-world examples of modern militaries fighting this kind of war, but a conflict that includes extensive space and cyber attacks, fought by militaries with advanced conventional precision strike capabilities and nuclear weapons, would pose escalation risks that are much higher than those of 1995–1996.[190] A related Chinese concept called "the Three Warfares" advocates preparation of the information domain prior to and during a conflict through manipulation of public opinion, diplomatically seizing the initiative, and using propaganda to divide society and influence outcomes.[191] Chinese coercive actions in a cross-strait crisis would likely be preceded by an intense propaganda campaign designed to spread misinformation and hinder U.S. and Taiwan decisionmaking. A major military campaign would likely also be preceded by cyber attacks on military command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance networks and on critical infrastructure to pave the way for PLA operations. Such intelligence and cyber preparation of the battlefield may provide warning of a Chinese attack.

Changes in the domestic political environments in China, Taiwan, and the United States since the 1995–1996 missile crisis include:

Authoritarian Turn and Centralization of Power in China

General Secretary Xi Jinping has consolidated and centralized power and enjoys a much stronger political position than Jiang Zemin did at the time of the crisis. Xi has emphasized protection of China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and adopted a more assertive position on territorial disputes. The CCP has also linked unification with Taiwan to its 2049 goal of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese people." The October 2022 National Party Congress further strengthened Xi's political dominance and gave him a third term as CCP General Secretary. China's strident nationalism, increasingly authoritarian political system, and crackdown on Hong Kong have discredited the "one country, two systems" model and made closer political relations unattractive to people in Taiwan. This has had the effect of making persuasion a less effective tool and shifting Chinese policy toward Taiwan in more coercive directions.[192]

Consolidation of Democracy and a Separate Sense of Identity in Taiwan

Democracy has been consolidated in Taiwan, with several successful political transitions between KMT and DPP control. There is an increasing sense of a Taiwan identity separate from China and declining interest in unification, trends which have been strengthened by political developments in Hong Kong and China. At the same time, the Taiwan public is wary of provoking China by overt moves toward formal independence and favors maintaining the status quo of de facto independence. With the KMT in disarray and the DPP consolidating political control, one important question is how future DPP leaders will position the party regarding an increasingly powerful China.[193]

A More Open Media and Internet Environment in Taiwan

The Taiwan media environment has changed greatly since 1995–1996. During the crisis, the KMT was just beginning to relax government control over the media, and Taiwan leaders had a considerable ability to control the messages sent to the Taiwan public and to external audiences, which it used to bolster public confidence. Today, Taiwan has a freer and much more diverse media environment, including pro-KMT, pro-PRC, and DPP-leaning media. The Internet and social media reach the Taiwan public quickly and directly with information, misinformation, and disinformation. This media environment makes Taiwan much more accessible and more vulnerable to Chinese influence operations. Given that Taiwan's will to resist Chinese coercion would be a strategic center of gravity in a future crisis, the information environment would be a critical battleground.[194]

Intensified Partisanship and Increased Isolation Sentiment in the United States

Although domestic politics was a factor in the 1995–1996 crisis, partisan divisions in the United States have deepened significantly, making it more difficult for a future U.S. President to rally support for a confrontation with China over Taiwan. A bipartisan consensus that China poses a major challenge to U.S. interests does not necessarily translate into agreement on appropriate policy responses. As a result, partisan political considerations are likely to weigh more heavily into a U.S. President's decisions about how to respond in a crisis. Moreover, consensus on the China challenge and the importance of the Asia-Pacific region coexists with significant isolationist sentiment stoked by 20 years of U.S. involvement in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Despite these differences, some important things have not changed. Taiwan remains one of China's "core interests" and a Chinese leadership priority. Reunification remains China's ultimate goal, and the Taiwan public—with an increasingly strong sense of a separate identity—

wants no part of it. No resolution is in sight to the underlying political disagreement between China and Taiwan, and the Chinese threat to use force to deter Taiwan independence and coerce Taiwan into unification remains.

Implications for Policymakers

Given these changes in the strategic and political environment, what are the implications for U.S. policymakers? If confronted with a crisis over Taiwan, what challenges would decisionmakers encounter? This section discusses the implications and articulates several recommendations.

