Bold and Unprecedented Moves

Building a US-Taiwan Defense Strategy in the Strait of Taiwan and South China Sea

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Abstract

This article argues that through revised national policy, the United States should enforce an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan, leverage Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) capabilities, and employ a counter antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy to curtail China's aggressive overtures within the South China Sea (SCS). First, this article examines why US national policy makers should explicitly guarantee the defense of Taiwan. It also highlights the impact of the United States' current "strategic ambiguity" policy language upon the backdrop of China's ambitions to reclaim Taiwan. Second, this text deliberates how Taiwan can leverage US joint force capabilities such as IAMD to inject uncertainty, fear, and high cost into China's calculus to seize and hold Taiwan. Third, this narrative explains how Taiwan should employ a counter A2/AD zone strategy to deter or resist China's use of force within the SCS. Fourth, this manuscript examines opposing views on how increasing the United States' joint force efforts with Taiwan could create an unnecessary flashpoint between the United States

and China. Finally, this text concludes that the concepts mentioned above could lead to greater regional interoperability to curtail China's aggressive overtures within the SCS.

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China wants the ability to take Taiwan by 2027.

—Gen Mark Milley

On 30 October 2020, Gen Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made a tough and timely decision to place a secret phone call to Chinese general Li Zuocheng to ease tensions and prevent an all-out war between two nuclear-armed great powers.[1] On 8 January 2021, shortly after the violent insurrection at the US Capitol, General Milley made yet another phone call to reassure his Chinese counterpart.[2] Eight months later, a political firestorm ensued. General Milley was called to testify on Capitol Hill on 28 September 2021 concerning his calls to China. General Milley argued that he was given disturbing intelligence that the Chinese were worried about a possible US strike considering Pres. Donald Trump's national rhetoric, unpredictable patterns of behavior, and reelection loss.[3] General Milley did not inform President Trump about his conversation with China before or after the calls. A few US Senators characterized General Milley's actions as treasonous and called for his resignation. During a Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing, General Milley told Congress, "My task at that time was to de-escalate."[4] For now, it appears that a potential crisis was averted, but the relationship between the United States and China is still in treacherous waters.

However, while General Milley avoided war, China continuously seeks to discredit and displace America's preponderant power by dominating the competitive matrix throughout the Indo-Pacific theater through aggressive maritime actions short of war. Accordingly, Chinese policy makers have been transparent concerning its intent to reshape international order, reunify China, and command a more significant share of influence around the globe.[5] Eerily similar to the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, China is disconcertingly calculated in its quest to reclaim Taiwan as part of its sovereign territory in the South China Sea (SCS). China is learning from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Beijing is observing the US response to the crisis. In the meantime, Beijing continues to conduct menacing shows of force by surging fighter jets into the southern Air Defense Identification Zone of Taiwan.[6] The surges serve as a warning to Taiwan, emphasizing China's

ability to strike at will. Both the United States and China understand that whoever controls the preponderance of waters and associated island chains throughout the SCS will influence freedom of navigation, possess the ability to affect maritime commerce shipments, and project power throughout the western Pacific.[7] Consequently, US and Taiwanese joint forces must develop countermeasures to quell China's bellicose behavior and weaken its Indo-Pacific posture. To deter and curtail China's aggressive approach to control the SCS, US national policy makers should draft an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan, assist in the acquisition of Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) capabilities to defend Taiwan, and synchronize a multidomain counter antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy. First, US national policy makers should explicitly guarantee the defense of Taiwan, since the United States' current policy of "strategic ambiguity" leaves room for doubt about whether America would intervene during a People's Republic of China (PRC) invasion of Taiwan. Second, in cooperation with Taiwan, the United States should help acquire joint IAMD capabilities to inject uncertainty, fear, and high cost into China's calculus to seize and hold Taiwan. Third, the United States should collaborate to develop a multidomain counter–A2/AD zone strategy to deter or resist China's use of force within the SCS.

