

The Cross Strait Conflict in the Light of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine - Lessons for Taiwan and the People's Republic of China

Angela Köckritz, October 2023

I Foreword

“Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow” is an oft-heard phrase nowadays on the island of Taiwan. Following Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine Taiwan and the rest of the world were reminded that economic interdependence does not necessarily prevent an invasion (it did not stop Germany to attack the United Kingdom in the First World War). The prospect that one day the Chinese government might try to take Taiwan by force suddenly did not seem so surreal or distant anymore.

The Cross Strait Conflict has always loomed large, now it has gravitated to the center of the world's attention.

For decades Taiwanese have contended with Beijing's threats with a relaxed nonchalance. Now, polls show that Taiwanese increasingly perceive Beijing's behavior as hostile¹. For years, a hybrid threat of international isolation, disinformation, and grey-zone warfare has been Beijing's preferred strategy². The CPC would prefer to grind the Taiwanese down to the point that they simply surrender to its will than to take the island by military force (even if currently only around 6 per cent of Taiwanese people can imagine unification at some point in the future³). The Chinese government knows that a successful military endeavor – as the Russian invasion has proven – is far from certain; that Taiwan is an island, and an amphibious landing would prove a daunting task, makes it even less so.

¹Chen Yufu and Chin Jonathan, „Public Perception of Chinese Hostility Grows“, Taipei Times, 19th August 2022, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/08/19/2003783794>

Yu Ching-hsin, „Why Tickle the Dragon's Tail?“, Asian Survey 2023, <https://online.ucpress.edu/as/article-abstract/63/1/150/195028/Why-Tickle-the-Dragon-s-Tail-Taiwanese-Attitudes>

²Bonny Lin et al, „Competition in the Gray Zone, Countering China's Coercion Against U.S.Allies and Partners in the Indo-Pacific, Rand Publications, Santa Monica, 2022, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA594-1.html

³Study Election Center, „Taiwan Independence vs Unification with the Mainland (1994/12-2023/06), National Chengchi University, Taipei, 2023, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>

Taiwan is not Ukraine and the People's Republic of China is not Russia. The conflicts are not alike, yet there are striking similarities, says Professor Wu Yu-shan from Academia Sinica, who has been studying both conflicts for decades⁴. Taiwan and Ukraine are both democracies in the direct neighborhood of powerful autocratic states that lay claim to their national territory. Both have historical, linguistic, and ethnic ties to their large neighbor. Their populations have shown cracks on the question of belonging. In Ukraine, some of the population (at least prior to 2014) have held deep-rooted sympathies for their colonial neighbor. In Taiwan, tensions exist between the descendants of long-established Taiwanese and the newcomers who arrived from Mainland China in the middle of the last century – even as these tensions are vanishing with the young generation. Both Ukraine and Taiwan are closely intertwined economically with their big neighbors but depend on the US and its allies for security⁵.

However, while Ukraine is a universally recognized state, Taiwan, under pressure from China, is only recognized by twelve countries and the Holy See⁶.

Both Taiwan and the People's Republic of China are closely following the events unfolding in Ukraine and Russia – drawing their lessons, recalibrating their lines of strategy. On the Taiwanese side the lessons to be drawn are under heated debate, as the island state prepares for its presidential election on January 13th 2024. Will the Taiwanese voters decide for the continuation of a policy of greater deterrence proposed by vice president and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Lai Ching-te? Or will they opt for a policy of intensified engagement with – and likely accommodation of - the People's Republic of China as presented by candidates Hou Yu-yih (Kuomintang – KMT), Ko Wen-je (Taiwan People's Party TPP), and aspiring candidate Kuo Tai-ming (independent)?

In the People's Republic of China, however, CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping's will remains uncontested, as the space of public, intellectual and political debate has been shrinking dramatically in the last decade.

⁴Wu Yu-Shan, Interview in April 2023 Academia Sinica, Taipei

⁵Wu Yu-shan, Ukraine and Taiwan: Comparison, Interaction and Demonstration, Taiwan Studies Program, University of Nottingham, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2022/04/04/ukraine-and-taiwan-comparison-interaction-and-demonstration/>

⁶Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Diplomatic Allies, <https://en.mofa.gov.tw/AlliesIndex.aspx?n=1294&sms=1007>

This paper will discuss Taiwan's importance for the PRC, the steps the Chinese government is currently undertaking to influence and intimidate Taiwanese citizens as well as the lessons the PRC and Taiwan are drawing from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

II) What does Taiwan mean to the CPC?

1 The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation

“To realize the complete reunification of the motherland” the CPC declares, is nothing less than „the common aspiration and sacred responsibility of all Chinese sons and daughters.“⁷ It is „the historic mission of the Communist Party of China (CPC)“⁸. The CPC dreams of restoring China's preeminent place in the world and therefore wipe out the so-called century of national humiliation. This is a sweeping all-encompassing endeavor. „Beijing's strategy entails deliberate and determined efforts to amass, improve and harness the internal and external elements of national power that will place the PRC in a „leading position“, setting milestones across virtually every aspect of governance and policy planning – from economics, diplomacy to science, technology and culture, states the Pentagon in its yearly report on China⁹. Achieving „full reunification“ is a core element of this vision, and this does not only entail completing Hong Kong's and Macao's integration by the end of 1949, but most importantly, regaining Taiwan.

„Taiwan is the most painful part of Chinese historic memory“, says Chinese Tsinghua international relations professor Da Wei. „The most painful part of a century of humiliation“ stretching from the Opium Wars starting in 1839 to the founding of the PRC in 1949. A century, says Da Wei, in which „imperialists invaded a weak and divided China many times, a China tortured by poverty, foreign invasion, civil war, famines and epidemics“, a stark and painful contrast to “the splendid Asian Chinese history and civilization”¹⁰.“ Of all the many disgraceful events happening in that century – the Unequal Treaties, the Eight-Nation Alliance

⁷Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202208/t20220802_10732293.html

⁸Statement of the People's Republic of China in Germany, Berlin, 2022, http://de.china-embassy.gov.cn/det/zt/taiwan/202208/t20220810_10740220.htm

⁹US Department of Defense, „Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China“, Washington 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>

¹⁰Interview with the Chinese International Relations Scholar Da Wei from Tsinghua University, „Are we entering a New Cold War?“ Podcast Sea of Change. A Podcast About the New Great Game in the Indo-Pacific. Angela Köckritz and Qin Liwen, Edition 11, April 2022, Minute 46.23, www.seaofchange.net

suppressing the Boxer Uprising, the Russian Invasion of Manchuria, the Japanese Invasion to name only a few of them – the most defeating of all was when Japan prevailed over the Qing empire in the Chinese-Japanese war in 1895 and the Qing had to cede Taiwan to Japan, a country it had always regarded as inferior to the Great Chinese Empire, says Da Wei. „That is the most sensitive issue.“¹¹.

From its humble origins the CPC defined itself not only as a force of social revolution but of national liberation¹². In the decades following the bloody crackdown of the 1989 Tiananmen movement the Party has greatly expanded patriotic education. Nowadays, as it struggles with deflation, a housing crisis and sluggish consumer spending following drastic Covid policies patriotic goals seem more important than ever in order to maintain its legitimacy.

However, the Party’s historic claims to Taiwan are much less clear than it maintains. Taiwan has never been part of the People’s Republic of China. In the end of the 17th century the Qing dynasty managed to gain control over Taiwan. For the longest time of its 200 year rule it only commanded over a third of the island’s territory. The territory beyond the so called „barbarian line“ was the realm of the aboriginal people, the Yuanzhuming¹³. When Japan had to hand over Taiwan in 1945 after having lost the Second World War, Chiang Kai-shek’s KMT took control over Taiwan¹⁴.

The KMT soon declared martial law. After losing the Chinese civil war in 1949, Chiang Kai-shek and 2 million of his followers set over to Taiwan. In the hope of eventually recovering the whole of China, Chiang tried to instill a Chinese identity on the citizens of Taiwan. But with the democratization of the island state citizens began to identify more and more solely as Taiwanese¹⁵. „This was a natural process“, explains Yu Ching-hsin, head of the Study Election Center at NCCU¹⁶. The overriding majority of Taiwanese prefer to maintain the status quo and do not wish to unite with China¹⁷. They want to keep their democracy and civil society, their

¹¹Ibid

¹²Julia Lovell, „The Opium War. Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China“, Picador, London, 2011

¹³Chou Wan-yao, „A New Illustrated History of Taiwan“, SMC Publishing, Taipei, January 2020

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵„Taiwanese/Chinese Identity 1992-2026“, Study Election Center, National Chengchi University, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961>

¹⁶Interview Yu Ching-hsin, Taipei, March, April 2023

¹⁷Study Election Center, „Taiwan Independence vs Unification with the Mainland (1994/12-2023/06)“, National Chengchi University, Taipei, 2023, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>

precarious status as the only democracy in the Chinese-speaking world. Taiwan's example deeply worries rulers in Beijing, who strive to stifle all democratic aspirations of their citizens.

2 Taiwan's Strategic Value for the CPC

When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7 1941, simultaneously attacking the Philippines, it started World War II in the Pacific. „The air assault was launched from the island of Taiwan which was then under Japanese military rule“, writes Joseph Bosco. „Throughout the war, it served as the staging area and major supply base that sustained Japan's armies in Southeast Asia and as the control point for all shipping through the Taiwan Strait. The U.S. State Department at the time stated that based on strategic factors, except for Singapore, no other location in the Far East occupied such a controlling position¹⁸.

For a long time Taiwan's excellent geostrategic location has attracted the attention of many foreign powers. Dutch and Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese. Taiwan is situated at the edge of the South China Sea's shipping lanes, 160 kilometers off the coast of China – 300 kilometers from the Philippines to the South, less than 1700 from Vietnam, 1500 from the Spratly Islands and about 1100 from Japan's home islands¹⁹.

The US-General Douglas McArthur, who played a prominent role in the Pacific theatre during World War II, described Taiwan as an „unsinkable aircraft carrier“, an essential element of the so called “island chains”²⁰, a maritime strategy meant to contain to the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in the Cold War. “From this island chain we can dominate with sea and air power every Asiatic port from Vladivostok to Singapore and prevent any hostile movement into the Pacific“, declared General Mc Arthur²¹.

¹⁸Joseph Bosco, Cross-Strait Relations: The Strategic Importance of Taiwan, University of Nottingham, 2018, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2018/02/26/cross-strait-relations-the-strategic-importance-of-taiwan/>

¹⁹Joseph Bosco, Cross-Strait Relations: The Strategic Importance of Taiwan, University of Nottingham, 2018, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2018/02/26/cross-strait-relations-the-strategic-importance-of-taiwan/>

²⁰Andrew S Erickson, Why Islands still matter in Asia: The Enduring Significance of the Pacific Island Chains, The National Interest, 2016, <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2016/02/why-islands-still-matter-in-asia-the-enduring-significance-of-the-pacific-island-chains/>

²¹Andrew S Erickson, Why Islands still matter in Asia: The Enduring Significance of the Pacific Island Chains, The National Interest, 2016, <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2016/02/why-islands-still-matter-in-asia-the-enduring-significance-of-the-pacific-island-chains/>

As any glance at the globe reveals, the Pacific Ocean is vast. It covers more than the Earth's total landmass and half of its seawater. Yet in the entire Pacific Ocean there are only 20 islands larger than 10 000 square kilometers – including Japan, the Philippines New Zealand, Taiwan, Papua New Guinea and Hawaii²². This explains the enormous strategic importance of every island to master what military strategists call „The Tyranny of Distance “²³.

