

Crisis Deterrence, Cross-Strait Relations, and Changing U.S.-China Landscape

MA Initial Thesis by Kevin Lau

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Introduction

In March 2019, the naval force of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the regular armed force of the People's Republic of China (PRC)¹, was accused of crossing the Taiwan Strait's Median Line. Recently, the PLA deployed 18 fighter aircraft into the Taiwan Strait, of which 12 reached and passed the Median Line, later claiming that such a line between Taiwan and Mainland China did not exist. Such an extensive and egregious violation of the cross-strait median line was unprecedented in the past two decades.² It was furthermore in contrast to Beijing's relative restraint in using military force since the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995-1996. This thesis strives to answer several questions. First, given the substantial differences in terms of the military and economic capabilities of the two parties, why has the PRC eschewed serious military escalation in the past thirty years? Second, what is the reason for the PRC's departure from its stance of non-escalation recently?

More concretely, this thesis attempts to explore, why, during the past thirty years, the PRC government has chosen to restrain itself from engaging in military crises against the Republic of China (ROC) at some periods but not others.³ In other words, this thesis seeks to identify and explain what conditions determine whether the PRC will exercise relative restraint – by applying the concept of self-deterrence in international relations theory. Based on three case studies covering three periods during which the ROC was ruled by leaders not in favor of re-unification, this thesis argues that promotion of de-

¹ PRC is the de-facto ruling government of Mainland China

² William Zhang, "Taiwan scrambles fighter jets after PLA spy plane enters air defence zone," *SCMP*, published on 2 Oct 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1580792/taiwan-scrambles-fighter-jets-after-pla-spy-planes-repeatedly-breach>

³ ROC is the de-facto ruling government of Taiwan

facto independence on the part of the ROC is a necessary condition for the PRC to escalate its actions against the ROC government. To explain the relative restraint of Beijing in the wake of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, this thesis asks if such a difference in relative restraint could be ascribed to differences in U.S.-China relations. It is postulated that when U.S.-China relations are good, the promotion of de-facto independence by the ROC does not produce crisis escalation. Whereas, when U.S.-China relations are bad, promotion of de-facto independence is liable to generate crisis escalation.

The argument of the thesis will be analyzed within the following framework. First, it will analyze the literature on deterrence, and how the concept of self-deterrence is relevant in this case study. Second, it will outline the hypothesis and explain why better U.S.-China relations will lead to relative restraint by the PRC in terms of military escalation, and why the deterioration of bilateral relations lead to the opposite. Third, it presents the research methodology, followed by a brief introduction to the case studies. The three case studies will be based on the three periods from the early 1990s: how the improvement of U.S.-China relations in 1997 had led China to refrain from military escalation in the latter period of Lee Teng Hui's era (1992-2000); how the continued cooperation between the U.S. and China and the diplomatic isolation of the ROC resulted in a similar outcome during Chen Shui-bian's era (2000-2008); and how the deterioration of U.S.-China relations since 2018 has led to military escalation afterwards (2018 onwards).

Deterrence and Self-Deterrence

In his seminal work *Arms and Influence*, Schelling introduces the concept of deterrence through explaining the shift from “the application of brute force” to a strategy based upon a “diplomacy of violence”. In particular, Schelling focuses on the utilization of military capabilities as a kind of bargaining power, bearing in mind that military victory had ceased to be the ultimate objective since the advent of the nuclear era.⁴ Equally important, he argues that deterrence requires the capability of estimating the intentions and military power of the enemy, and that it would require the ability to influence the intentions of the attacker. Yet, deterrence would lead to the problem of credibility, as it would require the attacker to believe a particular threat to be credible. Therefore, for deterrence to be robust, a country will need to commit itself to a position where the failure to react to its threats are inconceivable.⁵

Other scholars of international relations have further refined the notion of deterrence and the determinants of successful deterrence. Specifically, deterrence can be defined as a threat by one state to prevent another state from embarking upon some course of action resulting in a state of affairs that the former state would endeavor to avoid. In other words, deterrence is obtained when the defender threatens retaliation that is unacceptable to the attacker, who fears an unbearable burden or unavoidable loss, and elects not to escalate the conflict. It aims to convince the attacker that the costs of non-

⁴ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966): 1-34

⁵ Ibid., 35-56

compliance will be larger than the benefits thereof.⁶ It is based on the assumption that states are rational actors that maximize their own interests based on cost-benefit calculations. The main difference between deterrence and compellence is that the former is designed to deter the attacker not to undertake an action, while the latter seeks to compel the state to undertake an action.⁷

In general terms, success of deterrence is more probable when the defender is capable of making credible threats which are communicable to their opponents. Equally important is that the attacker is convinced that the defender would execute these threats, which would usually be predicated upon a history of similar behavior by the defender.⁸ Additionally, the mechanism of deterrence can be divided into deterrence by denial or deterrence by punishment, where denial is to prevent the attacker from achieving its objectives, and punishment implies a threat of punishment that enhances the costs of non-compliance by physical retribution.⁹ This logic of deterrence is applicable to crisis escalation by a potential attacker as I will elaborate upon below.

Nonetheless, conventional deterrence theory is also subject to various criticisms. In this regard, the existing literature on deterrence neglects the possibility that motives and intentions of other states can change, and so fail to explore how and under what conditions can hostile relations be transformed into peaceful ones.¹⁰ Conventional

⁶ Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983): 1-30; Glenn Snyder *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961): 3-51; Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," *World Politics* 42 (July 1990): 466-501.

⁷ Morgan, *Conceptual Analysis*, 1-30

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Robert Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," *World Politics* 31, no.2 (1979): 291-301.

deterrence theory has also ignored the possibility of using the promise of reward in tandem with the threat of force. For instance, the Cuban missile crisis was ended because the White House had shown not only its resolve to deter, but also its willingness to reward.¹¹ Equally important, conventional deterrence theory is “grounded in the experience, culture, and values of the West”, and the rationality of policy-makers under stressful circumstances might well have been overestimated.¹²

A separate criticism is that, according to T.V. Paul, the existing literature fails to distinguish between ability and willingness in deterrence, both of which are crucial for deterrence to work. According to Paul, the concept of self-deterrence refers to the “unwillingness to use coercive military power against an adversary, despite a declaratory threat to do so, due to self-imposed as opposed to other-imposed constraints”.¹³ Such a definition of self-deterrence is particularly valuable in allowing us to understand the restraint of the PRC toward Taiwan when it could have escalated crises to the level of military conflict. In this thesis, I seek to argue that the PRC’s self-deterrence in crisis escalation is underlay by the need to safeguard its domestic support which is undermined by Taiwanese separatism. The more acutely this need is felt, the less potent self-deterrence becomes, and greater is the likelihood that the PRC government will resort to crisis escalation to safeguard its domestic legitimacy. However, if its underlying concern with Taiwanese separatism is assuaged by U.S. reassurances to protect the status quo, the PRC government will be more self-deterred from escalation in the Taiwan Strait.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ T.V. Paul, “Self-Deterrence: Nuclear Weapons and the Enduring Credibility Challenge,” *International Journal* 71, no. 1 (March 2016): 20–40.

Similarly, Jervis contends that the concept of self-deterrence should be circumscribed to factors “other than retaliation by others”. In his chapter of “Deterrence, Rogue States, and the U.S. Policy” under TV Paul’s *Strategy in the Global Age*, Jervis states that although the military forces of the United States are capable of deterring direct attacks from rouge states such as North Korea and Iran, broader deterrence of other actions by these states is more difficult.¹⁴ To be more specific, he mentions as one of the reasons for the U.S.’ “self-deterrence” the differences in the military capabilities of the U.S. and these rogue states, which he proposes would enhance the degree of self-deterrence. For instance, Jervis suggests that public opinion, either domestic and international, would be offended when excessive force is utilized. Accordingly, he takes the view that the concept of “self-deterrence” cannot be applied to the case of Soviet deterrence or military response against the U.S. during the Cold War, which is more properly ascribed to a fear of retaliation by the other state.¹⁵

In this thesis, I focus not on deterrence in the conventional terms of preventing military attack, but on crisis deterrence. The main difference is that the former focuses on war: deterrence, in conventional terms, means not waging war due to fear of retaliation or inflicting of loss by the attacker. However, under crisis deterrence, PRC’s relative restraint is not determined solely by the absence of war between Taiwan and Beijing, but by the lack of crisis escalation involving military maneuvers from the latter. In other words, this thesis deals with the changing degree of military involvement or pressure, such as the violation of the Taiwan Strait Median Line by the PLA forces, but which fall

¹⁴ Robert Jervis, “Deterrence, Rogue States, and the U.S. Policy” in *Complex Deterrence* edited by T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan and James J. Wirtz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 150-155

¹⁵ Ibid.

short of full-scale war. Thus, the threat of American intervention could only be a deterrent against the forceful unification of the ROC by the PRC, but not crisis escalation as presented in this study.

