

China's Use of Force, 1950–96, and Taiwan

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The collision of a U.S. EP-3 reconnaissance plane with a Chinese military fighter on April 1, 2001, focused attention anew on Beijing's willingness to risk the use of force in pursuit of political objectives. The effort to deter U.S. intelligence flights over China's exclusive economic zone brought Chinese jets within dangerous proximity of U.S. aircraft. This raised the first tension in the Taiwan Strait since China's missile tests in 1995–96. That had occasioned the dispatch of two U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups toward the vicinity of Taiwan. More recently, China undertook a steady buildup of missiles across from Taiwan. This, together with greater emphasis on East Asian security by George W. Bush and his administration, justifies reexamination of the circumstances under which China used military force for deterrence or coercion from 1950 to 1996.¹ What patterns, if any, emerged during this period? To what extent are they likely to continue or change with respect to Taiwan in the coming years? How will the advent of high-technology weapons affect China's decision to use force in the future, particularly against Taiwan?

My study, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Vietnam*,² addressed some of these questions but was largely inferentially based on intelligence materials. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, newly opened archives in Moscow provided authoritative documents on Sino-Soviet relations, and the Korean War in particular. Recent Chinese collections of primary materials, sup-

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I have gained from reviews of an earlier version of this article by Kenneth Allen, Thomas Christensen, Bernard Cole, Paul Godwin, and Ronald Montaperto. Critical comments by anonymous reviewers were also helpful.

1. Earlier studies of the Chinese use of force that draw on the historical record include Melvin Gurtov and Byong-moo Hwang, *China under Threat: The Politics of Strategy and Diplomacy* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); George Segal, *Defending China* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985); Jonathan R. Adelman and Chih-yu Shih, *Symbolic War: The Chinese Use of Force, 1840–1980* (Taiwan: Institute of International Relations, National Chengchi University, 1993); and Mark Burles and Abram N. Shulsky, *Patterns in China's Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2000).

2. Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Vietnam* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975).

plemented by historical accounts, autobiographies, and personal interviews, have enabled American and Chinese scholars to reconstruct decisions made by the Chinese leadership and their implementation during Mao Zedong's reign. These new sources refine and strengthen my earlier work. In addition, China's invasion of Vietnam in 1979 and its 1995–96 Taiwan Strait exercises provide more case studies for comparison. As a final consideration, my earlier optimistic forecast concerning the unlikelihood of conflict over Taiwan is now tempered with recent Chinese military writings that emphasize the implications of the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the 1999 conflict in Kosovo for bringing Taiwan into negotiation with the mainland.³

My focus is on eight case studies wherein Chinese military actions involved the United States and the Soviet Union or indirect challenges to them via proxy allies: (1) major combat with the United States in Korea, 1950–53; (2) offshore islands operations against Taiwan, 1954–55 and 1958; (3) deterrence deployment opposite Taiwan, 1962; (4) limited combat with India, 1962; (5) support for Vietnam against U.S. intervention, 1965–68; (6) border clashes with the Soviet Union, 1969; (7) limited combat with Vietnam, 1979; and (8) missile firings and joint exercises in the vicinity of Taiwan, 1995–96. China's primary motivations included preemption of perceived attack (Korea), deterrence (the United States in Vietnam and the Soviet Union along the Sino-Soviet border), coercion (India, Vietnam), and coercive diplomacy (Taiwan).⁴ I first examine military doctrine manifest in historical writings and those of Mao Zedong that emphasize seizing the initiative. I then review verbal warnings and patterns of deployment by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in each case as indicators of intent to support deterrence and coercive diplomacy. On the basis of limited evidence, I assess the level of deliberate risk taking and risk management. The logic of Chinese threat perception is examined together with the calculation or miscalculation of consequences. The weight given political goals determining

3. Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 5–40, calls attention to Chinese strategic writings concerning Taiwan and the question of U.S. intervention.

4. Motivations may be multiple with behavior also targeting third parties, foreign or domestic. Inferring motivation is impeded by regime statements aimed at dissuading critics, rationalizing risks, and claiming victory after stalemate or defeat. These aspects are discussed in the case studies but remain subject to academic dispute until more Chinese archives are available. Coercive diplomacy is defined as taking action to "persuade an opponent to stop or reverse an action." Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, eds., *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), p. 7.

PLA action against a militarily superior enemy deserves special attention with respect to Taiwan, where the relevance of past patterns to future action are addressed.

Students of Chinese military affairs find that seizing the initiative is embedded in doctrine as a preferred course of action. An academic analogue to doctrine is the concept of strategic culture variously defined. For my purposes it is composed of formulated military practice reflected as a tendency in combat operations and tactics. This does not posit a rigid operational code automatically adhered to under all circumstances. Planning is necessarily contingency defined, and practice is inevitably contingency determined.⁵ Nevertheless, it is standard for military doctrine to be declared and codified, albeit modified in warfare. Over time this evolves into a strategic culture of how to pursue political objectives through military means. Generational changes in weaponry affect its implementation, but it rarely becomes wholly obsolete because of a single technological development.

Alastair Iain Johnston's systematic analysis of the Seven Military Classics of ancient China shows consistent emphasis on offensive action mediated by flexibility.⁶ Central to these writings and echoed in military memorials of the Ming, the Han dynasty between the Mongol and the Manchu dynasties, is war as a recurring aspect of state relations, anticipating Clausewitz's maxim of war as a means of politics. Thus the regime must be prepared militarily to seize the initiative, acting offensively and preferably through preemptive attack. During the Chinese civil war, 1927–37 and 1946–49, Mao's maxims echoed this theme.⁷ Paul Godwin, a leading specialist on Chinese military doctrine, identifies Mao's "core doctrinal principle" as "active defense," defined by the chairman as "offensive defense, or defense through decisive engagements."⁸

5. The classic analysis of the role of uncertainty and chance in war is Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), especially Bk. 1, chap. 7, "Friction in War," p. 120, where he notes, "Every war is rich in unique episodes. Each is an uncharted sea, full of reefs."

6. Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995). The classics appeared between the fifth century B.C. and the tenth century A.D. Johnston then traced this *parabellum*, or hard realpolitik paradigm, through military memorials submitted during the Ming dynasty of the fifteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries.

7. Alastair Iain Johnston, "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China," in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 216–270.

8. Paul H.D.B. Godwin, "Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine: 1949–1999," Conference on PLA Warfighting, 1949–1999, Center for Naval Analysis, Alexandria, Virginia, June 3–4,

Case Studies

The following case studies demonstrate the application of this doctrine through deployment of the PLA, whether for deterrence or coercive diplomacy.

KOREA, 1950

The principles of deterrence have been defined as (1) clear demonstrations of a consistent signal, (2) coordination of military and political-diplomatic actions, (3) pauses to permit the opponent to respond favorably, and (4) efforts to prevent the opponent from escalating the conflict.⁹ These factors framed Beijing's behavior in the fall of 1950. As recalled by the Chinese foreign minister years later, "At the time of the Korean War, we first warned against crossing the thirty-eighth parallel but America ignored the warning. The second time, we warned again, but America occupied Pyongyang. The third time, we warned once again, but America aggressed close to the Yalu River and threatened the security of China."¹⁰ He was referring to (1) a secret *démarche* by Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai to the Indian ambassador on October 2, prior to the thirty-eighth parallel crossing; (2) a ministry of foreign affairs statement on October 10 before capture of the North Korean capital; and (3) Beijing's formal acknowledgment on November 11 that Chinese "volunteers" were in Korea, two weeks before Gen. Douglas MacArthur's "end the war" offensive to the Yalu River.¹¹ Beginning in late July, a massive PLA redeployment moved from invasion preparations across from Taiwan to concentration in northeast China via railroads through major cities and was so reported by foreign diplomats. From August 20 to October 3, Beijing's statements to the United Nations (UN) and its own people steadily increased China's commitment to defend North Korea. On November 4 a nationwide propaganda campaign mobilized the population to "Resist America, Aid Korea." In short, Beijing had ample reason to believe that its multiple verbal and behavior signals would be understood by Washington, and it waited until October 19 before entering North Korea.

1999. The citation is from Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong), "Strategy in China's Revolutionary War," December 1936, in *Selected Writings of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), p. 105. I am indebted to Godwin for the manuscript and informal exchanges.

9. Alexander L. George, David K. Hall, and William E. Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 1–35.

10. Chen Yi, interview of May 29, 1962, *Tokyo Journalist*, June 26, 1962, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), August 13, 1962.