Chinese military strategists have been inspired by the theory of the island chains. A 2007 article in the Chinese navy's official magazine declares that the island chains have the power to “contain China and the Chinese navy “²⁴ . Two Chinese naval strategists similarly argue that the “partially sealed-off nature of China's maritime region has clearly brought negative effects on China's maritime security “²⁵. Others see the island chains as „springboards“, that could help the US to project power – in an Taiwan theatre for example. The most prominent line of thinking however, writes Andrew Erickson, sees the island chains as benchmarks for future Chinese operations. According to Admiral Liu Huaqing in the foreseeable future most Chinese operations would be confined to the First Island Chain, meaning Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan. As a long-term goal, argues Liu, China should be prepared to operate out of the Second Island Chain, including the Marianas, Guam and Palau²⁶.

Control of Taiwan would grant China huge strategic advantages. It would command over an excellent position. This year alone, more than 80% of the largest ships by tonnage and more than 40% of the world's container fleet passed the Taiwan strait²⁷. Ships carrying goods from Asian manufacturing hubs to markets in Europe, the U.S., and everywhere in between mostly travel through the Taiwan Strait, it is the vital artery for Japan's energy imports and global trade.

If China controlled Taiwan, it would greatly facilitate China's operations in the South China Sea and beyond. Its Eastern coast lacks deep-water ports, its submarines must operate on the surface until they are able to submerge and dive deep in the area of the Ryukyu archipelagos²⁸. On the

²²Ibid

²³Ibid

²⁴Ibid

²⁵Ibid

²⁶Andrew S Erickson, Why Islands still matter in Asia: The Enduring Significance of the Pacific Island Chains, The National Interest, 2016, <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2016/02/why-islands-still-matter-in-asia-the-enduring-significance-of-the-pacific-island-chains/>

²⁷Supply Chain Blogs, Rising China-Taiwan Tension threatens Global Shipping Routes, GEP Intelligence drives innovation, 2022, <https://www.gep.com/blog/mind/rising-china-taiwan-tension-threatens-global-shipping-routes>

²⁸Joseph Bosco, Cross-Strait Relations: The Strategic Importance of Taiwan, University of Nottingham, 2018, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2018/02/26/cross-strait-relations-the-strategic-importance-of-taiwan/>

Eastern coast of Taiwan, however, submarines can easily submerge into deep waters, or hide in the thick vegetation of the Luzon Strait²⁹.

Commanding over Taiwan would not only make it easier for Beijing to assert its claim over the huge territory within the Nine-Dash-Line in the South China Sea – the more it advances the more it could realize its vision of turning the South China Sea into a water dominated by China. It could escape what it regards as the navigational „choke points“ of the first island chain (Japan, Ryukyu, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia) constraining its navy’s access to the second island chain (Guam, the Marianas) and from there enter the open ocean³⁰. This could potentially even mean an increased threat for the US Seventh Fleet in Hawaii and the West Coast of the United States³¹.

Realizing these goals is in line with Xi Jinping’s vision for a „community of a shared future for mankind“ in the region, which, he declared in 2014, „is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia“³². It is the idea of an Asia free from US entanglement, an Asia under Chinese leadership. The Party views core aspects of the current international order as incompatible with its vision, foremost US security alliances and partnerships, especially those in the Indo-Pacific. In its 2019 Defense White Paper it claims that countries in the regions are „increasingly aware that they are members of the PRC’s „community with a shared future of mankind.“³³ This at least is its hope. Chinese control of Taiwan – an unofficial but nevertheless close ally of the US – could painfully weaken US alliances in the region. Depending on how China gained control over Taiwan, US allies could start to ask themselves, if the US could really provide the security they needed.

3 Taiwan’s Economic Value for the CPC

²⁹Interview Taiwanese Security Experts Institute for National Defense and Security Research, Taipei, April, May 2023

³⁰Ibid

³¹Ibid

³²Xi Jinping, „New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation,“ remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai Expo Center, May 21, 2014

³³<https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>

It is hard to overstate the importance of semi-conductors for modern economy and defense. „We rarely think about them, yet our modern society and daily life depend on them. They power phones and computers, airplanes and cars, microwaves and radios, missiles and submarines, manufacturing and medical equipment. We depend on semiconductors in our everyday life, but they also shape scientific progress, world economy and geopolitical power shift³⁴“, writes US author Chris Miller in his book „Chip War. “Globalization as we know it wouldn't exist without the trade in semiconductors and the electronic products they make possible. And the US military primacy largely stems from its ability to apply chips for military uses. World War II was decided by steel and aluminum, the Cold War was defined by nuclear weapons. The rivalry between the US and China may well be determined by computing power³⁵.“

The Biden administration tries to limit China’s advances in the chip industry. In Oct. 2022, The Biden administration published a CHIPS and Science Act with a sweeping set of export controls to cut China off from certain semiconductor chips made anywhere in the world with US tools. Hundreds of Chinese American tech executives working for China’s tech companies must choose between their citizenship or their job.

Xi Jinping tries to spur home-grown development, and is investing around 1 trillion yuan into a project called the „Big Chip Project“ in the past decade. But the Chinese chip industry still lags behind – especially when it comes to the most advanced semi-conductors³⁶.

If Beijing was to gain control over Taiwan, it would not only command over a vibrant high technology economy, excellent Research and Development facilities and a highly educated population of 22 million people –it could get access to TSMC, the most expensive factory in history, that supplies the world with 90 percent of the most advanced semi-conductors.

III) How does the CPC want to achieve its goal?

Lately many politicians, high ranking military and analysts have speculated when a Chinese invasion of Taiwan could take place. 2025 – as the Chief of the US Air Force Mobility

³⁴Chris Miller, „Chip War. The Fight for the World’s Most Critical Technology“, Simon & Schuster, London, 2022

³⁵Ibid

³⁶Interview with Chris Miller, Sea of Change: A Podcast about the New Great Game in the Indo-Pacific, October 2022, <https://seaofchange.net/podcast/chip-war-an-invisible-war-that-defines-the-future-of-superpowers/>

Command has proposed?³⁷ 2027 - the year the People's Liberation Army celebrates its 100th anniversary, as the Taiwanese foreign minister Joseph Wu has warned?³⁸ 2035 – when China's armed forces should have risen to a world-class military as Xi Jinping declares?³⁹ Or 1949, when the leadership will celebrate the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and strives to have achieved „National Rejuvenation“? By then, Xi Jinping has declared, the PRC should have attained a status of „a global leader in terms of comprehensive national strength and international influence“⁴⁰.

As understandable as these speculations – and their underlying political motives – are, it is highly unlikely that Xi Jinping or any other Chinese leader would choose a date for such a massive undertaking out of mainly symbolic reasons. It seems much more probable for a Chinese leader to ground a decision like this on careful political and military considerations. It could happen, if the Chinese leadership feels forced to act because it fears „loosing“ Taiwan definitely – as is outlined in the Chinese „Anti-Secession Law“ from 2005 in Article 8: „In the event that the "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces should act under any name or by any means to cause the fact of Taiwan's secession from China, or that major incidents entailing Taiwan's secession from China should occur, or that possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted, the state shall employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.“⁴¹

Or – possibly – if global events opened a possibility for an unhindered attack: if for example the US and their regional allies were occupied with other important events – war, natural disaster – and unable to come to Taiwan's help. An environment that – as State Councilor Yang Jiechi has put it, would be „favorable“ to the PRC's rise and national rejuvenation⁴². „PRC leaders continue to believe that global trends, especially perceived US decline, are generally conducive to their long-term interests“⁴³ states a Pentagon report.

³⁷Michael Klare, Is a Chinese invasion of Taiwan Imminent? March 2023, Tom's Dispatch,

<https://seaofchange.net/podcast/chip-war-an-invisible-war-that-defines-the-future-of-superpowers/>

³⁸Amy Hawkins, Taiwanese Foreign Minister warns of conflict with China in 2027, The Guardian, April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/21/taiwan-foreign-minister-warns-of-conflict-with-china-in-2027>

³⁹„Xi Jinping wants China's armed forces to be „world class“ by 2050“, The Economist, June 2019, <https://www.economist.com/china/2019/06/27/xi-jinping-wants-chinas-armed-forces-to-be-world-class-by-2050?>

⁴⁰US Department of Defense, „Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China“, Washington 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>

⁴¹„Full Text of the Anti-Secession Law“, Beijing, 2005,

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/d-cn2005042601/d-cn2005042601en.pdf

⁴²US Department of Defense, „Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China“, Washington 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>

⁴³Ibid

The Chinese government has invested massively in its military. Between 2009 and 2018 its military spending rose by 83 percent⁴⁴. In March 2023, China announced a yearly defense budget of 224,8 billion Dollars marking a nominal increase of 7,2 percent from the 2022 budget of 229,6 billion. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute puts real spending in 2022 at 292 billion US Dollar, the International Institute für Strategic Studies at 319 billion US Dollars⁴⁵.

Xi Jinping is vigorously striving to modernize the PLA across all domains⁴⁶ – more than any other Chinese leader before him. „The PLA’s evolving capabilities and concepts continue to strengthen the PRC’s ability „to fight and win wars“ against „a strong enemy“ (an euphemism likely for the United States) (...) and project power globally“, summarizes the Pentagon in its yearly report on China⁴⁷. There are important technological advances. In 2021 for example, the PLA introduced a new concept called „Multi-Domain Precision Network“, a network information system-of-systems that incorporates advances in big data and artificial intelligence to rapidly identify key vulnerabilities in the US operational system and then combine joint forces across domains to launch precision strikes against those vulnerabilities⁴⁸. The PLA also focuses on improving its capabilities in „space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR)“ as it „views space superiority, the ability to control the space-enabled information sphere and to deny adversaries their own space-based information gathering and communication capabilities, as critical components in conducting modern „informatized warfare“⁴⁹. Xi Jinping also seeks to reform the organizational structure of the Chinese armed forces, along the guiding principle of „jointness“- the ability of different services such as army, navy and air force to cooperate effectively on the battlefield⁵⁰.

⁴⁴„Xi Jinping wants China’s armed forces to be „world class“ by 2050“, The Economist, June 2019, <https://www.economist.com/china/2019/06/27/xi-jinping-wants-chinas-armed-forces-to-be-world-class-by-2050?>

⁴⁵„What does China really spend on its military?“, China Power, accessed September 2023, <https://chinapower.csis.org/military-spending/>

⁴⁶US Department of Defense, „Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China“, Washington 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>

⁴⁷US Department of Defense, „Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China“, Washington 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>

⁴⁸US Department of Defense, „Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China“, Washington 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>

⁴⁹Ibid

⁵⁰„Xi Jinping wants China’s armed forces to be „world class“ by 2050“, The Economist, June 2019, <https://www.economist.com/china/2019/06/27/xi-jinping-wants-chinas-armed-forces-to-be-world-class-by-2050?>

Chinese intellectuals point out in private that “the generals prepare for war. The whole atmosphere is changing in China. They are forging a collective consciousness that we are under attack, that we must prepare to bear hardship, congregate behind the big leader.”⁵¹ “The papers are full of stories about Taiwan. The atmosphere is all about the US not allowing the Chinese people to rise, of wanting to hedge and contain them.”⁵²

But even as the Chinese armed forces are modernizing, and Xi Jinping would like to take Taiwan rather sooner than later - the Chinese government knows that a successful military endeavor – as the Russian invasion has proven – is far from certain. Geography is a challenge – an amphibious landing is a daunting enterprise so much so that Adolf Hitler refrained from invading Great Britain. More importantly: due to the ambiguity of the US policy, neither China nor Taiwan knows if and in what way the US would come to Taiwan’s help. That Joe Biden was more outspoken in his commitment to help defend Taiwan⁵³ does not mean that a successor must follow that line. As this conflict has the potential to spiral into a Pacific war of two superpowers that could carry unforeseeable consequences for China itself, any hasty moves are to be avoided.

