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Back to Basics: The U.S. Perspective on Taiwan-PRC Relations

by Arthur Waldron

It is now 25 years since Richard Nixon's announcement that he would visit the People's Republic of China (PRC). In that time everything, and nothing, has changed. With respect to American relations with the PRC, change has been near total in most dimensions. But, despite some alterations in protocol, things have changed relatively little with respect to Taiwan–certainly less than was expected in the 1970s. Taiwan and mainland China are still two distinct political regimes (and they are growing more distinct) and neither shows any sign of packing up. Most importantly, as the March 1996 Straits crisis–with its echoes of 1958–reminded all, the United States still has a strong security relationship with Taiwan.

Thinking about the real future of China, Taiwan, and the United States, however, is remarkably undeveloped. There will, of course, be one "real future" unfolded over days and weeks and years in events and news reports. It is likely that this real future will be rather different from any of the scenarios currently popular, such as peaceful reunification or disastrous conflict. All sorts of reasons conspire to prevent the sort of open and speculative discussion required. These reasons range from political sensitivities to a desire to speak diplomatically, to an understandable unwillingness to increase already difficult problems. Nevertheless, there is a need for unconstrained discussion.

Protocol–A Starting Point

Perhaps the largest single objective difference between the situation today and that of 25 years ago is in the forms of language and diplomacy used. In essence, the taboos that were applied to the PRC in the 1950s and 1960s are now applied to Taipei. But the difference does not end there, for as is true of taboos generally, an associated way of think-

ing gives them more than ritual significance, and here we find an important difference between the two cases. In the 1950s and 1960s most American foreign policy experts understood that it was essential to come to terms with the PRC; and indeed, at least from Eisenhower on, successive administrations tried to do just that. The problem was that the PRC was not ready: in Dean Rusk's words, Beijing kept "hanging up the phone" on American initiatives.[1] Today, there is a comparable anomaly in our relations with Taiwan, and the way it complicates Asian policy is only beginning to receive attention.[2] Many government and foreign policy experts still believe that the basic problems were solved with "normalization" with the PRC; they have not yet grasped that the structure put in place in 1979, like that of the 1950s and 1960s, is very much based on "make believe."

This "make believe," however, has had the effect of confining and impoverishing discussion, while at the same time removing from the hands of Washington (and the world, which has followed us) many of the standard everyday tools of diplomacy, crisis avoidance, and security maintenance, such as diplomatic relations, alliances, state visits and summit conferences, not to mention military consultations, ship visits, and so forth. (Think how much easier it would be to manage relations with Taiwan and thus with PRC, if, for example, Lee Teng-hui and other top officials could get the full White House treatment). Furthermore, by creating false expectations, and hence unrealistically high demands in negotiations, American "make believe" has helped push PRC policy toward Taiwan down paths that ultimately lead nowhere.

Indeed, the elaborate pretenses of the relationship with China have now become so familiar that they are mistaken for reality. The lack of basic change over the past quarter century with respect to Taiwan and PRC comes almost as a surprise to many. Once recognized, however, it sets the agenda for American policy toward the Taiwan Strait in the decades ahead. An indefinite future lies ahead, in which two states coexist in an ambiguous and increasingly unstable relationship, in which the security interests of the United States will continue to be intimately involved.

The challenge for Washington is to develop a policy truly adequate to dealing with this situation. Certain aspects of such an approach follow. Taiwan, as Beijing now regularly points out, is a major issue

between the United States and China. It is also a key symbolic issue in Chinese domestic politics. And it remains, as March 1996 showed, a potential flashpoint for serious crises. But, contrary to widespread expectations in the 1970s and 1980s, issues associated with Taiwan are not "self-liquidating"; they are not going to go away, and to pretend they will is to forfeit the opportunity to think and act effectively, and fritter away precious opportunities for action. The United States needs to consider the real future of PRC-Taiwan relations as opposed to the diplomatic rhetoric; to develop a policy approach that serves U.S. and allied interests, and to work hard to bring the PRC along in its implementation.

Great Expections

Wisdom about U.S. policy toward China begins with the fundamental political fact that although an overwhelmingly large constituency exists here for good relations with PRC, effectively no constituency supports hurting Taiwan. This was abundantly clear in the U.S. Congress during 1978 as the diplomatic break with Taipei approached and shows up dramatically in the legislative history of the Taiwan Relations Act.[3] Taiwan's democratization and the PRC's turn toward repression since 1989 have only reinforced the fact. As a result, whatever the United States does with respect to the PRC and Taiwan must be accompanied by strong and clear reassurances, such as Jimmy Carter's, at the time relations were broken with Taipei, that "The United States is confident that the people of Taiwan face a peaceful and prosperous future."[4]

