



# **Strategic Standoff**

***The U.S.-China Rivalry and Taiwan***

**Ian Easton**

**March 2016**

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**The Project 2049 Institute** seeks to guide decision makers toward a more secure Asia by the century's mid-point. Located in Arlington, Virginia, the organization fills a gap in the public policy realm through forward-looking, region-specific research on alternative security and policy solutions. Its interdisciplinary approach draws on rigorous analysis of socioeconomic, governance, military, environmental, technological and political trends, and input from key players in the region, with an eye toward educating the public and informing policy debate.

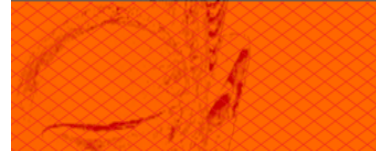
## **About the Author**

**Ian Easton** is a research fellow at the Project 2049 Institute, where he studies defense and security issues in Asia. During the summer of 2013, he was a visiting fellow at the Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIIA) in Tokyo. Previously, Ian worked as a China analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA). He lived in Taipei from 2005 to 2010. Ian holds an M.A. in China Studies from National Chengchi University in Taipei and a B.A. in International Studies from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He studied Chinese at Fudan University in Shanghai, and National Taiwan Normal University in Taipei.

## **Acknowledgments**

The author would like to thank Paul Huang and the Fletcher Security Review for publishing an earlier draft of this paper entitled "The Strategic Duel over Taiwan." He would also like to acknowledge and thank Lt Col Mark Stokes (ret), Mr. Peter Mattis, LT Barry Scott (USN), Dr. Oriana Skylar Mastro, Dr. Roger Cliff, Mr. Matt Hallex, Mr. Zack Cooper, Dr. Evan Montgomery, Mr. David An, Ms. Rachael Burton, and one reviewer who must remain anonymous, for their helpful insights, comments, criticisms, and suggestions. The following represents the author's own personal views only.

Cover Image Source: U.S. Navy



## Introduction

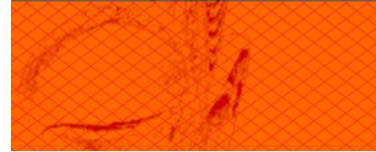
The United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are firmly entrenched in what will be a long and intense strategic competition for dominance over the Pacific Rim. American strategists Andrew Marshall, Robert Kaplan, and Aaron Friedberg each began foretelling of this great power struggle over a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> They were quick to recognize that there are strong forces underpinning the U.S.-PRC rivalry. Recent events have proven their foresight. In February 2016, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, announced that great power competition has reemerged as the Pentagon's top priority, and he expects it will define the next 25 years.<sup>2</sup> Later in the month, the Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that China seeks hegemony in East Asia.<sup>3</sup>

Their assessments should not come as a surprise. The political systems and national interests of America and China stand in fundamental opposition to each other. The United States, while an imperfect democracy, is an inspiration to people everywhere who yearn for the freedom and dignity that come from having a representative government, independent legal system, and market economy. In contrast, all power in the PRC is monopolized by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a political organization whose legitimacy is called into question by its troubled history.<sup>4</sup> Read the State Department's annual report on human rights and it quickly becomes apparent that this is a deeply authoritarian regime, and one that continues to oppress the Chinese people.<sup>5</sup>

The CCP compounds its governance failures by forgoing moves toward a genuine market economy and stifling innovation. For all its much ballyhooed reforms, the PRC's economy is still largely controlled by massive state-owned enterprises, making it a mercantilist country, not a capitalist one.<sup>6</sup> China treats the American-led international economic order with contempt, bending all the rules when it comes to trade and finance, and stealing what it cannot create. According to authoritative studies, much of Beijing's economic power stems from its ability to lure foreign business elites with promises of access to an immense market. Once the hook is set, Chinese state industries routinely pocket American companies' investments, siphon-off their intellectual property, and undercut their market competitiveness.<sup>7</sup>

Yet it is not China's disquieting political or economic practices that will ensure sustained U.S.-PRC competition over the coming decades—future American presidents, like Barack Obama and his predecessors, will undoubtedly be tempted to paper over ideological differences for expedience sake. It is Beijing's aggressive nature that is at the root of the problem.<sup>8</sup> In recent years China has stoked maritime tensions with Japan and the Philippines, both treaty allies of the United States; provoked border clashes with India, a democracy and security partner; and enabled nuclear missile proliferation amongst North Korea, Pakistan, and Iran.<sup>9</sup> Track records tell a compelling story. That is why credit scores (remarkably accurate predictions of future financial behavior) rely entirely upon historical data points. The PRC's track record indicates that a growing number of geostrategic issues could result in a clash between America and China.