The Party must bide its time. It needs the world for its sustained economic growth, as its policy of „dual circulation“ that aims to increase domestic resilience by reducing China’s reliance on foreign supply chain and exports is lagging behind expectations. In fact, due to the sluggish post-Covid growth, Chinese consumer spending has been less than desired. Neither does Beijing want to scare its neighbors and drive them closer to the United States, especially as it has always maintained that other than the West China does not follow an imperialist or colonialist policy.

It makes more sense for the Chinese government to push towards a foreign policy environment that supports its „Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.“ By increasing its clout in international organizations, building its own international institutions, amassing dependencies, building infrastructure and buying stakes in ports around the world, by expanding the reach of its armed forces with its base in Djibouti for example, China is seeking to build the „community

⁵¹ Interview with Chinese scholars that have to stay anonymous due to security concerns.

⁵² Interview with Chinese scholars that have to stay anonymous due to security concerns

⁵³ Michael Schumann, „No more „Strategic Ambiguity“ on Taiwan“, The Atlantic, September 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/09/joe-biden-taiwan-china-strategic-ambiguity/671512/>

of common destiny“ that is in line with Beijing’s foreign policy objectives. At the same time Chinese analysts expect US influence to decline.

To avoid escalatory actions that might destabilize economic relations with other countries or provoke a backlash from the US, the Chinese government resorts to techniques of Hybrid or Gray-zone Warfare to realize its objectives.

These tactics „enable flexible and deniable options for Chinese leaders, while avoiding the multifaceted costs of outright state-on-state aggression in the modern age. “⁵⁴

1 Hybrid Warfare

There is not one single definition for the set of strategies that we want to discuss here. Chinese strategy papers describe them as „Non-War Military Operations“ (Fei Zhangsheng Junshi Yundong)⁵⁵, which according to PLA official terminology are „military operations that the armed forces carry out to protect the nation’s security and development interests but that to not directly constitute war“⁵⁶. But in fact, hybrid strategies go far beyond the activities of the armed forces. The Russian conceptualization of hybrid warfare (or gibridnaya voyna) differs from that in the West. As Ofer Fridman has noted, whereas NATO countries tend to place an emphasis on operational issues surrounding its prosecution, the Russian’s see the primary purpose of hybrid warfare as being ‘to avoid the traditional battlefield with the aim of destroying the adversary via a mixture of ideological, informational, financial, political and economic methods, ultimately leading to socio-cultural disintegration and, eventually, social collapse’⁵⁷.

As Aurelio Insisa has eloquently described there has been some debate among experts on whether to use the term „hybrid“ or „gray-zone“⁵⁸ and how to define them - especially since

⁵⁴Bonny Lin et al, „Competition in the Gray Zone, Countering China’s Coercion Against U.S.Allies and Partners in the Indo-Pacific, Rand Publications, Santa Monica, 2022, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA594-1.html

⁵⁵Fabu „Jundui fei zhanzheng junshi xingdong gangyao (shixing), Renmin Ribao, 14 June 2022 <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0614/c1024-32445392.html>

⁵⁶ Quanjun junshi shuyu guanli weiyuanhui, junshi kexueyuan [All-Army Military Terminology Committee], *Zhongguo Renming Jiefang Junyu* [Military Terminology of China’s People’s Liberation Army] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2011), p. 163, as cited in SMS 13, p. 154.

⁵⁷Ofer Fridman, *Russian Hybrid Warfare: Resurgence and Politicization* (London, UK: Hurst, 2018), p. 7

⁵⁸ Aurelio Insisa, „Hybrid After All: The Grey Zone, the Hybrid Warfare Debate, p.6

Russia's operation in Ukraine in 2014, „when the focus shifted away from the battlefield to the full spectrum of great power competition.“⁵⁹

Strategy was beautifully defined by Lawrence Freedman as „the art of creating power“⁶⁰, the term hybrid warfare in its current connotation was coined by Frank G. Hoffman who defined it as „a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder“⁶¹. Aoi and her co-authors describe gray zone as a type of hybrid strategy: „the blending of conventional and non-conventional methods to achieve political-military objectives by both state and non-state actors.“⁶² A paper published by the Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC) program of the UK Ministry of Defense differentiates hybrid threats from hybrid warfare by defining threats as ‘a wide range of non-violent means to target vulnerabilities across the whole of society to undermine the functioning, unity, or will of their targets, while degrading and subverting the status quo ...’⁶³

Whatever definition one prefers its defining feature is ambiguity. „Hybrid warfare is the ability to strike the enemy with multiple synchronized elements forcing it into a state of cognitive impasse regarding its political, strategic, and tactical intentions“⁶⁴, write Andrew Mumford and Pascal Carlucci. Both Russia and China have proven to have mastered this war-fighting ability to their advantage. The West has to understand how ambiguity works in hybrid warfare precisely because great power competition breeds hybrid warfare“⁶⁵, write Andrew Mumford and Pascal Carlucci.

⁵⁹Aurelio Insisa, ebenda

⁶⁰Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶¹Frank Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007)

⁶²Chiyuki Aoi and others, „Introduction: Hybrid Warfare in Asia: Its Meaning and Shape“ *Pacific Review* 31n6 (2019) p 701

⁶³Patrick Cullen and Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, ‘Understanding Hybrid Warfare’, *Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC)* (2017), available at: {https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647776/dar_mcdc_hybrid_warfare.pdf}.

⁶⁴Andrew Mumford and Pascal Carlucci, *Hybrid Warfare, The Continuation of Ambiguity by Other Means* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) , p8. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-international-security/article/hybrid-warfare-the-continuation-of-ambiguity-by-other-means/1B3336D8109D418F89D732EB98B774E5>, p3

⁶⁵Andrew Mumford and Pascal Carlucci, *Hybrid Warfare, The Continuation of Ambiguity by Other Means* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) , p8. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-international-security/article/hybrid-warfare-the-continuation-of-ambiguity-by-other-means/1B3336D8109D418F89D732EB98B774E5>

But how is ambiguity achieved?

Firstly, hybrid warfare is not declared. At the beginning it might manifest itself with non-conventional or covert activities, some of them might be open other clandestine. The victim has difficulty assessing where this situation might lead, as it could have multiple outcomes. It might not even realize that all his „multiple instruments“ are part of a synchronized action⁶⁶. Hybrid warfare leaves the victim wondering where this all leads.

Secondly, it follows a strategy of dispersion. The victim sees itself forced to disperse its resources, because the attack suggests multiple goals⁶⁷, it cannot concentrate its forces, and is therefore weakened.

Thirdly, it is one of the most creative types of war. Freedman writes that „underdog strategies, in situations where the starting balance of power would predict defeat, provide the real test of creativity. “⁶⁸ „Hybrid warriors have few boundaries as the means they can use to strike the enemy “, write Mumford and Carlucci. „Artillery, constabulary forces, separatists, propaganda, special forces, armored vehicles, drones, legal claims, can all be used with the objective of forcing the enemy into a cognitive impasse. These tactics buy time and space and are frequently met with an inefficient defense. It is therefore important to underline the fact that hybrid tactics are not ‘blurry’ or ‘grey’ nor ‘mysterious’, they are cleverly designed to be so. War can generate chaos, but it is never chaotic. “ In hybrid warfare weaknesses such as economic constraints and insufficient military capacity can be turned into strengths – such as surprise and deniability⁶⁹.

Fourthly, hybrid wars can be started as quickly as they can be over. The aggressor can escalate and de-escalate the situation according to his needs and in synch with the overall situation. For Bettina Renz hybrid warfare is designed to prolong belligerency, perpetually frustrate an

⁶⁶Mumford and Carlucci, p7

⁶⁷Ibid, P 8

⁶⁸Lawrence Freedman, Strategy: A History (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xi

⁶⁹Andrew Mumford and Pascal Carlucci, Hybrid Warfare, The Continuation of Ambiguity by Other Means (Cambridge University Press, 2022) , p8. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-international-security/article/hybrid-warfare-the-continuation-of-ambiguity-by-other-means/1B3336D8109D418F89D732EB98B774E5>

opponent, and leverage protracted political pressure⁷⁰. By tackling and engaging in hybrid warfare states are both perpetually avoiding and committing to a continuous conflict – even if the prosecution and countering of hybrid warfare looks like neither war nor peace, write Mumford and Carlucci. „Renz’s approach suggests that hybrid warfare does not want to look like a conflict while continuing to violently pursue its objective in a very dilated time frame.“

With the resurgence of Russia and the rise of China as strategic competitors of the United States hybrid warfare is on the rise, write Mumford and Carlucci, especially before Putin decided to escalate his efforts into a full out invasion of Ukraine. Russia and China have employed similar techniques in their effort of territorial advances, as seen in the Russian strategy in Ukraine in 2014 and China’s advances in the South China Sea. In both cases Russia and China wanted to push their national interests without having to carry the risk of being outright combatants in a conventional war. „They use hybrid warfare because its inherent ambiguity allows them to shape their foreign and security policy at a relatively low cost.“⁷¹ Their strategies are tied to a specific historic and geopolitical setting.

In 2014-15, write Mumford and Carlucci, the short era when the United States ruled unipolarly gave way to a more chaotic undefined era of competition between the US, China and Russia. Putin had already expressed his discomfort with his country’s position at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, with the war in Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 he showed that he could change political events in what he perceived as his sphere of influence. And his geopolitical ambitions grew with the help of Wagner’s mercenaries. On February 2022 Putin decided to escalate the hybrid strategies into a full out war

Simultaneously, Xi Jinping made it clear that his ambitions didn’t stop at China’s economic rise and that the West’s hope for „Wandel durch Handel“, change through economic engagement, had been illusionary. In fact, he would do everything to counter attempts to bring about such a change, coined „color revolution“ in the CPC’s thinking. Not only does Xi Jinping want to cement the power of the Party, he also seeks to change the geopolitical order in a way that is

⁷⁰Bettina Renz, ‘Russia and “hybrid warfare”’, *Contemporary Politics*, 22:3 (2016), pp. 283–300.

⁷¹Andrew Mumford and Pascal Carlucci, *Hybrid Warfare, The Continuation of Ambiguity by Other Means* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), p8. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-international-security/article/hybrid-warfare-the-continuation-of-ambiguity-by-other-means/1B3336D8109D418F89D732EB98B774E5>, p3

more in line with Chinese geopolitical ambitions. It should be noted that Chinese sources do not view their own actions – for example in the South China Sea as gray zone activities. But rather as „lawful rights protection activities “. In Beijing ´s view it is the US that is engaging in hybrid activities – such as secret support to what it calls Chinese Tibetan separatists, sending US Navy research vessels to Taiwan, or the Western support of Chinese intellectuals, dissidents, Christians or disenfranchised groups (ruoshi junti)⁷². Hybrid strategies are not limited to any country, government or group.

However, there are several factors that enable and push the use of hybrid strategies in China. Xi Jinping has increasingly centralized power and authority. The role of security, always a topic of greatest importance for the CPC, has been strengthened, amplified and intensified. At China´s National Security Commission in 2014 Xi Jinping introduced the concept of comprehensive national security ” [“总体国家安全观”]⁷³. But even before, in fact since 2010, China´s leaders have revised or enacted laws that strengthen the Chinese central government´s ability to target “hostile” forces using multifaceted tools and co-opt elements of Chinese society into supporting government goals⁷⁴. Civilians and civil entities are called upon to contribute to national security in many ways. There have also been growing links between China´s military and economic sectors including the military-civil fusion as well as a series of military reforms that integrate military and paramilitary forces under the military high command⁷⁵.