11. For detailed reconstruction, see Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

Deterrence having failed, Mao seized the initiative to preempt a major UN advance to the Yalu River.¹² In addition to his Marxist preconception of hostile “American imperialism,” Mao’s perception of threat came from U.S. statements and behavior, especially interposition of the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait, that seemed to foreshadow an eventual attack on China.¹³ The risk of fighting the world’s strongest superpower with a hodgepodge of Japanese, Russian, and American weapons in the absence of air and naval power prompted top-level objections.¹⁴ Furthermore, the civil war continued at home with complete control over the entire country unfinished. But Mao juxtaposed these liabilities against a worst-case projection of passivity that would encourage greater U.S. aggression and dissidence within China. As a final point, he raised the obligation to help North Korea and advance the world socialist revolution as called for by Josef Stalin. The combination of perceived external and internal threat to “New China” persuaded Mao’s associates to risk war with the United States and UN forces that had already overrun the North Korean army. To achieve tactical surprise, the PLA moved entirely at night to inflict a stunning victory over the badly divided UN forces, driving them back to the thirty-eighth parallel and virtually restoring the status quo ante within two months of having crossed the Yalu. There the war remained stalemated until a cease-fire agreement in 1953.

Mao greatly exaggerated the U.S. threat of attack from (1) Korea, (2) the United States with Chiang Kai-shek’s forces on Taiwan, and (3) the United States with the French in North Vietnam. He nonetheless took steps to limit this risk. PLA divisions in Korea were dubbed the “Chinese People’s Volunteers,” thereby lessening formal identification with the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) carefully kept its operations well north of the thirty-eighth parallel throughout the war. After training two bomber divisions to target airfields in Seoul, Beijing reciprocated U.S. restrictions against attacking across the Yalu by canceling orders to strike Kimpo airfield near Seoul and pulled all bomber units off duty in Korea.¹⁵ Finally,

12. Mao’s decision came incrementally, with intermittent reversals, but was finally triggered by the UN forces’ crossing of the thirty-eighth parallel. See Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 157. This is the most comprehensive analysis on the basis of Chinese and Russian archives at the time of writing.

13. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, pp. 68–115.

14. Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 171–186.

15. Zhang Xiaoming, “Air Combat for the People’s Republic: The People’s Liberation Army Air Force in Action, 1949–1969,” Conference on PLA Warfighting, 1949–1999, citing Li Chuangeng,

Mao abandoned preparations to invade Taiwan after the Seventh Fleet intervened.

In sum, the Chinese response in Korea set five precedents for subsequent behavior: (1) exaggerated threat perception, (2) risk acceptance against a superior enemy, (3) risk management, (4) advance deterrence warning, and (5) seizure of the initiative and preemption.

OFFSHORE ISLANDS, 1954–55 AND 1958

The actual opponent of PLA attacks on the offshore islands along China's east coast was Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces, but the United States was intimately associated with them, risking war albeit at a lower level than in Korea. In 1954 Chiang pressed Washington for a defense treaty to replace the executive order for Seventh Fleet protection. In July Mao decided, "We should destroy the chance of the United States concluding the treaty with Taiwan. . . . Our objective is to put pressure on the United States so that [it] will not conclude the treaty."¹⁶ Coercive diplomacy won implementation in August when the Central Military Commission in Beijing instructed the Fujian PLA commander that, "since the American imperialist government and Chiang's gang are hatching a plot of making a mutual security treaty, you shall resort to a punishing bombardment on the Kuomintang forces on the Jinmen Islands."¹⁷ Shelling of Jinmen (Quemoy) Island began but, with no airport in Fujian, it was impossible to protect against Chinese Nationalist air raids. Chinese action was thus limited to one hour to allow artillery units to disperse before retaliatory attacks.¹⁸

Further north, however, action against the Dachen Islands made risk management a high priority when U.S. support for Chiang's forces increased Seventh Fleet activity, with nearly 300 sorties flown in August alone.¹⁹ An August

Feijiangjun Liu Benshan [Biography of General Liu Benshan] (Beijing: CCP [Chinese Communist Party] History Press, 1995), pp. 344–345.

16. Mao Zedong at enlarged meeting of the CCP Politburo, July 7, 1954, in Zhang Baijia and Jia Qingguo, "Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Probe in Confrontation: Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks As Seen from the Chinese Perspective," in Robert S. Ross, ed., *Reexamining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954–1973* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

17. PLA archives at the PLA Academy of Military Science, in Li Xiaoping, "PLA Attacks and Amphibious Operations during the Taiwan Straits Crises of 1954–1955 and 1958," Conference on PLA Warfighting, 1949–1999.

18. Zhang and Jia, "Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Probe in Confrontation"; interviews with Gen. Ye Fei (Ret.); also Ye Fei, *Ye Fei huiyilu* [Memoirs of Ye Fei] (Beijing: PLA Press, 1988), p. 644.

19. Zhang and Jia, "Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Probe in Confrontation," citing Deng Lifeng, *Jianguo hou junshi xingdong quanji* [A whole record of military operations after the founding of the republic] (Taiyuan: Shanxi People's Press, 1994), p. 207.

24 order from Beijing prohibited bombing Dachen Island while U.S. ships were in the area. The PLAAF could not engage U.S. ships and aircraft, including those within Chinese air space, because it was permitted to fire back only under direct attack. The air commander spoke with every pilot to ensure that no exchange of fire would occur without his express permission.²⁰ This order minimized the chance of an incident such as had occurred on July 23, when an accidental downing of a British airliner over Hainan Island prompted retaliation by U.S. naval planes three days later, felling two PLAAF aircraft.²¹

Contrary to Beijing's goal, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, faced with the bombardment and its domestic political repercussions, reversed his opposition to the defense treaty and signed it in December. PLA activity continued nevertheless. In January 1955 an assault on the Taizhou Islands, the last Nationalist stronghold off Zhejiang Province, was followed by seizure of an outpost on the Dachens. Eisenhower thereupon asked for and received a congressional resolution authorizing U.S. action if offshore islands were attacked in preparation for an attack against Taiwan and the Pescadores. Two weeks later the Nationalists withdrew from the Dachens, escorted by the U.S. Navy. Thus China's seizing of the initiative won tactical objectives, but lost the strategic political goal with the new treaty and congressional resolution. Deterrence failed as did coercive diplomacy, but risk management avoided further escalation.

Relative quiet prevailed along China's coast for the next two years; then PLA action resumed in 1958. Mao seized on the landing of U.S. forces in Lebanon in July to justify bombardment of Jinmen Island for "international solidarity," to mobilize the populace for his radical economic Great Leap Forward restructuring, and to test the degree of U.S. support for Chiang's remaining offshore island forces.²² When the Middle East rationale quickly faded, Mao postponed action until August 23, at which time shelling was to deal with "Chiang directly and the Americans indirectly."²³ Risk management prompted Mao to instruct Chinese planes not to go beyond Jinmen and Mazu islands, which fell within Beijing's newly announced 12-mile territorial sovereignty.²⁴ Moreover,

20. Zhang and Jia, "Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Probe in Confrontation," citing Nie Fangzhi, *Sanjun huige zhan donghai* [Eagles soar to the sky and shock the East China Sea].

21. Zhang and Jia, "Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Probe in Confrontation," citing *Dongdai Zhongguo kongjun* [China today: Air force] (Beijing: Social Sciences Press, 1989), p. 355.

22. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, details evidence for Mao's multiple motivations.

23. Mao "to Peng Dehuai," in Li, "PLA Attacks and Amphibious Operations," from *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [The manuscripts of Mao Zedong since the founding of the nation] (Beijing: Central Documents Publishing Company, 1987–90), Vol. 7, p. 326.

24. Information given to the author; U.S. ships ignored this announcement and continued to escort Nationalist ships within 3 miles of the islands. Kenneth W. Allen, Glenn Krugel, and Jonathan D.

they could not bomb the islands unless Chiang's forces bombed the mainland. As in the Dachens, the PLAAF could not engage U.S. planes, but unlike the earlier confrontation, it could defend against U.S. aircraft entering China. Tight discipline avoided incidents that might have triggered escalation.