Further, a distinction is drawn here between extended deterrence and self-deterrence, as the focus of this thesis is on the latter. Extended deterrence is a concept which can be defined as a threat by the defender to prevent the attacker from embarking upon some course of action against the protégé, a third-party state which the defender aims to protect.¹⁶ As with general deterrence, the notion of extended deterrence can be divided into extended-general and extended-intermediate deterrence. In the latter case, the attacker is seriously considering attacking the protégé and the defender is aware of such consideration.¹⁷ Therefore, policy-makers of the defending state threaten to use retaliatory forces to prevent this attack. Whereas in the former case, the attacker is not engaged in preparation for the use of force against the protégé, although the threat by the defender against the attacker still exists.¹⁸

Additionally, there has been further examination by other of the conditions under which extended deterrence would be more successful. For instance, Danilovic argues that the existing literature on extended deterrence has focused too extensively on “on the defender’s ties with the protégé”. She claims that the credibility of external threats may differ depending on whether there exists a high degree of “importance of ties between a

¹⁶ Paul Huth, “Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War,” *The American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (1988): 424.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

major power and the entire region where the protégé is located”.¹⁹ In particular, if the protégé is located in a region more important to the defender, it is more likely that the defender would defend the protégé from the attacker. Equally importantly, if the same region is important to two or more major powers, the possibility of serious conflict would be correspondingly higher.²⁰

The existing literature on cross-strait relations focuses either on extended deterrence (the PRC’s fear of American intervention in the event of forceful unification) or deterrence in terms of how the PRC deters Taiwan from making any formal declaration of independence. Extended deterrence involves discouraging attacks by an aggressor on a third state, usually an ally or partner of the deterring state. In this regard, too, a threat by the deterring state has to be credible. However, such extended deterrence is directed towards forceful unification by the PRC and not other forms of military escalation such as crisis escalation. This thesis does not deal with extended deterrence, despite the relevance of American policy on this topic.

My argument differs from other accounts of extended deterrence such as by Zagare and Kilgour who contend that the defender is more likely to support the protégé when the latter is more disloyal to the former.²¹ That argument assumes that the attitudes of the defender depend by and large on the strategies and behavior of the protégé, which I would argue in my theory is not the case. In fact, the behavior of the U.S. towards

¹⁹ Vensa Danilovic, “The Sources of Threat Credibility in Extended Deterrence,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 3 (2001): 348-351

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Frank Zagare, and D. Marc Kilgour, “The Deterrence-Versus-Restraint Dilemma in Extended Deterrence: Explaining British Policy in 1914,” *International Studies Review* 8, no. 4 (2006): 623-41.

Taiwan is predicated on the ROC's loyalty to the U.S. or the possibility of re-alignment, not disloyalty. As will emerge from the analysis in the upcoming section, the orientation of the White House's policy towards Taiwan depends largely upon U.S.-China relations, where a more cooperative relationship between the two propels the U.S. to adopt a less tolerant position towards the de-facto independence of the ROC.

Trager further argues that the strength of the defender's threat to defend the protégé will have an impact on the latter's behavior, as the protégé will adopt more aggressive policies vis-a-vis the attacker if the threat is potent.²² This increases the likelihood of military conflict as it entails the need of the defender to abide by its commitments to protect the protégé or risk its destruction.

My approach differs from his argument in several ways. First, domestic legitimacy still carries a heavier weight in my theory, which is manifested in the point on the changing Chinese nationalism that I will demonstrate later. Second, barring military unification, the defender's threat to defend the protégé in the event of military escalation remains a hollow one, and on this point my theory is not compatible with Trager's analysis on extended deterrence.

Existing Arguments on Crisis Deterrence

Applying the theory of deterrence on cross-strait relations, Zhang and Bush contend that stable deterrence in the Taiwan Strait will not endure should there be significant change in the regional balance of power. More specifically, as China emerges as a superpower in the international system matching the U.S., the maintenance of

²² Robert Trager, "Diplomatic Signaling among Multiple States," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (2015): 635-647

divided rule across the Taiwan Strait will become exceedingly difficult.²³ Also, according to the Zhang, the ROC government faces two rather discouraging scenarios: first, once the PRC becomes a superpower, it is likely to give up its longstanding strategy of peaceful unification, in which case the ROC government can hardly defend itself; second, the changes in balance of power will continuously undermine the U.S.' willingness to defend Taiwan. In the case of military conflict between Taipei and Beijing, military intervention from the U.S. might become less plausible.²⁴

On the other hand, Ross argues that he is optimistic about stability in the Taiwan Strait as long as Beijing continues to recognize the capacity and resolve of the U.S. to defend the ROC and does not invade the ROC.²⁵ Meanwhile, Beijing continues to possess both the capacity and resolve to militarily invade the ROC, in case the latter formally declares its independence, a fact which the ROC is highly cognizant of. Simply put, Ross is convinced that stability in the Taiwan Strait could be maintained by dual deterrence, that is, the PRC's deterrence on the ROC; the U.S.' deterrence on the PRC.²⁶

Yet Ross' analysis of the concept of "stability" is not consistent enough and rather too narrow. For Ross, stability is defined by the lack of a major war between the PRC and the ROC, in which American forces will also be involved. In this model, military

²³ Baohui Zhang, "Peaceful unification vs. divided rule: Assessing political relations across the Taiwan Strait" in *New Dynamics in Cross-Taiwan Strait Relations* edited by Weixing Hu (New York: Routledge, 2009): 115-129; Richard C. Bush, *Uncharted Strait: The Future of China-Taiwan Relations*. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2012): 137-158

²⁴ Zhang, "Peaceful unification vs. divided rule: Assessing political relations across the Taiwan Strait," 115-129

²⁵ Robert Ross, "Navigating the Taiwan Strait: Deterrence, Escalation Dominance, and U.S.-China Relations," *International Security* 27, no. 2 (2002): 48-55.

²⁶ Ibid.

escalation by the PRC against the ROC, however rapid or extensive, including invasion of the Taiwan Strait Median Line, cannot put relations out of the realm of “stability”, nor can they pose any challenge to mutual deterrence by Ross’ standards.²⁷ In so defining “stability”, Ross’s analysis fails to ascribe proper weight to crisis escalation in the Taiwan Strait. In fact, in the past thirty years, the ROC has been helmed by no less than three presidents who had professed pro-independence views, during which the PRC had attempted to violate the Taiwan Strait twice, first in 1995-1996 in the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, and now in the ongoing crisis since 2019.

The existing literature has not offered a robust framework as to how crisis escalation occurs, which happens not in a state of stability yet falls short of a forceful unification by the PRC. My central hypothesis is that crisis escalation by the PRC is determined not so much by the political philosophies of the ROC leader, but rather, whether they have acted to voice and promote de-facto independence. In fact, the two major crises involving military escalation occurred not only when the ROC was ruled by leaders who did not share any sense of national affinity with the PRC, they occurred during periods in which Lee and Tsai were actively promoting de-facto independence for Taiwan.

It is therefore crucial to examine the reasons behind ROC’s promotion of de-facto independence during the three main periods defined above, and to show that such reasons are exogenous to the behavior of China and the U.S. To explain the promotion of de-facto independence during Lee’s era, I will examine the background that paved the way for the Cornell University Speech by President Lee in June 1995, where he alluded to the

²⁷ Ibid.

independent status of the ROC through circumscribing the concept of “Republic of China”²⁸. I will discuss the Qiandao Lake incident in 1994 as an important but often neglected factor that contributed to the promotion of de-facto independence.

The incident occurred in Hangzhou, a city in Zhejiang Province of Eastern China, where 24 Taiwanese tourists, alongside their tour guides, were kidnapped and murdered by a local armed mugger. Yet, the case was mishandled by the regional authorities, and the local police failed to acknowledge the incident promptly.²⁹ Such incompetence led to widespread anger among the Taiwanese population. It also led to a burst of Taiwanese nationalism, with survey results showing a sudden spike in support towards Taiwan independence.³⁰ Seen in this light, Lee’s abrupt adoption of his pro-independence attitude was a reflection rather than a catalyst of the sudden burst in pro-independence attitudes among the Taiwanese population

In addition, low approval ratings toward the ROC presidents have also contributed to the promotion of de-facto independence. Li, James, and Drury have found that during the years leading up to Taiwan’s 2004 presidential election, the drop in president’s approval rate was highly correlated with Chen’s pro-independence rhetoric.³¹ This was

²⁸ David Chen, “Taiwan’s President Tiptoes Around Politics at Cornell,” *New York Times*, published on June 10, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/10/world/taiwan-s-president-tiptoes-around-politics-at-cornell.html>.

²⁹ Sina News, “Di Liushiqi qi Qiandao hu Shijian [67 Volume: Qiandao Incident],” published on Nov 07, 2008, news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-11-07/100716608211.shtml

³⁰ Wangyi News, “Liangyan Guanxi Danizhuan: 1994 Nian Qiandao hushijian [Turning Point of Cross-strait relations: 1994 Qiandao Incident],” published on Apr 26, 2020, <https://www.163.com/dy/article/FB5FI3GB0543781A.html>

³¹ Yitan Li, Patrick James, and A. Cooper Drury, “Diversionary Dragons, or ‘Talking Tough in Taipei’: Cross-Strait Relations in the New Millennium,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 3 (2009): 369–98. doi:10.1017/S1598240800006718.

particularly true when Chen (2002-2008) and Tsai (2017-2019) promoted de-facto independence in the midst of low approval ratings. While it is possible that the low approval ratings could be reducible to Beijing's behavior, the sudden drop in Chen's approval ratings is more logically attributed to the economic recession from 2001 to 2002, while the drop in Tsai's ratings are better understood to have been caused by her administrative incompetence in 2017, including the widespread power outage and her reform of the ROC's pension system. This thesis will examine in greater detail each of the above reasons for pro-separatist advocacy in the case studies section.

From Beijing's perspective, allowing pro-separatist advocacy or policy in the ROC would undermine the legitimacy of the PRC government. This is so because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) bases at least part of its legitimacy upon it being the protector of China's national sovereignty, and its public is vehement in its opposition to Taiwanese independence.³² Thus, it would be logical to infer that when ROC leaders promote de-facto independence, PRC citizens would perceive it as a failure of the Central Government to protect Chinese national sovereignty. In this regard, military escalation by the PRC serves several purposes.