Improved and More Diverse PLA Capabilities Will Make It Harder to Determine China's Intentions

In 1996, U.S. policymakers did not expect China to go to war, largely because PLA capabilities were too limited to invade Taiwan, blockade Taiwan's ports, or conduct a sustained strike campaign. There was broad agreement among U.S. and Taiwan analysts that China was conducting a show of force to make a political point. Today's PLA capabilities and reorganized force would make any assessment of Chinese intentions much more difficult. In addition to better air and missile systems, the PLA now has a robust navy and either has or is building the capabilities necessary to conduct an invasion or inflict serious harm on Taiwan's population.[195] The recent August 2022 exercises highlighted the PLA's ability to control the air and maritime space around Taiwan, which could allow it to enact a quarantine or blockade. The PLA is also more forward deployed than in the past, with much of the equipment, troops, and capabilities necessary for a Taiwan contingency already deployed to the Eastern Theater Command. The force movements intelligence community analysts saw in February of 1996 prior to the March exercises are less likely today, or at least will not happen as early and on as large a scale. Finally, China's information and political warfare capabilities are greater, leading to increased misinformation, propaganda, and misleading messages meant to obscure Chinese intentions and confuse U.S. and Taiwan decisionmaking.

These developments highlight the difficulty for today's analysts in determining whether China is simply angry and trying to make a political point (as in 1995–1996) or preparing to undertake military action. China might follow Saddam Hussein's example in Kuwait in 1991, when Iraq masked preparations for its invasion by suggesting that its military mobilization was intended to generate leverage in a dispute with Kuwait about oil revenues. Such an approach would allow China to conduct the necessary political and military mobilization for a

conflict while seeking to maintain operational surprise. Because the PLA is less constrained than it used to be by capability limitations, an accurate assessment would require understanding Chinese leadership intentions; this was a significant problem in 1995–1996 but would be an even greater challenge today. As one interviewee stated, "It's hard to tell the difference now between Chinese coercion and invasion preparations. We [the intelligence community and policymakers] don't understand the degree to which China is already at war."[196] These challenges will make it harder for the U.S. and Taiwan intelligence communities to reach a consensus judgment that China plans to attack, shrinking warning times and giving policymakers more ambiguous assessments.

Higher Costs and Risks of Military Action and Ambiguous Assessments Will Make It Harder for Policymakers to Decide When and How to Act

With more room for analytic disagreement on China's intentions, a barrage of Chinese misinformation and propaganda, significant domestic political considerations, and many equities at stake in both U.S.-China relations and cross-strait relations, policymakers in the United States and Taiwan would have great difficulty deciding when and how to respond to Chinese military threats. For the United States, the tyranny of distance and improved PLA capabilities would create pressures to begin flowing forces to the theater early to strengthen the U.S. military position, despite the attendant escalation risks. The President might be asked to authorize military force movements to preserve U.S. military options well before policymakers had reached a decision on whether the United States should intervene. The escalation risks of fighting a war against a nuclear power would raise the stakes and make a U.S. cost-benefit assessment about whether to intervene challenging. Taiwan policymakers would face similar tough decisions, given the high cost of an armed conflict with China and limited chances of success absent a clear U.S. commitment to intervene. The decision to mobilize Taiwan military reserves would be particularly difficult given the domestic impact and the inherent risk of escalation once China detected Taiwan troop and equipment movements. Taiwan leaders would also confront difficult decisions about employing "use-or-lose" capabilities such as sea mines, which must be deployed early in a conflict to be effective.

Incentives for Consultation and Policy Coordination Are Stronger Today

In the 1995–1996 crisis, there was relatively little high-level consultation and almost no policy coordination between the United States and Taiwan. The negative consequences were limited because the PLA was conducting a show of force rather than an actual use of force.

Today, there are established channels of communication that are regularly employed, better connectivity, and a greater degree of trust than was the case in the past.[197] A future crisis might feature more robust interactions and deeper coordination if the two sides desired it. An imminent Chinese military threat to Taiwan would produce strong incentives for joint actions to deter China's use of force and for coordinated military actions if the United States intervened in response to a PLA attack. Policymakers in Washington would place a high priority on understanding Taiwan's diplomatic actions and military preparations in order to factor them into its communications with Beijing and its own actions, including the possible evacuation of American citizens from China and Taiwan. Policymakers in Taipei would urgently want to understand U.S. assessments of Chinese intentions and whether Washington intended to intervene if China attacked. Much of this information would depend on the unfolding context of the political-military crisis and could not be determined in advance.