Before the bombardment Mao summoned the PLA commander, Ye Fei, to a Politburo Standing Committee meeting to inquire whether Americans would be killed.²⁵ With U.S. advisers present down to the battalion level, Ye said it was inevitable. Mao paused but approved shelling the next day. On September 7 radar detected U.S. ships escorting 2 miles to either side of Nationalist supply ships. Mao ordered Ye to attack only the Nationalists. Ye asked what he should do if the Americans fired at his positions. Mao replied not to fire unless ordered. But when the Nationalists began unloading, Mao directed Ye to fire, at which point the U.S. ships turned back toward Taiwan, and the Nationalists took heavy casualties.

Finally on October 8, Mao indirectly acknowledged the assemblage of six U.S. aircraft carriers, three heavy cruisers, forty destroyers, and two air divisions, saying: "We fired a few shells on Jinmen and Mazu [actual count more than 10,000]. I did not expect the entire world would be so deeply shocked and the smoke and mist is shading the sky."²⁶ The PLA campaign quickly subsided with shelling on alternate days. Reportedly questioned by a vice chairman of the National Defense Commission as to why Mao did not seize the two islands, Mao replied that the heavy concentration of U.S. forces had to be taken seriously. Therefore the PLA was to shell without landing and to "cut off without killing" supplies from Taiwan.²⁷ Mao explained that his "noose strategy" purposely "trapped" the United States through the Nationalist presence on Jinmen, enabling Beijing to strain Taipei-Washington relations anytime by increasing tension over the islands. He also argued that this strategy prevented a total break across the Taiwan Strait, thereby avoiding a virtual two-China situation. Hence Mao drafted the subsequent announcement of a one-week suspension of shelling on October 5 to allow supplies for Jinmen. He followed this

Pollack, *China's Air Force Enters the Twenty-first Century* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1995), based on *Dongdai Zhongguo kongjun*, pp. 396–397, 651–677.

25. Li, "PLA Attacks and Amphibious Operations," citing *The Manuscripts of Mao Zedong*, Vol. 7, p. 348.

26. Mao Zedong at the Fifteenth Meeting of the Supreme State Council, *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* [Selected diplomatic papers of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Central Press of Historical Documents, 1994), in James G. Hershberg, ed., *Cold War International History Project Bulletin: The Cold War in Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center), Nos. 6–7 (Winter 1995–96), p. 217.

27. Li, "PLA Attacks and Amphibious Operations," gives no source for this account.

with a two-week suspension on October 13, culminating on October 25 with shelling on even-numbered days. Mao summed up, "Militarily it sounded like a joke, since such policy was unknown in the history of Chinese or world warfare. However, we are engaged in a political battle."²⁸ Risk management offset miscalculation to avoid escalation, while Mao's post hoc rationalization of political goals saved face to camouflage defeat.

TAIWAN STRAIT, JUNE 1962

In 1962 perception of an imminent Nationalist invasion of the mainland moved the PLA into another deterrent deployment. The Great Leap Forward catastrophe caused the largest famine in modern Chinese history, killing an officially estimated 30 million people. In the spring this desperate economic situation prompted some 80,000 Moslems to flee from the Xinjiang autonomous region into Kazakhstan, whereupon Beijing closed Soviet consulates in the area and made charges of subversion. In May a similar number of Chinese poured across the border into the territory of Hong Kong, calling international attention to the crisis. In this context evidence of Taiwan's plan to activate its long-proclaimed goal, "recover the mainland," caused the *People's Daily* on May 19 to declare, "We must serve a fresh warning to the Kennedy Administration that it shall be held fully responsible for all grave consequences arising from its policy of playing with fire."²⁹ Foreign Minister Chen Yi admitted in a press conference that "several million" Chinese opposed communism because of "economic difficulties" and noted that "elements trained by Chiang Kai-shek are hiding on the mainland." Were Chiang to "drop paratroops and land on the mainland with American support, these elements will come out of hiding."³⁰

In the first three weeks of June, an estimated seven PLA divisions moved opposite Taiwan, displacing large numbers of people and tying up rail lines.³¹ On June 23, China's ambassador in Warsaw summoned U.S. Ambassador John M. Cabot on twenty-four-hour notice and alluded to the Korean War in warning that the United States would bear the responsibility if Chiang's forces invaded

28. Ibid., citing Wu Lengxi, "Inside Story of the Decision Making during the Shelling of Jinmen," *Zhuanji wenxue* [Biographical literature], No. 1 (1994), p. 11.

29. *People's Daily*, May 19, 1962, in Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 66.

30. Press conference, May 29, 1961, in *ibid.*, p. 67.

31. Special National Intelligence Estimate, June 20, 1962, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Northeast Asia*, Vol. 22, pp. 251–253. This may have overstated the actual number of troops with signal intelligence monitoring headquarters deployment in advance of the total force.

the mainland.³² The same day, Beijing broke its three-week silence on the perceived threat in a lengthy New China News Agency (NCNA) dispatch asserting that Taiwan, “with the support and encouragement of U.S. imperialism, is preparing for a large-scale military adventure, an invasion of coastal areas of the mainland.”³³

Four days later President John F. Kennedy publicly affirmed Cabot’s private response to the PRC démarche, declaring that the U.S. position had always been opposed to the use of force in the Taiwan Strait. Beijing eased its propaganda alert, the troops withdrew, and the crisis passed. By seizing the initiative, China, through its PLA deployment, aimed at deterring attack—and should that fail to defeat it. As in Korea, no invasion was planned. In fact, although indicators of Chiang’s aggressive intent existed, U.S. policy adamantly opposed it.³⁴ From Beijing’s perspective, however, serious internal vulnerability had raised the external threat, which was forestalled by verbal deterrence and PLA action.

BORDER WAR WITH INDIA, OCTOBER 1962

Minor clashes between patrols in the Himalayan heights and desultory diplomatic talks through the summer raised Sino-Indian tensions to their highest level since 1959.³⁵ Following the perceived success of PLA deterrence in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing moved to coercive diplomacy against increased Indian assertiveness along the disputed border. On September 13 it warned New Delhi, “He who plays with fire will eventually be consumed by fire,” and proposed talks beginning on October 15.³⁶ Beijing repeated this deadline three weeks later, warning India to “rein in before the precipice.”³⁷ On October 20 the PLA opened fire at both ends of the 2,500-mile frontier. Indian resistance collapsed, and Chinese forces advanced for one week, whereupon they paused for three weeks to consolidate their positions and await Prime Minister

32. U.S. embassy, Warsaw, telegram to Department of State, June 23, 1962, in *ibid.*, pp. 273–275. This version omits all reference to Korea, unlike the original cable sent immediately to the State Department and seen by the author on arrival. The previous meeting, on May 17, 1962, had scheduled the next one for July 12. *Ibid.*, pp. 225–226.

33. *Peking Review*, June 29, 1962, in Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 68.

34. According to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Chiang ordered a complete overhaul of his invasion plans and covertly sought purchase of 500 large outboard motors in the United States; the purchase was blocked. Information given the author.

35. This section draws on Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Jawaharlal Nehru's response to a private letter from Zhou Enlai of October 27. New Delhi remained adamant, and the PLA resumed the offensive and swept down to the undisputed border along the foothills. On November 21 Beijing announced a unilateral cease-fire and restoration of the status quo ante, provided that New Delhi made no forward move for three weeks. This time New Delhi complied, whereupon the PLA withdrew to its approximate positions before the attack except for critical checkpoints at certain passes that remained under its control.

Its coercive diplomacy having failed to move Indian patrols back or bring Indian negotiators to the table, Beijing took four steps to minimize the risk of escalation. First, Chinese forces were publicly identified as "border guards" with no reference to the PLA, thereby reducing the image of a major military action. Second, three weeks separated the first and second offensives. As in Korea, this allowed infiltration of mountain ridges along Indian logistical lines for envelopment of enemy units, while cutting off their line of retreat. This also permitted Beijing to observe whether a Soviet response to the initial attack might strengthen Indian resistance. Third, the PLA exercised strict command and control over fighting at both ends of the border. Despite the Indian abandonment of the headquarters in Tezpur, Chinese troops stopped their advance at the base of the mountains. Fourth, announcement of a unilateral cease-fire came as Washington readied a high-level mission to New Delhi, thereby forestalling any effective U.S. response to Nehru's appeal for air support. Risk management proved completely successful as did military tactics, leaving the brief war with India as a model for possible emulation.