First, it can demonstrate to the domestic audience of the PRC that in the face of pro-independence actions or policies in the ROC, the PRC government is proactive and decisive in taking action to compel the ROC regime to back down. Second, a policy of escalation can demarcate the boundaries of acceptable behavior from the ROC and set

³² Heike Holbig and Bruce Gilley, "Reclaiming Legitimacy in China," *Politics and Policy* 38 (2010): 395–402; BBC News, "Dajia Tan Zhongguo: Dalu Baixing Kantaiwan [How Mainlanders view Taiwan]," published on Dec 3 2014, https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/comments_on_china/2014/12/141203_coc_mainland_view_twelectio_n

standards for what punishment is to follow if the ROC does not comply, thereby providing an incentive for the ROC to avoid explicit discussions on and advocacy of de-facto independence. Where the ROC chooses to resist, the costs of non-compliance can be high. For example, in late September 2020 alone, Taiwan spent about US\$5 million to intercept PLA aircraft entering the Taiwan Strait.³³ Given that such military spending is not supported by the U.S., they constitute a not insignificant burden on the ROC government. Moreover, although military escalation will also entail financial costs to Beijing, such costs are relatively minimal given the immense defense budget of the PRC.

Moreover, it can be argued that based on historical trajectories, there is one common attribute unifying the two periods in which the PRC intensified military crises (1995-1996, 2018-2020), which is that both periods occurred around the time that anti-Western nationalism in China reached its peak. In contrast to the late 1980s and 2000s which were marked by a burgeoning pro-Western and liberal nationalism, the two periods of intensifying military crises were informed by a Chinese nationalism that was both preoccupied with territorial sovereignty (especially with regard to contested territories such as Taiwan and Tibet) and deeply suspicious of the West, having been spurred by waves of pro-independence action by the ROC.³⁴ In the climate of such anti-Western nationalism, the U.S.' tolerance of de-facto Taiwanese independence signaled a lack of

³³ Liberal Times, "Gongjunjian Raotai Guojun Lanjie Haofer 312 yi [CPC annexation, ROC spent 31.2 billion]," published on Oct 8 2020, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/paper/1404634>

³⁴ Academic Roundtable of Academia Sinica, "1995-1996 Nian Taihai Weiji: Zhonggong Guandian" [Taiwan Crises: CPC Point of View], published on June 6, 1997, <https://nccur.lib.nccu.edu.tw/bitstream/140.119/25745/1/119.pdf>

respect towards Chinese sovereignty, and became a focal point for anti-Western sentiment.³⁵

Viewed in this light, attempts at protecting Chinese sovereignty through military escalation in Taiwan are a means for the PRC to signal to the Chinese population that the Chinese government will not acquiesce to American attitudes on China's sovereignty. In other words, military escalation by the PRC is a reflection of Chinese public sentiment. Therefore, the necessary conditions for military escalation by Beijing consist both of the promotion of de-facto independence by the ROC and strong anti-Western sentiment among the Chinese citizenry. For example, according to a poll conducted in late 2017 by Phoenix News, one of the largest media entities in the PRC, more than 90% (i.e., more than 60,000 participants) of the respondents supported forceful unification over Taiwan.³⁶

At the same time, the escalation of military crises is a strategy that avoids the full negative consequences of forceful unification by China. As Ross argues, the PRC's preference is against military annexation of Taiwan so long as the latter refrains from formally declaring independence, as the PRC will most likely face the prospect of American military intervention if it does so.³⁷ In any case, even if Taiwan is forcefully unified, anti-PRC sentiment will still remain strong in Taiwan. Thus, in the case of forceful unification, the CPC's rule of Taiwan is unlikely to be smooth, meaning that it will nonetheless undermine the legitimacy of the central government in the eyes of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Baiting Chen, "Taimingan Gangmei Wutong Mindiao Jiche [Too sensitive, Hong Kong media military reunification polls withdrew]," *China Times*, published on Jan 3, 2018, <https://www.chinatimes.com/newspapers/20180103000544-260108?chdtv>

³⁷ Ross, "Navigating the Taiwan Strait," 48-62.

Chinese citizens. The escalation of military crises, on the other hand, largely avoids the negative effects of forceful unification on the CPC's legitimacy while still retaining some measure of deterrent effect. Based on the above discussion, I propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Promotion of de-facto independence in the ROC and strong anti-Western sentiments in the PRC are necessary conditions for the PRC's military escalation against the ROC government.

Scholars have attempted to understand international politics in terms of triangular alliances and the case of cross-strait relations is of no exception. The first generation of scholars trying to understand cross-strait relations through the lens of the triangular alliance followed Dittmer's article "The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game Theoretical Analysis", which traced the relationships among China, the U.S., and the U.S.S.R. from 1949 to 1978. The necessary conditions for the triangle to work are: that the players acknowledge the strategic importance of each of the three parties, and the relationship between any two parties will be impacted by one party's alliance with the third.³⁸ Additionally, the existence of the triangle means that each actor will seek to nurture the most desirable relations feasible with the other two players to enhance its own national interests.

Developing Dittmer's framework, Wu puts forwards a Strategic Triangle based on the relationships among Taipei, Washington, and Beijing. He argues that when U.S.-

³⁸ Lowell Dittmer. "The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game-Theoretical Analysis," *World Politics* 33, no. 4 (1981): 485-495.

China relations are good, the ROC will have a strong propensity to adopt more accommodative policies towards the PRC, as the ROC will face alienation by both China and the U.S. if it does not do so (as was the case during the rule of the DPP from 2000 to 2008).³⁹ However, when U.S.-China relations take a negative turn while cross-strait relations remain good, the ROC will have less incentive to adopt a stance of accommodation. The underlying logic is that the U.S.' calculations of its relationship with Taiwan is based in part on the state of U.S.-China relations. However, what this framework fails to do is to predict the behavior of the U.S. and China based on the Washington-Taipei-Beijing triangle.⁴⁰

I posit that when the U.S.-China relations are good, the White House will prioritize its relationship with the PRC government over the ROC government. Since the cooperation of the PRC is of strategic importance to the political and economic interests of the U.S., the latter will naturally seek to ensure that the ROC government will not do anything to incur Beijing's ire. In this case, the U.S. government will favor the status quo of "One China with different interpretations" as a means to pacify the Chinese government. As was the case during both the George W. Bush Administration and the latter period of the Clinton Administration, the White House had striven to utilize its political leverage to compel the ROC government to maintain the status quo.⁴¹ As a

³⁹ Yu-shan Wu, "Under the shadow of a rising China: Convergence toward hedging and the peculiar case of Taiwan," in Chu Ming-chin Monique, and Kastner Scott L. (eds), *Globalization and Security Relations across the Taiwan Strait: In the Shadow of China*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 24–41.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Shizhong Liu, "Lishi De Zhongjie—Taimei Guanxi De Zhanlve Hezuo Yu Fenqi (2000-2008) [End of History —US Taiwan Relations and its strategic cooperation and Divide]," *Taiwan International Studies Quarterly* 6 no.4 (2010), 177-95.

result, Taiwan's de-facto efforts towards independence were replaced by a greater role of American intervention in Taiwanese politics, and this also had the effect of self-detering the PRC government from engaging in intense military escalation in the Taiwan Strait..

When the White House perceives China as a major threat to the U.S. (as was the case in the mid-1990s and during the Trump administration), it will tolerate the ROC's policies of de-facto independence. As mentioned above, protecting Chinese national sovereignty is crucial to maintaining the legitimacy of the regime. Where China is a perceived threat, the White House will have no incentive to protect the legitimacy of the Communist regime by intervening in Taiwanese politics.⁴² The underlying logic is that such toleration will foster the potential loss of legitimacy to the CPC. Therefore, if the CPC suffers from the loss of legitimacy, it would require the further allocation of additional resources to maintain the PRC's domestic stability. Hence, less attention could be afforded by the PRC to the competition for foreign resources and the development of the country's economic and military strength. In such a scenario, corresponding to the lower willingness of the U.S. to intervene in the ROC will be greater incentive for the PRC government to engage in crisis escalation, in order to threaten the ROC government into not promoting de-facto independence, in the hopes of safeguarding the PRC's own legitimacy.

There is the concern that such an argument might be subjected to the problem of endogeneity. In particular, some may argue that U.S.' attitudes towards China are highly linked to China's attitudes towards Taiwan, which might lead to the problem of reverse

⁴² Mengping Ouyang, "Chuanpu Shidailuomu TaimeiGuanxi Huidaoguoqu [End of Trump-US-Taiwan relations become history]," *Radio Taiwan International*, published on Nov 11, 2020, <https://www.rti.org.tw/news/view/id/2084443>

causality. However, based on historical trajectories, this thesis argues that unless forceful military unification occurs, U.S.-China relations are largely unaffected by Chinese actions towards Taiwan. In the aftermath of Tiananmen Incident in 1989, the White House imposed economic and political sanctions on the PRC, putting an overriding priority towards human rights issues in China.⁴³ Tellingly, when the ensuing economic sanctions were lifted in the early to mid-1990s, the Clinton Administration explained the decision to lift the sanctions on the basis of human rights in China, but not Beijing's actions towards Taiwan.⁴⁴

More importantly, in the wake of September 11 attacks, the George W. Bush Administration had put an emphasis on dealing with the burgeoning terrorist activities across the globe. Therefore, the prime concern of the White House was to foster further cooperation between China and the U.S. to combat terrorism.⁴⁵ As such, Chinese attitudes towards Taiwan did not in fact have any significant effect on U.S.' attitudes towards China: for instance, during the SARS crisis in 2003, China had prevented the ROC from entering the World Health Organization, and yet the U.S. government had been unwilling to criticize or sanction China for this action.⁴⁶ In a similar vein, the U.S.' recent sanctions against China under the Trump Administration were related to the human rights issues of Hong Kong and Xinjiang, whereas the PRC's actions towards Taiwan were only rarely

⁴³ Robert Bernstein, and Richard Dicker, "Human Rights First," *Foreign Policy*, no. 94 (1994): 43-47, doi:10.2307/1149129.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jia Qingguo, "The impact of 9-11 on Sino-US relations: a preliminary assessment," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 3 no: 2 (2003): 159-177, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/3.2.159>

⁴⁶ David Cyranoski, "Taiwan left isolated in fight against SARS," *Nature* 422 no. 652 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.1038/422652a>

mentioned by the Administration.⁴⁷ Such examples show that short of forceful military unification, American attitudes towards China are not highly linked to Chinese attitudes toward Taiwan.