One positive outcome from the 1995–1996 crisis is that Pentagon officials became alarmed at how little communication existed between Taiwan and U.S. defense officials and have since upgraded the U.S.-Taiwan military relationship across the board. The Department of Defense has pursued greater information-sharing between the two militaries, including more regular sharing of intelligence assessments of PLA capabilities and intentions. The two countries began a regular dialogue to discuss how each side would react in a military conflict.[198] The United States has sent more uniformed personnel to help Taiwan assess its defense needs and has continued a robust program of arms sales, which are now more constrained by Taiwan defense budgets than by U.S. willingness to sell. The AIT Liaison Affairs and Technical sections are now staffed by Active-duty U.S. officers who are better connected with the Pentagon. Taiwan observes some U.S. exercises, such as the Air Force's Red Flag exercise, and the United States sends senior retired officers to observe Taiwan's Han Guang exercises.[199] Taiwan's defense minister and other senior officials visit the United States more frequently, and U.S. officials in Taiwan keep in frequent touch with Taiwan's leaders.[200] There are more regular contacts between U.S. and Taiwan civilian and military leaders, more channels of communication available, and more opportunities for policy coordination than in 1995–1996.

Significant Impediments May Limit Consultations and Policy Coordination

Although there are strong incentives for deeper U.S.-Taiwan consultations and policy coordination in a crisis, there are some significant impediments. For Taiwan, a military conflict with China would be an existential crisis that would put the island's survival and de facto independence at risk. Taiwan leaders are best equipped to judge the willingness of Taiwan society

and the Taiwan military to fight to resist Chinese military pressure and to reach difficult decisions about what political concessions might be necessary to avert or end a conflict. For its part, the United States has a broader range of global and regional interests at stake, which may give U.S. leaders a different perspective on the best course of action. Differences in interests can make frank consultations and joint action difficult.

There are also practical challenges. Personalities and the degree of trust between U.S. and Taiwan civilian leaders would be critical. Interviewees remarked that the AIT director's relations with the Taiwan president and senior government officials have a significant impact on the quality of U.S.-Taiwan communications; the same is true of the TECRO representative.[201] The 1995–1996 crisis showed that efforts to meddle in domestic politics can erode trust and impede communications and policy coordination. Both sides are also reluctant to share too much information for fear of leaks for political reasons and concerns that sensitive intelligence, policy, and military information might be compromised, given Chinese intelligence's record of successful human and technical penetration operations. This sensitivity is especially acute for information on military force deployments and operational plans. Both the U.S. and the Taiwan military had extensive contingency plans in 1996, but neither side was willing to share with the other.[202] If more extensive coordination did occur, U.S. and Taiwan policymakers would need to decide how much information to share and whether and how to convey or coordinate major decisions with their counterparts on the other side. Decisionmakers should discuss these issues before a crisis erupts to ensure that everyone is on the same page. For U.S. policymakers, a critical question would be deciding which U.S. actions should be revealed publicly, which should be shared with Taiwan privately, and which should be kept secret from both China and Taiwan.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Based on our analysis of the crisis, we have formulated some specific recommendations to help improve U.S.-Taiwan information-sharing, communications, and policy consultation so that policymakers on both sides are better prepared for a future crisis:

- Discuss differences between broader U.S. regional interests and equities and Taiwan's narrower political, economic, and security interests frankly, and seek to limit China's ability to exploit these differences in peacetime, crisis, and conflict. This may require sharing more information on each side's conversations with China, especially in a crisis.

- Consult in advance on major policy initiatives that might have a significant impact on Sino-U.S. or cross-strait relations. Both sides should practice the principle of "no surprises."
- Exercise great caution in lobbying efforts or contacts with the opposition party to pressure the government in power. Such actions can erode trust and impede cooperation in a crisis.
- Increase bilateral cooperation on cybersecurity, information warfare, and countering Chinese propaganda. Taiwan is on the front lines in confronting these threats; the United States should support and learn from Taiwan's defensive measures.
- Conduct regular intelligence consultations on Chinese strategic intentions and joint analysis of PLA force posture, exercises, and capabilities to improve assessments of Chinese military capabilities and identify potential indicators of military attack, especially in terms of intelligence and cyber preparation of the battlefield.
- Restore wargaming/crisis simulation exercises to the annual Monterey Talks to improve mutual understanding of the other side's security perceptions, crisis communications mechanisms, and decisionmaking procedures.
- Develop and maintain a common threat picture as a crisis begins to emerge, including regular discussion of assessments of Chinese intentions and of circumstances that might lead one side to consider unilateral military actions.
- Distinguish areas where active U.S.-Taiwan military coordination would be necessary in a crisis or conflict from areas where coordination would be unnecessary or where deconflicting operations would be sufficient.
- Consider what types of additional military, policy, and intelligence information could be shared in a crisis and how that information should be protected.
- Identify trusted liaison officers in AIT and TECRO who would be conduits for information that each side's crisis management group decided to share.