Washington's attempts to cooperate with Beijing and "shape" China into a responsible stakeholder have foundered and will continue to achieve little with the CCP. Communist party elites in Beijing view the U.S. as hostile to their revanchist interests, and they will continue to



compete regardless of American gestures of goodwill.<sup>10</sup> Anti-American pathologies have long plagued PRC decision-making, but conditions have grown considerably worse under the current paramount leader, Xi Jinping.<sup>11</sup> Beijing's cognitive failures include a paranoid reading into American actions, hawkish ideology, and departures from reality.<sup>12</sup> Making matters worse, Xi has engaged in a widespread campaign to purge his peers within the CCP elite. The collective leadership model cultivated by Deng Xiaoping, while profoundly flawed, had checks and balances for restraining radical decision-making. Those internal constraints are now gone, a development attended by immense risks.

The U.S. Government does not appear to have dedicated the resources needed for the broad collection, translation, analysis, and dissemination of Chinese writings and speeches. As a consequence, Washington, D.C. has only a limited understanding of the PRC worldview, and even less knowledge of what is going on inside Beijing's halls of power. In the absence of understanding, too many Americans assume that China operates basically like the United States, when in fact it is profoundly different in all the ways that matter: politically, economically, and militarily.<sup>13</sup> This is why Chinese behavior so often puzzles Western observers. And this is why, despite Washington's continued reluctance to officially admit it, U.S.-PRC strategic competition is here to stay.

## **Past and Future Flashpoints**

To better see the shape of things to come we must first look to the past. Prior to America's entrance into World War Two, the nation had much reason to fear Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, but isolationism meant there were few actual flashpoints. Only the prospect of an enemy attack on U.S. soil, realized at Pearl Harbor, could drag the country into war. In contrast, the Cold War featured a rapid expansion of American security commitments and interests abroad. Far-flung standoffs and proxy wars ranged from the Korean Peninsula to Berlin, from Cuba to Vietnam, and from Afghanistan to Grenada. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 the world became a much safer place for the United States and other democracies. Great power conflict and the attendant specter of nuclear war no longer seemed threatening simply because no other country had the military wherewithal to compete. However, after a two-decade buildup, China now confronts the U.S. with a new rivalry—and new flashpoints around which to organize strategic efforts.

Of all the powder kegs out there, the potential for a war over Taiwan is the largest and most explosive.<sup>14</sup> Beijing has made clear that its main external objective is attaining the ability to apply overwhelming force against Taiwan during a conflict, and in a manner that would keep American-led coalition forces from intervening.<sup>15</sup> Chinese military strategists focus on Taiwan because the communist party is insecure. The CCP views Taiwan, which exists as a free and independent state that is officially called the Republic of China (ROC), as a grave threat to its grip on power. Taiwan is anathema to the PRC because it serves as a beacon of freedom for Chinese speaking people everywhere.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which is the armed wing of the CCP, considers the invasion of Taiwan to be its most critical mission. It is this envisioned future war that drives the PLA's modernization program.<sup>17</sup>



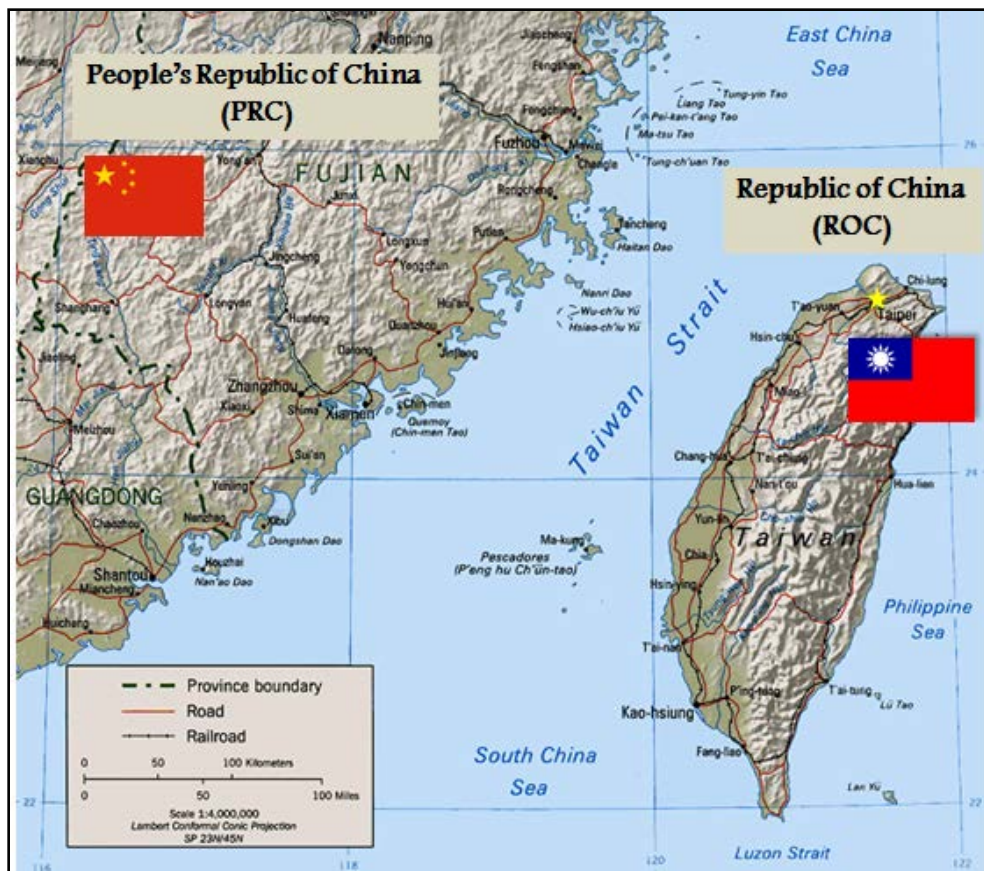
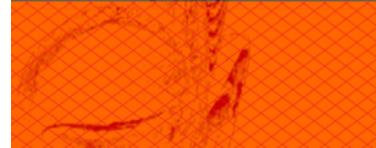