Hybrid strategies have been very evident in the South China sea, where Chinese fishing vessels manned by so-called „little blue men“ have undertaking aggressive maneuvers on foreign ships – the US and China´s distressed neighbors see them as part of the People´s Liberation Army Navy´s push for greater influence in the South China sea⁷⁶. In using civilian ships Beijing tries to avoid direct confrontation while gain leverage and erode the 2016 International Court of Justice

⁷²Rand: “Competition in the Gray Zone”,
https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA500/RRA594-1/RAND_RRA594-1.pdf

⁷³Overall National Security Concept: Action Guidelines for Maintaining and Shaping National Security” [“总体国家安全观: 维护和塑造国家安全的行动指南”], Xinhua, April 13, 2019

⁷⁴Rand p 26

⁷⁵Rand

⁷⁶Simon Tisdall, ‘Little blue men: The maritime militias pushing China’s claims’, The Guardian (16 May 2016), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/16/little-blue-men-the-maritime-militias-pushing-chinas-claims-in-southchina-sea>}.

ruling that rejected Beijing's territorial claims to the South China Sea on the base of its Nine-Dash-Line.

Already in 2012 Chinese vessels took the Scarborough Shoal – in what could be a textbook example for hybrid strategies⁷⁷. Such actions are complemented by the building of military and civilian facilities on artificial islands constructed in the sea. After having erected seven such islands in the contested Spratly groups – which have been equipped with airstrips, docks and military systems satellite photo suggest that the Chinese government is currently building another airstrip on Triton island in the Paracel group⁷⁸.

Hybrid activities have been employed extensively against Taiwan, too. In fact, Taiwan is not only a place that has received a much wider variety of tactics than others, but also one where Beijing has tested new tactics. It is therefore an important case study.

2 Hybrid Strategies in Taiwan

Beijing has been using hybrid tactics towards Taiwan for a long time, even as its general political tactics shifted over time – depending on who was in power in Taiwan and Beijing.

Beijing initially pursued a coercive approach toward Taiwan starting from 1995 up to Ma Ying-jeou's presidency in 2008, when it started to highlight the benefits of unification, a strategy it abruptly changed when Tsai Ing-wen came to power in 2016. Beijing's strategy on Taiwan was not only shaped by who was in power in Taipei, but certainly also by the CPC Chairman's outlook on Cross-Strait-Relations. As Jiang Zemin (1989-2002) had presided over the 1997 return of Hong Kong to China he believed he could make fast and easy progress on Taiwan as well, aiming for unification by 2020⁷⁹. His approach was therefore heavy handed, resulting in multiple crisis in the Taiwan Strait (1995,1996,1999). However, this strategy did not bring the intended results. When Taiwanese approached their first direct presidential elections in 1996,

⁷⁷Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, Jake Douglas, „Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/>

⁷⁸AP, „China appears to be building an airstrip on a disputed South China Sea island, August 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/south-china-sea-island-airstrip-8b8ae02349a7a548af7d943cc300f776>

⁷⁹Rand: “Competition in the Gray Zone”,

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA500/RRA594-1/RAND_RRA594-1.pdf

China threatened voters not only by amassing 100 000 soldiers in Fujian, but also by extensive air and naval exercises, firing missiles near Taiwan's two largest port cities Keelung and Kaohsiung. This however did not yield favorable results, as the threats may have driven some Taiwanese voters to support Lee Deng-hui. Ultimately this led to an increase of US defense planning and the 1997 revision of US Japanese defense guidelines. China's neighbors also grew alerted to a potential China threat⁸⁰.

Jiang's successor Hu Jintao eschewed heavy handed tactics as he believed they would backfire and drive Taiwan closer to the United States. His immediate goal was to avoid independence, he did not want to rush unification, emphasizing the benefits of unification with China.

Xi Jinping however (2012-) views Hu as too soft and believes that his strategy emboldened pro-independence forces. He has consequently increased pressure on Taiwan. He has much more leverage on his hands than his predecessors. China had been Taiwan's leading trade partner since 2005, when it made up 17% of its trade flows. Now even as President Tsai has been trying to redirect trade to Southeast Asian countries, New Zealand and Australia with her Southbound Initiative, China accounted for 25% of Taiwan's exports and 20% of its imports last year⁸¹. Beijing has also significantly improved its military capabilities. Generally, the Chinese government follows a carrot and stick strategy, on one hand enticing Taiwanese citizens to move closer to China with the promise of economic benefits, on the other hand threatening all others with dire consequences.

a) International

The PRC has been trying to isolate Taiwan internationally for decades, a strategy it pushes much more energetically since President Tsai Ing-wen took power in 2016. With the recent shift of Honduras Taiwan has lost 9 diplomatic allies since 2016⁸². Taiwan is left with 13 partners who recognize it officially: 12 mainly small countries in the Pacific and Caribbean and the Holy See⁸³. This poses unique challenges to foreign policy making. Although Taiwan maintains unofficial

⁸⁰Ibid

⁸¹„It is time to divert Taiwan's trade and investment away from China“, The Economist, March 2023, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023/03/06/it-is-time-to-divert-taiwans-trade-and-investment-from-china>

⁸²Ian Huang, „China vs Taiwan: The Battle for Diplomatic Allies, April 2023, <https://english.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=3407>

⁸³Ministry of Foreign Relations of the Republic of China, „Diplomatic Allies“, <https://english.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=3407>

relations with many countries, high level political contacts are very restricted. Visits to the United States can only be realized within tight limits, as the Taiwanese president can only visit the US while stopping over on her way to Latin American countries. Beijing has responded to these restricted visits with military threats and maneuvers. It also protests whenever ministers of countries that maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan visit the island state.

Since 2016 Beijing has also barred Taiwan from attending the World Health Assembly as an observer, meaning that during the Covid pandemic Taiwanese citizens were barred from obtaining vital information. Neither can Tsai Ing-wen attend important meetings of organizations where Taiwan is a member. She frequently sends TSMC founder Morris Chang to represent Taiwan at the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference.

b) Bilateral

China is intensifying efforts to drive a wedge between Taipei Kinmen and, to a lesser extent, Matsu, two groups of islands that sit less than 10 km off the coast of China⁸⁴. Both places are KMT strongholds and Beijing went to great lengths to convince them that much is to gain from unification with China. A cross-party alliance of eight Kinmen councilors has recently proposed building a bridge to China, part of a wider plan to turn Kinmen into a demilitarized zone or so-called „peace island “. This proposal calls for removing Taiwan´s troops and military installations and turning Kinmen into a setting for bilateral talks aimed at „de-escalating tensions⁸⁵.“

c) Economic

Beijing is very apt at using carrots and sticks to try to produce the political results it wishes for. On one hand it provides economic incentives and business opportunities to Taiwanese businesspeople and groups it hopes will help promote its desired pro-China vision. Since 2016 it has offered additional incentives and sweetheart deals to Taiwanese companies and citizens alike – this includes for example the 31 preferential policies in 2018, the 26 additional measures in

⁸⁴Rand,

⁸⁵Eric Cheung, Will Ripley, John Mees, „A China-Taiwan DMZ? Meet the Kinmen islanders who want a bridge, not a war, CNN, June 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/01/asia/taiwan-china-tensions-kinmen-island-dmz-intl-hnk/index.html>

2019, the 11 new incentives so that “the smart [Taiwan individuals] will realize that the reunification will be the only and best choice”⁸⁶.

On the other hand, the Chinese government restricts the cross straits flow of goods and people – to punish the Taiwanese government, voters, entrepreneurs, farmers or fisherman. For example, Beijing reduced tourism to Taiwan by discouraging group tours in 2016 and banned individual travel in 2019. In 2017 Beijing cut the quota for PRC students in Taiwan into half, suspending all PRC student programs in 2020⁸⁷. It has announced a whole series of bans on products from Taiwan in the past years – from pineapples, wax apples, grouper, honey, pastries, seafood to beer⁸⁸. Beijing has also pushed foreign firms operating in China to label Taiwan as part of China including the Marriott hotel chain and 30 airlines. And it has punished companies such as Muji that dared to offer goods with the label „Made in Taiwan “⁸⁹.

d) Military

The Chinese government has used military drills and maneuvers to threaten Taiwanese on many occasions, for example when Nancy Pelosi, the then speaker of the US congress, visited Taiwan in August 2022 or when Vice President and DPP presidential candidate William Lai visited the US this year⁹⁰. Chinese fighter jets violate the Taiwanese Air Identification Zone on a nearly daily basis. With all the threats the Chinese government is cautious not to escalate too much – especially before elections, in order to not repeat a reaction like the above mentioned in 1995. In September Beijing launched large-scale military drills in the Western Pacific - China’s aircraft carrier Shandong led at least 20 naval vessels - the largest number of warships seen in years into waters to the east of the island – while at the same time issuing a planning document on turning Fujian province into a demonstration zone for “integrated development” with Taiwan⁹¹.

e) Cyberattacks

⁸⁶Cao Siqi, “New 5-Year Plan to Tackle External Interference in HK and Taiwan,” Global Times, November 3, 2020. See also “Taiwan Compatriots Should Seize Opportunities Created by 14th Five-Year Plan: Spokesperson,” Xinhua, March 17, 2021.

⁸⁷Rand

⁸⁸Brian Hioe, „China slaps ban on Taiwanese goods – again “, The Diplomat, December 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/china-slaps-export-bans-on-taiwanese-goods-again/>

⁸⁹Rand

⁹⁰Casey Hall, Ben Blanchard, „China launches drills around Taiwan in angry response to VP’s US visit “, Reuters, August 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-says-military-held-naval-air-combat-readiness-patrol-around-taiwan-2023-08-19/>

⁹¹Chris Taylor, “China ratches up `carrot and stick `pressure on Taiwan”, RFA, September 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/china-taiwan-integration-09142023030758.html>

In 2019 officials estimated that China launched about 18 million cyberattacks on the island monthly, constituting the majority of all cyberattacks on Taiwan⁹². When Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan last summer, attacks on Taiwanese government websites reached a record high⁹³. Hacked messages appeared on screens in 7-Eleven convenience stores throughout Taiwan that read: „Warmonger Pelosi, get out of Taiwan! “ A hacked screen in a train station in Kaohsiung announced that Pelosi was „an old witch“⁹⁴.

f) Disinformation

In comparison to the Russian strategy of disinformation which is much more intelligence-driven⁹⁵ the Chinese strategy is rather dispersed. Every day Chinese government and party departments on different administrative levels churn out massive amounts of disinformation which are picked up and disseminated by state linked social media, commercial media, content farms, *fenhong*, nationalist Chinese bloggers, paid youtubers, Taiwanese media and bloggers⁹⁶. There is a whole food chain of disinformation targeting Taiwan, the country, according to the Swedish organization V-Dem most targeted by a disinformation campaign by a foreign state⁹⁷. This decentralized campaign is very experimental and highly sophisticated – as is described in a whole number of reports by the Taiwanese organization Double Think Lab. “They just see which topic could actually land and then work from there. They try out different kinds of disinformation with Weibo influencers, see which one picks up, then use it first on commercial and then official media”, says Doublethink Lab Chairperson Puma Shen⁹⁸. The upcoming presidential election in January 2024 in Taiwan will very likely see an escalation of disinformation efforts by Beijing.

f) United Front Work/Grassroots Work

⁹²Lawrence Chung, “Taiwan to Put Cyber Defenses to the Test in Drills with the US,” South China Morning Post, September 24, 2019a.