Explicit Security Guarantee for Taiwan

US national policy makers should take a bold and unprecedented step forward to offer an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan. After 20 years of fighting in Afghanistan and strategic inertia from a controversial withdrawal, the United States must undergird its strategy in the Indo-Pacific with crystal clear policies that guarantee security for key partners. Unfortunately, Washington has entered a stretch where American policy makers have not taken advantage of the opportunity to develop an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan. The United States currently abides by the One China Policy and must maintain an unofficial relationship with Taipei. However, if China invades Taiwan, it is not clear if the United States would commit military forces in support of Taiwan. For this reason and others, America has operated under a policy of strategic ambiguity with Taiwan rather than making a firm defense commitment.[8] Small countries depend on explicit security guarantees from larger countries with robust military capabilities to ensure their survival in the event of an attack. For example, the United States has a 70-year-old Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the Philippines where both nations guarantee to defend each other; however, the United States has not renewed its previous MDT with Taiwan since the late 1970s.[9] Unfortunately, as a result, Taiwan has been panting prey caught in the net of China's immense political power. To be fair Taiwan can also do many things to defend itself against

PRC incursion; however, with an explicit security guarantee or mutual defense pact with the United States, Taiwan could help provide a First Island Chain buffer against the PRC's attempts to project its force capabilities in the SCS.

The Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) initially served as a statute to support regional security; however, its ambiguous language has contributed to a complex international security dilemma that must be resolved.[10] The TRA was drafted by the United States and China in 1982 and aimed to dispel fears that Washington and Beijing would enter negotiations concerning support for Taiwan.[11] Also, the TRA asserts that the United States would maintain the capacity to come to Taiwan's defense and provide it with arms to defend itself.[12] Importantly, however, the TRA does not explicitly guarantee that Washington would come to Taipei's defense, neither does it recognize Taiwan in an official capacity.[13], [14] This article will not brood over the historical evolution of the TRA, but it is worth noting that from the onset, there have been various interpretations of the TRA's original intent that have affected the strategic relationship between Washington, Taipei, and Beijing. Despite documented agreements, the SCS and Strait of Taiwan continue to simmer with PRC gray zone activity by the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) and frequent violations of international rules of the sea. The PAFMM veils itself as commercial fishing vessels; however, these are armed fishing boats that are supported by the PRC and often conduct operations to disrupt maritime order.[15] Policy limitations hamstring INDOPACOM's ability to engage the PAFMM vessels. As a result, the absence of an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan has emboldened China to act with relative impunity as Beijing looks to reclaim territory in the SCS using gray zone tactics. Today, US-China relations have deteriorated, and it is clear that some of Washington's national policies toward Taiwan are ineffective. In a series of bold moves, the United States should revise the TRA or sign a new MDT; however, before doing so, Taiwan should prepare for the aftermath by strengthening its resilience against China's military, political, and economic coercion. Finally, the United States should officially recognize Taiwan as an ally and amend the President's National Security Strategy (NSS) accordingly.[16]

The NSS should be revised to include an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan to frustrate China's ambitions and offset its territorial acquisition strategy. The NSS has limitations when applied to the protection of US allies and partners, especially when solving such a complex problem as defending Taiwan from China.[17] Under the Trump administration, the NSS and foreign policy speeches contained principled realism, ambiguity, and contentious rhetoric.[18] For most critics, Trump's "principled realism" strategy was not a legitimate commitment to Taiwan but rather a catchy slogan that could be propagated in media.[19] Trump's policy left

many allies wondering if the United States would hold firm to its commitments. Similarly, under Interim NSS guidance, the Biden administration acknowledged the United States' commitment to increased security cooperation with Taiwan. However, the unclassified 24-page Interim NSS document only mentions Taiwan once. It states, "We will support Taiwan, a leading democracy and a critical economic and security partner, in line with longstanding American commitments."[20] China continues to exploit gaps in both the Interim NSS and the president's statements, using the United States' vague language concerning defense commitments as a catalyst to fuel skepticism in developing countries within the SCS.[21]

Revising the president's NSS and other defense policy documents with explicit security guarantees would allow the USINDOPACOM joint force to establish a permanent presence in Taiwan and openly showcase large-scale integrated deterrence measures. For example, the III Marine Expeditionary Force could be transferred from Okinawa Japan to Taiwan. Many high-ranking political leaders have supported similar ideas but have been unable to see them to fruition.[22] For example, under a revised or explicit NSS, the United States, Japan, and Taiwan would be able to openly exercise a defense counterstrategy against China with pre-positioned equipment, US supplies, and war reserve stocks to help Taiwan defend itself.[23] Although provocative and escalatory, this hard-power approach could demonstrate the United States' clear commitment to Taiwan and cause China to reconsider the high cost of mounting a full-scale invasion. China undoubtedly will perceive the United States' actions as a threat to its national security, so the United States must be ready to respond.