Figure 1: Map of Taiwan Strait Area (Source: Wikimedia and Project 2049 Institute).

## Correcting Misplaced Assumptions

Understanding a Taiwan scenario requires some myth-busting. It has become conventional wisdom that Taiwan will eventually be pulled into China's orbit by cross-strait trade entanglements.<sup>18</sup> This view, however, is disconnected from the reality on the ground and in the streets of Taiwan. The Taiwanese are fiercely protective of their hard won freedoms and rightfully proud of their democracy. They are no more willing to compromise their territorial sovereignty for the sake of economic benefits than the Japanese or Australians. In spite of the power disparity that exists—Taiwan has a population of 23 million to China's 1.3 billion—Taipei's close ties with Washington means that it does not have to bow to coercion from the authorities in Beijing, economic or otherwise.<sup>19</sup>

Nor is the U.S. likely to sell Taiwan out, another remarkably popular myth.<sup>20</sup> The American commitment to Taiwan is enshrined in U.S. Public Law 96-8, the Taiwan Relations Act.<sup>21</sup> This legal instrument is founded on bedrock judgments of national interest. Every professional American strategist since Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur has recognized that Taiwan is a center of gravity in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>22</sup> The island sits astride the world's busiest maritime and air superhighways, right in the middle of the first island chain, a defensive barrier for keeping Chinese naval power in check.<sup>23</sup> America does not need Taiwan as a base for its soldiers,

marines, sailors, or airmen, but it does require that the island remain in the hands of a friendly government. If Taiwan were lost, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines would become extremely vulnerable to the threat of Chinese naval blockades and air assaults. For this reason (and many others), any PRC attempt to gain control of Taiwan would almost certainly be regarded as an attack on the vital interests of the United States, and therefore repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

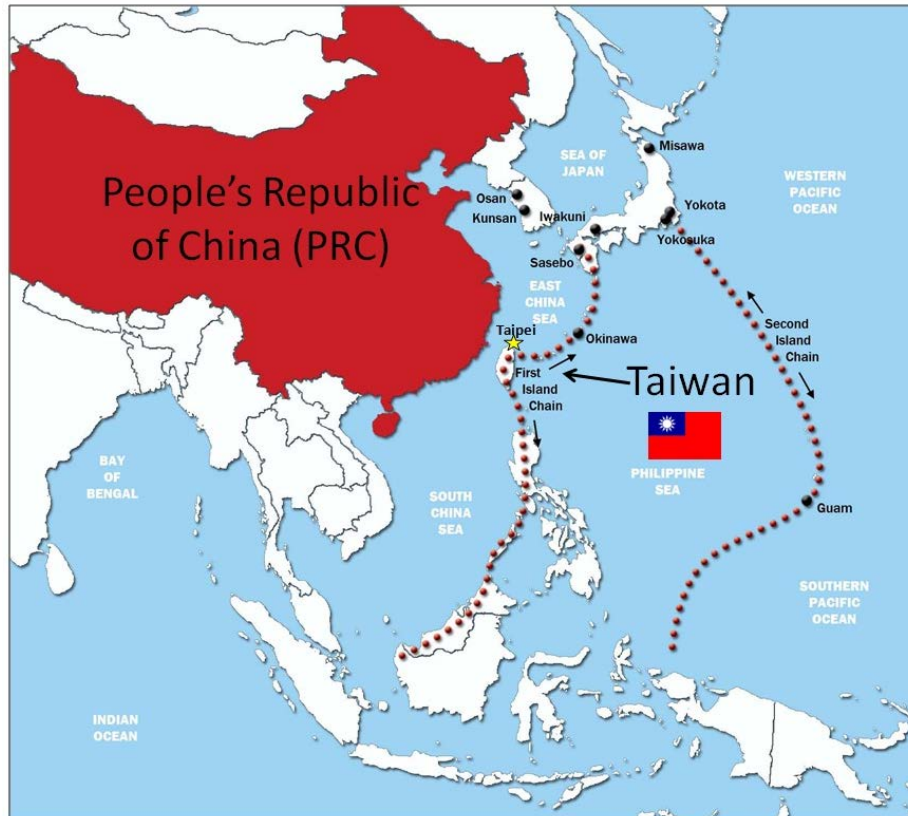
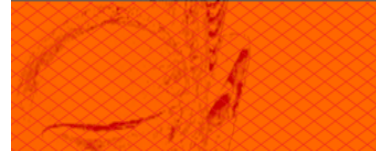


Figure 2: Map of Taiwan's Location in First Island Chain (Source: CSBA and Project 2049 Institute).