Hypothesis 2: When U.S.-China relations are poor, the ROC government's explicitly voicing out in favor of or implementing policies that promote de-facto Taiwanese independence will produce an intensification of military crises.

Hypothesis 3: When U.S.-China relations are good, even where the ROC government explicitly voices out in favor of or implements policies that promote de-facto Taiwanese independence, relative restraint from the PRC can be expected.

Alternative explanations

One alternative explanation for crisis escalation is based upon the features of Chinese governance under Xi Jinping, who shows a much greater ambition than previous Chinese presidents to shape China into a global power. However, such an argument disregards the fact that the PRC's current policies towards the ROC are in fact consistent with its policies in the period of Ma's presidency (from 2008 to 2016) when President Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping were in power. Further, the PRC has not changed its policies towards the ROC government since Xi's presidency began in 2013: for example, it has maintained its policy of supporting the Nationalist Party by providing tourism and trade as well as further enhancing cross-strait exchanges. It is equally worthwhile to note that while Beijing

⁴⁷ Humeyra Pamuk and David Brunnstrom, "U.S. announces new sanctions on six linked to Hong Kong mass arrests," *Reuters*, published on Jan 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-security-usa-sanctions-idUSKBN29K1RC>

has adopted a policy of military escalation in the Taiwan Strait since Tsai Ying-wen's came to power in 2016, the intensity of this current military escalation has been relatively mild compared to that in Lee's era from 1992 to 2000, despite the ROC adopting similar attitudes and actions during these two periods.⁴⁸ This illustrates that while Xi might indeed be more aggressive than his predecessors in terms of the overall goals of Chinese foreign policy, the CPC's orientation towards the ROC government has not fundamentally changed.

Another alternative explanation can be based upon economic integration between Beijing and Taipei. One might argue that the relative restraint during the 2000s and early 2010s was due to the burgeoning economic relations between the two entities. However, such an argument disregards the changes in the PRC's attitude in both the mid-1990s and late-2010s. In particular, inflows of China's Foreign Direct Investments from Taiwan, which started from the early 1990s, became extremely voluminous during the mid-1990s. Yet this economic integration paradoxically coincides with the escalation of military crisis by the PRC. Likewise, the recent military escalation occurred at a time when economic integration between the two regions was thriving. For instance, the value of export goods from Taiwan to Mainland China had increased from around 73 billion USD in 2017 to slightly more to 100 billion USD in 2020, witnessing an increase of more than 20% in the span of three years.⁴⁹ This shows that economic integration, though important, cannot adequately explain the PRC's behavior against Taiwan.

⁴⁸ BBC Chinese, "Dajia Tanzhongguo: Taiwan Chaoyede LianganGuanxi Kunju [About China: Taiwan's dilemma of Cross-strait relations]," published on Aug 21 2015, https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/comments_on_china/2014/12/141203_coc_mainland_view_twelectio_n.

⁴⁹ Statista, "Value of goods exports from Taiwan to mainland China between 2010 and 2020," n.d., <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1116752/taiwan-goods-exports-to-mainland-china/>

Research Design

I will trace my argument over three periods in the Taiwan Strait as case studies using a historical-comparative study approach. The first case studied is the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995-1996, while the second covers the presidency of Chen Shui-bian from 2000 to 2008. The third case study covers the period of Tsai Ying-wen's presidency from 2016 to 2020, where the PRC's military escalation began in 2018. There are several reasons for choosing to compare and contrast among the three historical periods. First, from Beijing's perspective, the three periods occurred in the aftermath of PRC's reform and opening-up, meaning that China's fundamental political system - that is, socialism with Chinese characteristics, remained unchanged across the three periods.⁵⁰ Second, the examination of multiple small cases with a single large case analysis can help elucidate theories: the historical trajectories ascertained by these three component essays will enable this essay to formulate a more generalizable theory than a single case study would.⁵¹

This thesis will utilize the strategy of process tracing to examine whether the conditions I postulate exist in all the small cases. According to Bennet and George, process tracing is a method which purports to "identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between an independent variable and the outcome of the dependent variable."⁵² Additionally, according to Collier, there are several advantages to utilizing the method of process tracing. First, it provides an alternative means of research

⁵⁰ Zhili Bai and Juan Liu, "China's governance model and system in transition," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 9, no.1 (2020): 65-82, DOI: 10.1080/24761028.2020.1744229.

⁵¹ Thomas Pepensky, "Context and Method in Southeast Asian Politics," *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 3 (2014): 457-460.

⁵² Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. (Cambridge, MA and London, England: MIT Press, 2005): 206.

to statistical inference and regression analysis that is able to deal with the questions of selection bias and reverse causality.⁵³ Second, it can identify new “political and social phenomena” that would require systematic analysis.⁵⁴

Through testing the implications of the theory as well as examining alternative explanations, this strategy will enable this thesis to establish a more detail-oriented causal argument to explain the varying behavior of crisis escalation by the PRC. To be more specific, this thesis will examine the underlying reasons for the promotion of de-facto independence by the ROC government, and how it affects the relationship between Beijing and Taipei. It will then examine the background of strong anti-Western sentiments in the PRC during the 1990s and late 2010s, which provided a necessary condition for military escalation. Finally, this thesis will trace and explain how the promotion of de-facto Taiwanese independence, under good U.S.-China relations, will lead to American intervention against the ROC, which in turn will allow Beijing to exercise relative restraint.

Case Studies

1. Lee-Teng-hui’s era: From cross strait friendship to U.S.-PRC marriage (1992-2000)

This case study will examine the relationships among Taipei, Beijing, and Washington during the presidency of Lee-Teng-hui of Taiwan. I first trace and analyze cross-strait relations in the early 1990s, especially on the aspects of Lee’s attitude on cross-strait relations that would change later on. I then examine how the year of 1995 became a

⁵³ David Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” *Political Science and Politics* 44, no.4 (2011): 823-830

⁵⁴ Ibid.

turning point of cross-strait relations, leading to military escalation in the mid-1990s amidst inauspicious U.S.-China relations. Lastly, I analyze how the emerging friendship between the U.S. and China was accompanied by military de-escalation by the PRC, even when the ROC had attempted to promote de-facto independence, providing a pathway to the alienation of Taiwan by both the PRC and the U.S.

To understand the relationship between Beijing and Taipei, it is crucial to examine the background of cross-strait relations after the normalization of U.S.-China relations in 1979, during which the White House had decided to cut off diplomatic relations with the ROC government. In reaction to the U.S.' decision, the ROC government under President Chiang Ching-kuo thus promulgated the "Three-Noes" policy, under which Taipei would refrain from engaging in direct communications with the PRC government.⁵⁵ It would also refuse to negotiate or compromise on any agreements with Beijing, a policy which would persist throughout the early 1980s.⁵⁶

Yet, when a hijacked Taiwanese cargo plane landed in Mainland China in 1986, the ROC government was left with no choice but to communicate and jointly handle the incident with the Mainland authorities.⁵⁷ As such, Taipei put an end to the "Three-Noes" policy, enabling direct communications between the Red Cross Society of Taipei and Beijing as a channel between the two governments. Through such a channel, Taipei made

⁵⁵ James Cotton, "Redefining Taiwan: 'One Country, Two Governments'," *The World Today* 45, no. 12 (1989): 213-16. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40396074>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 214-216

⁵⁷ Lan Tai, "Zhongdu liangan lingdaoren huimian zhilu [Re-discover interaction of leaders of Taiwan Strait]," *IFeng News*, published on Nov 07, 2015, <https://news.ifeng.com/history/zhongguoxiandaishi/special/zdlaldrhmzl/>

possible the reunion of divided families in 1987.⁵⁸ This shows that at least compared to the early 1980s, cross-strait relations in the latter half of 1980s had become less hostile and more cooperative.

Such a moderate stance in cross-strait relations, too, persisted in the earlier periods of Lee's Presidency. For instance, in his first press conference, Lee claimed that the ROC government would accept only the premise of one-China policy, and that it was necessary to reunify China under the Three Principles of the People developed by Sun Yat-sen, being nationalism, democracy, and the livelihood of the people.⁵⁹ More importantly, President Lee had dispatched his head secretary to secretly negotiate with representatives of the PRC on the issue of cross-strait relations and the prospects of reunification.⁶⁰ In 1991, under Lee's leadership, the National Unification Committee of the ROC passed the "National Unification Program".⁶¹ Under this pledge, the ROC government undertook to further foster cross-strait exchanges to enhance mutual understanding between Taiwan and Mainland China. It established also, in the long-run, the aim to establish a consultative agency to discuss the question of Chinese unification.⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ CNA News, "Four President comparison- Cross strait stances comparison [Libian Macai siwei zongtong Liangan Lunshu Biyibi]," published on May 21, 2016, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/firstnews/201605200348.aspx>

⁶⁰ RFA News, "Only leader that doesn't suffer from CPC [Quanqiu weiyi yige meichi zhonggong kui de zhengzhijia]," published on Aug 3, 2020, <https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/ear/ear-lee-07312020100015.html>

⁶¹ "Guidelines for National Unification (March 14, 1991)," *Chinese Law & Government* 35, no.3 (2002): 57-59, DOI: 10.2753/CLG0009-4609350357

⁶² Ibid.