There are several critical reasons the United States should develop an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan. First, losing Taiwan would cost the United States its credibility as a defender of democracy and primary security provider in the Indo-Pacific region. Second, an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan would help boost Taipei's confidence in Washington's international policy commitments, improve regional perceptions, and produce healthy democracies.[24] Independent democracies are fragile, and any reductions to the number of democratic partners would be detrimental to US interests and could further jeopardize security in the SCS. Third, if the United States fails to develop an explicit security guarantee to prevent China's annexation of Taiwan, Washington could lose access to Taiwan's microchip manufacturing and critical supply chain.[25] A branch plan in any of these Chinese invasion scenarios would likely include the destruction of manufacturing facilities, which are arguably the most important industries on the island. More importantly, a Chinese annexation would further legitimize Beijing's power, give China open access to the Pacific Ocean, and provide it with the military range to threaten US territories in the Pacific, Hawaii, and the continental

United States.[26] Fourth, an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan makes the United States' deterrent posture in the Pacific firm and credible instead of fluid and vulnerable.[27] Finally, an explicit security guarantee could help disrupt China's hegemonic strategy, enlist regional support from allies, and ensure stability throughout the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, such an affirmative policy could open the door for greater US-Taiwan integration to combat transnational threats similar to counter-Islamic State (ISIS) operations.[28]

The reasons mentioned above are important because they indicate areas where the United States can leverage a distinct advantage in modern statecraft by issuing an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan. If diplomacy, comprehensive economic sanctions, and information instruments of power fail, Taiwan must be prepared to defend itself. China is posturing to reclaim Taiwan by force if necessary; therefore, the United States should not pacify Taiwan with empty rhetoric and continued strategic ambiguity. The Ukrainian crisis and the ambitious aims of leaders such as Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping point toward the need for explicit guarantees and deeper cooperation with American partners and allies around the globe to curtail China's aggressive actions in the Pacific. These factors should inform and guide US policy makers to support investments in Taiwan's defense capabilities proportionate to American interests.

Fear is the beginning of Wisdom.

—GEN William Tecumseh Sherman, USA

Integrated Air and Missile Defense Investment

In cooperation with Taiwan, the United States should invest in building joint IAMD capabilities to deter and inject uncertainty, fear, and high cost into China's calculus to seize and hold Taiwan. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is gaining momentum and shows no signs of fear or relenting in its pursuits. It would be difficult for Taiwan to stand toe to toe against China's hypersonic glide vehicles and antiship ballistic missiles; so, Taipei must build up Taiwain's conventional deterrence and IAMD capabilities—the clock is ticking. On 23 June 2021, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Milley explained to Congress, "China wants the ability to take Taiwan by 2027."[29] China's buildup of military forces and provocative actions underscore its iron will in the Indo-Pacific region. The PLA has achieved parity with US forces in military modernization and distinct war-fighting capabilities.[30] The PLA has two million personnel in its regular force and has the world's largest naval, aviation, and standing ground forces.[31] Additionally, the PLA possesses the most robust A2/AD capabilities in the First Island Chain and plans to extend its operational reach further into the Pacific Ocean.[32] China's

overwhelming capacity in terms of shipbuilding, ballistic missiles, and IAMDs makes it a formidable opponent.[33] However, China may lack experience in employing its capabilities in a high-end fight.

Through a joint war-fighting approach, the United States and Taiwan could field remarkably accurate IAMD systems to match China's capabilities and diminish the PLA's confidence in defeating Taiwan's air defenses. Moreover, Washington and Taipei can assume that Beijing is developing plans to simultaneously deter, delay, and deny any third-party intervention during a large-scale conflict.[34] That said, both the tyranny of distance and extremely capable PLA forces create a significant time, space, and force advantage for the PLA. This advantage elevates risk for any allies who decide to intervene. Therefore, through defense pacts and foreign military sales, USINDOPACOM and regional allies could help Taiwan field a suite of technologically advanced long-range strike assets as well as: ballistic, antiship, hypersonic, and upgraded ground-launched cruise missiles.[35] Fielding technologically advanced IAMD capabilities could offset the risk and help Taiwan defend itself. This approach could ensure that Taiwan remains in the Western sphere of influence. For example, by combining combat-proven IAMD capabilities such as the Israeli Iron Dome and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery, a PAC-3 MSE battery China will not be able to suppress Taiwan with a decisive first strike.[36], [37] Furthermore, positioning these IAMD capabilities closer to China's borders would be a bold and unprecedented act of deterrence, signaling INDOPACOM's and Taiwan's readiness to respond to strikes.[38]