While China's expansionism in the South China Sea has dominated the discourse on the PRC's rise and brought its naval threat into sharp relief, it is the Chinese threat to Taiwan that is likely to keep the Pentagon awake at night in the years ahead.<sup>24</sup> The RAND Corporation, the venerable defense think tank that helped guide America's strategic competition with the Soviet Union, has repeatedly warned of the challenge PLA modernization poses to America, especially in a Taiwan conflagration.<sup>25</sup> Taiwan's own military still maintains many potent capabilities, yet its overall combat power risks being eclipsed by the PLA's rapid buildup, increasing the likelihood of Chinese aggression.<sup>26</sup> Barring a dramatic reduction in Taiwan's self-defense capabilities or a general reversal of U.S. military power in Asia, the direct defense of Taiwan will remain a credible strategy for the foreseeable future—but only if the U.S. and Taiwan can work more closely together.<sup>27</sup>



According to RAND, Beijing's investments into space and cyberspace weaponry, conventionally armed ballistic missiles and cruise missiles, and stealthy submarines and fighters all make it more conceivable that America could lose the next war—or at the very least fail to deter it, a strategic defeat in its own right. Maintaining a favorable balance of power in the Taiwan Strait will therefore be essential for the prevention of catastrophe.<sup>28</sup> The destructive potential of China's growing military strength means that even though the U.S. and coalition partners are likely to emerge from any future war over Taiwan victorious, they would still wish more had been done to keep the conflict from occurring in the first place. As Benjamin Franklin famously noted: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

The question of how the U.S. can best deter Chinese aggression against Taiwan will be hotly debated in the years ahead. Rightfully so. Peace and prosperity in Asia and beyond are riding on America's ability to get this problem right. Some scholars have entertained notions of abandoning Taiwan, trading it away for other ends as if it were a stack of poker chips.<sup>29</sup> Their views, however, will be ignored by policymakers in Washington who recognize that the dispute between China and Taiwan cannot be separated from the larger geopolitics of the region, and that there is an underlying confluence of interests.<sup>30</sup>

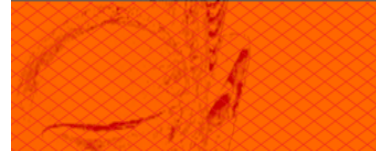
Taiwan is critical not only for its location, but also for its shared liberal values and its position as a key trading partner.<sup>31</sup> PRC diplomats often assert that China is big and Taiwan is little, therefore constructive relations with China matter more, and it is in the American interest to compromise on Taiwan. This is a false argument. When it comes to freedom, human rights, and quality of government, Taiwan towers over China. Experience has shown senior U.S. policymakers time and time again that nations that share democratic values are the best partners and worth defending. Common values generate common interests, which are the basis for making a common cause in addressing global challenges.

Taiwan is currently America's ninth largest trading partner, ahead of Saudi Arabia, India, and Brazil.<sup>32</sup> The Taiwanese excel when it comes to researching, designing, and manufacturing the advanced technology that drives much of America's economy. Integrated circuits (or microchips) are the brains of our handheld devices and computers. The global chip making business as we know it was invented by Taiwan in the 1980s, and the high-tech island nation still occupies a strong position on the global supply chain. However, the PRC is rapidly catching up, something that poses a serious threat to the security of the world's hardware.<sup>33</sup> America needs Taiwan as a "Silicon Shield," keeping the technology of tomorrow from being controlled and corrupted by an adversary.<sup>34</sup>

## **Imbalance, Rebalance, Quagmire, and Elections**

America has suffered from a lack of strategic clarity, unsure of what is needed to compete effectively against China or even whether there is a real competition underway. Ever since the early 1970s many American foreign policy elites have taken it for granted that the PRC was of supreme importance and that Washington needed Beijing's cooperation, first as a counterweight to the Soviet Union, then for market access, and more recently as a partner on global issues ranging from North Korea to the Taliban and from piracy to climate change. This view is especially pronounced among those who embrace the notion that America is in decline and that





China is going to prevail over the long run. From their perspective, the best the U.S. can do is make a "grand bargain" that would limit China's ascendancy to its own sphere of interest.<sup>35</sup> American policymakers, influenced by these defeatist views, have sometimes gone to great lengths to accommodate China's communist leadership. The tendency to overvalue the strategic importance of US-PRC relations is something which unnecessarily weakens Washington's bargaining power with Beijing, and undermines efforts to formulate long-term strategy.