Unlike the Korean War, however, in the Indian case no public mobilization was sounded in Chinese media. As Chen Yi had noted, domestic dissidence cautioned against encouraging it by calling attention to external threat. Threat perceptions on the Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Himalayan fronts followed a traditional Chinese aphorism, "trouble within, trouble without." In this context, seizing the initiative to deter Washington and Taipei, stop Moscow, and coerce New Delhi forestalled anticipated assaults on Chinese territorial integrity. The results provided *prima facie* validation of Mao's strategic doctrine of seizing the initiative.

DEFENSE OF NORTH VIETNAM, 1965–68

Beijing's support for Hanoi against U.S. attacks on North Vietnam began in 1964 and continued through the following year. It addressed two different

threats in succession: bombing of the North and invasion, with verbal warnings from Zhou Enlai and the *People's Daily* being made credible through military movements detectable by U.S. intelligence. Massive deployment of China's best fighter planes within 300 miles of the border, new airfields to serve North Vietnamese aircraft, interlocking radar grids between the two countries, and joint exercises over a 12-mile space below the border signaled Beijing's commitment to defense of the Hanoi-Haiphong area. U.S. monitoring by signals intelligence, drone reconnaissance planes, and Chinese Nationalist piloted U-2s tracked these moves.³⁸ Nevertheless, U.S. air raids on North Vietnam began in February 1965, ostensibly in retaliation for guerrilla attacks on U.S. installations in South Vietnam. In March regular bombing slowly and systematically moved up toward Hanoi, testing Chinese responses at successive latitudes, but no response occurred. Deterrence had stopped initial attacks on Hanoi and Haiphong, but ultimately failed to halt the bombing of all North Vietnam except for a narrow sanctuary along the border.

According to Hanoi, Beijing had initially agreed to provide pilots and planes to defend it.³⁹ Then on July 16, 1965, China reneged on its promise of air support. The same month, however, Zhou Enlai instructed PLA railroad engineering divisions to enter North Vietnam, explaining that the U.S. goal of a triple encirclement of China had failed in Korea, remained in Taiwan, but now "they have come back to Vietnam. Our assistance is to break this ring of encirclement and defend the country."⁴⁰ Deployment began of 20,000 engineering troops to the northeast coast, completing defenses there by October and deploying on to the Red River Delta. On July 29 President Lyndon Johnson increased U.S. troop strength in Vietnam from 75,000 to 125,000, doubled the monthly draft call, and indicated that further forces would be sent as necessary. On August 7 China pledged "to the Vietnamese people our all-out support and assistance, up to and including the sending according of their need, of our own men to fight shoulder to shoulder with them. . . . We warn the U.S. aggressors. We Chinese people mean what we say!"⁴¹

38. Information available to the author.

39. Statement by Vietnamese military historian to the author at a Vietnamese-American conference on the war, Hanoi, October 18–20, 1988; also Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 135.

40. Quoted in Xiaoming Zhang, "The Vietnam War, 1964–1965: A Chinese Perspective," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 60 (October 1996), pp. 731–762, citing Wang Xianguan, *Zhongguo mimi da Fabing: yuan Ye kang Mei shilu* [China's secret military deployment: Record of aiding Vietnam and resisting America] (Jinan: Jinan Press, 1992), p. 161.

41. *Peking Review*, August 13, 1965, in Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 164.

Ultimately 320,000 PLA anti-aircraft, railroad engineering, and logistics troops in systematic rotation served in Vietnam between June 1965 and March 1968, when President Johnson announced a reduction of the bombing and the start of peace talks in Paris.⁴² The peak level of 170,000 PLA troops came in 1967. Reportedly 1,500 died, and 4,200 were wounded before their final withdrawal in August 1973. Of these, 280 dead and 1,166 wounded were in anti-aircraft units that claimed hundreds of U.S. aircraft downed and damaged. These deployments were purposively visible to U.S. intelligence. In addition to bolstering North Vietnam's defenses, they served to deter Washington from a decision to invade the North.⁴³ In 1950 Beijing had failed to put military forces in North Korea for deterrence, not crossing the Yalu until U.S. forces had advanced toward the border. By positioning sizable forces in North Vietnam to back up Vietnamese defense against invasion, Beijing counted on credible deterrence to avoid another Korea. As a consequence, Washington was forced to accept stalemate in South Vietnam.

Risk management to limit the chances of escalation marked Chinese behavior throughout its intervention in North Vietnam. First, Beijing reversed its commitment to air defense of Hanoi and Haiphong despite extensive preparations and its earlier pledge. Second, Beijing never publicized its presence in the North, thereby avoiding an open challenge to Washington. Third, it carefully controlled air combat over Chinese territory so as to warn against intrusion without engaging in systematic combat. In January 1965 orders restricted Chinese planes to simple monitoring of U.S. overflights, although unarmed reconnaissance planes could be shot down.⁴⁴ On April 8 two U.S. naval fighters overflew Hainan Island without incident, but the next day eight came, one of which fired a missile that downed another U.S. plane, according to Chinese reports.⁴⁵ On April 9 the PLA requested permission to attack U.S. aircraft over

42. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 135, citing Guo Ming, ed., *Zhong Youe guanxi yanbian sishinian* [The evolution of Sino-Vietnamese relations over the last forty years] (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshi, 1991). Beijing has acknowledged that 1,000 Chinese troops remain buried in Vietnam.

43. During 1965–66, an invasion of North Vietnam by three divisions at the port of Vinh to link up with a force entering from Thailand to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail was intensively debated within the administration. The author participated concerning the disposition of Chinese forces in North Vietnam, which appeared to commit Beijing to whatever role was necessary for Hanoi.

44. Zhang, "The Vietnam War," citing Li Ke and Hao Shengzhang, *Wenhua degeming zhong de renmin jiefangjun* [The People's Liberation Army during the Cultural Revolution] (Beijing: CCP Historical Materials Press, 1989), p. 341; and Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, cites the "Six-Point Directive on the Struggle against U.S. Ships and Aircraft in the South China Sea," New China News Agency, January 11, 1965.

45. U.S. military sources did not acknowledge the Chinese claim.

Chinese space, whereupon Mao ordered his pilots to “resolutely strike American aircraft that overfly Hainan Island.”⁴⁶ On April 12 he expanded this command to “not only be ready to engage U.S. aircraft in aerial battles and intercept U.S. bombers in the border region but also be prepared to fight U.S. fighter planes and bombers on a larger and more protracted scale in interior regions.”⁴⁷ Subsequently the PLAAF varied its responses to overflights, with passive radar lock-on and noncombat sorties that allowed for U.S. pilot error, but reacted aggressively on occasion to warn against repeated entry of Chinese air space. Beijing did not publicize these engagements until after the war, when it claimed to have shot down twelve U.S. planes and damaged four more, with some 2,138 combat sorties reported in Guangxi Province alone.⁴⁸ On one occasion when a U.S. plane was pursued across the border and shot down, Hanoi was credited with the kill.⁴⁹ These rules of engagement testified to Beijing’s willingness to risk escalation while endeavoring to minimize that risk.

SOVIET BORDER CLASHES, 1969

During 1967–68, growing Chinese apprehension expressed by Mao over possible Soviet aggressiveness stemmed from a slow but persistent buildup along the entire Siberian border. In addition, Moscow signed a virtual military alliance with Mongolia.⁵⁰ Soviet concern over Chinese intentions began in July 1964, when Mao told a visiting Japanese delegation, “A hundred years ago they incorporated the territory to the east of Lake Baikal, including Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and the Kamchatka Peninsula. . . . We have not yet settled these accounts with them.”⁵¹ This claim to 585,000 square miles ceded to czarist Russia by the Qing Empire threatened to exclude the Soviet Union from

46. Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, citing *Mao Zedong junshi wenji* [Mao Zedong’s military papers] (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1993), Vol. 6, p. 403.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 143, citing Lin Hu, ed., *Kunjun shi* [History of the air force] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1989).

48. *Ibid.*, citing *Dongdai Zhongguo kongjun*, pp. 390–392.

49. Information available to the author.

50. Moscow and Ulan Bator had previously concluded a military pact against the Japanese threat from Manchuria in 1936; Elena Boikova, “Aspects of Soviet-Mongolian Relations, 1929–1939,” in Stephin Kotkin and Bruce A. Elleman, eds., *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 107–122.