⁹³Interview Audrey Tang, Minister of Digital Affairs, April 7th, see also <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/taiwan-digitalministerin-audrey-tang-bereitet-sich-auf-massive-cyberangriffe-vor-a-eab86874-8a11-4f6b-bed6-d68e98049bdc>

⁹⁴Brit McCandless Farmer, „China’s cyber assault on Taiwan, 60 minutes, CBS, June 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-cyber-assault-taiwan-60-minutes-2023-06-18/>

⁹⁵ Luke Harding, Stiliyana Simeonova, Manisha Ganguly, Dan Sabbagh, “Vulkan files leak reveal Putin’s global and domestic cyberwarfare tactics”, The Guardian, March 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/mar/30/vulkan-files-leak-reveals-putins-global-and-domestic-cyberwarfare-tactics>

⁹⁶ Puma Shen, Interview Sea of Change with Angela Köckritz and Qin Liwen “Taiwan Trilogy Part 3: Fake news and conspiracy – China’s disinformation campaign on Taiwan, March 2023, <https://seaofchange.net/podcast/taiwan-trilogy-part-3-puma-shen-on-mafia-chinas-united-front-work-and-disinformation-war-in-taiwan/>

⁹⁷Yang Mien-chieh and Jonathan Chin, „Taiwan most targeted for false information: study“, Taipei Times, March 2022, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/03/20/2003775114>

⁹⁸ Puma Shen, Sea of Change

The Chinese government's foreign influence activities have accelerated under Xi. The status of the United Front (统一战线) Department of the CCP Central Committee has been upgraded and expanded⁹⁹. Xi's decision to name his close ally Shi Taifeng as head of the United Front Work Department, also shows the importance of this body to his national rejuvenation program¹⁰⁰. Xi Jinping has on numerous occasions stressed the importance of United Front Work – calling it one of the CCP's "magic weapons" 三个大法宝¹⁰¹.

This expression goes back to Mao Zedong who named The United Front Work together with the armed forces and the Party building as the three core elements that helped the CCP gain power in 1949.

Originally, United Front is a Leninist tactic of strategic alliance, that was adapted in the mid-1930 to fit Chinese circumstances and culture¹⁰². With this strategy the Party makes use of non-Party or non-government organizations or civilians such as businesspeople, religious figures, pop stars, students, artists, to advance its means. United front activities incorporate working with groups and prominent individuals in society; information management and propaganda; and it has also frequently been a means of facilitating espionage¹⁰³. "United Front work often takes the form of co-optation: by advocating for the Party's views to their circles of influence and reporting the views of their circles back to the Party, targets are rewarded with enhanced status and in some cases material advantages as well. The Party, in return, gets to tap their diverse talents for the ongoing tasks of nation-building and economic construction. Their public expressions of loyalty, moreover, helps validate the Party's claims", writes Brady¹⁰⁴.

United Front can be used both in the domestic as well as the foreign policy sphere.

United Front cadres have to be able to forge friendships and win those over who are not the Party's natural allies. The more diverse and widespread their allies appear, the better, as it advances the Party's position. Agencies such as the International Liaison Department, the All-China Federation of Overseas Chinese, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with

⁹⁹Gerry Groot, The Expansion of the United Front Under Xi Jinping, The China Story, Australian Center of China in the World, 2015, <https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2015/forum-ascent/the-expansion-of-the-united-front-under-xi-jinping/>

¹⁰⁰ Salina Li, Xi Jinping ally Shi Taifeng to head Chinese Communist Party's influence machine, South China Morning Post, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3197609/xi-jinping-ally-helm-communist-partys-influence-machine>

¹⁰¹ Anne-Marie Brady, Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping, Wilson Center, Washington, DC, 2017, p1

¹⁰² Matthey Rothwell, „Communist Unionizing and the Genesis of the United Front with the Guomindang“, People's History of Ideas Podcast, October 2019, <https://spotify.link/ownHs0sW6Cb>

¹⁰³ Anne-Marie Brady p 3

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

Foreign countries all contribute to this effort and play an important role in Chinese foreign affairs.

Taiwan is a major destination for Chinese United Front Work. Beijing offers “Taiwan compatriots” preferential treatment as tourists, students, and investors and it welcomes back old soldiers who once fought against it in the civil war of 1945–1949 and beyond. In 2017, Yu Zhengsheng, then a member of China’s Politburo Standing Committee, declared that China’s approach toward Taiwan involves targeting one generation (the youth) and one stratum (the grassroots)¹⁰⁵. Beijing is extremely worried about the development of a unique Taiwanese identity – a trend that is accelerating among young people¹⁰⁶. Whereas in 1992 only 17,6 percent of Taiwanese citizens solely identified as Taiwanese recently the number has risen to 62,8 percent¹⁰⁷. More than 80 percent of young people under 30 identify solely as Taiwanese¹⁰⁸.

Beijing seeks to leverage shared cross-strait ethnic identities, culture and history in its favor. Since at least 1997 it started to develop cross-straits religious and cultural networks – particularly Matsu temples – in the hope that they would help support the PRC agenda¹⁰⁹. It also provides support to friendly political parties – “since at least 2007 China began funneling money to KMT campaigns”, write the authors in the Rand Study¹¹⁰. China also seeks to influence Taiwan outlets, purchase media content, and support pro-China media. In 2008, for example, pro-China Taiwan businessman Tsai Eng-meng acquired China Times Group and encouraged censorship of articles that he deemed as too critical of China¹¹¹. By at least 2010, China had begun embedding advertisements or advertorials in Taiwan news outlets that appeared to be news coverage¹¹². In 2019, Reuters found evidence that Beijing paid at least five Taiwan media groups for favorable coverage¹¹³.

¹⁰⁵ Rand Corporation

¹⁰⁶ Interview Yu Ching-hsin, Head of Taiwan Study Election Center, National Chengchi University, March and April 2023

¹⁰⁷ Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese, Study Election Center, National

¹⁰⁸ Statista, “Share of respondents who identify themselves as Taiwanese or Taiwanese and Chinese in Taiwan by age group in 2020”, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1118310/taiwan-national-identity-affiliation-by-age/>

¹⁰⁹ Alice Su, David Rennie: Drum Tower: Mazu and the Motherland, The Economist’s China Podcast, June 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0odpzK4x0bBcUzF6Rn6D2i?si=EWw5cBx6Q0e4i-b2D0xzNQ>

¹¹⁰ Rand Corporation

¹¹¹ Chien-Jung Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 54, No. 3, May–June 2014, p. 518-524

¹¹² Hsu, 530-532

¹¹³ Yimou Lee and I-hwa Cheng, “Paid ‘News’: China Using Taiwan Media to Win Hearts and Minds on Island — Sources,” Reuters, August 9, 2019.

In 2013, as it expanded its grassroots efforts, it also began investing in groups beyond the KMT. Under Xi Jinping the Party ceased to work only with a few proxies, but tries to target all aspects of Taiwanese society – especially those known not to harbor much pro-unification sympathies like youth and DPP strongholds in central and southern Taiwan. It therefore tries to co-opt groups that are smaller or cater to segments of the Taiwan population¹¹⁴.

Beijing pursues a long-term approach – for example by reaching out to the assistants of local Taiwanese counsellors – lichang – assuming that they will likely decide for a political career and might have achieved important political positions in decades¹¹⁵.

IV) Putin’s Invasion of Ukraine – any lessons for the People’s Republic of China?

Officially, the CPC rejects analogies between Taiwan and Ukraine. “The Taiwan question is fundamentally different from the Ukraine issue. Making deliberate analogy between the two is an attempt to create a new crisis into the Taiwan Strait with a malicious intention”, said Wang Wenbin, Spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in March 2022. “On the Taiwan question, those who play with fire will get burned.”¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, in conversation with Chinese intellectuals it becomes clear that they are closely watching what the outcome could mean for China¹¹⁷. Some actions the Chinese government is taking clearly appear to be influenced by the lessons it has drawn from Putin’s all out invasion of Ukraine.

1 There might be no easy victory – better prepare

¹¹⁴ Rand Corporation

¹¹⁵ Interview Puma Shen, Co-Founder Double Think Lab, Taipei, March 2023

¹¹⁶ Global Times, “Taiwan is not Ukraine”, linking the two is to create new crisis across Taiwan Straits: Chinese FM”, March 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1256993.shtml>

¹¹⁷ Alicja Bachulska; Mark Leonard, “China and Ukraine: The Chinese Debate about Russia’s War in Ukraine”, European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/China-and-Ukraine-The-Chinese-debate-about-Russias-war-and-its-meaning-for-the-world.pdf>

When Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to march into Ukraine, he expected to triumph within days. Officers were told to pack their dress uniforms and medals in anticipation of military parades in Kyiv, show Russian invasion plans, obtained by the New York Times¹¹⁸. “When the head of the CIA traveled to Moscow to warn against invading Ukraine, he found a supremely confident Kremlin, with Mr Putin’s national security adviser boasting that Russia’s cutting-edge armed forces were strong enough to stand up even to the Americans”¹¹⁹.

The reality proved to be very different. Corruption and theft had eaten up a big part of the enormous sums invested into the modernization of the Russian armed forces. Material, weapon systems, equipment that might have looked great on paper was often in a sorry state. The invading forces relied on bad intelligence and bad maps – sometimes dating from the 1960ies. Russian soldiers were allowed to use their cellphones, allowing Ukrainians to find them. The command system was sclerotic and outdated, its top-down structure leaving little room for rapid response. Putin divided his war into fiefs, as the initial invasion failed, the war effort grew even more disjointed and fractured with different groups often acting as rivals. Conscripts were often poorly trained, “with gear from the 1940s or little more than printouts from the internet describing how to use a sniper rifle.”¹²⁰

A lesson the Chinese government very likely has drawn is that it’s People’s Liberation Army’s true military capabilities might be less impressive than on paper. It is therefore very likely that witnessing Putin’s rather humiliating experience in Ukraine, Beijing would want to prepare itself very well before taking any military steps¹²¹.

The PLA lacks combat experience. Nearly all – if not all – soldiers with experience of a large-scale conflict – a war with Vietnam in 1979 – have retired¹²². The PLA has not prosecuted a major offensive operation since China invaded Vietnam in 1979, which exposed “the PLA’s humiliating ineptitude and shocking backwardness in comparison with the battle-hardened Vietnamese troops. Many PLA commanders did not know how to read military maps; despite

¹¹⁸ Michael Schwirtz, Anton Troianovski, Yousou Al-Hlou, Masha Froliak, Adam Entous, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “Putin’s War. A Times Investigation based on interviews, intercepts, documents and secret battle plan show how a “walk in the park” became a catastrophe for Russia”,

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/12/16/world/europe/russia-putin-war-failures-ukraine.html>

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Interview Wu Yu-shan, Academia Sinica, March 2023,

¹²² Ian Huang, „China vs Taiwan: The Battle for Diplomatic Allies“, Tian Xia, April 2023, <https://english.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=3407>

superior artillery firepower and strike capability, the PLA high commanders inexplicably preferred close hand-to-hand combat, which was Vietnam's outstanding strength, sending many PLA soldiers to brutal and unnecessary deaths. In addition, throughout the war, the PLA's combat communications turned out to be highly ineffective¹²³. The performance, writes Miles Maochun Yu, was so abysmal that it stimulated the modernization drive that made the PLA the powerful military force that it is today.