Yet for all this reassurance, a quite different set of expectations has existed since the 1970s in some Western policy circles, and in Beijing–that, in fact, Taiwan was not going to survive indefinitely. Some Americans seem to have expected that China's opening and liberalization would lead naturally to negotiations, while Beijing saw the Nixon diplomacy as the first step in a gradual process of cutting official U.S. ties with Taipei that would eventually force Taipei to come to terms. Because Beijing expected the United States to assist in this process, Ruan Ming, the distinguished former PRC official, has labeled this the policy of *lianMei zhiTai* [uniting with America to control Taiwan].[5]

The subterranean political struggle between those who saw Sino American "normalization" as the beginning of the end for Taiwan, and those who drafted legislation and took diplomatic initiatives to ensure Taiwan's continued survival rarely emerges into broad daylight. It is a contest between values and visions, and above all, expectations. The earliest hints of an expectation that Taiwan would not survive indefinitely can be found in the record of the Nixon diplomacy. Thus Henry Kissinger recalls how, on the day he was to leave for his first trip to Beijing, he met James Shen, the Taiwan ambassador, to discuss the issues of UN representation. "No government less deserved what was about to happen to it than that of Taiwan" Kissinger recalls. "I found my role with Shen particularly painful, since I knew that before long his esoteric discussion of UN procedural maneuvers would be overtaken by more *elemental events*."[6] Furthermore, on first meeting Zhou Enlai, Kissinger affirmed the PRC formula that the United States did not seek to create "two Chinas, one China one Taiwan, or an independent Taiwan." (Kissinger omits this fact from his memoirs.)[7]

The expectation of fairly prompt change was stronger eight years later when the Carter administration finally cut, as they imagined, the Gordian knot and ended all official ties with Taiwan. Reassuring words notwithstanding, there was a sense in some quarters that Taipei would not recover from the seismic shock. "The United States," said the communiqué, "expects that the Taiwan issue will be settled peacefully by the Chinese themselves."[8] Some in the U.S. government expected settlement in as few as three years;[9] others, of course, worked hard on the Taiwan Relations Act and other measures having an opposite effect.

For Beijing, however, "normalization" was only the first step on a longer quest. Deng Xiaoping consistently linked together the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States and the return of Taiwan as cause and effect, and expected that unification would be achieved within the decade of the 1980s. In 1979 he stated that "the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States has created favorable conditions for the return of Taiwan." In his interview with "Sixty Minutes" he expressed a hope that the United States would play a role [*you suo zuowei*] in the process of assisting the PRC in achieving its objective.[10]

Deng's expectation was greatly strengthened by the 1982 arms sales

communiqué, which implied that, after a "decent interval," Taiwan would simply cease to have the means to protect herself. The United States stated that it intended "to reduce gradually its sales of arms to Taiwan, leading over a period of time to a final resolution."[11] This sounded very much like saying that the United States would permit Taiwan's forces to become obsolete: where, after all, was she going to obtain the new navy and air force she would soon require? (The United States had just refused to permit sale of the Northrop F-20, specifically designed for the island, to Taiwan).

On both sides, these expectations formed a crucial but largely unacknowledged subtext to the whole process of "normalization," and the complete failure of these expectations is a basic problem today. Official media in the PRC increasingly express outrage at the not-so-residual American support for Taiwan and are upset to discover that Washington meant what it said when it insisted, in the negotiation of the three communiqués, on peaceful means only. According to one Asian diplomat, the Chinese were "shocked by the U.S. reaction during the Taiwan Strait crisis."[12] In the West, what Ian Buruma terms "peevishness" can be detected among some China hands, confronted by Taiwan's increasing tendency not to follow their scripts but rather to go its own, democratic way.[13]

Half the Communiqués' Meaning?

In fact, the wording of the three communiqués defining U.S.-PRC relations (1972, 1979, 1982) presented Beijing with the proverbial poisoned chalice. The United States would end official relations with Taiwan if, and only if, they would effectively renounce the use of force against the island. An expectation about peaceful means was woven tightly and inextricably into the fabric of each of the communiqués; American concessions were carefully balanced by Chinese assurances. Indeed even the 1982 negotiations, which looked like a real change in the American approach, rested on Chinese assurances that their "fundamental" policy toward Taiwan was peaceful. In other words, U.S. withdrawal of troops from Taiwan and restraint on arms sales did not mean the United States was abandoning the island; rather, they meant that the PRC had authoritatively committed itself not to threaten it. As the Taiwan Relations Act put it, "the United States decision to

establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China [rests] upon the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means."[14]

This was a game that PRC could not win, unless the rules were changed (or unless the PRC decided to make a realistic compromise), but Beijing was willing to play as long as she faced the Soviet threat, or valued economic development above all. As long as Deng Xiaoping was in power she did play very cooperatively. Until the mid 1990s she rarely threatened Taiwan verbally, and carefully refrained from military deployments that could be interpreted as threatening. Quite the opposite: she sought negotiations (such as the Koo-Wang talks in Singapore) and resolved issues (such as Olympic participation) rather pragmatically. But then, as Deng passed from the scene in the mid-1990s, the PRC began to try to change the game. The recent redefinition of "One China" to mean "PRC" is an example.[15]

Today the PRC is using what in the 1930s were called "salami tactics" to redefine the three communiques by removing the bits it dislikes slice by slice and keeping the rest. More specifically, it is attempting to maintain the American commitment to Beijing–no official relations, no military forces protecting Taiwan–while discarding the Chinese undertaking–no threat to Taiwan.