51. Mao Zedong, speech to Japanese visitors, July 10, 1964, *Mao Zedong sixiang wan sui* [Long live Mao Zedong thought] (Taipei: n.p., 1974), pp. 540–541; a similar version is in Dennis J. Doolin, *Territorial Claims in the Sino-Soviet Conflict: Documents and Analysis* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 1965), p. 44.

access to the Pacific Ocean. In 1965 Mao refused Moscow's proposal for joint assistance to Hanoi against Washington. In 1967 China's militant Cultural Revolution Red Guards harassed the Soviet embassy, forcing many of its members to run a brutal gauntlet as they fled to the airport. Security concern over Beijing's behavior prompted concentration of the Red Army along the Chinese border, including nuclear-capable missiles around Manchuria. Meanwhile, in August 1968 the Soviet Union joined Warsaw Pact forces to invade Czechoslovakia, publicly justified by Leonid Brezhnev's doctrine of "limited sovereignty" within the "socialist family" whenever socialist rule was threatened. Mao's Cultural Revolution had virtually destroyed the CCP as a functioning organization and crippled government at all levels. As seen from Beijing, the possible analogy with Czechoslovakia invited similar intervention. The stage was set for mutual misperception of threat.

Unarmed incidents increased along the Ussuri River where Chinese and Soviet border guards contested control of islands, prompting Moscow in January 1969 to warn that further provocations would be met by force.⁵² The CCP Central Military Commission responded, instructing PLA units in Shenyang and Beijing "to strengthen the defense in the eastern section of the Sino-Soviet border and militarily prepare to play a supporting role in political and diplomatic struggles."⁵³ Beijing's restrictions against initiating action included the specific use of firearms only in self-defense, but the instruction added "See to it that the counter-attacks are kept within Chinese territory." This admonition left room for misinterpretation because the incidents arose precisely over opposing definitions of territorial sovereignty, most specifically the mile-long Damansky Island. The next month the Heilongjiang military command proposed that three companies engage the Russians on Damansky and attack by ambush.⁵⁴ On February 19 the PLA general staff headquarters and the foreign ministry approved the plan, warning Chinese troops to "strictly observe the principle of waging a tit-for-tat struggle and gaining mastery only after the enemy has struck. You will not show signs of weakness, nor will you provoke troubles.

52. Bruce A. Elleman, *Modern Chinese Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 276–279, offers a secret Soviet account of the clashes in the East German archives. Allegations of vicious mutilation of Soviet corpses may have been exaggerated for East German consumption.

53. Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Chinese Foreign Policy during the Cultural Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), p. 88, citing Li and Hao, *Wenhua dageming zhong de renmin jiefangjun*.

54. Gong Li, "Chinese Decision-Making and Thaw of U.S. Relations," in Ross, *Reexamining the Cold War*, citing Li and Hao, *Wenhua dageming zhong de renmin jiefangjun*, pp. 318–319.

You have to render counter-attacks, if any, in a concentrated way and finish it as quickly as possible without getting tied down by the enemy.”⁵⁵

In the politically volatile context of the Cultural Revolution, this effort at risk management carried little weight. On March 2 Chinese border guards attacked Soviet patrols on Damansky, killing 38 and wounding about 30.⁵⁶ The two sides offered conflicting accounts, but the circumstances suggest that the PLA deliberately incited the clash. Moscow responded forcefully on March 15, attacking reinforced PLA units on the island and suffering 60 killed and 80 wounded. That day Mao declared, “The northeast, the north, and the northwest should be prepared. We are now confronted with a formidable enemy.”⁵⁷ Limited Soviet attacks continued at various points along the extensive border throughout the summer, while war fever gripped both capitals. Tension subsided but did not disappear completely after a September meeting in the Beijing airport between the two premiers, Zhou Enlai and Alexei Kosygin, who pledged to pacify the border dispute.

The absence of archival materials on high-level Chinese discussion of the border crisis precludes conclusive analysis of motivation comparable with the earlier cases. The context of the planned ambush strongly suggests, however, that its aim was deterrence against a perceived threat of Soviet intervention in China’s Cultural Revolution disarray. As in 1962, the perspective of “trouble within, trouble without” could associate internal vulnerability with the external threat. This preconception justified risking conflict with a superior enemy if this action would dissuade it from the worst-case contingency. Whatever the calculation, Beijing’s seizing the initiative provoked a series of border clashes that ultimately included a Soviet threat of attack on China’s nuclear production facilities if the PLA did not back off from its assertive posture.⁵⁸

55. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

56. Barnouin and Yu, *Chinese Foreign Policy during the Cultural Revolution*, p. 88.

57. Quoted in *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shilu* [A factual history of the People’s Republic of China] (Changchun: Jilin People’s Press, 1994), Vol. 3, Pt. 1, p. 469, in James G. Hershberg, ed., *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 11 (Winter 1998), p. 162.

58. In June 1969 a bomber wing moved from Eastern Europe to a Central Asian base from which it exercised attacks on targets in northwest China, including the nuclear facility at Lanzhou. That summer Soviet diplomats hinted to East European and U.S. officials of a possible strike against this production point; information available to the author. On September 17 Chen Yi reported to Mao, “Quite recently they have . . . voiced nuclear threats against us and plotted a sudden strike on our nuclear installations.” Quoted in Barnouin and Yu, *Chinese Foreign Policy during the Cultural Revolution*, p. 143.

ATTACK ON VIETNAM, 1979

A combination of factors prompted China's "self-defensive counterattack" on Vietnam on February 17, 1979.⁵⁹ First, in early 1978 Hanoi took strong measures against Chinese residents, ostensibly against economic exploitation and corruption, resulting in the expulsion of 250,000 and triggering harsh accusations from Beijing. Hanoi refused to let Chinese ships transport them by sea and blamed Beijing for having prompted the exodus "to cause political, social, and economic disorder in Vietnam."⁶⁰ In August Beijing claimed that 2,000 Chinese living in Vietnam had been forced across the border, with 4 killed and PRC officials attacked.⁶¹ The disputed border raised a second factor, with Beijing claiming that six months prior to February 1979 Vietnam intruded across it in 162 locations, provoking 705 armed clashes and killing or wounding more than 300 people. Hanoi reciprocated, charging an increase of PLA incursions from 49 monthly in 1978 to 171 in January and 230 in sixteen days before the final attack.⁶² Third, in June 1978 Vietnam joined the Soviet economic organization, COMECON, and in November signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Moscow, a virtual military alliance. For China this perceived threat of Soviet encirclement required a firm response.

Beijing signaled Hanoi through a series of warnings in the press that steadily increased the threat of attack if Vietnam were to take specific actions.⁶³ Chinese military deployments strengthened this threat for forty days before the invasion with an intensive program to upgrade airfields, logistical routes, and medical facilities in Guangxi Province opposite the Vietnam border, which was almost certainly detected by Hanoi.⁶⁴ But public threats and PLA deployments failed to deter Vietnam from invading Cambodia on December 25, taking Phnom Penh in twelve days and collapsing China's client state in two weeks.

59. This section is informed by a U.S. military specialist on the conflict.

60. Hank Kenney, "Vietnamese Perceptions of the 1979 War with China," Center for Naval Analysis draft, April 28, 1999, p. 1; see also Harlan W. Jenks, "China's 'Punitive War' on Vietnam," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 8 (August 1979), pp. 801–805.

61. *On Vietnam's Expulsion of Chinese Residents* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978), pp. 71–72.

62. Kenney, "Vietnamese Perceptions of the 1979 War with China," p. 10.

63. Robert G. Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Policy: Developments after Mao* (New York: Praeger, 1986), pp. 79–80.

64. Kenneth W. Allen, *People's Republic of China's Liberation Army Air Force* (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, 1991), depicts the shipment of 10,000 mobile beds, 32,000 meters of water pipe, 43,000 square meters of bamboo beds, and repairing of 23,000 square meters of old housing, in addition to greatly expanded fuel shipments to Guangxi airfields.

Cambodia's Khmer Rouge rulers retreated to the Thai-Vietnam border for guerrilla warfare, covertly assisted by China.

Deng Xiaoping's vaunted determination to "teach Vietnam a lesson" left China's military goal undefined. Beijing nonetheless addressed risk management much as in the 1962 border war with India. The PLA withdrew after three weeks, destroying five provincial capitals but stopping at Long Sam, a key juncture route to Hanoi. No air power was used. The Chinese ambassador remained in Hanoi throughout the invasion. On February 26 Deng told a Japanese journalist that the attack showed China had "no fear of the Soviet Union."⁶⁵ By signaling in advance the limited duration of action, however, China was presumably able to preclude Soviet involvement. In January Deng had won American acquiescence during his successful visit to the United States, including talks with President Jimmy Carter and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had just recognized the PRC and announced termination of the U.S. defense treaty with the Republic of China on Taiwan.