Conclusion

The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis was a major turning point in East Asian security. It highlighted Taiwan's significance both as an independent democratic actor and as a factor in U.S.-China relations. The outcome of the crisis accelerated PLA modernization and focused Chinese planners on considering how to deter and prepare for U.S. military intervention in a

future crisis. This study has highlighted a number of issues in U.S.-Taiwan information-sharing, consultations, and policy coordination during the crisis. Although the impact of these issues was limited in 1995–1996 because China planned to conduct a show of force rather than an actual use of force, they could be critical in a future crisis in which Beijing might be contemplating war to deter Taiwan independence or to achieve unification. The authors hope the findings and recommendations in this study are helpful in preparing U.S. and Taiwan civilian and military leaders for a crisis that we hope will never come.

Notes

[1] Suisheng Zhao, "Economic Interdependence and Political Divergence: A Background Analysis of the Taiwan Strait Crisis," in *Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan, and the 1995–1996 Crisis*, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: Routledge 1999), 32.

[2] See Deng Xiaoping's December 22, 1984, speech, *Beijing Review*, 28, no. 5 (February 4, 1985), 15, cited in C.L. Chiou, "Dilemmas in China's Reunification Policy Toward Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (April 1986), 469.

[3] China and Taiwan had different views of what the "1992 consensus" actually entailed, with China interpreting it as Taiwan's acceptance of a specific formulation of the "one-China principle" and Taiwan interpreting it as "one China, respective interpretations" [*yizhong gebiao*]. See Shirley A. Kan, *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the "One China" Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 10, 2014), 50–51, available at <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL30341.pdf>; and Su Chi, *Taiwan's Relations with Mainland China: A Tail Wagging Two Dogs* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[4] Zhao, "Economic Interdependence and Political Divergence," 22–23.

[5] The Democratic Progressive Party maintains that Taiwan is already an independent, sovereign state and thus there is no need to declare de jure independence.

[6] See Richard C. Bush, *A One-China Policy Primer*, East Asia Policy Paper 10 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, March 2017), available at <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/one-china-policy-primer.pdf>.

[7] Interviewee 2.

[8] James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 320–322; and Michael Weisskopf and Keith B. Richburg, "Taiwan, in Courting U.S. Officials, Reflects Yearning for Recognition," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1996, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1996/11/12/taiwan-in-courting-us-officials-reflects-yearning-for-recognition/be7f3a78-5869-40d9-8547-70efb0592351/>.

[9] Chinese senior foreign ministry officials felt they had a clear commitment from the U.S. Department of State that Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui would not be allowed to visit and conveyed that message to top Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders; the U.S. policy reversal undercut U.S. credibility and their personal credibility with CCP leaders. Mann, *About Face*, 322, and Qian Qichen, *Ten Episodes in China's Diplomacy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 243–245.

[10] Denny Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[11] Suisheng Zhao, "Changing Leadership Perceptions: The Adoption of a Coercive Strategy," in Zhao, *Across the Taiwan Strait*, 108.

[12] Zhao, "Changing Leadership Perceptions," 105–106.

[13] Andrew Scobell, "Show of Force: Chinese Soldiers, Statesmen, and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 231; Interviewee G, Interviewee A.

[14] "Pragmatic diplomacy" involved abandoning the insistence that countries must choose between relations with China or Taiwan and being willing to have unofficial relations (in the form of representative offices) with foreign countries.

[15] Mann, *About Face*, 320.

[16] "Press Conference by the Press Secretary 20 October 1995," Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/1995/10/1020.html>.

[17] Although Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office Director Benjamin Chao-Chung Lu agreed to "full cooperation and coordination" with the United States, Lee sought to make the visit as official as possible. According to one interviewee, Taiwan did not share a copy of the speech until the day before it was delivered, when it was too late to make any changes to address U.S. concerns. This situation partly reflected different agendas for the visit: Washington wanted it to be a private visit that did not harm U.S.-China relations, while Taipei wanted Lee to appear presidential and respected by the United States. Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations 1989–2000* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 217–221.

[18] Interviewee 11; David M. Lampton, "America's China Policy in the Age of the Finance Minister: Clinton Ends Linkage," *The China Quarterly* 139 (September 1994), 597–621.

[19] Interviewee 11.

[20] The U.S.-China relationship in the years prior to the crisis is detailed by former senior U.S. officials in The National Security Council Project, Oral History Roundtables, *China Policy and the National Security Council* (College Park, MD: Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, and Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, November 4, 1999), available at <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/19991104.pdf>.