This reinforced the 1992 consensus between the two by confirming the conciliatory approach of “One-China policy with different interpretations”.⁶³

Since 1995, however, Lee’s attitudes towards Chinese reunification changed. With the approval of the American Congress and the White House under the Bill Clinton administration, President Lee paid a private visit to his alma mater Cornell University in June 1995. In so doing, Lee had become the first ROC president to enter the American continent after the normalization of U.S.-PRC relations since 1979.⁶⁴ More importantly, Lee’s speech at Cornell University became one of the turning points of cross-strait relations. In the speech, he circumscribed the concept of “the Republic of China”, restricting it to the geographical extent of Taiwan, alluding to the independent status of the ROC, and he was explicit on the subject of Taiwan independence ever since.⁶⁵ Although this speech was well received among the Taiwanese populace, it triggered intense irritation among the PRC authorities, leading to rapid military escalation soon after the incident.

The Qiandao Lake incident in 1994 is another important but often overlooked factor contributing to Taiwanese promotion of de-facto independence since 1995. The incident occurred in Hangzhou, a city in Zhejiang Province of Eastern China, where 24 Taiwanese tourists alongside their tour guides were kidnapped and murdered on a ferry by three local armed mobsters. Yet, the case was mishandled by the regional Mainland

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ David Chen, “Taiwan’s President Tiptoes Around Politics at Cornell,” *New York Times*, published on June 10, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/10/world/taiwan-s-president-tiptoes-around-politics-at-cornell.html>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

authorities, as the police authorities refused to swiftly acknowledge the incident.⁶⁶ Such incompetence ignited widespread anger among the Taiwanese population. It also led to a sudden burst of Taiwanese nationalism, with survey results showing a spike in support towards independence.⁶⁷

It is impossible to understand the PRC's intense military escalation towards Taiwan without paying particular attention to the poor state of U.S.-China relations prior to the mid-1990s. It is true that the normalization of U.S.-PRC relations in 1979 had put an end to the long-standing mutual hostility following China's regime change in 1949. In particular, trade relations had been re-established mainly in the form of direct investments from the U.S. into Mainland China throughout the 1980s.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, U.S.-PRC relations took a downturn after the PRC's military repression of the protestors in Beijing in 1989, also known as the Tiananmen incident.⁶⁹ Even in the years following the Tiananmen incident, U.S.-PRC relations had remained relatively cool, for example: arms sanctions were imposed by the U.S. on China throughout the early 1990s, while high-level exchanges between the two states remained infrequent, and China had still not been granted Most Favored Nation (MFN) status despite years of negotiations.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Sina News, "Di Liushiqi qi Qiandao hu Shijian [67 Volume: Qiandao Incident]," published on Nov 07, 2008, news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-11-07/100716608211.shtml

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ World Bank, "Foreign Direct Investment – the China story," published on July 16, 2010, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2010/07/16/foreign-direct-investment-china-story>

⁶⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, "US Relations with China," n.d., <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Meanwhile, domestic conditions in the PRC were also such as to favor military escalation against Taiwan. By the 1990, the pro-Western and pro-liberal leanings of the teenagers in the 1980s had given way to strong nationalist sentiments focused upon the protection of national sovereignty from forces of Western imperialism. For instance, surveys in the mid-90s showed that the U.S. was ranked among the most unpopular countries by teenagers in China.⁷¹ Another survey suggested that the hatred of Chinese citizens towards the U.S. was largely attributable to American statements on Chinese human rights issues and the Taiwan question.⁷² With a populace increasingly belligerent to the West, the central government could afford to take a tougher stance in protecting its national sovereignty in Taiwan and expect such acts to be welcomed domestically. In this way, the climate of nationalist sentiments in Mainland China becomes a necessary precondition for the escalation of military crises against Taiwan.

Given the antagonistic relationship between Beijing and Washington, the PRC government responded to Lee's advocacy of de-facto independence with intense military escalation. The first wave of military exercises and missile launches by the PLA in the cross-strait region occurred between July and November of 1995, one month after President Lee's visit to Cornell University.⁷³ In particular, in the end of July, the PLA

⁷¹ Shiming Fan, "Aihen Jiaorong Zhongde Fanmei Zhuyi [Anti-Americanism in "Love and Hate]," *Studies of International Politics*, no.2 (2005): 52-58

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ BBC Chinese, "Meizhongtai Sanjiao Cong Jiangshandao Zhanyi Jinmen Paozhan Dao Daodan Weiji Chongxin Renshi Lishide Taihai Weiji [US.-China-Taiwan Triangular: From Jiangsan to Kinmen conflict to missile crisis, rediscover history of taiwan crisis]," published on Aug 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-53834569>

forces launched six Dongfeng-15 (short-range ballistic missiles) to the north of Taiwan.⁷⁴ Additionally, the PLA's navy and air forces made frequent patrols in the coastal areas of southern Fujian during the period.⁷⁵ The second wave of military exercises occurred in March 1996 when the PLA forces launched four Dongfeng-15, which landed west of Kaohsiung and outside Keelung.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the navy, land, and air forces of the PLA orchestrated a joint military exercise east of Fujian province, for the preparation of possible landing operations in Taiwan.⁷⁷

With the end of the second wave of military exercises in 1996 emerged a renewed friendship between Beijing and Washington. Exchanges of high-level officials became more frequent, through which consensus in topics such as nuclear proliferation and human rights issues were hoped to be achieved.⁷⁸ More importantly, Jiang Zemin, then president of the PRC, paid a visit to the U.S. in October 1997.⁷⁹ During this visit, the two sides issued the "Sino-U.S. Joint Statement", under which the two powers agreed to enhance cooperation in the realm of trade and environmental protection, while President Clinton gave his reassurance that the U.S. government would stand by the One-China

⁷⁴ Yingzhi Feng, "Hanjian! Jiefangjun Gongbu Taihai Weiji Dongfeng 15 Fashezha" [Rare! PLA announce Dongfeng 15 photos in Taiwan Strait], *China Times*, published on Feb 20, 2019, <https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20190220003194-260417?chdtv>

⁷⁵ BBC Chinese, "Meizhongtai Sanjiao Cong Jiangshandao Zhanyi Jinmen Paozhan Dao Daodan Weiji Chongxin Renshi Lishide Taihai Weiji [US.-China-Taiwan Triangular: From Jiangsan to Kinmen conflict to missile crisis, rediscover history of taiwan crisis]," 2020

⁷⁶ "Taiwan Feidan Weijiji Daguo Boyi" [Taiwan Missile crisis and superpower competition], *Ifeng News*, n.d., <https://news.ifeng.com/special/taihai1996/>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, "President Jiang Zemin visited the United States," n.d., https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18030.shtml

⁷⁹ Ibid.

policy.⁸⁰ This shows that by the late 1990s, U.S.-China relations had moved away from hostility and frustration to some measure of mutual respect.

Nonetheless, cross-strait relations remained poor after the cross-strait crisis. In particular, even in the face of tough criticism by both Beijing and the White House, President Lee did not relent in his advocacy of de-facto independence. Even as late as 1999, Lee explicitly claimed that the relationship between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait was a “special state-to-state relationship”.⁸¹ The foundation of his claim was that since the PRC’s establishment in 1949, it had never ruled Taiwan. Additionally, according to him, there was the constitutional amendment of the ROC in 1991 which had explicitly stated that the executive body of the ROC government should represent and represent only the people of Taiwan, and thus the legitimacy of the ROC could only be derived from the citizens of the ROC itself.⁸² As such, he argued that such legitimacy was independent of the PRC, thus demonstrating that cross-strait relations should be delineated as “a relationship between countries”.⁸³

Lee’s hostility towards Beijing could also be manifested in his trade policies towards Mainland China. In hopes of reducing cross-strait economic exchange during the late 1990s, the ROC government enacted various restrictions on Taiwanese companies investing in Mainland China. Prior to this restriction, there had been an upsurge across

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Gunter Knabe, “Hugu: Leedenghui 1999 Nian Jieshou Deguo Zhisheng Zhuanfang [Lee’s interview with DW in 1999],” *DW News*, published on Mar 03, 2015, <https://www.dw.com/zh/回顾李登辉1999年接受德国之声专访/a-18297778>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

various industries in Taiwan in investments in Mainland China which at its height had accounted for more than 40% of Taiwan's foreign investments.⁸⁴ Additionally, cross-strait economic exchanges had by then accounted for more than 10% of Taiwan's aggregate trade volume, as well as 18% of Taiwan's exports.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the ROC government still decided to restrict Taiwanese investments in Mainland China that were related to infrastructure and advanced technology. Additionally, investments worth more than US\$50 million were to be forbidden.⁸⁶ Such a policy, though of great consequence to the Taiwanese economy, was largely political in nature, and it showed that during the late 1990s, the ROC government was willing to restrict cross-border economic activities so as to promote de-facto independence.