Still, it has not conducted an operation that resembles an invasion of Taiwan since 1950 when it launched an amphibious assault on holdout Kuomintang forces on Hainan Island¹²⁴. The People's Liberation Army Eastern Theatre Command – whose responsibility includes the Taiwan Strait – has declared that it offered a “valuable experience” for future seaborne landings¹²⁵. The Hainan landings, writes Kevon McCauley, “displayed careful planning, preparation and intelligence collection. Hainan's terrain and defenses were closely analyzed, and a suitable transit time, crossing routes, and landing areas chosen.”¹²⁶

Every maneuver the PLA is undertaking near Taiwan does therefore not only serve as a threat but also as a very precious training possibility for the PLA.

The war in Ukraine provides Beijing with very valuable insights – as all wars the US conducted before have done. From the Persian Gulf War in 1991, when American F-117 stealth bombers hit Baghdad with their laser-guided high precision bombs and Tomahawk cruise missiles slammed into their targets. It was the first time the US fought a major war since Vietnam, and this was a high-tech war, revolutionized by integrated circuits enabling better surveillance, communication and computing power¹²⁷. The Persian Gulf War was the first major test of the US “offset strategy” which had been devised after the Vietnam War. “Videos of Iraqi buildings,

¹²³ Miles Maochun Yu, “The 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War and its Consequences”, Hoover Institution, December 2022, <https://www.hoover.org/research/1979-sino-vietnamese-war-and-its-consequences>

¹²⁴ Kevin McCauley, “Amphibious Operations: Lessons of Past Campaigns for Today's PLA”, China Brief Volume, February 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/amphibious-operations-lessons-past-campaigns-todays-pla/>

¹²⁵ Amber Wang, “PLA says 1950s battle for Hainan is valuable experience for future seaborne landings”, South China Morning Post, August 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3188701/pla-says-1950-battle-hainan-valuable-experience-future-seaborne>

¹²⁶ Kevin McCauley

¹²⁷ Chris Miller, “Chip Wars”, Chapter 27: “War Hero”

tanks and airfields being destroyed by precision weapons made it impossible to deny: the character of war was changing.”¹²⁸ “What’s making all this work is weapons based on information instead of the volume of fire power”, one military analyst told the media¹²⁹.

The Chinese government has been closely watching. In an indirect struggle between two superpowers on the other side of the world, Beijing’s military planners see a source of invaluable lessons on weapons, troop power, intelligence and deterrence that can help it prepare for potential wars of its own¹³⁰. “Russia’s troubles in Ukraine appear to have hardened official Chinese views that Beijing, like Moscow, is the focus of a U.S.-led campaign of “hybrid warfare” that includes economic sanctions, technological bans, information campaigns and cyberattacks”¹³¹. “The United States and West have seized on this conflict to engage in the total political negation, all-out diplomatic suppression and full cultural isolation of Russia,” writes Gao Yun, a researcher at China’s Academy of Military Sciences¹³².

Chinese military planners have especially focused on Russia’s deployment of hypersonic missiles, and the equipment NATO countries have provided Ukraine, like Stinger Javelin and other missiles. Witnessing how Russia failed in supplying its forces with reliable intelligence about Ukrainian actions, Chinese analysts call for an improved use of drones, communications and satellites in battle. Chinese military thinkers have been especially focused on “how Ukrainian troops used Starlink satellite links to coordinate attacks and circumvent Russian efforts to shut their communications and warned that China must swiftly develop a similar low-orbit satellite system and devise ways to knock out rival ones.”¹³³

For nearly two decades the PLA has systematically planned, trained and build the forces it believes it needs to invade Taiwan. It has modernized and expanded its cyber, missile, aerial, naval and amphibious assault capabilities – all of which would play a key role in not only attacking

¹²⁸ Chris Miller, “Chip Wars”, Chapter 27: “War Hero”

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ Chris Buckley, “China draws lessons from Russia’s losses in Ukraine and its gains, New York Times, April 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/01/world/asia/china-russia-ukraine-war.html>

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Ibid

Taiwan but also in keeping the US and its potential allies at bay – a concept known as “anti-access/area denial” or A2AD¹³⁴.

“(The PLA) has already achieved the capabilities needed to conduct an air and naval blockade, cyberattacks and missile strikes against Taiwan,” the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission said in a November 2021 report to Congress¹³⁵.

The PLA’s current military sea and air lift capacity could carry an initial landing force of 25,000 or more troops, according to the commission, adding that China has also developed substantial capabilities to use civilian ships in military operations, providing resources for the PLA to land additional troops on Taiwan after securing a beachhead¹³⁶.

The core of the PLA’s warfighting mission regarding Taiwan resides in six amphibious combined arms brigades (ACAB) assigned, two each, to the three group armies stationed closest to Taiwan in the Eastern and Southern Theater Commands. During a cross-strait invasion, these brigades would likely receive support from other elements of the group armies to which they belong. This could include fire support, air defense, air transport, aerial fire support and electronic warfare/cyber attack¹³⁷. All four services, the PLA, PLA Navy (PLAN), PLA Air Force (PLAAF), and PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) would contribute to this endeavor.

While some experts argue that Beijing would opt for taking some of the outer lying islands by force¹³⁸, many analysts in Taiwan agree that it would make much more sense for Beijing to launch a whole-scale surprise attack – anything else would only grant Taiwan, the US and its potential allies precious time to prepare their defensive moves, without granting Beijing what it really wants: the island state¹³⁹. Taiwanese experts agree that imposing a blockade on Taiwan is a scenario Beijing is very likely to take. They differ in their assessment if that would be automatically followed by an attack.

¹³⁴ Gabriel Dominguez, “Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – a cautionary tale for Beijing?”, March 2022, The Japan Times, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2022/03/18/commentary/world-commentary/china-taiwan-lessons-russia-ukraine-war/>

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ Dennis Blasko, “The PLA Army Amphibious Force, Missions, Organizations, Capabilities and Training”, China Maritime Report, China Maritimes Studies Institute, April 2022, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=cmsi-maritime-reports>

¹³⁸ Chris Miller, Sea of Change Podcast, Episode 4, December 2022, <https://seaofchange.net/podcast/chip-war-an-invisible-war-that-defines-the-future-of-superpowers/>

¹³⁹ Interview Lai Yi Chung, Prospect Foundation, Paul Huang, Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation, Ou, Institute for National Defense and Security Research

The Chinese government knows that due to its geography Taiwan cannot follow any “Ukraine” model. In the Ukraine war, the US and NATO have supplied Ukraine with massive amounts of equipment and supplies, Russia has been unable to stop this overland flow. This model cannot be replicated in Taiwan, because the Chinese government can easily isolate the island for weeks and months.

While most wargames are confidential, the Center for Strategic and International Studies has provided valuable insights into what a Chinese attack could look like¹⁴⁰. “The invasion always starts the same way: an opening bombardment destroys most of Taiwan’s navy and air force in the first hours of hostilities. Augmented by a powerful rocket force, the Chinese navy encircles Taiwan and interdicts any attempts to get ships and aircraft to the besieged island. Tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers cross the strait in a mix of military amphibious craft and civilian roll- on, roll-off ships, while air assault and airborne troops land behind the beachheads.”¹⁴¹

Taiwan’s topography is not very suitable for rapid large-scale offensive mechanized movements. There are only 14 beaches suitable for amphibious landing¹⁴² and behind them the terrain soon becomes mountainous and checkered with rice paddies and urban sprawl. This might encourage the PLA leadership, believes Blasko, to shift the decisive phase of a joint island landing campaign from a traditional over-the-beach amphibious assault followed by a mechanized ground movement inland to a series of airborne (parachute) or airmobile (helicopter) assault operations to seize ports of entry on the coast, airfields, and other key terrain/objectives closer to the center of gravity of Taiwan’s defenses to allow for the rapid insertion of second-echelon follow-on forces by sea and air. Nonetheless, a large-scale assault by multiple amphibious combined arms brigades remains a major component of China’s deterrence posture and any joint landing operation¹⁴³.

If Taiwanese ground forces hold the line, the US can use its bases in Japan and strike the Chinese fleet rapidly and en masse from outside the Chinese defense zone, the authors of the CSIS

¹⁴⁰ Marc Cancian, Matthew Cancian, Eric Heginbotham, “The First Battle of the Next War. Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2023, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/230109_Cancian_FirstBattle_NextWar.pdf?VersionId=WdEUwJYWIySMPIr3ivhFolxC_gZQuSOQ

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Interview Su Tzu Yun, Institute for National Defense and Security Research

¹⁴³ Dennis Blasko, “The PLA Army Amphibious Force, Missions, Organizations, Capabilities and Training”, China Maritime Report, China Maritimes Studies Institute, April 2022, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=cmsi-maritime-reports>

studies argue, Taiwan could manage to stay autonomous¹⁴⁴. Their conclusions, however, are to be taken cautiously, as they used a table board and cards to wargame a Chinese attack on Taiwan – too simple a method to calculate the outcome of a scenario as complex as this.

What makes any wargaming in this situation extremely complex is the sheer endless variety of possibilities. Will the US come to Taiwan's help – when and how? Will they be able to use Japan's bases, will the Japanese armed forces decide to fight with their American allies, will the US already be tight up in another crisis, will Beijing try to instigate one to distract the US?

What is certain, however, is that Beijing learned one very important lesson from Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

2 The Nuclear Deterrent works

Chinese intellectuals could not help but notice how careful Ukraine's partners are in picking weapon system and equipment deliveries to Ukraine. Each of them is carefully scrutinized – could it possibly hit targets on Russian soil? Putin has already threatened to use nuclear weapons – and the US and NATO are taking this threat very seriously – a fact that was very much noted on the Chinese side. Maj. Gen. Meng Xiangqing, a professor at the National Defense University in Beijing, wrote in the *Guangming Daily* newspaper in January: “Russia's strategy of nuclear deterrence certainly played a role in ensuring that NATO under the United States' leadership did not dare to directly enter the war.”¹⁴⁵

A growing number of Ukrainians¹⁴⁶ deplore that they gave up their nuclear arsenal in the 1990ies. They point out that a policy of appeasement nor deterrence worked out in their case. After its independence Ukraine was briefly the third-largest nuclear power in the world. Thousands of nuclear weapons had been left by Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But in the years that followed, Ukraine made the decision to completely denuclearize. In exchange, the US, the UK and Russia promised they would guarantee Ukraine's security in a 1994 agreement known as the Budapest Memorandum¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁴ Dennis Blasko, “The PLA Army Amphibious Force, Missions, Organizations, Capabilities and Training”, China Maritime Report, China Maritimes Studies Institute, April 2022, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=cmsi-maritime-reports>

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/01/world/asia/china-russia-ukraine-war.html>

¹⁴⁶ Talk with Ukrainian Scholar at Lung Ying Tai Foundation, Taipei

¹⁴⁷ Marie Luise Kelly, Kat Lonsdorf, “Why Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons – and what that means in an invasion by Russia, NPR, February 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/21/1082124528/ukraine-russia-putin-invasion>

The fact that Russia so blatantly violated its promises in 2014 and 2022 – and that the US and UK – while delivering arms to Ukraine – were not willing to intervene directly, certainly is bad news for global non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Countries such as Iran or North Korea are certainly drawing their lessons – as is the Chinese government.

A new nuclear arms race looms. Not only are the links between the Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers of the world’s biggest nuclear powers US and Russia severed, the half-year updates and on-site inspections agreed on under the New START have stopped, too¹⁴⁸. There still is some co-operation between the two powers, and so far, they abide by the treaty’s confines on warhead numbers.