Vietnamese resistance proved stubborn, however, having been tested in two decades of fighting against French and American forces. By comparison the PLA performed poorly, lacking extensive combat experience since the Korean War and failing to guard against heavily entrenched Vietnamese troops in mountains adjoining the main invasion routes. Hanoi did not withdraw its forces from Cambodia until 1989. Moscow strengthened its support of Hanoi and enjoyed continued access to the U.S.-built naval base at Cam Ranh Bay. Vietnam did not give in on the disputed border across which Chinese artillery continued shelling for much of the following decade. In short, deterrence failed to halt Hanoi's joining with Moscow in an implicit anti-China alliance, and coercive diplomacy failed to accomplish anything substantive. But risk management succeeded in showing Moscow's inability or unwillingness to back Vietnam under attack.

TAIWAN STRAIT EXERCISES, 1995–96

The absence of actual combat by the PLA during military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in 1995 and 1996 differentiates this situation from the previous ones. Nevertheless, it illustrates China's recurring pattern of deterrence and seizing of the initiative in direct or indirect confrontation with the United States. In May 1995 Lee Teng-hui, president of the Republic of China, contrary to Wash-

65. Quoted in Jenks, "China's 'Punitive War' on Vietnam," p. 803.

ington's assurances to Beijing, received a visa to visit Cornell University, his alma mater. In June his speech there emphasized the international status of Taiwan, triggering a wave of rhetorical attacks from Beijing, followed by missile exercises north and south of Taiwan.⁶⁶ From July 21 to July 28, after public warning, the PLA fired missiles 80 miles northeast of Taiwan in a 10-nautical-mile circular area near the air- and sea-lanes between Japan and Taiwan.⁶⁷ China's motivation was twofold: to warn Washington against further support for Lee and to deter Lee from continuing his perceived moves toward Taiwan independence. For the sixty-eighth PLA anniversary on August 1, Beijing's defense minister declared that China "will not sit idle if foreign forces interfere in China's reunification and get involved in Taiwan independence."⁶⁸ By August upward of 400 articles in the Chinese press attacked Lee by name. That month previously announced missile firings occurred over a wider area 90 miles north of Taiwan, ending the day that U.S. Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff arrived in Beijing as previously scheduled to discuss the overall Sino-American relationship.

In the fall the regular semiannual PLA exercises took on an expanded format as CCP Chairman Jiang Zemin watched an amphibious landing on an "enemy shore" in the Yellow Sea, involving aerial combat and missile bombardment of shore defenses while submarine and antisubmarine units blocked the operations from "enemy" ship attack.⁶⁹ In mid-November ten-day exercises simulated an invasion of Dongshan Island near southern Fujian in reportedly the largest combination of ground, naval, and air units in PLA history. With more than 160,000 participants, 200 landing craft, and 100 other ships, the political target was Taiwan, where the Legislative Yuan election was scheduled for December 2. Two days before that event, a member of Beijing's Taiwan Research Council declared that the exercises were a "most serious warning" to alert those who thought they could "break Taiwan away from China through so-called 'democratic procedures' with the support of foreign forces."⁷⁰ The

66. The Chinese foreign ministry spokesman stated, "What we are going to do is make the U.S. realize the importance of U.S.-China relations to prompt it to take the right track." Quoted in Robert S. Ross, "The 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 87–123, at p. 95.

67. Unless otherwise noted, this section draws on John W. Garver, *Face Off: China, the United States, and Taiwan's Democratization* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

68. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 74, from NCNA, July 31, 1995, in FBIS–China, August 1, 1995, pp. 21–23.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

70. Quoted in *ibid.*, citing *Wenhui Bao*, November 27, 1995, in FBIS–China, November 28, 1995, p. 72.

election cut the Kuomintang Party (KMT) majority to two seats, contrary to forecasts of an easy victory, with only 46 percent of the popular vote compared with 53 percent in 1993. Open opposition to Lee had split the KMT, with several party leaders announcing their candidacy and the formation of a rival New Party headed by the popular former governor of Taiwan. However much these factors contributed to Lee's setback, Beijing could regard it as a success for coercive diplomacy.

Also in November, Beijing announced another round of exercises for the following spring prior to and coinciding with Taiwan's presidential election, when Lee would run for a second term. After one month of deployments that included elements from all three PLA fleets, an estimated 300 planes, and 150,000 troops, Beijing scheduled missile exercises for March 8–15 during Taiwan's three-week campaign period.⁷¹ The relatively small target areas were 32 miles from the southwest coast with a major port, Kaohsiung, and naval base, Tsuoying, and 22 miles from the northeast coast with a major port, Keelung, and naval base, Su'ao. Chinese commentary specified that these would be "exercises," as differentiated from the 1995 "tests," and noted that the timing coincided with the seventeenth anniversary of the PLA having "taught Vietnam a lesson" in 1979.⁷²

On March 8 Washington announced deployment "a few hundred miles" from Taiwan of the USS *Independence* aircraft carrier battle group, which included two destroyers, a cruiser, and a frigate. Beijing responded on March 9 with the announcement of a second air, land, and naval exercise for March 12–20 in a 17,000-square-kilometer area off southern Fujian and near the midline in the Taiwan Strait. On March 11 Washington countered that a second carrier battle group headed by the USS *Nimitz*, two destroyers, a cruiser, a frigate, and a submarine was being deployed from the Arabian Sea to join the *Independence* off Taiwan. On March 12 PLA joint-force exercises began as scheduled. On March 15 NCNA announced a third set of exercises for March 18–25, ending two days after Taiwan's election and covering 6,000 square kilometers around Haitan Island off the Fujian coast. There amphibious boats, helicopters, and parachute forces would combine with land, air, and naval forces to practice sei-

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100, citing Japanese defense ministry information. Ross, "The 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation," was told by Chinese policymakers that Washington's apparent lack of response to the 1995 exercises showed the need for greater pressure to force a change in the U.S.-Taiwan relationship.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 101, citing NCNA, March 4, 1996, in FBIS-China, March 5, 1996, p. 68.

zure of the island. On Taiwan the political results were mixed so far as Beijing's goals were concerned. On one hand, Lee won re-election by a majority of 54 percent. On the other hand, the strongest independence advocate of the Democratic Progressive Party was resoundingly defeated, with only 21 percent of the vote.

As already noted, several factors distinguish this case from the preceding ones. First, the initial exercises of 1995 responded to the granting of a U.S. visa to Lee and Lee's provocative remarks at Cornell. Therefore they were not preemptive. Second, the later exercises attempted coercive diplomacy on Taiwan voters by threatening the use of force but without specifying the precise condition or circumstances that would bring it about. Third, the PLA remained confined to live-fire exercises that did not engage Taiwan or U.S. forces. They did affect Washington sufficiently, however, to prompt the largest deployment of force toward Taiwan since 1958. The standoff also triggered diplomatic communications that ultimately led to an exchange of summit visits in 1997 and 1998.

Risk management began in mid-1995 with the explicit designation of scheduled missile firings and the advance announcement of exercises in the fall. In addition, none of the missiles fired in Taiwan's vicinity in either year were armed. PLAAF planes flew across the midstrait line in 1996, contrary to practice by both sides, but they did not come close to Taiwan. Finally, in contrast with all of the previous cases, Beijing took several steps to inform Washington that no attack on Taiwan was planned. First, in February 1996 the U.S. embassy in Beijing was informed to this effect.⁷³ Second, later that month National Security Adviser Anthony Lake proposed that his counterpart come to the United States for discussions; Beijing agreed. Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu met in Washington with Lake, Secretary of Defense William Perry, and Secretary of State Warren Christopher just as the first missiles were to be fired. Frank exchanges that night and the next day established the boundaries of anticipated movement by both sides. Unlike previous PLA actions that directly or indirectly involved the United States, authoritative high-level communication was undertaken to minimize misunderstanding between Washington and Beijing. As an aftermath, in 1997 and 1998 President Bill Clinton and President Jiang Zemin exchanged summit visits.

73. Jonathan D. Pollack, "The U.S. and Asia in 1996: Under Renovation but Open for Business," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (January 1997), p. 98.