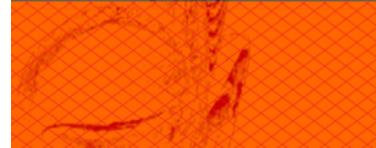
America's relatively sanguine approach to China's emergence as a strategic competitor is increasingly difficult to reconcile with events. Over the past decade the PRC has offered Washington several indicators that trouble is lurking ahead, each of which has been minimized or ignored in the name of positive Sino-U.S. relations. One of the first wake-up calls came on January 11, 2007, when China shot a ballistic missile into a target satellite in low earth orbit.<sup>36</sup> This missile test was followed by several others, all that clearly demonstrate Beijing's intention to weaponize space and neutralize the eyes and ears of U.S. military power in a conflict.<sup>37</sup> Another warning came in 2010, when China deployed the world's first anti-ship ballistic missile, a weapon apparently capable of targeting ships at sea including aircraft carriers, the queens of America's fleet.<sup>38</sup> Many other unsettling developments, both diplomatic and military, followed over the course of the next several years (see Table 1 on the following page).<sup>39</sup>

Some analysts have turned a blind eye to these developments, and instead have clung to the false hope that mutual economic interdependence, military-to-military exchanges, and favorable diplomatic treatment will build trust and socialize China, enticing it into becoming a responsible stakeholder. These analysts often emphasize the risks of inadvertent conflict and rapid escalation if their policy prescriptions are not followed. Yet none of their recommendations, which arguably have been tested to the limit of prudence in recent years, have dulled the CCP's ruthless competitive instincts. If anything, examples of American appeasement and risk aversion have only emboldened Beijing to push farther and harder.<sup>40</sup>

Recognizing the gathering storm ahead, Kurt Campbell, then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia under Hillary Clinton, spearheaded the rebalance to Asia strategy in the first years of the Obama administration.<sup>41</sup> The rebalance, or "pivot" as it became known, was warmly welcomed by America's allies and partners in Asia. As part of the effort, the Pentagon publically rolled-out its new Air-Sea Battle Office, which generated excitement among those who recognized fresh operational concepts were needed for dealing with China's military threat.<sup>42</sup> However, when Campbell stepped down in early 2013, things began unraveling. The new foreign policy team, characterized by a strong focus on the Middle East, Europe, and climate change, allowed the much-anticipated rebalance to get quagmired.<sup>43</sup>

In 2015 several major strategic setbacks occurred. First, the PRC created a giant archipelago of artificial islands in the South China Sea, claiming the entire area as a virtual province of China. This unforeseen development disrupted ongoing attempts to apply international legal mechanisms to settle disputes and greatly weakened the defensive positions of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam.<sup>44</sup> Next, it was revealed that Chinese intelligence agents had penetrated sensitive computer systems and compromised the identities (including fingerprints) of over twenty million Americans who worked for the federal government. The military, intelligence, and contractor communities lost untold reams of



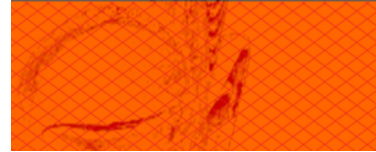


confidential information on their most precious asset: people.<sup>45</sup> Not long afterwards, Xi Jinping held a jingoistic military parade in Beijing, rolling out a number of new systems, including a new conventionally-capable intermediate range ballistic missile for attacking the U.S. territory of Guam, a strategic hub in the Western Pacific.<sup>46</sup>