Nevertheless, a very complex nuclear arms race is about to evolve, not only including the US and Russia but also a rising China – creating a “three-sided deterrence”¹⁴⁹. Experts believe that it will be much harder to control than the race between two superpowers in the Cold War.

With numerous agreements the US and the Soviet Union, now Russia, managed to reduce the global nuclear stockpile from 70 400 warheads in 1986 to 12 500 today¹⁵⁰. Yet, the New START is set to expire in February 2026 - and there is not much hope for a follow-up deal.

Satellite image show that Russia, the United States and China have all built new facilities and dug new tunnels at their nuclear test sites in recent years¹⁵¹. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists this year set its iconic Doomsday Clock, a measure of how close the world is to self-destruction, to 90 seconds to midnight, the clock’s most precarious setting since its inception in 1947¹⁵². They cite the war in Ukraine as the main reason for their sobering assessment. “Russia’s thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons remind the world that escalation of the conflict – by accident, intention, or miscalculation – is a terrible risk. The possibility that the conflict could spin out of anyone’s control remains high”¹⁵³.

¹⁴⁸ The Economist, “A new nuclear arms race looms”, August 2023, <https://www.economist.com/international/2023/08/29/a-new-nuclear-arms-race-looms>

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ Eric Cheung, Brad Lendon, Ivan Watson, “Exclusive: Satellite images show increased activity at nuclear test sites in Russia, China and US”, CNN, September 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/22/asia/nuclear-testing-china-russia-us-exclusive-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

¹⁵² Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, “A time of unprecedented danger: It’s 90 seconds to midnight”, <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/>

¹⁵³ Ibid

3 Create your own circle of friends

Leaders in Russia as well as in China could not help but notice that in confronting Putin's all-out invasion of Ukraine the West proved to be more united than expected – but was not able to rally the whole world. Not only was China helping a Russia in economic distress – therefore conveniently turning Putin into a dependent junior partner – India kept buying cheap Russian gas, North Korea pledged help for its old friend and in certain West African countries the Russian flag became an anti-colonial fashion item¹⁵⁴. For many non-Western intellectuals the West's outrage about Putin's war was just another sign of Western double-standards – while many countries have been ravaged by wars for a long time no other war managed to monopolize Western attention and resources like this one did¹⁵⁵.

While Chinese intellectuals agree that the US can rally its old allies, they note that it has failed to win hearts and minds in African, Latin American and Asian countries. “Capitalizing on America's reputational weakness and winning over these ‘non-aligned’ countries has thus become a key objective of Chinese foreign policy¹⁵⁶”, write Bachulska and Leonard. “By proposing a plethora of loose cooperation formats, Beijing wants to portray itself as much more inclusive than the US, with a special focus on showing that political and economic development does not equate to Westernization.”¹⁵⁷ With the Belt and Road Initiative, Brics Plus, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative Beijing has been very active in proposing alternatives to US led cooperation formats. It has also been increasingly skillful at addressing developing countries as is shown in the newest White Paper “A Global Community of Shared Future”: “Some countries, holding to the notion of might makes right, willfully engage in bullying, plundering, and zero-sum competition. The development gap is widening and the deficit in security is growing. The isolationist and exclusive practice of alliance-based confrontation runs counter to the trend towards multipolarity and the evolution of international relations in the post-Cold War era. Especially with the rise of a large number of emerging market and developing countries, the current international order is increasingly out of step with the changing times. “What kind of world we need and how to build such a world” has become a vital question

¹⁵⁴ Elian Peltier, “The hottest new accessory in Niger? A Russian flag”, New York Times, September 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/01/world/africa/russian-flags-west-africa-niger.html>

¹⁵⁵ Jabin Jacob, “The uneasy border: Will China and India find a way to be good friends?”, Sea of Change Podcast Episode 5, <https://seaofchange.net/podcast/indias-smart-alignment-india-china-border-conflicts-and-a-new-era-of-indias-international-strategy/>

¹⁵⁶ Alicja Bachulska; Mark Leonard, “China and Ukraine: The Chinese Debate about Russia's War in Ukraine”, European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/China-and-Ukraine-The-Chinese-debate-about-Russias-war-and-its-meaning-for-the-world.pdf>

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

with the future of humanity at stake. China's answer to this question of the times is to build a global community of shared future."¹⁵⁸

The Chinese government has also certainly noticed that with the war in Ukraine dragging on, some members of the alliance are becoming less willing to contribute – Donald Trump has already declared to end the war in case he would be reelected¹⁵⁹.

4 Prepare for sanctions

Even as the trends toward s securitization and weaponization of economic interdependencies has started before Putin's full-out invasion of Ukraine, it has since then accelerated significantly.

Biden has implemented the CHIPS act to ensure that China will not be able to benefit militarily from US technological innovations. De-coupling and de-risking from China are buzz words in the West, although implementation in many sectors prove to be rather challenging.

The Chinese government has also for some time now followed a course of dual circulation strategy, a model in which the domestic market becomes the mainstay, with a heavy focus on boosting internal consumption, while international trade and investment play a complementary role. The problem with this strategy is that an economy that focuses on internal consumption necessarily has to be a decentralized one, leaving more freedom to private enterprise - a step the Chinese government does not want to take out of security considerations.

While battling with sluggish Post-Covid growth the Chinese government is also trying to prepare for sanctions. Officials are reportedly running "stress tests", such as modelling, to understand how China's domestic market would fare in various scenarios involving sanctions or other measures put in place against China¹⁶⁰.

The Chinese government tries to enhance its country's self-reliance, especially in strategic sectors such as high tech – for example by pushing the development of an indigenous semi-conductor industry¹⁶¹. Two senior Chinese economists working for the Bank of China Research Institute propose that "China should strengthen top-level design and weave a "security net" for sanctions

¹⁵⁸ State Council Information Office of the PRC, "A Global Community of Shared Future", September 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202309/t20230926_11150122.html

¹⁵⁹ Aaron Blake, "Trump's plan to end the war in Ukraine is...something", The Washington Post, July 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202309/t20230926_11150122.html

¹⁶⁰ Alicja Bachulska; Mark Leonard, "China and Ukraine: The Chinese Debate about Russia's War in Ukraine", European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/China-and-Ukraine-The-Chinese-debate-about-Russias-war-and-its-meaning-for-the-world.pdf>

¹⁶¹ Chris Miller, "Chip War - An invisible struggle that defines the future of super powers", Sea of Change Podcast, Episode 4, <https://seaofchange.net/podcast-2/page/2/>

immunity, orderly promote the internationalization of the RMB and improve the independence of the payment system, re-examine its economic security and improve the resilience of the industrial chain.”¹⁶²

The Chinese government, they propose, should built a sanction-immune safety net by developing its own cooperation frameworks, by the BRI, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. They even call for the establishment of small banks, fully “decoupled” from the Western financial system¹⁶³. The internationalization of the Renminbi, a strategy that Beijing has pursued for a long time, would also help this endeavor.

“Widespread use of a currency as a means of settling transactions reduces the costs of using that currency, and market actors would face costs if they tried to use an alternative, especially after the leading currency has achieved a critical mass of users”, write DiPippo and Palazzi. “For this reason, leading currencies tend to benefit from self-reinforcing cycles of dominance.” For Beijing to achieve its foreign policy and financial goals networking therefore is key, especially in the Global South, as most talk of expanding renminbi usage is among developing countries.

V Putin’s invasion of Ukraine – any lessons for Taiwan?

In Taiwan there is a whole plethora of conferences, talks, discussions dedicated to the question what the island state can learn from Putin’s all-out invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine’s experience provides one very crucial lesson for the Taiwanese: that it is possible for a smaller state to defend itself against the aggression of a much larger one.

The Taiwanese government has thus decided that it must greatly improve its lines of deterrence. This is not only a matter of preventing the horror scenario of an all-out invasion, but also of better protecting itself from the hybrid threat that Beijing has long represented. Russia’s war has

¹⁶² Xiong Qiyue, Zhao Xueqing, “The Logic, Influences and Implications of US and EU economic sanctions against Russia”, CNKI, June 2022,

https://www.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2023&filename=ELSY202206006&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=wOjs2GsvCTg_BD91TRubm-s0jfOjNbEN3fbUIHc0cfIj8UQ9WbX4xI2KODelZ8bq

¹⁶³ Alicja Bachulska; Mark Leonard, “China and Ukraine: The Chinese Debate about Russia’s War in Ukraine”, European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/China-and-Ukraine-The-Chinese-debate-about-Russias-war-and-its-meaning-for-the-world.pdf>

directly influenced some of the Taiwanese government's actions. Other changes on the island have been under way for some time.

1 Military Deterrence

The poor performance of the Russian army in Ukraine has made the Taiwanese acutely aware of their military shortcomings. Historically, Taiwan's military emerged from the Kuomintang army, which was developed with Soviet support in Canton, China, in 1925. Many of the structures inherent in the Russian army¹⁶⁴ also feature in that of Taiwan, such as the hierarchical command structure, the ineffective reservist system, and the poor training of recruits.

When Taiwan's government decided last December to extend compulsory military service to one year¹⁶⁵, almost 80 percent of Taiwanese¹⁶⁶ were in favor – an astonishing approval rate in a society that is usually quite divided. Until then, military service had lasted for four months. Recruits described it as a kind of summer camp, at which the instructors were mainly concerned with cleanliness and ensuring their protégés did not injure themselves. The army should now improve its training procedures. The military suffers from logistical issues too. According to insiders, no one really knows¹⁶⁷ how many tanks and weapon systems are in combat-ready condition. Even pro-government observers admit in private that the structures within the leadership are antiquated. The island state urgently needs modern civilian oversight of its military¹⁶⁸.

There is an intense debate raging about the island's best defense strategy. American experts assume that the air force and navy, jewels in the crown of the Taiwanese military, would be quickly destroyed by Chinese missiles in the event of an attack¹⁶⁹. They are urging Taiwan to concentrate on light weapon systems such as the Stinger and Javelin missiles, which have proved to be so effective in Ukraine. Their preferred „porcupine strategy“ is one of asymmetric

¹⁶⁴ Hanna Shelest, “Defend. Resist. Repeat. Ukraine's lessons for European Defense, European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/defend-resist-repeat-ukraines-lessons-for-european-defence/>

¹⁶⁵ Wang Fan, “Taiwan Extends Mandatory Military Service to one year”, BBC, December 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64100577>

¹⁶⁶ “Conscription extension has the majority in Taiwan”, Focus Taiwan, February 2023, <://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202302170016>

¹⁶⁷ Paul Huang, “Taiwan's Military has Flashy American Weapons but no Ammo”, Foreign Policy, August 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/20/taiwan-military-flashy-american-weapons-no-ammo/>

¹⁶⁸ Interview with various security experts in Taipei, Chatham House Rules

¹⁶⁹ Michael Lostumbo, David Frelinger, James Williams, Barry Wilson, “Air Defense Options for Taiwan”, Rand Corporation, 2016, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1051.html#:~:text=Surface%2Dto%2DAir%20Missiles%27,not%20to%20defend%20fixed%20targets.

warfare¹⁷⁰. The Taiwanese government, however, also calls for more conventional weapons¹⁷¹ – this autumn Taiwan unveiled its first domestically produced submarine¹⁷².

2 Prepare for a blockade

An island may be difficult to invade, but it is easy to cut off from the rest of the world. Taiwan therefore needs to prepare for a blockade, a scenario Beijing is already rehearsing through its military maneuvers. Military insiders suggest that Taiwan has oil reserves for 90 days, but only two weeks' worth of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and only three LNG terminals. The current government would like to build another but has faced environmental protests¹⁷³.