[21] Warren Christopher warned Qian Qichen that congressional pressure to grant the visa was mounting, but Qian appears not to have taken note of that warning or conveyed it to senior leaders in Beijing. See Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999), 415.

[22] Secretary of Defense William Perry had longstanding ties with China dating back to the Jimmy Carter administration but did not play a prominent role in China policy prior to the 1995–1996 crisis.

[23] Interviewee 12.

[24] Scobell, "Show of Force," 234; John W. Garver, *Face Off: China, the United States, and Taiwan's Democratization* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 61–62.

[25] *[Redacted] Decision Making and the Missile Firing Exercise*, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) declassified report, September 11, 1995.

[26] For a detailed discussion on China's willingness to use force to arrest adverse trends, see Thomas J. Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force" in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 50–85.

[27] Robert S. Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force," *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000), 89; Scobell, "Show of Force," 232; Arthur S. Ding, "The Lessons of the 1995–1996 Military Taiwan Strait Crisis: Developing a New Strategy Toward the United States and Taiwan," in *The Lessons of History: The Chinese People's Liberation Army at 75*, ed. Laurie Burkitt, Andrew Scobell, and Larry M. Wortzel (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2003), 380–383.

[28] As a Chinese spokesman from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated: "What we are going to do is make the U.S. realize the importance of U.S.-China relations to prompt it to take the right track"; "Wu Barrier to Jiang Visit," *South China Morning Post*, August 1, 1995.

[29] Qian Qichen describes this as the issue China was most concerned with. Qian, *Ten Episodes in China's Diplomacy*, 249.

[30] Ding, "The Lessons of the 1995–1996 Military Taiwan Strait Crisis," 383.

[31] Ibid., 380–383; "Commanding the Counter–'Taiwan Independence' Exercise," in *The Biography of Zhang Wannian* [张万年传] (Beijing: People's Liberation Army [PLA] Press [解放军出版社], 2011).

[32] Qian, *Ten Episodes in China's Diplomacy*, 246.

[33] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 94.

[34] The DF-15 is the PLA designation; DIA refers to the missile as the CSS-6, and some open-source reports use M-9, which is the designator for the export version.

[35] *[Redacted] Decision Making and the Missile Firing Exercise*. According to John Garver's account (based on Hong Kong press sources), the decision was reached at an expanded meeting of the Taiwan Affairs leading small group. See Garver, *Face Off*, 61–62.

[36] Author's interview with PLA officer, 1997.

[37] A blue whale in the shape of Taiwan was the symbol of Taiwan's pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party. Beijing used Xinhua, the CCP's official mouthpiece, to announce that the PLA would conduct "a training for launching a surface-to-surface guided missile into the open sea." Beijing warned foreign vessels and aircraft to avoid the area. See "PLA Announces Missile Launch Training on East China Sea," Xinhua, July 18, 1995; Garver, *Face Off*, 74.

[38] Scobell, "Show of Force"; *[Redacted] Decision Making and the Missile Firing Exercise*.

[39] This statement was made by Warren Christopher when he met with Qian Qichen on August 1, 1995, in Brunei. Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 96.

[40] Garver, *Face Off*, 85–87.

[41] Ibid., 87.

[42] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 96.

[43] "Wu Barrier to Jiang Visit."

[44] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 96.

[45] Qian, *Ten Episodes in China's Diplomacy*, 248–249.

[46] Yuan Le Yi [亓樂義], *Defensive Action: A Record of the 1996 Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis* [捍衛行動:1996台海飛彈危機風雲錄] (Taipei: Li Ming Cultural Enterprise Co., 2006).

[47] Andrea Koppel and Claire Shipman, "Human Rights Activist Convicted in China," CNN, August 24, 1995, available at <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9508/Harry_Wu/indexam.html>.

[48] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 236–238.

[49] Qian, *Ten Episodes in China's Diplomacy*, 248–249.

[50] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 238–243.

[51] Alison Mitchell, "China's President and Clinton Meet to Repair Fences," *New York Times*, October 25, 1995, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/25/world/un-50-clinton-jiang-china-s-president-clinton-meet-repair-fences.html>; Qian, *Ten Episodes in China's Diplomacy*, 250–251.

[52] Ding, "The Lessons of the 1995–1996 Military Taiwan Strait Crisis," 384.

[53] "Commanding the Counter–'Taiwan Independence' Exercise."

[54] Garver, *Face Off*, 92.

[55] Ibid., 93.

[56] Yuan, *Defensive Action.*

[57] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 102–103; Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 243.

[58] See Shelley Rigger, *Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 172–174.