**Table 1: Selected PRC Provocations (2005-2015)**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Incident</i>	<i>Parties Involved</i>	<i>Details</i>
March 2005	Anti-Succession Law Passage	PRC, Taiwan, USA	China passes a law aimed to "legalize" a military attack on Taiwan (and the US) if its vaguely defined "redlines" are crossed
August 2005	First Joint Sino-Russian Military Exercise	PRC, Russia	China and Russia stage their first joint military exercise since the Cold War, "Peace Mission 2005," an event that appeared to simulate an assault on Taiwan
January 2007	Anti-Satellite Missile Test	PRC, USA, others	China successfully carries out test of an anti-satellite missile, creating massive debris cloud endangering the International Space Station and US intelligence satellites
March 2009	USNS Impeccable Incident	PRC, USA	Chinese maritime forces harass an unarmed US ocean surveillance ship in international waters
Late 2010	Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Deployment	PRC, USA	China's strategic rocket force deploys the world's first anti-ship ballistic missile, a weapons system designed for targeting ships, including US aircraft carriers
January 2011	Stealth Fighter Test	PRC, USA	China unveils stealth fighter prototype during visit of then-US Defense Secretary Robert Gates to Beijing
April-July 2012	Scarborough Reef Occupation	PRC, USA, Philippines,	China illegally occupies reef near the Philippines after failing to abide by US negotiated deal to end standoff in the area
November 2013	Air Defense Identification Zone Declaration	PRC, Japan, USA, Taiwan, South Korea	China declares an intrusive air defense identification zone in the East China Sea without prior notification of other parties
December 2013	USS Cowpens Incident	PRC, USA	Chinese warship unsuccessfully attempts to collide with US guided missile cruiser in international waters
July 2014	Spy Ship Incident at RIMPAC Exercises	PRC, USA, others	Chinese naval intelligence gathering ship arrives uninvited to US-led Rim of the Pacific naval exercises near Hawaii despite participation of other PRC ships
Spring 2015	Island Building in South China Sea	PRC, USA, others	China begins rapid buildup of artificial islands in the South China Sea, militarizing the international maritime sovereignty dispute
June-July 2015	Security Clearance Data Hack	PRC, USA	Chinese intelligence hack into security clearance files of over 22 million Americans revealed
September 2015	Military Parade in Beijing	PRC, USA, others	China conducts large scale military parade in Beijing, unveiling DF-26 "Guam Killer" ballistic missile, and other advanced nuclear-capable delivery vehicles

Confidence in American leadership has declined among allies and partners across the Asia-Pacific as the result of Beijing's actions and Washington's inactions. While the White House has developed some excellent talking points, very little has actually been done to adapt to changing facts on the ground. Strong rhetoric and weak execution is a toxic mix. It has hit Taiwan especially hard; Taipei has no other security partners to turn to for help, and its threat-environment is the most stressing. Taiwanese officials have discovered to their chagrin that Washington is unwilling to sell them new fighters, tanks, drones, and destroyers.<sup>47</sup> Even diesel-



electric submarine technology, promised by George W. Bush in 2001, has heretofore proven out of reach for Taipei.<sup>48</sup> The White House, fearful of rousing Beijing's ire, has instead offered Taiwan equipment of the type provided to Mexico.<sup>49</sup> Adding insult to injury, the Taiwanese have looked on in astonishment as U.S. Navy ships make port calls up and down the PRC coast, then sail past Taiwan at full steam as if it were a dreadful pariah state, not a friendly democratic country.<sup>50</sup>

The landslide results of the recent presidential and legislative elections in Taipei are telling. The citizens of Taiwan chose Dr. Tsai Ing-wen, who is widely viewed as tough on China and friendly to the United States, and therefore more likely to secure a better future relationship with Washington.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, they also chose a Democratic Progressive Party whose policy platform calls for a more robust indigenous defense industry as a pragmatic hedge against continued American quagmire.<sup>52</sup> Taiwan's new government wants to arm itself and will do so whether its "big brother" helps or not. This can-do attitude means that the small island democracy, largely ignored for the past decade, will soon be at the forefront of American geostrategic thinking. If the contest of the century is to be waged between the U.S. and PRC for primacy in the Pacific, Taiwan will be at the center of the action.