The change has complex roots. In the mainland, the 1989 regime crisis and Tiananmen massacre led to a policy shift away from reform and democratization, which made the regime more belligerent externally and less attractive to Taiwan. Indeed, the desire to square Taiwan away, by force if necessary, is simply the June 4, 1989 domestic policy applied externally, and this approach is not limited to Taiwan. Chinese dissidents, as well as residents of Hong Kong, Tibetans, Turks, Mongols, and others are also feeling pressure from Beijing's current program of forcible recentralization.

But in Taiwan the direction of change has been the opposite, toward liberalization. There, long standing domestic demands for reform plus American warnings after the murder of Henry Liu set in train a process of democratization that has given the people of the island the last word on any negotiation, and thus ruled out most PRC scenarios (deals with senior mainlanders, party-to-party talks, and so forth). With democratization has come Taiwanization, which has invigorated the political process in Taiwan and increased popular identification with the state, which worries Beijing just as much as democracy did and does.

On the American side, various nuances of the communiqués' language began to be lost in the early 1990s. Thus, in August 1995, after the meeting of Qian Qichen and Warren Christopher in Brunei, the Chinese foreign minister reported that Washington had "reaffirmed in specific terms that the United States recognized Beijing as the sole legitimate government of China, including Taiwan."[16] If true, the American statement had made a hash of the careful diplomacy of the 1970s, which "acknowledged" but did not endorse, Chinese claims. It is, after all, not very difficult to say: "fine, Taiwan is yours." What took skill in the 1970s was coming close enough to saying that to permit U.S.-PRC relations to develop, but still to reserve the United States position.

Equally important, the credibility of America's subtly-expressed but real commitment to Taiwan's security began to erode. Chinese expectations were fed by the mild language with which the United States responded to a series of East Asian security challenges during late 1994 and 1995, notably the Kitty Hawk and Mischief Reef incidents. When PRC fired ballistic missiles into waters near Taiwan in 1995, the State Department noted only that they were "not conducive to peace and stability in the area of the Taiwan Strait."[17]

From the Chinese side, statements and signals about non-use of force became similarly muddy. PRC began acquiring more advanced weaponry and, breaking with previous practice, deployed it near Taiwan. Rhetoric changed as well: force, it turned out, was actually a necessary ingredient in dealing with Taiwan. As Jiang Zemin told the publisher of the *Asahi Shimbun* at Beidaihe on August 12, 1995, "If we abandon the threat of force against Taiwan, *then it is not possible that peaceful reunification will be achieved.*"[18]

Experiments with Coercion

The PRC missile tests near Taiwan in March 1996 finally brought these problems into the open. Under the communiqués' rules such an action was completely out of bounds: can one imagine Nixon or Carter, not to mention Reagan, signing a communiqué with a China that was

lobbing missiles at Taiwan? Furthermore, the Taiwan Relations Act contained wording that came within a micron of committing the United States to Taiwan's defense. Congress queried the administration. The response was that "in the end the decision would depend on the timing, pretext, and nature of Chinese aggression." The intention was to deter through what the Pentagon called "strategic ambiguity"[19] but that did not work.

Chinese strategic thought has always esteemed the minimization of the use of force [*li*], and the maximal exploitation of circumstances [*shi*] through the use of strategems [*ji* or *ce*]. In 1995 and 1996 Chinese operations showed these characteristics, as well as a concern to employ force at a level high enough to intimidate the local adversary (the Philippines, Taiwan) while at the same time low enough not to elicit intervention from the United States. The use of ballistic missiles against Taiwan, in the expectation that they would create a political crisis without bringing in the United States, fit this profile.

Sun Zi counsels "attack that which is not defended,"[20] and by choosing ballistic missiles as the means to threaten Taiwan, the PRC was selecting a weapon for which no defense currently exists. It is true that when two U.S. carrier battle groups were sent to the area, the crisis quickly wound down, but that was not because the carriers could do anything against the missiles. Had PRC wanted to, they could have continued firing missiles and even the dispatch of the entire U.S. Navy, and for that matter the U.S. Air Force as well, could not have stopped them.

Obviously one conclusion that flows from the March crisis is that defense against missiles must receive attention. But this is not a popular project in the United States.[21] The PRC, moreover, deeply fears missile defense because a Taiwan protected against missile strikes would, they believe, be free to opt for independence.[22] This fear highlights the basic flaw (to which we will return) in the PRC approach to Taiwan: namely, that it still relies, in the end, on force or the threat of force–a threat which is both lacking in military credibility and also counterproductive diplomatically.