At the same time, the ROC's relationship with the White House had been deteriorating since the emergence of the U.S.-PRC partnership.⁸⁷ When U.S.-China relations began to improve after 1996, not only did the Clinton administration become more restrained in its arms sales to Taiwan, it also went as far as to publicly pressure Taiwanese officials to abide by the 'One China Policy', and refused to offer the ROC any aid in joining international organization.⁸⁸ Equally important was the Clinton administration's expression

⁸⁴ Shaoen Feng, "Leedenghui Jiejyongren Gaiguan Nanlunding [Restriction on investment cannot be judged]," *Yuanjian News*, Aug 27, 2020, <https://www.gvm.com.tw/article/74338>

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Xiulan Chen, "Limiting cross strait investment, Taiwan Economy regrets [Jieji Yongren Suoguo Taiwan Jingji Yihan]," *China Times*, published on Nov 17, 2017, <https://www.chinatimes.com/newspapers/20171117001632-260301?chdtv>

⁸⁷ Yi Gao, "Deng Xiaoping Yu 1989~1993 Nian de Zhongmei Guanxi [Deng Xiaoping and U.S.-China Relations, 1989-1993]," *Literature of Chinese Communist Party*, 2001, <http://www.dswxyjy.org.cn/n1/2019/0228/c423964-30915123.html>.

⁸⁸ Liu, "End of History," 177-95

of dissatisfaction with President Lee's "two-state theory" promoting de-facto independence during the late 1990s. On this matter, the Clinton administration was even willing to designate Taipei as the "troublemaker" in cross-strait relations.⁸⁹

The differences in the PRC's attitude on Taiwan before and after the emerging U.S.-China partnership were drastic. In response to Lee's Speech at Cornell University, the PLA forces deployed its first wave of missile launches and conducted military exercises targeted at the ROC government, which did not end until mid-1996.⁹⁰ Yet, following the improvement of U.S.-China relations in 1996, the PRC government largely restrained itself from military escalation. Despite attempts by the ROC government to incite the PRC government, China largely restricted its actions to the imposition of political and economic sanctions, rather than any form of military escalation.⁹¹

In sum, this section has traced and explained the changes of Lee's attitudes towards cross-strait relations. Prior to 1995, Lee had endeavored to facilitate communications with the Mainland authorities. Yet, since his speech at Cornell University in 1995, Lee's attitude towards Chinese reunification had hardened, and he became proactive in promoting de-facto Taiwanese independence. Due to the antagonistic relationship between Beijing and Washington which persisted throughout the early days of the Clinton administration, the PRC government responded to Lee's advocacy of de-facto

⁸⁹ Jun Niu, "Meiguodui Taiwan Ji Meitai Guanxide Yanbian [US' Taiwan Policy and US-Taiwan changing relations]," *University Service Center for China studies of CUHK*, n.d., ww2.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/PaperCollection/Details.aspx?id=3985

⁹⁰ Gang Lin, "Zhonggong Shiwuda Hou Taihai Liangan Zhengzhi Ganxide Hudong [Cross Strait Relations and interaction After 15th CPC's]," *Modern China Studies*, 1997.

⁹¹ Ibid.

independence with intense military escalation. Once U.S.-China relations began to improve after 1996, the PRC government restrained itself from military escalation against Taiwan.

II: Chen Shui-bian's era: Improved U.S.-PRC relations and alienation of ROC (2000-2008)

This section examines the relationships among Taipei, Beijing, and Washington during the presidency of Chen Shui-bian. First, I trace how the administration of Chen Shui-bian began with a moderate stance in cross-strait relations, and why that stance changed after 2002. Second, I trace the responses from both Washington and Beijing towards Chen's promotion of de-facto independence since 2002. In sum, we can see that despite actions to promote de-facto independence having been taken by Taipei since 2002, Beijing's conduct had, again, been relatively restrained in the Taiwan Strait, with Washington being the moderator to intervene in Taiwan's pro-independence policies.

Due to the political infighting within the Pan-Blue Coalition near the end of 1990s, James Soong, former governor of the Taiwan Provincial Government, decided to abandon his Nationalist Party membership so as to run for the 2000 Presidential election.⁹² As a result, Chen was elected as the president of the ROC through winning almost 40% of the total votes during the election, surpassing James Soong and Lien Chan, who had obtained approximately 37% and 23% of the votes respectively.⁹³ As a result, Chen came into power in May 20, 2000, realizing the first party rotation and peaceful transfer of power in Taiwan

⁹² Gang Lin, "KMT Split Handed Chen the Presidential Victory," *Wilson Center*, published on Apr 1, 2000, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/kmt-split-handed-chen-the-presidential-victory>

⁹³ Ibid.

to the Democratic Progressive Party, after the Nationalist Party had been in power for more than five decades.

In contrast with the aggressive advocacy of de-facto independence in the mid-2000s, the administration of Chen Shui-bian began with a relatively moderate stance in cross-strait relations during the first two years of his presidency. In fact, during Chen's Presidential Inauguration in 2000, he declared that the ROC government would abide by the pledge of "The Four Noes and One Without" concerning the political status of the ROC vis-à-vis Mainland China.⁹⁴ Under this pledge, unless the PRC government resorted to military force against Taiwan, the ROC government would not declare its status as an independent nation, and that it would abandon attempts to incorporate the doctrine of "One Country on Each Side" into the constitution of ROC.⁹⁵ In the same vein, Chen promised not to promote referendums on the topic of Taiwanese independence, or to alter Taiwan's national title to the Republic of Taiwan. Apart from this pledge, Chen also acknowledged the commitment of the ROC government to the framework of one country under various interpretations.

Such a moderate stance towards cross-strait relations, however, did not last long. Two years after Chen became the ROC's head of state, he breached the DPP government's promise not to promote Taiwanese independence. During a meeting hosted by the World Federation of Taiwanese Associations (WFTA) in Tokyo, President Chen claimed that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait comprised two separate countries.⁹⁶ Also, in 2003, during

⁹⁴ Sina News, "Xinwen Beijing: Hewei Chenshuibian de Sibu Yimeiyong [News background: What is Chen Shui-bian's "Four Nos and Ones]," published on Aug 05, 2002, news.sina.com.cn/c/2002-08-05/1712660970.html

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

the 20th anniversary of the DPP's establishment, President Chen announced that he would, together with the people of Taiwan, create a new constitution by 2006. Although the ROC government had denied that such an amendment to the constitution was to promote Taiwanese independence, that proposal would nonetheless entail a public referendum that would decide the prospects of cross-strait relations.⁹⁷

It is impossible to understand Taiwan's change of stance in cross-strait relations without paying attention to Taiwan's economic recession in 2001, which occurred one year after Chen came into power. In 2000, affected by a stock market bubble among internet and technology-related enterprises, the GDP growth rate in Taiwan dropped from 6.3% in 2000 to -1.4% in 2001. Equally important, the unemployment rate had increased from around 3% in 2000 to around 5% in 2001, and this employment level did not witness any improvement throughout the early 2000s.⁹⁸ Accordingly, after the economic shock in 2001, more than 56% of the Taiwan population had become dissatisfied with the performance of the DPP-led government.⁹⁹ As a diversionary tactic, Chen then decided to become more proactive in advocating Taiwan's de-facto independence.

Following the DPP's taking an explicit stance in favor of de-facto independence since 2002, the Bush administration became critical towards the ROC leadership and its cross-strait policies. Not only was George W. Bush against the promotion of "One Country

⁹⁷ Apple Daily, "Bian: 2006 Cuisheng Taiwan Xinxianfa Bian [2006 gave birth to Taiwan's new constitution]," published on Sept 29, 2003, <https://tw.appledaily.com/headline/20030929/O5QX2P7TV6PYPS64I3MCN73MS4/>

⁹⁸ National Statistics of Taiwan, "Latest indicators," n.d., <https://eng.stat.gov.tw/point.asp?index=3>

⁹⁹ Sina News, "Mindiao Xianshi Guoban Minzhong Bumanyi Chenshuibian de shizheng Biaoxian[survey shows dissatisfaction against Chen Shuibian]," published on Oct 27, 2001, mil.news.sina.com.cn/2001-10-27/41119.html

on Each Side” by the ROC government, he was also explicit in pressuring the ROC government not to orchestrate any form of “referendum of independence” in 2003, even going as far as to express his view to PRC Premier Wen Jiabao that he was resolutely against any such attempt by President Chen to change the status quo. In the face of such pressure from the White House, the ROC government decided to partially concede in setting the topic of its referendum in 2004, focusing mainly on consolidating its arms deals with the U.S rather than any question of sovereignty.¹⁰⁰

Given that U.S-ROC relations are “derivative” according to Wu’s framework, this relationship can in large part be explained by (and is inferior to) the relationship between Washington and Beijing. Despite the Hainan Island incident that had led to the death of a PLA soldier in 2001, the Bush administration was still intent on to preserving its friendship with the PRC, especially given its preoccupation with the September 11 Attacks (and as the White House needed the PRC’s cooperation on terrorism issues).¹⁰¹ Additionally, throughout the 2000s, Beijing and the White House had been cooperating heavily in solving the question of nuclear proliferation in North Korea. For instance, Robert Zoellick, then U.S. deputy secretary of state, urged Beijing to act as a “responsible stakeholder” as a growing power, which meant using its influence to deal with the question of North Korea and Iran.¹⁰² Indeed, after Pyongyang had left the six-party talks in 2005, Beijing had used its influence to put North Korea back to the negotiating table.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Liu, “End of History,” 178-86.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Council on Foreign Relations, “US Relations with China,” n.d.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

In addition to cooperation on the questions of terrorism and nuclear proliferation, the PRC and the U.S. had become strong trading partners during the period of the Bush administration. In December 2001, the Bush administration granted permanent trade status to the PRC in an attempt to normalize trade relations between the two countries. Under the terms, China would be granted tariff rates that would not be worse than other countries with the same status.¹⁰⁴ In a similar vein, the Bush administration also backed China into becoming a full member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), thus allowing the PRC to fully integrate into the global economic system.¹⁰⁵ This shows that Beijing and Washington had been cooperating closely throughout the 2000s with respect to both economic and political issues.