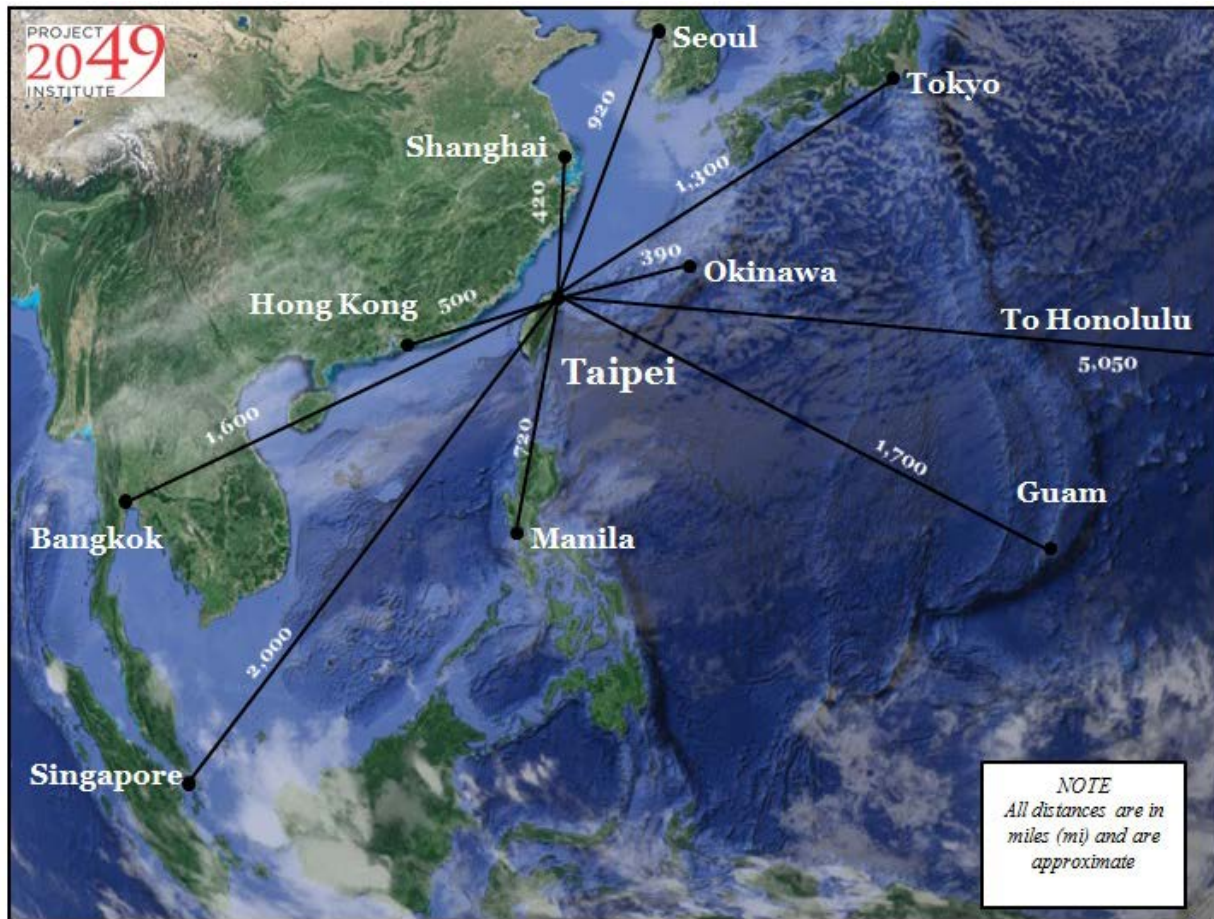
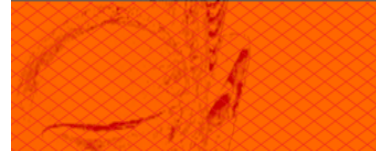


Figure 3: Map of Taiwan's Location in Western Pacific (Source: Project 2049 Institute).



## Policy Recommendations

The next President of the United States should consider doing at least three major things to win back the confidence of Taiwan and other allies and partners in Asia. While he or she must formulate policies with an eye to deterring Chinese military aggression and preventing war, the long-term prize is much bigger. Getting the strategic competition with China right will ultimately help America secure unprecedented levels of prosperity, freedom, and stability for all Pacific nations by the century's midpoint.

### ***First, get America in the game.***

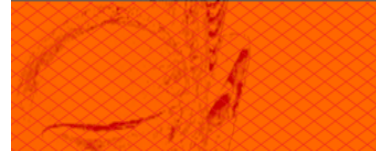
It is critical that the next president fully recognizes that the nation is locked in a long-term strategic competition with the PRC and begins to act accordingly. Past presidents have labored in vain to integrate China into the American-led world order, apparently unaware that Beijing is hostile toward the status quo. By now it should be clear that China will never be a true friend of America until it shares common democratic values. However unwanted it may be, the great game of our times is in the Pacific, and it is here to stay. While it is unfortunate that none of China's warning signs galvanized concerted action in the present administration, even more disquieting is that the current batch of presidential candidates also appear unprepared to get in the game. They do not seem to appreciate the degree to which U.S.-China competition will likely decide America's future foreign policy outcomes. To start with, the next president should direct the nation's best strategic thinkers to develop and publish a strategy for the Asia-Pacific. Currently, the U.S. Government only has a number of individual actions and initiatives, all under the rubric of the "rebalance to Asia." There is no overall strategic document in the public domain that can be a source of ideas for additional actions and initiatives.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Second, plan for the long haul.***

It is possible that China's communist system will fragment or collapse into chaos at some point in the next decade or two, something that could remove its direct threat to American interests, at least initially.<sup>54</sup> The next administration should closely study the implications of this, but not assume it will happen in the near future.<sup>55</sup> The PRC is not the Soviet Union. It may prove far more sophisticated and resilient. Planning for strategic competition with China should be predicated upon the notion that Chinese power will continue to grow at America's expense, and priorities must be set that make sense in that eventuality. High end scenarios, like defending Taiwan from invasion, should come first not because they are the most probable, but because they are the most consequential. Wars fought to keep people free of tyranny are more salient than those over artificial atolls.