But even if a rather good theater missile defense existed, it would not solve the basic military problem, for if the PRC is willing to expend enough missiles, then it can saturate any defense system. Indeed, the deployment of missiles to threaten key targets (nuclear reactors?) plus

an ultimatum might be enough to compel Taipei to come to terms. What would the United States be able to do? One can imagine strong internal pressure in Taiwan for acceptance of terms, or if that was not forthcoming, then a sort of Eastern Munich, with Taiwan's president cast as Beneš, and the Powers instructing Taipei to give in.

What is the military answer to the scenario spelled out above if not missile defense? Unfortunately, it is *deterrence.* I say unfortunately, because the logic of strike, counter-strike, and mutually assured destruction cannot hold any appeal to anyone who grasps the horrors of war. But no substitute has been found for deterrence in the maintenance of peace, and a China that even toys with ideas such as the one just presented will elicit a good deal of deterrence.

At present, the PRC is the only nuclear power in East Asia; the task of deterring China (not to be confused with "containment") falls to the United States. If China continues to develop its missile forces, however, that task will become more difficult. Carriers may work now, but they are likely to be vulnerable in the future. Deterring the USSR required not just a short-term naval presence, but rather a whole structure of alliances, deployed forces overseas, and constant vigilance. Without a change in behavior, nothing less is likely to deter the PRC. Furthermore the problem of extended deterrence will become more acute, and states such as Japan and Korea will want to develop their own deterrent forces, as our closer allies France, Britain, and Israel have.

What about Taiwan? Objectively speaking, unless the situation can be stabilized and pacified, they need a deterrent. The PRC has warned Taiwan specifically against a nuclear program, as has the United States, and I doubt this will change. However, deterrence need not be nuclear and Taiwan has considerable resources. As President Lee Teng-hui put it in a speech to 700 military officers in early July 1996, "We have to make the Chinese Communists realize that if they use force against us, they will suffer unbearable damage, which could jeopardize the very foundation of their survival and development."[23]

A Peaceful Solution? Or More Crises?

But how can the situation be stabilized and pacified? This question should be a primary focus of American planning. The ultimate

answer, I expect, will be through an intra-Chinese "normalization" comparable to the *Ostpolitik* that reduced tensions in Cold War Germany (and eventually brought unification).[24] Something along these lines is possible between Taipei and Beijing: people on both sides of the Strait get along; they share a great deal culturally as well as in objective interests; their disagreements are political. They are not Arabs and Israelis and they understand that. Rhetoric aside, no one has been killed in PRC-Taiwan fighting since the 1960s. So the raw material exists for a breakthrough.

The alternative is not pleasant to consider. If Beijing and Taipei do not secure a peaceful settlement, and particularly as long as Taiwan is seen to be making a reasonable good faith effort toward that end, then PRC attempts to push the process along by threats and coercion will only poison Beijing's relations with Washington as well as (although they will avoid saying as much) with her Asian neighbors. This could jeopardize both the PRC's economic future and the peace of the region. The road of force will lead only to tension and crisis, but not to resolution. Wishful planners may cook up beguiling scenarios involving cruise missile strikes against the Presidential building in Taipei but as with Israel and the Palestinians, or India and Pakistan, no military answer exists to the basic problem for either side.

But the obstacles to peaceful settlement are deeply entrenched. As there was in Germany, so there exists in the PRC today (it disappeared in Taiwan only a few years ago), a complete unwillingness to acknowledge the real *status quo*. Konrad Adenauer supported the Hallstein Doctrine (refusing diplomatic relations to states that recognized East Germany) and referred to the German Democratic Republic as "the Zone." Brandt, who entered the grand coalition as foreign minister in 1966, recalls how "'My' Federal Chancellor [Kurt Kiesenger] did bring himself to answer letters from the other Germany . . . but he would rather have had half the world laugh at him than dignify the GDR as the name of a state; he insisted on calling it a 'phenomenon.'"[25] American officials do much the same when it comes to Taiwan and this is not cost-free, for such a U.S. policy can only encourage Beijing (as its mirror image once encouraged Taipei) toward this dead-end course.

Chiang Kai-shek, after all, used to insist on absolute denial of the

mainland, and the United States went along (otherwise he could never have managed it as long as he did). The policy caused terrible misjudgments and lost opportunities. Thus, in 1964 Paris agreed to recognize Beijing, but drove a hard but judicious bargain that was difficult for the PRC to accept because, among other things, it did not break French relations with Taipei. Beijing swallowed hard and agreed. Had Taipei accepted the deal, the whole course of diplomacy would probably have been different. But Taipei completed the breach with Paris, withdrawing its ambassador, in a move later much regretted, on February 10, 1964.[26]

But like Chiang Kai-shek or the Federal Republic of Germany before Brandt, the PRC is simply incapable of pronouncing the words that would open the door to a solution by establishing a status for Taipei from which progress could be made. As with Bonn before Brandt, this unwillingness seems to be in part a matter of pride and habit, as well as the result of domestic political pressure, mixed with a sense that if only the rival can be isolated enough then perhaps it will somehow disappear or cave in. Other states of the world, the United States included, follow that usage, which sustains the illusion.