The warming relations between Washington and Beijing also explain why the White House was willing to publicly pressure Taiwanese officials to abide by the One China Policy, and why it was so openly critical of the DPP government's attempts to change the status quo in cross-strait relations. In fact, when in 2002 the DPP government promulgated the notion of "One Country on Each Side" that portrayed Taiwan and Mainland China as two separate states, the Bush administration had deployed its director of Asian Affairs to express its opposition to Taipei's stance.¹⁰⁶ The Bush administration also pressured the DPP-led government in 2003 to alter the contents of its 2004 referendum

¹⁰⁴ White House Archives, "President Grants Permanent Trade Status to China," published on December 27, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011227-2.html>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Liu, "End of History," 178-86.

such that a question on the independence of Taiwan was substituted with the much less sensitive question of whether military relations with the U.S ought to be enhanced.¹⁰⁷

From the perspective of the ROC government, the second term of Chen's presidency was marked by the advocacy of de-facto Taiwanese independence. Although during the first few months of his presidency, Chen had promised not to abandon the National Unification Program, the subsequent conduct of the ROC government makes it clear that the Program had become much less influential. In 2006, the ROC government claimed that the pledge under the Program would cease to be implemented, and the National Unification Council would from then on cease to function.¹⁰⁸ In so doing, President Chen denied the possibility of Chinese unification in the future, thus alluding to the independent status of the ROC as a separate political entity.

Unlike what it had done during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, Beijing did not, this time, respond to overt pro-independence actions by the ROC with strong military escalation. Instead, the PRC government focused its efforts on building up its guided missiles targeted at the ROC, while keeping such military build-up within its own borders, such that the situation in the Taiwan Strait remained relatively intact (despite the number of guided missiles having increased from 350 to around 900 towards the end of Chen's presidency).¹⁰⁹ In political terms, PRC continued to exclude Taiwan from membership in international organizations, such as barring the ROC from participating in the World Health

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ New York Times, "Taiwan leader announces termination of China unification body," published on Feb 27, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/27/world/asia/taiwan-leader-announces-termination-of-china-unification-body.html>

¹⁰⁹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008," n.d., <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/dod-2008.pdf>

Organization during the outbreak of SARS in 2003. This suggests that when U.S.-China relations are good, ROC policies that promote de-facto independence have only translated to weak military escalation by Beijing.¹¹⁰

In short, this section has traced and explained the changes in Chen's attitudes towards cross-strait relations in the early 2000s. Whereas the beginning of Chen's presidency was marked by its moderate position, the economic downturn since 2001 propelled Chen to become more proactive in promoting Taiwan's de-facto independence, a position which he maintained until the end of his presidency. However, during the Bush administration, the PRC and the U.S. had become strong trading partners, in addition to intensifying their cooperation in the questions of terrorism and nuclear proliferation. As such, the White House was willing to publicly pressure Taiwanese officials to follow the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. Hence, Beijing responded to overt pro-independence actions by the ROC with almost no military escalation.

III: Tsai's era: Deterioration of cross-strait relations and crisis escalation (after 2017)

This section examines the changing relationships among Taipei, Beijing, and Washington since President Tsai Ing-wen came into power in 2016. First, I trace and explain how the ROC government under Tsai began by adopting a rather cautious position towards the PRC, and why that has shifted two years following her inauguration. Second, I analyze the responses from both White House and the PRC government towards Tsai's advocacy of de-facto independence after 2017. In a nutshell, I attempt to demonstrate that

¹¹⁰ Simon Shen, "The 'SARS Diplomacy' of Beijing and Taipei: Competition Between the Chinese and Non-chinese Orbits," *Asian Perspective* 28, no. 1 (2004): 45-56.

as the relationship Beijing and Washington deteriorated, the advocacy of de-facto Taiwanese independence by President Tsai was liable to spur military crisis escalation by the PRC.

After Tsai Ing-wen won the presidential election of the ROC in 2016, cross-strait relations began once again to deteriorate. Yet, in the early months of her presidency, Tsai had striven to appear, if not neutral, ambivalent on the subject of Taiwanese independence, claiming that her mission in cross-strait relations was to maintain stability and peaceful relations in the Taiwan Strait. During Tsai's presidential inauguration in May 2016, she declared that the ROC government would respect the 1992 consensus, under which both Beijing and Taipei would abide by the principle of one country with various interpretations.¹¹¹

Additionally, Tsai claimed that the ROC government would enhance cross-strait relations on the basis of the 1992 consensus.¹¹² Such a moderate stance shows that in terms of the attitude towards the PRC government, at least at the onset of Tsai's presidency, there was no substantial difference compared to Ma's presidency. Nor, despite the power transfer from the Nationalist Party to the DPP, was there any military reaction from Beijing during the first two years of Tsai's presidency. At the same time, the PRC government remained

¹¹¹ Mainland Affairs Council, "Tsai Yingwen Zhengfude Liangan Guanxi Guoji Xueshu Yantaohui Linfuzhuwei Zhicigao [The Tsai Ing-wen Government's Cross-Strait Relations International Symposium Vice Chairman Lin's speech]," published on Sept 15, 2016, https://www.mac.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=A0A73CF7630B1B26&s=3610C88FDC7CB0B9

¹¹² Ibid.

somewhat dissatisfied with Tsai's moderate stance, likening her stance in cross-strait relations to an "incomplete answer to an exam paper".¹¹³

Tsai's reticence did not persist. One year after she came into power, the DPP had become more explicit in its attitude towards de-facto independence. Not only did Tsai explicitly reject the 1992 consensus, going on to claim that Taiwan was an independent country to begin with, the DPP-led government also attempted to punish Taiwanese organizations and individuals that were in favor of cross-strait exchanges and those that had been working in Mainland China.¹¹⁴ For instance, the ROC's National Communications Commission refused to renew the broadcast license of CTi News, a pan-Blue cable television channel based in Taiwan known for its relatively pro-PRC views.

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Such a change in stance could be ascribed to the low approval ratings of the ROC government under Tsai. After Tsai came into power in 2016, the ROC government under the DPP had been marked by its administrative incompetence. For instance, in summer 2017, Taiwan witnessed an unprecedented power outage, affecting 6.68 million households

¹¹³ Huanqiu, "Taiwan Diqu Xinliangdaoren Weiwan Cheng Dajuan [The new leader of the Taiwan region "unfinished the answer sheet]," published on May 21, 2016, <https://taiwan.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJVALb>

¹¹⁴ Zuwei Lin, "Cai Yingwen Jiuzhi Lianren Taiwan Zongtong Xinian Gongguo Ji Weilai Tiaozhan, [Tsai's re-elected as president-merits and de-merits over the four years]," *BBC Chinese*, published on May 20, 2020; Zheng Zhonglan, "Fan Shentou Fa Ling Fanduipiao Tonggu Beihou Taiwan Daxuan Qian Zhengdang de Fuza Xuanze [Reverse Osmosis Law: What kind of goals were targeted by the law on the eve of Taiwan's election]," *BBC Chinese*, published on Jan 3, 2020.

¹¹⁵ Voa News, "Taiwan Zhongtian Xinwentai Yinweigui Huanzhao Beiju Zhengshi Tingbo [Taiwan Zhongtian News Station officially stopped broadcasting due to illegal change of photos denied]," published on Dec 12, 2020, <https://www.voachinese.com/a/pro-china-news-channel-in-taiwan-is-taken-off-air-20201212/5696976.html>

as well as 17 counties and cities.¹¹⁶ This unprecedented outage was linked to attempts by the DPP-led government to phase out nuclear power by 2025, which were eventually withdrawn in early 2018.¹¹⁷ Equally important, the DPP-led government had crippled the retirement pensions and benefits among public employees, leading to widespread protests in early 2017. For these reasons, Tsai's approval rates had dropped by more than 20% one year after she came into power.¹¹⁸ Therefore, Tsai's decision to become more proactive in advocating Taiwan's de-facto independence can be seen as a diversionary tactic.

The PRC responded first with economic and diplomatic sanctions on the ROC. For instance, the ROC government had been allowed to participate in the WHO Assembly under the name of "Chinese Taipei" since 2009. However, from mid-2017, Beijing began persistently to object to the ROC government's participation in the WHO Assembly.¹¹⁹ In other words, Beijing attempted to undermine the ROC's diplomatic status through forestalling its entry and participation in international organizations. Also, as opposed to the moderate course the PRC had taken in the earlier years of the 2010s, during which Beijing was content to allow the ROC to preserve its diplomatic relations with some less developed nations, Beijing has now adopted a more aggressive stance against the ROC's attempts to normalize diplomatic relations with these countries. For instance, since 2017,

¹¹⁶ Reuters, "Taiwan power outage affected 151 companies, caused \$3 million in damages," published on Aug 17, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-power-outages-idUSKCN1AX0S3>

¹¹⁷ Keoni Everington, "Taiwan Cabinet scraps 2025 nuclear-free target," *Taiwan News*, published on Dec 06, 2018, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3590972>

¹¹⁸ TVBS News, "TVBS Mindiao/ Jiuzhi 2 Zhounian [TVBS pools Two Year after Coming to Power]," published on May 16, 2018, <https://news.tvbs.com.tw/politics/920714>

¹¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs ROC, "Zhongguo Zulao Woguoji Kongjian Shili" [Cases of China obstructing our international space], n.d., <https://www.mofa.gov.tw/cl.aspx?n=671>

six African and Latin American countries, including Burkina Faso and Panama, have normalized their diplomatic relations with the PRC, cutting ties with the ROC.¹²⁰

On the other hand, U.S.-China relations under the Trump administration had gone from cooperative to adversarial following the outbreak of the trade war between the two parties. Four months after President Donald Trump came into power, the U.S. government hosted a two-day summit at the Mar-a-Lago estate, hosting President Xi Jinping as well as other representatives of the PRC.¹²¹ During this conference, the two parties engaged in discussions with regard to the issues of bilateral trade and North Korea. In May 2017, the two countries reached a ten-part agreement that strived to expand bilateral trade relations. In particular, the agreement put an emphasis on the expansion of economic exchanges of goods and services, including but not limited to the trade of beef, poultry, and electronic payments.¹²² Such actions showed that during the first several months of Trump's presidency, U.S.-China relations had remained largely friendly.