The most important (and controversial) part of planning for the long haul could be deciding on a coordinated strategy for supporting China's peaceful evolution, the objective of which would be to affect positive political transformation and democratization by peaceful means. Encouraging genuine political reform to take root in China is a critical endeavor, but not one that can produce immediate results. It must be thought of as a drawn-out campaign. Innovative policy approaches should be considered to put pressure on the communist system. Examples might include the enforcement of blanket trade restrictions on Chinese state-owned enterprises; the enactment of





strict reciprocity regarding bilateral access; and the promotion of arms control initiatives for delegitimizing offensive PLA missiles and space weapons.<sup>56</sup> As a matter of principled interest, the next administration should build stronger partnerships with Chinese human rights organizations, and do more to support the oppressed Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Christians in China. It should also develop a blueprint for gradually normalizing diplomatic relations with Taiwan.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Third, rebuild the rebalance to Asia.***

The image of the U.S. has been tarnished by the grueling outcomes of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, by secret prisons and water boarding, by a failure to respond with force to Syrian chemical weapons attacks, and by a dysfunctional Congress and series of budget crises. To compete with China effectively the next president will have to restore faith in American diplomacy, retool the military for great power conflict, and repair strained security partnerships. The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a vital trade agreement that can help cement U.S. leadership into place across the Asia-Pacific region. It provides the next president an opportunity for advancing American economic statecraft.<sup>58</sup> Once the trade deal is ratified, it should be expanded to incorporate South Korea and Taiwan.<sup>59</sup>

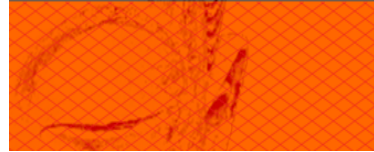
To help the military adapt to the emerging threat environment in the Western Pacific, the next president should invest more into stealth bombers, submarines, unmanned systems, nuclear weapons, missile defenses, destroyers, and long-range missiles.<sup>60</sup> Working closer together with traditional allies like Japan and Australia—and partners like Singapore and Mongolia—will be critical. But perhaps nothing will be more vital than new initiatives for making U.S. bases in Asia hardened, resilient, and adaptable.<sup>61</sup> Helping friends help themselves will also be imperative. The quality of training exchanges, exercises, and arms sales to Taiwan will have to be greatly enhanced if China's aggressive impulses are to be restrained and cross-Strait conflict avoided. Security aid to the Philippines, Vietnam, and others is very important and should be continually bolstered, but again, central front in the Pacific will be Taiwan so it makes sense to start there and work outward.

## **Conclusion**

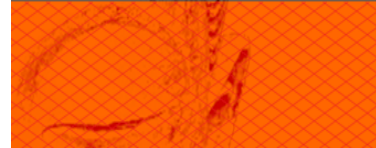
All indications suggest that China is striving for military superiority over the United States in the Pacific, and especially in a Taiwan scenario. Beijing's communist government sees itself as fundamentally incompatible with an American-led global order. The U.S. and PRC are thus engaged in a strategic standoff that is likely to define the decades ahead. Those who would deny this are simply failing to be skeptical enough, or are too satisfied with information (often crafted in Beijing) that conforms to their preconceptions and not giving enough weight to what Chinese leaders are actually saying, writing, and doing. The next president will therefore come into office during a period of shifting global power, which, if the trend is not arrested, will be increasingly adverse to American interests.

Without a course correction, the U.S. and other Pacific democracies will find themselves confronted by an adversary who does not share their most fundamental beliefs and who will soon be able to threaten much of region and beyond. More can and should be done by America and allies to convince the PRC that a war in the Taiwan Strait (or anywhere else) would be





fruitless and financially crippling. Deterring Chinese aggression requires a capability to communicate to Xi Jinping and his senior advisors, as well as PLA leaders, troops, and the general population, that China's competitive efforts are failing and will continue to fail. To do this, the next president will need to get America in the game, plan for the long haul, and rebuild the rebalance to Asia. Keeping the long-term strategic competition with China peaceful is not going to be easy. It will only be possible with stronger and smarter American leadership.



## Notes

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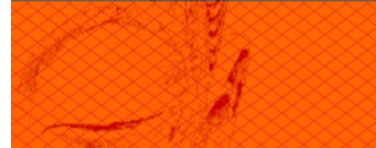
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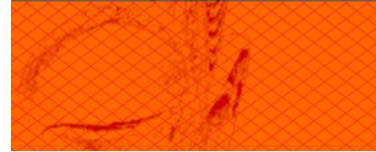
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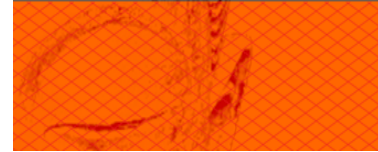
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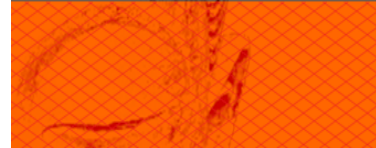
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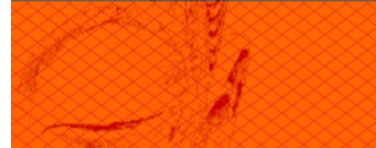
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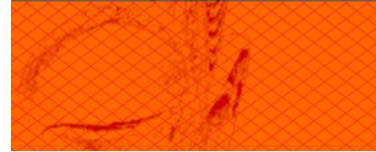
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