This short-sighted PRC (and U.S.) policy is particularly inappropriate today, at a time when Taiwan is changing rapidly. Time does not favor Beijing, and if a settlement is not reached soon, Taiwan's development may diverge so much from China's as to make reunification close to impossible. Democracy challenges the anti-democratic regime in Beijing; so too does the growing sense of Taiwan's identity. If the world could accord to the residents of Taiwan a functional Chinese identity (i.e. one that would permit them to be themselves, and not come under PRC rule, but would nevertheless affirm their Chineseness) then much of the steam would be taken out of moves for Taiwan independence. The same would be true if the PRC could agree to some sort of loose federal or "greater China" political framework. Many in the PRC understand that these steps will have to be taken sooner or later. Recently the PRC State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office explored federal solutions to the problem, far more forthcoming than anything in the current political rhetoric.[27] But Jiang Zemin later specifically ruled out such an approach in talks with Shen Junshan, the president of (Taiwan) Ch'ing-hua University.[28]

Without some such functional solution, Taiwan will continue to

seek a way out on its own, a process that is already destabilizing the precarious arrangements of the 1970s. Some policy specialists seem to imagine that process can be stopped somehow, but that is unrealistic. People in Taiwan have resources and acumen, and they understand that no less than their continued peaceful and free survival is at stake. The challenge is to find a middle way; a functional status that will work, and thus genuinely "normalize" the situation. Hewing close to Beijing's line will not help, for the fact is that PRC's current policy, acquiesced in by the United States and most of the world, is pushing Taiwan in the direction of independence. Faced with a threatening PRC that is increasingly unwilling to talk; disillusioned with "Chinese" identity if it means PRC citizenship, and finding international doors closed to them, the people of Taiwan are reacting the way numerous others have in the past–by turning to nationalism. Polling data still show Taiwan independence a less than preferred option, but in a recent period, it did get 40% approval, a new high.[29] If present trends continue, pro-independence forces may well win control of Taiwan's government through a free election in the not too distant future. Their claims, moreover, will have a substantial presumption of legitimacy.

The PRC has responded to these developments with military threats designed to intimidate Taiwan, undermine the U.S. security commitment, and drive a wedge between Taipei and Washington. They have enjoyed some success, reflected in the widespread tendency to explain problems by blaming Taiwan for "provoking" Beijing. But what would Washington do if Taiwan did declare independence and the PRC then attempted a military operation? Try to visualize the scenario as it unfolds: there would have been an election campaign visible all over the world and covered at least as thoroughly as that in 1996; there would have been bellicose PRC statements and threats; a tense night as the returns came in, then tears and celebration and a dramatic shift in Taiwan's proclaimed identity. What would follow next? Missile deployments and an ultimatum? The world would do everything to buy time, by creating a commission of some sort, or negotiations–none of which would produce the clean resolution desired. Would there actually be conflict and disorder, possibly propagating and escalating? Beijing would apply ugly pressure on Washington to stand aside, but in fact it would be difficult for any American administration to declare

that Taiwan's elected government was wrong and Beijing's dictatorship held the moral high ground–even if we had spoken out strongly against independence; even if we had tried to influence the election (as we did recently in Israel). We have here the makings of a crisis that would dwarf that of March 1996.

This is a problem in whose solution the United States and the world should have a role. The weak political leadership in Beijing is simply incapable, at least for now, of doing what has to be done. But that is no reason for us to postpone dealing with the issue, which is real and highly volatile.

The Current Situation

The basic issues of U.S. policy toward the PRC and Taiwan in the years ahead are political and diplomatic, but whatever we do will require a credible military posture as well. The March 1996 confrontation revealed glaring weaknesses in U.S. capabilities and plans. These began with intelligence. The United States failed to detect or take seriously the threat until it was upon us; this despite a whole series of telling indications in the previous year. As the crisis developed, the gaps in our knowledge of and ability to monitor both PRC and Taiwan forces became clear as well. Finally, there was a lack of operational plans. Taiwan and the United States had a certain amount of informal contact, but questions such as communications and joint operations had simply not been addressed. The March crisis galvanized American thinking about all these issues.

The crisis also energized Taiwan, where problems of demoralization and complacency had been undermining the readiness of forces. The same sorts of illusions about an all-economic conflict-free future that had been accepted in Washington had also made headway in Taiwan. The mainlander-dominated military was resented by opposition political parties, and scandals attended many major foreign arms purchases. But now a broad consensus is beginning to emerge in favor of a formidable national defense. As popular identification with the state increases, more and more of Taiwan's abundant technical expertise is likely to be turned to the issues of defense: witness here the powerful DPP concern with security. A 10-year program is already in

place to improve training and to rationalize the structure of the military. Recently a major shakeup of command brought new officers to 10 high ranking positions, among them Lt. Gen. Tan Yau-ming, the first-ever Taiwan-born commander-in-chief of the Taiwan army.[30]

In fact, Taiwan is rather secure today against the standard scenario of an attempted cross-strait invasion. Some PRC observers see the military gap opening rather than closing.[31] Taiwan's navy is being transformed by the acquisition of new craft, including the French Lafayette-class frigates; the window of vulnerability of her air force is being closed by deliveries of the Mirage 2000 and the F-16. So far pressure from the PRC has picked off, one by one, each country that has considered supplying submarines to Taiwan, creating a weakness. But with all the new hardware being supplied, the biggest challenges that Taiwan faces in conventional military operations are in personnel and logistics. Where will the highly-skilled manpower come from that is necessary for this equipment? And how will the several distinct logistical trains for the new U.S. and French systems be maintained?