[59] Garver, *Face Off*, 95.

[60] "Commanding the Counter–'Taiwan Independence' Exercise."

[61] Interviewee 5 and Interviewee 4; "Commanding the Counter–'Taiwan Independence' Exercise."

[62] China was fully aware that the missile exercises could have a counterproductive effect and actually bolster support for Lee, but that "there was too much at stake not to take a strong stand." An interviewed researcher with the Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies emphasized that Chinese leaders believed "that they had no other choice." See *[Redacted] Decision Making and the Missile Firing Exercise*.

[63] *Chinese Exercise Strait 961: 8–25 March 1996* (Washington, DC: Office of Naval Intelligence, n.d.), public release from the National Security Archive, available at <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB19/docs/doc14.pdf>. While political tension determined the timing and location of Strait 961, it is likely that China would have conducted some type of large-scale, tri-service exercise in the first half of 1996 to evaluate the PLA's capability to operate in a joint environment.

[64] Zhao, "Economic Interdependence and Political Divergence," 22–23.

[65] *Chinese Exercise Strait 961*.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.; Garver, *Face Off*, 101. The PLA's *The Biography of Zhang Wannian* claims that two DF-15s were fired on March 8, and another pair of missiles were fired into the northern and southern exclusion zones on March 11.

[68] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 107.

[69] *Chinese Exercise Strait 961*.

[70] Zhao, "Economic Interdependence and Political Divergence," 22–23.

[71] Garver, *Face Off*, 87–88.

[72] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 232.

[73] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 96.

[74] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 247; Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 15.

[75] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 247–251.

[76] Ibid., 251.

[77] Interviewee 1.

[78] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 247; Patrick Tyler, "As China Threatens Taiwan, It Makes Sure the U.S. Listens," *New York Times*, January 24, 1996; Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 5.

[79] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 106–107.

[80] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 252.

[81] Ibid., 252–255.

[82] Mann, *About Face*, 336.

[83] For a detailed discussion on Liu Huaqiu's visit and discussions with U.S. leaders, see Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 252–254.

[84] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 109.

[85] Interviewee 16.

[86] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 257. Interviewees also noted that the carriers did not transit through the strait, which might have been too escalatory, but were in the region.

[87] *Chinese Exercise Strait 961*, 7; Mann, *About Face*, 337.

[88] Interviewee A.

[89] Lampton, "America's China Policy in the Age of the Finance Minister."

[90] Interviewee 6.

[91] Interviewee 11; *China Policy and the National Security Council*, 39.

[92] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*; Interviewee 12.

[93] Interviewee 2.

[94] *China Policy and the National Security Council*, 31.

[95] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 255.

[96] Interviewee 12; Mann, *About Face*, 337.

[97] Interviewee 16.

[98] The decision to stand up the intelligence task force was partly based on warnings from Chas Freeman's October 1995 meetings in Beijing that the PLA was going to attack Taiwan and partly due to other intelligence reporting. See Chas W. Freeman, Jr., "U.S.-China Military Relations: From Enmity to Entente and Maybe Back Again," in *Beyond Engagement: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*, ed. Anne F. Thurston (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), n58.

[99] Interviewee 13.

[100] Interviewee 13, Interviewee 4, and Interviewee 5.

[101] Interviewee 2, Interviewee 4, and Interviewee 5.

[102] Interviewee 5.

[103] Interviewee 2.

[104] Interviewee 4.

[105] Interviewee 5, Interviewee 2, and Interviewee 4. The Hong Kong press issued scathing propaganda against Lee, with inflammatory language meant to influence China's and Taiwan's domestic opinion of Lee. Garver, *Face Off*, 104.

[106] Interviewee 11.

[107] One analyst noted that senior policymakers have a large appetite for raw intelligence during a crisis; one challenge was to debunk PLA misinformation passed to the United States through controlled sources. Interviewee 5.

[108] Interviewee 3.

[109] *Chinese Exercise Strait 961*, 1; Interviewee 13 and Interviewee 4.

[110] "Lien Calls for Rationalism, Peace," Central News Agency, in FBIS Daily Report, China, July 20, 1995.

[111] Interviewee A; and Yuan, *Defensive Action*, 45–46.

[112] Pang Jiajun [龐家均], *Intelligence Notes* [情报札记] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Cultural Arts Publishing [香港文化艺术出版社], 2010), chapters 1–2. The name is a pseudonym; the author is Pang Dawei, former deputy director of the Taiwan Military Intelligence Bureau.

[113] Interviewee A.

[114] Yuan, *Defensive Action*, 45–46.

[115] Interviewee A.