Nonetheless, such a cooperative relationship was not to last. Since early 2018, the White House had imposed a 25% and 10% tariff on steel and aluminum imports from China, and adopted measures to restrict Chinese investment in the U.S. In response, the Ministry of Commerce of China had issued a "retaliatory tariff" against a list of suspended concession products imported from the U.S.¹²³ This move, however, only marked the inception of the growing antagonism between the two parties.

¹²⁰ CCTV, "Taiwan Bangjiaoguo Bengkui Wangyou BuPaichu Guiling [Taiwan's "diplomatic country" collapses. Netizens: Do not rule out]," published on Sept 21, 2021, www.zeroingm.news.cctv.com/2019/09/21/ARTIfzP6Z5roAo57UMU0Dne5190921.shtml

¹²¹ Council on Foreign Relations, "US Relations with China," n.d.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

As American Foreign Policy under the Trump administration became more antagonistic towards the PRC, its sympathy for the DPP's explicit attitude towards de-facto independence since 2017 grew in proportion. In 2018, the U.S. Congress and Senate, with Trump's approval, passed the "Taiwan Travel Act" to foster high-level exchanges between the ROC and the U.S. With U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Michael Azar II's visit to Taiwan in 2020, the White House had strengthened its efforts to enhance the ROC's political status.¹²⁴ Through the Taiwan Assurance Act, the U.S. had also increased its support to the ROC to develop its status in international organizations.¹²⁵ The above shows that when the U.S. perceives China as a major threat to its own interests, it will encourage the ROC's policies of de-facto independence.

With respect to the Chinese population, the current wave of anti-Western sentiments in China have also provided necessary conditions for the PRC's military escalation against the ROC. Since 2016, there has been the emergence of "Little Pink" in Mainland China, a term which refers to a group of young nationalists who are persistent, proactive and increasingly vocal on China's internet and social media. In particular, they are known for their expression of viewpoints that are largely anti-Western and in opposition to any forms of separatist movements on Chinese territory. Since Tsai began her advocacy of de-facto independence in 2017, these "Little Pink" activists have criticized even the

¹²⁴ Liberal Times, "Taiwan Baozheng Fa VS Taiwan Guanxi Fa [Taiwan Assurance Law Versus Taiwan Relations Act]," published on May 8, 2019, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/world/breakingnews/2783833>.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

policy of “peaceful unification” which had been emphasized by the PRC government throughout the decade.¹²⁶

To illustrate, in 2020, one netizen on Weibo even went as far as to claim that “one country, two systems is not a suitable system for Taiwan, as these Taiwanese people are not able to rule themselves”, and that comment was bolstered by the support of no less than 3,700 netizens.¹²⁷ Many netizens on Weibo also expressed their support when the PRC government engaged in military escalation against Taiwan, and towards Beijing’s unyielding stance.¹²⁸ This suggests that the recent wave of nationalism has supported the central government to take a more hawkish position on the international stage, thus providing a necessary condition for PRC’s military escalation.

Moving away from the relative restraint of the previous decade, Beijing has responded with strong military escalation in the midst of pro-independence actions by the ROC since 2018. The PLA air force has made frequent patrols beyond the ROC’s Air defense identification zone, which has caused the ROC air force to deploy more than 3,300 military aircraft to intercept the PLA planes (as of October 2020).¹²⁹ More recently in Fall 2020, the PLA upgraded its missile base in Southeastern China that was closest to the

¹²⁶ China Daily, “Yiwu Cutong Yiwu Cuhe [Using force to promote reunification, using force to promote peace],” Weibo, Dec 16, 2020, <https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=国台办称绝不台独分裂活动留空间&Refer=top&sudaref=www.google.com>

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Huanqiu, “Yinpin Baoguang Dalu Zhanji Huiqiang Taijun Guangbo Woshi Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Zhengzai Jinxing Lixingxing Xunlian [Audio exposure! The Continental Army’s aircraft responds to the Taiwan Army Radio: I’m the Chinese People’s Liberation Army and I am undergoing routine training],” Weibo, Mar 26, 2021, https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=自由时报&xsort=hot&Refer=hotmore#_loginLayer_1612576794248

¹²⁹ Liberal Times, “Gongjunjilan Raotai Guojun Lanjie Haofer 312 yi [CPC annexation, ROC spent 31.2 billion],” 2020

Taiwan Strait with the capacity to fire Dongfeng-17, a Chinese solid-fueled medium-range ballistic missile equipped with accurate and high-speed warheads. Such military actions show that the PRC government is now willing to engage in crisis escalation.¹³⁰

In sum, I have explained how President Tsai began adopting a rather moderate stance in cross-strait relations, and why her administration has chosen to adopt a more pro-independence position two years after she came into power. However, when U.S.-China relations are less hostile and more communicative, the ROC's advocacy of de-facto Taiwan independence has only translated to economic and diplomatic sanctions on the ROC. It is only when U.S.-China relations take a turn for the worse that the ROC's promotion of de-facto Taiwanese independence will foster military action by Beijing, in addition to economic and diplomatic sanctions.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, this thesis has sought to explain the conditions that determine the PRC's relative restraint through applying the concept of self-deterrence. On the one hand, it argues that when U.S.-China relations are poor, the ROC government's explicitly voicing out in favor of or implementing policies that promote de-facto Taiwanese independence will translate to an intensification of military crises. On the other hand, when U.S.-China relations are good, even where the ROC government explicitly voices out in favor of or implements policies that promote de-facto Taiwanese independence, relative restraint from the PRC will be expected.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Based on the analysis above, the case studies support my hypotheses. I have shown how the emerging friendship between the U.S. and China during Lee's era was accompanied by military de-escalation by the PRC, even when the ROC had attempted to promote de-facto independence. In particular, during the early-1990s, the ROC government had established a relatively cordial relationship with Beijing, with communication channels being established between the two parties. In the aftermath of Lee's speech at Cornell University in 1995, the ROC government became explicit in advocating de-facto Taiwanese independence. Due to the worsening relationship between China and the U.S. during the early Clinton administration, Beijing responded to Lee's policies of de-facto independence with military escalation. Nevertheless, improving U.S.-China relations eventually fostered de-escalation by the PLA forces, although cross-strait relations remained inauspicious throughout the late 1990s.

Further, during Chen's era, despite actions to promote de-facto independence being taken by Taipei since 2002, Beijing had been relatively restrained in the Taiwan Strait, with Washington acting as the moderator to intervene in Taiwan's pro-independence policies. To begin with, Chen had adopted a relatively moderate stance towards Beijing in the earlier periods of his presidency, although the economic downturn two years into his term propelled him to change his position. Meanwhile, U.S.-China relations had remained largely cooperative due to the questions of North Korea and terrorism, and the two powers had subsequently emerged as strong trading partners in the 2000s. Therefore, the White House was willing to publicly pressure the Taiwanese officials to adopt a more moderate stance in the Taiwan Strait. As a result, Beijing did not respond to Chen's pro-independence actions with intense military escalation.

Additionally, since 2017, with the U.S. under the Trump administration, Beijing has responded to pro-independence actions by the ROC with strong military escalation. Such military escalation occurred in the midst of U.S.' sympathy for the DPP's explicit attitude in favor of de-facto independence. Although the ROC government under President Tsai had begun by taking a less aggressive stance towards the question of Taiwan independence and cross-strait relations, President Tsai decided to espouse a more pro-independent position less than two years after her inauguration. When the relationship between Beijing and Washington had been more friendly and cooperative, such pro-independence advocacy only translated into economic and diplomatic sanctions against Taipei. Yet, when U.S.-China relations turned sour in the midst of the trade war, the PRC no longer restrained itself from military escalation.

This study has major implications for international relations theory and policy-making. For deterrence theory, it is clear that there are potential applications of the deterrence framework which extend beyond military escalation and war. In particular, the concept of "self-deterrence" should prove to be an important dimension for further research. Although the existing literature on self-deterrence has focused extensively on nuclear deterrence, exploration on its potential applications in non-nuclear aspects ought to be conducted. For instance, future research could further examine whether, and if so, how, during the Cold War, China, the U.S., and the U.S.S.R., were willing to restrain themselves for reasons other than the fear of forceful retaliation.

Likewise, crisis escalation could be another important dimension to deterrence. Future research could examine deterrence as based upon military escalation, and compare its efficacy with that of conventional deterrence. In terms of policy implications, the

policymakers of all three regions will benefit from knowing which policies produce escalation and which policies generate more peaceful relations. In this regard, a cooperative relationship between Beijing and the White House would generate positive effects on cross-strait relations. As such, not only should the U.S. rely on providing military protection and defensive weapons to Taiwan, it could also develop better channels of communication and cooperation with China to protect peace and prosperity in the Taiwan Strait. As for the Taiwanese side, although the promotion of de-facto independence is one way to divert attention from its own domestic problems, the DPP-led government should avoid taking an aggressive stance in Taiwan Strait. In fact, it should emphasize the importance of the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, a stance which had been adopted by both President Lee and Tsai during the earlier periods of their presidencies. Such a position would not only be acceptable to the Taiwanese population, but could also avoid the possibility of intense military escalation by the PRC.

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