Nevertheless, Taiwan lacks the power to deter on its own; that job must still be done by the United States. The carriers did it in 1996, but only for the short run. The political problem remains, for there has been no return, on the PRC side to the communique policy of not threatening Taiwan. Quite the opposite: the PRC now seems to be preparing to deploy as many as 100 Su27 aircraft at two fortified airfields within 250 nautical miles of Taiwan.[32] Rather than reassuring Taiwan and the United States, the PRC seems to have decided to entrench the threat. Coping with such conventional developments will require a higher level of U.S.-Taiwan military cooperation than we have seen over the past two decades. We should bring Taiwan into theater missile defense consultations, and ensure that we supply them with weapons that can realistically deal with PRC threats short of the strategic.

Only the United States, though, has the reconnaissance and intelligence capability to pick up PRC deployments or missile launches deep inland. Only the United States has the capacity, through stealth and RMA capabilities, to counter a massive conventional attack. Only the United States can counter a blockade of Taiwan. Only the United States may be able to deal with ballistic missiles. These are scarcely the

sorts of military questions that the United States has been considering in connection with Taiwan for the past 20 years, but until the PRC makes some clear and binding renunciation of force, we will have to assess them.

Deterrence should not be a matter of waiting for an emergency and then sending in carriers or stealth aircraft or even threatening nuclear strikes. The fundamental problem with Taiwan is not its military capability but rather the lack of the rest of the framework that usually accompanies it. The best deterrence is that which is incorporated into the daily structures of activity, as, for example, in the relations of the United States with its NATO allies. Constructing such a relationship with Taiwan today is made difficult by the pretense of non-officiality. Oddly, we have a military policy for Taiwan, but not a political policy. Still, a great deal is possible even within the current framework.

It is important that Taiwan be brought, in whatever way, into international security discussions. Again, the obstacles are formidable. At the insistence of the PRC, the Regional Forum of ASEAN (which has 21 members including India and Burma) excludes Taiwan–even from its unofficial parallel meetings. As Michael Liefer of the London School of Economics observes, this means that the ARF goal of building an effective multilateral security mechanism "faces the same order of difficulty as the biblical Hebrew slaves in Egypt who were obliged to make bricks without straw."[33]

The obvious answer to these problems is to bring Taiwan back into the international system but within a framework of Chineseness. As the example of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* discussed above makes clear, doing this need not jeopardize eventual Chinese unification. It might even bring it closer.

Certainly bringing Taiwan back into the world as a "China" is the best structural guarantee for the PRC against independence, as many in the PRC understand. Beijing believes that military threats are the only way to prevent independence, but recognizes that the sort of military Taiwan is now creating will actually be so strong as to make independence militarily plausible. This leads to talk of preemptive attack.[34]

One goal of American diplomacy should be to persuade Beijing that the best way to *bao Tai* [protect Taiwan–i.e. as part of China] is not through military threats, which are counterproductive, but rather by

bringing Taipei back into the world within a greater-China framework. Such cross-recognition—"baptism of the *status quo*" in effect—would naturally be called "unification" and it would provide enormous political payoffs to whoever in the PRC brought it about.

Obviously the great powers should take the lead—if only in private—in urging this approach. Unfortunately that is not happening. It is falling to states of the second and third rank, from Africa and Central America, to state certain obvious facts—such as that everyone, the PRC included, would be better off if Taipei could "participate" in the UN.

The problem is that Beijing still has not abandoned its belief that somehow the rest of the world will solve their problem for them. Recent activity has sought to render Taiwan's isolation even more complete. Thus Beijing recently protested at the participation of European Industrial Affairs Commissioner Martin Bangemann in a roundtable with European industrialists held in Taipei on June 24 and 25, 1996, causing him to cancel an upcoming visit to the PRC. "It was just a meeting of business leaders and there's no ban on European economic and cultural contacts with Taiwan" an official in Brussels commented.[35]

U.S. diplomacy since the March crisis may have provided unwitting encouragement, for instead of beginning to explain to the PRC that some sort of change is unavoidable, Washington has attempted to soothe Beijing by appearing to cooperate with the renewed *lianMei zhiTai* policy—by means of assurances on UN membership, arms sales, official visits, and so forth. This may buy calm in the short term, but it pays an opportunity cost.