Implications of China's Use of Force for Taiwan

The political-military pattern of PLA deployment from 1950 to 1996 showed certain consistent characteristics, such as early warning for deterrence, seizure of the initiative, risk acceptance, and risk management. Their relevance for China's future use of force against Taiwan, however, must be critically assessed, given four major differences in this situation. First, PLA power must be projected across the Taiwan Strait with ground forces in a secondary role, unlike every case examined above.⁷⁴ This calls for a new capability where the PLA has no previous experience. Second, using force against Taiwan runs a very high risk of major U.S. involvement with greatly superior air and sea power. Not since 1950 has Beijing faced this serious a consequence of military action. Third, Taiwan is a valuable economic asset to be acquired with minimum damage. Its destruction in reunification would be a Pyrrhic victory. Finally, the use of high-technology weapons systems presents formidable new challenges to Beijing's military planners.

Previously a high-priority political goal or a perceived military threat would move the PLA into a deterrent or coercive posture that prepared for action but did not provoke it, as in the Chinese adage, "Pull back the bow but do not let loose the arrow." This signaled the opponent of China's intent while allowing the PLA time to assess the response before taking further action. Except in the Ussuri River ambush during the 1969 Soviet border clashes, no surprise attack occurred because the goal was to affect the opponent's behavior without fighting. During an extended period, Beijing orchestrated a mixture of increased verbal warnings and military buildup for maximum credibility, as in Korea and the 1962 actions opposite Taiwan and India. Unfortunately, several factors make this early warning for deterrence and coercion unlikely to occur in the case of Taiwan, or at best, the time between warning and attack may be severely shortened. Whether for deterrence or coercion, previous PLA strategy required extensive movement of ground forces with necessary logistical preparations being detectable abroad. Necessity became a virtue insofar as this simultaneously prepared for possible combat while sending a signal to deter or

74. David A. Shlapak, David T. Orletsky, and Barry A. Wilson, *Dire Strait? Military Aspects of the China-Taiwan Confrontation and Options for U.S. Policy* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2000), offers a comprehensive military assessment of alternative scenarios for attacking Taiwan and U.S. responses thereto.

coerce. But the difficulty of mounting an invasion across the 100 miles of the Taiwan Strait, prone to severe winds in the winter and typhoons from May to November, shifts attention to a steady buildup of hundreds of missiles opposite Taiwan.⁷⁵ These can be launched with minimal preparation. Beijing would probably not announce firing well in advance as in 1995 and 1996 because the longer the delay between warning and action, the easier it is for the United States to mobilize a defensive force. Time and distance would place the United States at a disadvantage in the first days. Political sensitivity in Japan may preclude the use of Okinawa for combat with China, placing reliance on Guam. Once assembled east of Taiwan, however, U.S. air and naval units could inflict heavy damage at long distance while reinforcing Taiwan's determination to stand fast.

Seizing the initiative, a second characteristic, would prompt the PLA to follow precedent to gain the advantage by striking first. Beijing's past willingness to take on a superior enemy, whether the United States or the Soviet Union, made defining the immediate scenario critical to offsetting PLA inferiority. This is especially important in high-technology warfare, where the initial engagement can determine the ability to continue fighting after possibly serious retaliatory damage. Preemption becomes an increasingly attractive option under these circumstances.⁷⁶ Furthermore, in the context of Taiwan the objective is negotiations, not conquest through combat.⁷⁷ Beijing may calculate that the shock effect on morale of an initial use of force followed by a cease-fire and talks could obviate the need for further action, thereby preempting an effective U.S. response.

In this regard, Chinese military security writings show close attention to the Persian Gulf War and the NATO attack on Yugoslavia, where the impact of combined force operations and information warfare broke new ground in

75. For the problems of an invasion scenario, see Michael O'Hanlon, "Why China Cannot Conquer Taiwan," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 51–86. In 1949 Gen. Sun Li-ren, Taiwan defense commander, estimated that the PLA could land 200,000 troops in twenty-four hours on 1,000 junks. Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo's Son: Chiang Ching-kuo and the Revolutions in China and Taiwan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 182. Sun believed that only 60,000 of his 300,000 troops were combat soldiers.

76. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up," pp. 26ff., cites Lieut. Gen. Wang Houqing and Maj. Gen. Zhang Xingye, chief eds., *Zhanyi Xue* [Military campaign studies] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, May 2000) (military circulation only), on the need and manner of preemption with missiles and information warfare.

77. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up," pp. 23 ff., spells out Beijing's ends and means for inducing Taiwan to accept the mainland terms for reunification.

strategy and tactics.⁷⁸ Attention to foreign writings on the so-called revolution in military affairs prompted an acute awareness of PLA limitations in integrating its largely obsolete ground, air, and sea forces with advanced weapons assembled piecemeal from Russia with support systems from Israel and elsewhere.⁷⁹ Acquiring complex systems is only a first step. Training in their operation and coordinated exercises takes time, as does mastering command and control of three different services by simultaneous communication. Maintenance of systems and management of spare parts adds another step in preparing for combat. In the final analysis, combat experience is essential to engage successfully in high-technology warfare.

Over the past decade, the level of technological sophistication has steadily increased in the higher ranks of the PLA, although this is obscured by the more flamboyant pronouncements by some of its spokespeople.⁸⁰ For example, the deputy director of the Academy of Military Sciences Strategy Department, Luo Yuan, delivered a paper that stated: “The initiative for taking military action will be in the hands of the PLA—when, where, and what action will be up to the PLA, and the armed forces of Taiwan can only wait to take a beating. . . . We are fully ready to fight a tough war. Although we prefer to fight a short war to force a quick end, we are also prepared to fight a protracted war. . . . We will not stop until we accomplish our goal. If our first attack is unsuccessful, we will take another one and another one until complete victory.”⁸¹ Rhetoric aside, in the past the PLA has been constrained not by a power imbalance favoring the opponent, but by risk management through closely supervised rules of engagement in an attempt to control escalation. This was particularly manifest where involvement with the U.S. Air Force arose as a

78. Nan Li, “The PLA’s Evolving Campaign Doctrine and Strategies,” in James C. Mulvenon and Richard H. Yang, eds., *The People’s Liberation Army in the Information Age* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1999), pp. 146–174; and June Teufel Dreyer, *The PLA and the Kosovo Conflict* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2000).

79. Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2000), pp. 259–304, surveys articles from 1994 to 1999 by Chinese security analysts; Rear Adm. Eric A. McVadon, USN (Ret.), “Systems Information in China’s People’s Liberation Army,” in Mulvenon and Yang, *The People’s Liberation Army in the Information Age*, pp. 217–244.

80. Ellis Joffe, “The Military and China’s New Politics: Trends and Counter-trends,” in Mulvenon and Yang, *The People’s Liberation Army in the Information Age*, pp. 34–47.

81. Luo Yuan, “The Military Factor in the Cross-Strait Situation,” paper presented at the Center for Strategic and International Studies conference, Washington, D.C., April 4, 2000, cited in David L. Shambaugh, *Reforming China’s Military* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

contingency to be safeguarded against, as in the offshore islands campaigns, or if necessary, selectively accepted as in Vietnam. But once again, the circumstances of high-technology warfare in a future Taiwan Strait crisis raise questions over how to implement rules of engagement so as to control the timing and scale of action. The introduction of information warfare that focuses on crippling communication nodes adds another dimension of complexity.

These challenges to past patterns of PLA strategy in turn raise the prospect of miscalculation, a recurring phenomenon under both Mao and Deng, whether in the offshore islands or “teaching a lesson” to Vietnam. Both men had spent much of their lives in military action against the Japanese and the Chinese Nationalists. Yet Mao failed to anticipate the reaction of the United States and the Soviet Union under circumstances that could have spun completely out of control had it not been for the constraint of the opponent. Deng miscalculated Vietnam’s response to attack. Jiang Zemin and his successors lack any military experience. This places a premium on the PLA assessment of consequences in attacking Taiwan. Beijing almost certainly did not anticipate the deployment of two U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups toward Taiwan in 1996. Military planning must aim for the capability to deter a repetition of that scenario or else inflict significant damage in any future confrontation.