Another challenge is potential attacks on the island's digital infrastructure. Beijing could try to isolate Taiwan by cutting all submarine cables that connect it to the rest of the world. To ensure the island stays connected, the government will install 700 satellite receivers¹⁷⁴ by next year, some in fixed locations, others on vehicles. Ukraine has been served by tech billionaire Elon Musk's Starlink satellite internet service since the start of the war. Having witnessed the extent to which Ukraine is dependent on the whims of a single provider, even one single ego, Taiwan's digital minister Audrey Tang is cooperating with several providers to avoid this scenario¹⁷⁵. She also prepares for massive cyber-attacks.

3 Economic Resilience

Despite the conflict, China remains Taiwan's most important trading partner. For the past eight years, however, Taiwanese businesspeople have been redirecting their investment elsewhere¹⁷⁶. The Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, has pursued a policy of diversification. Her southbound

¹⁷⁰ Edward Wong, Amy Qin, "US presses Taiwan to buy weapons more suited to win against China", New York Times, May 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/us/politics/china-taiwan-military.html>

¹⁷¹ Interview with security experts in Taipei, March, April, May 2023

¹⁷² Reuters, "Taiwan investigation accusation submarine programs leaked, Reuters, October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-investigating-accusation-submarine-program-details-leaked-2023-10-02/>

¹⁷³ Interview with nine experts at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research, Taipei, April 2023,

¹⁷⁴ Eric Priezkalns, "Taiwan to build 700 satellite receivers as defense against China cutting underground cables", Commsrisk, June 2023, <https://commsrisk.com/taiwan-to-build-700-satellite-receivers-as-defense-against-china-cutting-submarine-cables/>

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Minister Audrey Tang, April 2023, Taipei, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/taiwan-digitalministerin-audrey-tang-bereitet-sich-auf-massive-cyberangriffe-vor-a-eab86874-8a11-4f6b-bed6-d68e98049bdc>

¹⁷⁶ The Economist, "It is time to divert Taiwan's trade and investment from China, March 2023, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023/03/06/it-is-time-to-divert-taiwans-trade-and-investment-from-china>

policy¹⁷⁷ promotes trade with South and South-East Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Last year, Taiwan's investment in these countries combined amounted to about 35 per cent of its total overseas investment, outstripping investment in China for the first time¹⁷⁸.

Moreover, in recent years, China's appeal has dwindled as a place for Taiwanese to do business. Beijing has pivoted¹⁷⁹ towards supporting domestic industries, and Taiwanese entrepreneurs have been displaced by mainland Chinese supply chains. Wages are on the rise. Beijing's "zero-covid" policy stifled business, and the subsequent recovery has remained sluggish. But what worries Taiwanese businesspeople the most is the political risk that has swept up even prominent Chinese business impresarios such as Alibaba co-founder, Jack Ma. In recent months, Beijing has detained several people with links to Taiwan. In April, for example, a Taiwan-based publisher was detained¹⁸⁰ in China on the grounds that he allegedly endangered national security. As geopolitical tensions rise, so does political risk.

4 Voters and Civil Society

A whole number of very active civil society groups in Taiwan try to counter Chinese infiltration and disinformation campaigns. Groups such as Doublethink Lab investigate the nature and strategy of Chinese disinformation campaigns¹⁸¹, Cofacts fight fake news and conspiracy with the help of 2000 volunteers¹⁸² and a whole plethora of projects started and devised by civil hackers from g0v try to inform and enlighten citizens and voters about the workings of their political system, election, media etc¹⁸³. The resilience and vibrancy of Taiwanese civil society is truly inspiring. What is special in the case of Taiwan is the extent to which civil society and civil hackers are integrated into policy making by Digital Minister Audrey Tang, a former member of this group, that can still be reached by them via slack line. In this regard Taiwan offers its very own blend of technology, civil society and policy making.

¹⁷⁷ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Taiwan's new Southbound Policy", July 2019, <https://southbound.csis.org>

¹⁷⁸ The Economist, "It is time to divert Taiwan's trade and investment from China, March 2023, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023/03/06/it-is-time-to-divert-taiwans-trade-and-investment-from-china>

¹⁷⁹ Lin Thung-hong, "The Time is up: Taiwanese business men in China facing the centennial of the Chinese Communist Party, The Taiwan Gazette, 2023, <https://www.taiwangazette.org/news/2022/1/21/the-time-is-up-taiwan-businessmen-in-china-and-the-ccp-centennial>

¹⁸⁰ Helen Davidson, Chu Hui-lin, "Fears grow for Taiwanese book publisher believed held in China", The Guardian, April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/24/fears-grow-for-taiwan-book-publisher-li-yanhe-believed-held-in-china>

¹⁸¹ Interview with Puma Shen, March/April Taipei, Sea of Change Podcast Episode 10, <https://doublethinklab.org>

¹⁸² Interview with Founder Billion Lee in Taipei, April 2023

¹⁸³ Interview at g0v Hackathon, April 2023, Taipei

The Taiwanese government also introduced a new school curriculum to better educate youth on how to spot disinformation. Signed an Anti-Infiltration Act in 2020, which allows law enforcement to investigate individuals or organizations suspected of engaging in activity on behalf of a foreign actor that damages national sovereignty or undermines Taiwan's democracy¹⁸⁴. And the National Immigration Agency is strengthening screening to deny CCP or PLA linked visitors entry into Taiwan.

After Putin's full-out invasion of Ukraine several civil society groups started to offer survival training courses to the Taiwanese public¹⁸⁵. There, citizens learn first aid and where to seek refuge should Beijing attack. Some courses even offer firearms training. In fact, founders Kuma Academy Founder Puma Shen and Forward Alliance Founder Enoch Wu point out, these courses have much wider ramifications. They are about trust and community building, granting a community insight into what useful skills it can offer in the event of an emergency, but also about gaining an understanding about disinformation, United Front tactics and other forms of infiltration the Chinese government might seek to use¹⁸⁶. Surprisingly, the atmosphere on these courses is often joyful, Taiwanese even use the expression "wan" for them. "Come on, let's play survival training." Another sign for the relaxed nonchalance of Taiwanese reacting to Beijing's threats.

VI Outlook

The strategies outlined above might change in just some months, as Taiwan is about to head into a highly contested presidential election on January 13th 2024. The most contended issue is – as with every presidential election – how to deal with China. Three, potentially four contenders run for Taiwan's highest office, presenting very different strategic options. A 三腳督 that could morph into a 四腳督。

On the one hand is Vice President and frontrunner Lai Ching-te from the pan-green camp who stands for a continuation of President Tsai Ing-wen's policy and will very likely follow a course of greater deterrence. Lai has stressed that Taiwan is in fact already an independent country,

¹⁸⁴Mainland Affairs Council, Republic of China (Taiwan), "Legislative Yuan Passes Anti-Infiltration Bill to Strengthen Defense for Democracy and Preserve Stable and Orderly Cross-Strait Exchanges," press release, December 31, 2019

¹⁸⁵<https://kuma-academy.org>

<https://www.forward.org.tw>

¹⁸⁶ Interview Puma Shen, Enoch Wu, April, May 2023, Taipei

even if it is only recognized by twelve countries worldwide and the Holy See. “Taiwan holds regular elections for our president, vice president, legislators, officials, mayors and local government leaders, and they serve the people, so I think this shows that it is a fact that Taiwan is a sovereign country,” Lai said. “This is a consensus in Taiwan. In the future, I will build on this foundation when conducting foreign policy.”¹⁸⁷

Even if Lai is leading the polls at around 35 percent taken together the other candidates of the pan-blue camp who present somewhat similar policy ideas represent a bigger share of the population according to polls (Ko Wen-je from the Taiwan’s People Party 20 percent, Hou Yu-ih from Kuomintang around 17,5 percent, independent and not yet confirmed candidate Terry Guo 10,3 percent)¹⁸⁸.

Although a coalition of them looks rather unlikely at this moment of time, were they to take power, this would mean a very different Cross Strait policy, as all three candidates support a policy of more engagement with and appeasement of the Chinese government.

Both Ko Wen-je and Hou Yu-ih have endorsed resurrecting the controversial Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement, the subject of mass protest of the Sunflower Movement in 2014¹⁸⁹. Ko later distanced himself from the proposal after he was heavily criticized and stays strategically ambiguous whether he supports it or not. Hou whose party presents itself as the party of peace has not been walking back on that proposal. In fact, he maintains that economic engagement with China is needed to avoid conflict – in contrast to a DPP he describes as warmongering¹⁹⁰. Hou seems to want to roll back on many policies of the Tsai administration – even for a short moment proposing to return to a military service of four months¹⁹¹.

Ko Wen-je tries to present himself as the candidate of the middle – wanting to capitalize on voter’s discontent with both the DPP and KMT. He criticizes the DPP as being too confrontational, the KMT as being too deferential, and both as being corrupt. “I often say,

¹⁸⁷ Aljazeera, „Presidential hopeful Lai says Taiwan’s sovereignty is “a fact”, Al Jazeera, August 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/25/taiwan-vice-president-emphasises-islands-autonomy>

¹⁸⁸ Wen Ti-Sung <https://x.com/wentisung/status/1704374362294669731?s=46>

¹⁸⁹ Brian Hioe, „Cross Strait Issues take center stage in Taiwan’s presidential race, The Diplomat, July 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/07/cross-strait-issues-take-center-stage-in-taiwans-presidential-race/>

¹⁹⁰ Jason Pan, “Ke Wen-je is a “defeatist”. Lin Fei-fan, Taipei Times, September 2023, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/09/15/2003785355>

Brian Hioe, „Cross Strait Issues take center stage in Taiwan’s presidential race, The Diplomat, July 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/07/cross-strait-issues-take-center-stage-in-taiwans-presidential-race/>

¹⁹¹ Brian Hioe, “Hou You-yi supports returning draft to four months, then quickly drops idea”, New Bloom, July 2023, <https://newbloommag.net/2023/07/04/hou-you-yi-draft/>

‘Sometimes getting elected is not because people like you — it’s because people hate your opponent,’” Ko said. “I think that’s going to be a large part of this election.”¹⁹²

He has characterized his policy stance as a mix of “deterrence and communication”, supporting increasing Taiwan’s defense budget to three percent of GDP – higher than the record 2,5 percent the government has requested in its 2024 budget proposal¹⁹³. At the same time, he stresses that “Taiwanese should do things that enable people in China to like us. That is the highest goal. If they do not like us, then we will have trouble... The two sides [of the Taiwan Strait] should hold talks, it is better for happiness as members of one big family.”¹⁹⁴

Independent candidate Terry Guo vows to unite the opposition with his vision of a “people’s mainstream coalition”. However, the Foxconn founder must collect 280 000 signatures supporting his bid by November 2nd to officially register as a candidate. He vowed to bring “cross-strait peace for the next 50 years” and stop the island from becoming the next Ukraine.

It is therefore obvious that Putin’s full-out invasion of Ukraine has a huge influence on Taiwan’s presidential election. The lessons the candidates are drawing – appeasement or deterrence on both ends of the spectrum with some variations in between – could not be more different. The question what their country learns from Putin’s full out invasion of Ukraine is therefore entirely in the hands of the Taiwanese voters.

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¹⁹² Stephanie Yang, David Shen, “With controversy and clicks, Taiwan presidential hopeful aims to be a third-party exception”, Los Angeles Times, September 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-09-07/taiwan-presidential-election-ko-wen-je>

¹⁹³ Matthew Mazzetta, “Ko Wenje reiterates China policy based on “deterrence and communication”, Focus Taiwan, September 2023, <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202309140021>

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