[116] Yuan, *Defensive Action*, 59. This concern about mainland fishing boats may have stemmed from earlier crises over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, which Taiwan also claims. For instance, the PRC dispatched more than 80 armed fishing vessels to the islands in 1978. See Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip C. Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands," *International Security* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1998–1999), 126.

[117] Yuan, *Defensive Action*, 53–59.

[118] Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 5.

[119] Interviewee A.

[120] *[Redacted] Decision Making and the Missile Firing Exercise*; Interviewee F.

[121] *[Redacted] Decision Making and the Missile Firing Exercise*; Garver, *Face Off*, 33–34.

[122] Yuan, *Defensive Action*, 230.

[123] For example, General Luo Ben-li [羅本立] visited the islands to boost troop morale and reinforce the message of caution. Interviewee F, Interviewee E, and Interviewee A; "PLA Circular Proposes Seizing Outlying Taiwan Islands," *South China Morning Post,* March 8, 1996; and Yuan, *Defensive Action*.

[124] Interviewee F.

[125] Interviewee B, Interviewee E, Interviewee F.

[126] Interviewee H and Interviewee F.

[127] *Chinese Exercise Strait 961*, 1.

[128] Yuan, *Defensive Action*, 230.

[129] Ibid., 230.

[130] *[Redacted] Decision Making and the Missile Firing Exercise*.

[131] Central News Agency (Taipei), November 26, 1995, published as "Coverage of Latest Mainland Military Exercise Termed 'Routine' Drill," FTS19951127000441, FBIS Daily Report, China, November 26, 1995..

[132] "PLA Circular Proposes Seizing Outlying Taiwan Islands."

[133] In 1999, China executed Major General Liu Liankun and Senior Colonel Shao Zhengzhong for spying for Taiwan during the missile crisis. Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Executes Two for Spying for Taiwan," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1999, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1999/09/14/china-executes-two-for-spying-for-taiwan/2572942a-153e-41d2-8ecd-fa209f2779f2/>; Interviewee G.

[134] *The Biography of Zhang Wannian*, chapter 26.

[135] Pang, *Intelligence Notes*.

[136] Interviewee D, Interviewee 7.

[137] Interviewee 12, Interviewee D.

[138] Interviewee D, Interviewee C.

[139] See, for example, Desmond Ball, "Signals Intelligence in Taiwan," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7, no. 11 (November 1995), 506–510; and Wendell Minnick, "Taiwan-USA Link Up on SIGINT," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, January 24, 2001.

[140] Interviewee A, Interviewee 4, Interviewee 5, Interviewee 15.

[141] Interviewee F, Interviewee D, Interviewee C.

[142] Interviewee 8, Interviewee 9.

[143] Interviewee 5, Interviewee 4.

[144] Interviewee 9.

[145] Interviewee 13, Interviewee A.

[146] For one look at Lee's advisors on policy toward the mainland, see Wang Ming-I, "Who Is Lee Teng-hui's Brain Trust?" *Chiu-Shin Nian-Tai*, February 1, 1996, 68–69, in FBIS Daily Report, China.

[147] Interviewee 9, Interviewee 10, Interviewee D.

[148] Interviewee 9, Interviewee 10, Interviewee D, Interviewee C.

[149] Ambassador Winston Lord, interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, April 28, 1998, 592, available at <https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Lord,%20Winston.pdf>.

[150] Interviewee 10, Interviewee 6, and Interviewee 1; Howard H. Lange, interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs [Oral] History Project, June 20, 2000, available at <https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Lange,%20Howard%20H.toc.pdf>.

[151] Interviewee 9.

[152] Lord interview; Lange interview; Interviewee 8, Interviewee 9, Interviewee 10.

[153] Lange interview. Senators Jesse Helms, Alphonse D'Amato, and Frank Murkowski met with Lee at Cornell.

[154] Lange interview, 146–148; Interviewee 10. However, one Taiwan interviewee noted that Benjamin Lu met and got briefings from Cassidy & Associates on their lobbying efforts; Interviewee D.

[155] Lord interview, 887–889.

[156] See "Taiwan: Representative Meets Assistant Secretary Lord," in FBIS Daily Report, China, March 15, 1996.

[157] Interviewee 10.

[158] Interviewee C, Interviewee D.

[159] Interviewee 9, Interviewee 10.

[160] Interviewee 5.

[161] Interviewee D.

[162] Interviewee D, Interviewee F.

[163] Interviewee D.

[164] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 259.

[165] Interviewee A.

[166] Interviewee A.

[167] Interviewee A.