The Way Forward

As in the 1970s, modifying U.S. China policy to fit realities will not be easy. No obvious counterpart exists today for the Soviet threat, which then played the crucial role of persuading Beijing to change course. Dangers exist to China in the current situation, chiefly, the fact that postponing the inevitable negotiations with Taiwan guarantees that the eventual bargain will be more difficult and probably less favorable to the PRC. Another danger arises from how the military threats against Taiwan poison other PRC interests. But these are currently not enough to offset the powerful domestic political interests served by a hard-line foreign policy.

American policy must recognize that "peaceful unification" is a mirage, *absent a major political initiative from Beijing* (in which case, by baptizing the *status quo*, it could be achieved very easily). The current situation, moreover, is not stable: Taiwan is a rapidly maturing democracy and an important international player, while the PRC is itself entering a period of volatility. But PRC policy toward Taiwan, mirrored by the United States and other major powers, is worsening the objective situation, while the continued tendency to follow the map of 1970s expectations down the road to "unification" is in fact taking us ever farther from a real solution.

The PRC is reacting to these developments in a counterproductive way: threatening and humiliating Taiwan builds the constituency for full independence; insisting on the Chiang Kai-shek policy of absolute denial and non-recognition cripples those in Taiwan who want compromise. It is important that the United States not become an unwitting accomplice in this process (as it was to Chiang's in the 1950s and 1960s).

With this in mind, we must first recognize our own strengths. Beijing *needs* good relations with Washington; any real deterioration would hurt them far more than us. We are, furthermore, a mighty military power and likely to remain so. Our policy then should be one of *candor* and *firmness* with the PRC, designed both to *integrate* the PRC into the world system and to *deter* any military adventures. We must insist on maintenance of the full communiqués' bargain even as we begin to look beyond it.

For example: at a time when the PRC is testing military rather than peaceful means to deal with Taiwan, it makes no sense for us to reaffirm the August 1982 communiqué or give assurances that arms sales to Taiwan will be curtailed. Rather, we should tell Beijing authoritatively that military preparations in the Taiwan area will unravel the whole PRC-U.S. relationship and that the use of force will continue to elicit a strong American response. That, after all, was the deal in the 1970s.

But we must also attempt to map constructive ways to move the PRC out of its Taiwan dilemma. We may not hear them agree much with arguments for compromise and peaceful settlement, but we can at least articulate those views, knowing that many Chinese share them (but dare not speak), while we await the sorts of political changes in China that may make them acceptable.

As we do this, the PRC will attempt to develop leverage–for example by lobbying American interests in China, by using economic "baits" to lure other countries, and by engaging in nuclear and missile proliferation. More often than not, these tactics have some success, which underlines the importance for Washington of *coordinating policy with allies and friends.* Much more effort should be devoted to consultations with European states, Russia, and other Asian states regarding the real future of China and Taiwan in the region.

Some will suggest that realistically the best answer is to return to the implicit 1970s road map, and "make" Taiwan come to terms, perhaps by some tough talking combined with threats (for example to withhold military supplies). All that can be said on this is that such an approach is not viable politically: the whole premise of Chinese relations is that Taiwan is *not* to suffer, and this is spelled out in an awful lot of communiqués and official statements. Nor will it enhance our general reputation as an ally. Furthermore, such an approach probably would not work. The example of American attempts to coerce Israel (which, like Taiwan, has its own agenda) by withholding arms sales should always be kept in mind. Far better is a steady, predictable, and reliable relationship.

The moment is not ripe to push Beijing too hard on the need for realism in connection with Taiwan; Jiang Zemin and his colleagues have their hands full at home, and will need several years to try to straighten out their political system (and even then they probably will not be able to do so). We should begin to explain to the PRC that the current situation cannot endure indefinitely; that although friendship with China is favored by almost all Americans, no constituency exists for mistreating Taiwan; that a policy of bringing Taiwan back in to the international community serves Beijing's interests better than their current policies do, and so forth.

There is still time for the PRC to reverse course and begin its own *Ostpolitik* across the Strait toward Taiwan. Of course the United States cannot cause this to happen, and we must prepare for the unpleasant prospects if China does not. But we will make a beginning if it we cease to pretend the problems do not exist.

Notes

1. Kenneth T. Young, *Diplomacy and Power in Washington-Peking Dealings: 1953-1967* (Chicago, 1967), pp. 19-21; cited in Arthur Waldron, "From Nonexistent to Almost Normal: U.S.-China Relations in the 1960s" in *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations in the 1960s* ed. Diane B. Kunz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 219-250 at p. 231.

2. Note, however, that a distinguished report on "America's National Interests" contrasted the circumstances in the past when the United States affirmed its "one China policy" with those existing today. "On all those occasions, Washington acknowledged China's ultimate claim to sovereignty over Taiwan. Today, however, the weight of the argument for acknowledging the reality of Taiwan's importance as a member of the international system is nearly overwhelming. Handling this issue will require much more skill in both Washington and Beijing than either has demonstrated so far in the mid-1990s." The Commission on America's National Interests, *America's National Interests* Cambridge, Mass: Center for Science and International Affairs, Kennedy School of Government, 1996), p. 30.