The priority of the political goal, however, may override the exigencies of high-technology warfare so as to make the leadership in Beijing take risks that might seem unacceptable militarily. This concept of politics prevailing over conventional military calculations was epitomized by Mao’s celebrated “man over weapons” maxim. His maxim challenges the rationality imposed by foreign strategic theorists who calculate Chinese cost-benefit ratios in their terms rather than those determined in Beijing.⁸² First, ongoing developments can increase China’s felt need either to act or to face loss of Taiwan, in contrast with the patience it has exhibited since 1950. In October 1975 Deng Xiaoping told a visiting American foreign affairs delegation that China could “wait one hundred years” but it would never give up Taiwan.⁸³ At that time the Kuomintang regime held fast to a one-China stance. Subsequently, however, the population

82. For the most complete review of theory and practice, wholly Western oriented, see Michael Nicholson, *Rationality and the Analysis of International Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

83. Cyrus Vance headed the delegation, which was escorted by the author. In fact, since the U.S. Seventh Fleet interposition in the Taiwan Strait in 1950, Beijing has already waited more than fifty years.

has increasingly identified itself as a separate country, with Taiwanese succeeding in politics previously dominated by the 2 million mainlanders who fled China in 1949. In 2000 Chen Shui-bian became president of Taiwan as head of the Democratic Progressive Party, with independence in its basic charter. More recently, the U.S. provision of a growing defensive capability is likely to diminish Beijing's hope of Taipei agreeing to negotiate reunification.

Second, the prominence of Taiwan in Chinese political discourse and security writings since 1995 contrasts with its intermittent reference in previous decades. The emotional connotation of accepting Taiwan's permanent separation as the result of U.S. policy is heightened by the mantra of a "century of shame and humiliation" from foreign intervention. This carries special weight in assertive policy advocacy. At some point, assessing the risk of political loss through passivity may outweigh the risk of material costs in military action.⁸⁴ Thus the perception of Taiwanese behavior and U.S. intentions can prompt Beijing to feel being "backed into a corner," as put by Thomas Christensen.⁸⁵

A third factor in regime calculation can be rising instability in China. Whether as the result of serious economic grievances in urban and rural areas or growing political resentment of corruption, or both, the regime may feel at risk. In 1962 catastrophic famine after the collapse of the Great Leap Forward triggered alarm and exaggerated threat perceptions with respect to the United States and Taiwan, the Soviet Union and Xinjiang, and India with the disputed border. In 1969 the political disarray from the Cultural Revolution coupled with a steady Soviet buildup along the border sparked the Ussuri ambush. A more recent worrisome precedent is 1989, when anger over corruption and inflation underlay widespread demonstrations far beyond the confines of Beijing and Shanghai, where students had begun their marches.⁸⁶ Thus if the "trouble within, trouble without" syndrome arises from a coincidence of perceived internal and external pressures, the resulting worst-case analysis can impart a greater sense of urgency on winning Taiwan than otherwise would exist. In sum, the time line for anticipating the Chinese use of force may not be calculated simply on the respective balance of forces in the Taiwan Strait.

84. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up," pp. 23 ff., fully elaborates the calculations of ends and means in Beijing.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

86. Compiled by Zhang Liang with Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership's Decision to Use Force against Their Own People* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), carries graphic accounts of turmoil in far-reaching areas of China.

Central to Chinese calculations on Taiwan is the U.S. response. American scholars, conversant with long-standing associates in the security and academic communities, report a range of views that vary across groups as well as across time.⁸⁷ Generally the anticipation of eventual conflict tends to rise and fall with relations between the two countries. Since the June 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during “the U.S. attack on Yugoslavia,” official statements and mainland media have placed more emphasis on Washington’s “hegemonic” goal of domination in East Asia with an “anti-China Cold War” focus. At the same time, interviews and articles discount the likelihood of a major U.S. intervention on behalf of Taiwan.⁸⁸ Arguments against this probability include U.S. obligations elsewhere with peacekeeping, preoccupation in the Middle East, and uncertain alliances. One Chinese senior colonel anticipated only “limited intervention” because war would “seriously impair U.S. economic interests.”⁸⁹ American acceptance of stalemate in Korea and Vietnam evokes the disparagement of U.S. will to sustain prolonged war with mounting casualties, epitomized by the 1995 withdrawal from Somalia after the televised dragging of a soldier’s body in the streets of Mogadishu. As one professor at China’s National Defense University argued, “Americans can never afford to take a beating, not even a light one. . . . the United States is unlikely . . . to fight a large-scale war for the sake of Taiwan.”⁹⁰ Interviews with American security specialists depict the PLA leadership as “hawkish” prior to the 1995–96 missile firings. Foreign analysts agree, however, that this action probably emerged through a strong civilian-military consensus on the need to warn Taipei and Washington against any further steps toward Taiwan independence.⁹¹

A widely cited statement dismissive of a U.S. nuclear intervention came in December 1994 in an extended exchange between a retired American official and a high PLA officer who claimed, “You will neither threaten to use it [nu-

87. Informal exchanges with more than a dozen China specialists in security affairs.

88. Christensen, “Posing Problems without Catching Up,” pp. 17–21.

89. “Military Expert Wang Baoqing Envisages War with Taiwan,” *Zhongguo xinwenshe*, September 7, 1999, in Shambaugh, *Reforming China’s Military*.

90. Christensen, “Posing Problems Without Catching Up,” p. 18, citing an interview in *Ta Kung Pao* (Hong Kong), August 18, 1999.

91. You Ji, “Changing Leadership Consensus: The Domestic Context of War Games,” in Suisheng Zhao, ed., *Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan, and the 1995–1996 Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 88 ff.; also Suisheng Zhao, “Changing Leadership Perceptions: The Adoption of a Coercive Strategy,” in *ibid.*, pp. 113ff.

clear weapon] nor actually do so because in the end you care a lot more about Los Angeles than you do about Taipei. If you hit us, we will hit you too.”⁹² Offered in a prolonged informal exchange, his remark aimed at the alleged imbalance of will between the United States and China with respect to Taiwan. Contrary to the interpretation subsequently made in the U.S. media, this was neither a literal threat of launching nuclear missiles against the United States nor an official statement of strategic intent. It won attention in January 1995, however, before the first missile firings, received notoriety in that context, and subsequently became a frequent reference by proponents of a U.S. national missile defense. Yet the basic asymmetry between the two nuclear arsenals precludes Beijing taking this ultimate step, which would invite total destruction of all it has achieved since China’s “open door” policy of 1981.

Nevertheless, in conventional warfare, although the country is never strategically reckless, China’s readiness to take casualties—ranging from 26,000 in Vietnam to at least 300,000 in Korea—underscores its risk-taking propensity. In this regard, another characteristic—flexibility in managing a dispute to limit escalation—is likely to follow precedent, as with the offshore islands and India. The uncertainties attending confrontation and possible combat with the United States over Taiwan preclude absolute confidence in Beijing that the use of force will result in the island rejoining the mainland. But the political imperative of pursuing this goal may force acceptance of the risks and costs, regardless of the odds against success. Lifelong indoctrination in the ability of the weaker to defeat the stronger through willpower, reinforced by repeated reference to the U.S. failures in Korea and Vietnam, can tip the decision to act rather than risk the loss of Taiwan. In this case the perceived imbalance of will may be seen as offsetting the gross imbalance of power. Under these circumstances, Beijing is likely to use the PLA against Taiwan in the hope of deterring or preempting a U.S. response, but Chinese leaders are ready to accept the consequences regardless.

Conclusion

From 1950 to 1996, Beijing gave priority to political goals of deterrence and coercive diplomacy in PLA deployments. This pattern cautions against sanguine

92. Correspondence with Chas. W. Freeman Jr., January 2, 2001.

assumptions that the risk of fighting U.S. forces over Taiwan, combined with the associated economic costs, preclude China's future use of force there. When the calculation of political cost from passivity outweighed the economic and military costs of taking action, Beijing moved against the United States in Korea and in Vietnam, against India, and against the Soviet Union. Preemption and seizure of the initiative resulted in limited victory in Korea and India, deterrence of the United States in Vietnam, and perceived deterrence of the Soviet Union. Risk taking did not result in defeat, while risk management avoided escalation by the opponent.

This record does not necessarily predict China's future course of action in the Taiwan Strait. Too many contingent factors must be taken into consideration over the long term for such an absolute forecast, especially with regard to the trend of Taiwan politics. The island's growing economic interaction with the mainland manifest in trade, investment, and movement of people could ameliorate worst-case concerns in Beijing. Beijing and Taipei may find a mutually acceptable formula for negotiating unification as one China. China's growing interaction in the global economy, particularly with Japan and the United States, after entry into the World Trade Organization in November may take on increasing weight in calculating the consequences of using force against Taiwan. Should these favorable circumstances not prove decisive, however, China's past pattern in the use of force casts a worrisome shadow over the next decade.