[168] Interviewee 12, Interviewee D.

[169] Interviewee F, Interviewee A. This theme is also evident in the Yuan's *Defensive Action*.

[170] Interviewee 5, Interviewee 4, Interviewee 13.

[171] Interviewee 5, Interviewee 4, Interviewee 9; Lord interview.

[172] Interviewee 1.

[173] Interviewee 2, Interviewee 13, Interviewee 4, Interviewee 5; See also "China's Taiwan Strategy: The Civil-Military Dimension," in the declassified DIA Military Intelligence Digest 355-5A, December 21, 1995, National Security Archive.

[174] Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen*, 255–256.

[175] Ross, "The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," 108. See also Secretary of Defense William Perry, speech at National Press Club, Washington, DC, February 28, 1996.

[176] Interviewee A.

[177] *China Policy and the National Security Council*, 28.

[178] Interviewee 12.

[179] Interviewee 2.

[180] Interviewee 5, Interviewee 7.

[181] Qian, *Ten Episodes in Chinese Diplomacy*,

[182] Freeman, "U.S.-China Military Relations," n58; "China: Avoiding a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 13, 2001, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2001/03/13/china-avoiding-self-fulfilling-prophecy-pub-9505>.

[183] Saunders's experience in dialogues with PLA officers and Chinese officials, 2011–2018.

[184] *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, October 2022), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

[185] See Thomas F. Lynch III, ed., *Strategic Assessment 2020: Into a New Era of Great Power Competition* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2020).

[186] For a detailed description of the cross-strait military balance, see Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power 1996–2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), available at <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR392/RAND_RR392.pdf>; and *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 116–120, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

[187] For recent assessments, see the testimony of Lonnie Henley, Fiona S. Cunningham, and Michael Hunzeker at the U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing, "Deterring PRC Aggression Toward Taiwan," February 18, 2021, available at <https://www.uscc.gov/hearings/deterring-prc-aggression-toward-taiwan>; and Joel Wuthnow et al., ed., *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2022).

[188] Phillip C. Saunders, "U.S.-China Relations and Chinese Military Modernization," in *After Engagement: Dilemmas in U.S.-China Security Relations*, ed. Jacques deLisle and Avery Goldstein (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2021), 267–295; *Annual Report to Congress 2020*, 72–81.

[189] Shou Xiaosong, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 130, available at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2021-02-08%20Chinese%20Military%20Thoughts-%20In%20their%20own%20words%20Science%20of%20Military%20Strategy%202013.pdf?ver=NxAWg4BPw_NylEjxaha8Aw%3d%3d>; Jeffrey Engstrom, *Systems Confrontation and System Destruction Warfare: How the Chinese People's Liberation Army Seeks to Wage Modern Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), available at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1708.html>.

[190] Avery Goldstein, "First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in U.S.-China Relations," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013), 49–89, available at <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/IS3704_pp049-089.pdf>; Phillip C. Saunders, "The Military Factor in U.S.-China Strategic Competition," in *Managing Strategic Competition: Rethinking U.S.-China Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Evan Medeiros (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, forthcoming).

[191] Elsa Kania, "The PLA's Latest Thinking on the Three Warfares," *China Brief* 16, no. 13 (August 22, 2016), available at <https://jamestown.org/program/the-plas-latest-strategic-thinking-on-the-three-warfares/>.

[192] See Phillip C. Saunders, "Three Logics of Chinese Policy Toward Taiwan: An Analytic Framework," in Wuthnow et al., *Crossing the Strait*, 35–64.

[193] See Richard C. Bush, *Difficult Choices: Taiwan's Quest for Security and the Good Life* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2021).

[194] Interviewee 14.

[195] For a description and analysis of PLA military options, see Michael Casey, "Firepower Strike, Blockade, Landing: PLA Campaigns for a Cross-Strait Conflict," paper presented at the 2020 CAPS-RAND-NDU PLA conference, November 18–20, 2020. For an assessment of PLA force modernization related to a Taiwan contingency, see *Annual Report to Congress 2020*, 116–118.

[196] Interviewee 7.

[197] Interviewee 14; See Michael J. Green, Richard C. Bush, and Bonnie S. Glaser, *Toward a Stronger U.S.-Taiwan Relationship* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2020), 22–24, available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/toward-stronger-us-taiwan-relationship>.

[198] Interviewee 7.

[199] Interviewee 7.

[200] Interviewee 14.

[201] Interviewee 14, Interviewee 9, Interviewee 10.

[202] Interviewee A, Interviewee F, Interviewee 5, Interviewee 15.

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