3. See Hungdah Chiu and Karen Murphy, eds. *The Chinese Connection and Normalization* (Baltimore: School of Law, University of Maryland, 1979).

4. William B. Bader and Jeffrey T. Bergner, eds. *The Taiwan Relations Act: A Decade of Implementation* (Indianapolis: Hudson Institute and SRI International, 1989), p. 159.

5. "Xingcheng chaodangpai liangan guanxi gongshi," *Ziyou shibao* (Taipei) June 23, 1996. Ruan Ming is a PRC intellectual, formerly on the staff of the Communist Party Central Party Academy, and since 1989 resident in the United States. He is author of *Deng's Empire* and other books.

6. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 733. Emphasis added.

7. Marshall Green, John H. Holdridge, William N. Stokes, *War and Peace With China: First-Hand Experiences in the Foreign Service of the United States* (Bethesda, Md.: Dacor-Bacon House, 1995), pp. 117-118, cf. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), p. 749 where he records, accurately enough, that Taiwan was "mentioned only briefly during the first session." Holdridge believes that without Kissinger's assurances, the talks would have been called off. Kissinger thought of himself as a practitioner of *realpolitik*, and I suspect he saw his Chinese interlocutors as the same, missing the strong domestic agenda that (along with concern about the USSR) drove their approach to the United States.

8. Bader and Bergner. *The Taiwan Relations Act*, p. 159.

9. Author's personal information. In a recent Washington lecture, Senator Jesse Helms noted "at that time, most countries of the world ignored Taiwan. And, like some in the United States, these same people assumed it was only a matter of time before the Communists on the mainland consumed tiny Taiwan." Senator Jesse Helms, "Entering the Pacific Century" The B.C. Lee Lectures (Washington, D.C. The Heritage Foundation, 1996), p. 6.

10. Ruan Ming, "Taiwan ruhe huiying Zhonggong lianMei zhiTai?" *Ziyou Shibao* (Taipei) July 27, 1996, p. 8.

11. Bader and Bergner, p. 182.

12. *International Herald Tribune*, July 6-7, p. 4.

13. Ian Buruma, "China's New Nationalists" *Foreign Affairs* 75.4 (July/August 1996), p. 85.

14. Bader and Bergner, p. 167.

15. That this is a change is clear from the fact of the Singapore and other talks, for if Beijing had insisted then on "one China equals PRC" Taiwan would never have agreed to participate. The compromise was "one China" with each side providing its own explanation of what that meant.

16. *International Herald Tribune*, August 2, 1995, pp. 1, 6.

17. See Arthur Waldron, "Deterring China" *Commentary* 100.4(October 1996), pp. 17-21.

18. *World Journal*, August 13, 1995, p. A1.

19. "As China Threatens Taiwan, It Makes Sure U.S. Listens" by Patrick E. Tyler. *New York Times*, January 24, 1996, p. A3.

20. Sun Zi, I.6

21. See Bob Livingston, "Enough Smoke and Mirrors" *Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 1996, p. A12.

22. "Chinese Military Expert Says U.S. Arms Sale to Taiwan Will Force Mainland to Attack Taiwan" *Ming Pao* (HK) June 27, 1996, p. A10. FBIS-CHI 96-126 28 June 1996, p. 12.

23. "Lee says a strong military can help deter mainland," *Free China Journal*, July 12, 1996, p. 2.

24. A good treatment is Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, 1993).

25. Willy Brandt, *My Life in Politics* (Viking Penguin, 1992), p. 157.

26. *New York Times*, January 18, 1964, p. 1; Da Jen Liu, *A History of Sino American Diplomatic Relations, 1840-1974* (Taipei, 1978), p. 389.

27. "Party considers federal option to accommodate Taiwan" by Willy Wo-Lap Lam. *South China Morning Post International Weekly*, May 25, 1996, p. 1.

28. *World Journal*, August 1, 1996, p. 1.

29. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 11, 1996, p. 24.

30. "Lee approves shakeup in military" by Virginia Sheng. *Free China Journal*, June 28, 1996, p. 2.

31. "Chinese Military Expert Says U.S. Arms Sale to Taiwan Will Force Mainland to Attack Taiwan," cited above.

32. At Jiancheng in Fujian (110 nm inland) and at Luqiao in Zhejiang (on the coast); large scale construction of revetments [*jibao*] to hold between 70-100 Su27. *World Journal*, July 3, 1996, p. A4.

33. "Pacific Nations to Sound a New Tone" by Michael Richardson. *International Herald Tribune*, July 23, 1996, p. 4.

34. "Chinese Military Expert Says U.S. Arms Sale to Taiwan Will Force Mainland to Attack Taiwan," cited above.

35. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 11, 1996, p. 12.