If Washington is serious about deterring Beijing, decision makers should consider rebalancing the DoD's Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) investment portfolio and expedite the procurement of advanced IAMD systems in the SCS.[39] This would ensure the USINDOPACOM commander receives the requisite funding and capabilities to support Taiwan.[40] By and large, the PDI has put some economic teeth behind the Pentagon's effort to acquire advanced war-fighting tools. Funding levels for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 PDI feature a $5.1 billion budget[41] request to provide long-range strike and stand-off capability in a contested environment.[42] However, most of the budget earmarked for PDI-related acquisitions in the FY22 request is allocated to warships and fighter platforms.[43] That is a stark contrast with INDOPACOM's earlier PDI request in March 2021, which did not ask for additional warships and fighter platforms, but requested funding for IAMDs, logistics support, and infrastructure.[44] It is clear that the current PDI investment is not allocated proportionately to the greatest needs. That said, the PDI's method to convert resources into a successful defense strategy remains to be seen.

Based on examples of historic success, there are a few other things the United States should do to help build up integrated defense capabilities in the SCS. First, if national leaders changed the policies to allow an explicit security guarantee, USINDOPACOM could openly provide joint task force (JTF) assistance and integrate it into Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept (ODC). The ODC is a joint operations approach developed by Taiwan's former Chief of the General Staff, Admiral Lee Hsi-ming, to improve Taiwan's defensive posture.[45] The concept was designed to defend and hold Taiwanese ground until third-party intervention arrived from allies. In the 1950s, the United States created a defense command in Taipei and sent a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) or JTF to Taiwan under the command of a two-star general. The MAAG transformed the former Republic of China (ROC) or Taiwanese military into one of Asia's most capable fighting forces in the following years.[46] For the past year, the United States has rotated small Special Forces packages to Taiwan to train Taiwanese personnel; however, this effort should be expanded into a permanent JTF similar to the highly effective MAAG of old.[47]

The joint force should take the lead in integrating IAMD systems to increase lethality throughout the SCS. Using the current IAMD buildup in Guam as an example, ADM Philip S. Davidson, then US Indo-Pacific commander, asserted that, "The most important action the U.S. can take to increase the joint force's lethality in the Pacific is to introduce a 360-degree, persistent IAMD capability on Guam called the Guam Defense System (GDS)."[48] Davidson further contended that "GDS could be established cost-effectively consisting of Lockheed Martin's Aegis Baseline 10, solid-state radar (SPY-6 or SPY-7 variant), MK-41 VLS, Aegis Ashore, and SM3/SM6 in order to address the emerging threats, including hypersonic while integrating existing weapon control systems."[49] Finally, Davidson argued that the GDS can speed up the decision-to-execution cycle for US forces fighting within the enemy's threat rings, thus improving the joint force's ability to withstand attacks."[50] Building on Davidson's idea, one could argue that the same IAMD systems proposed for Guam's defense should also be fielded, positioned, and paid for by Taiwan. Taiwan already has 21 Patriot/TK III batteries and 1,500 Patriot/TK III interceptors.[51] Adding a US-supported IAMD to Taiwan's arsenal would provide Taipei with a greater chance to deter China or survive during the opening phases of massive PLA strikes. Furthermore, US-supplied systems could provide Taiwan with increased interoperability with USINDOPACOM's joint force and regional allies abroad.[52] Lastly, positioning IAMDs near Taiwan could serve as a desperately needed multi-domain command-and-control (C2) node for forward-deployed and geographically separated joint

forces. If nothing else, it could serve as a distraction, taking the PLA's eyes off other valuable US assets at sea or in Guam or Okinawa.

If the concepts mentioned above came to fruition, US forces operating at greater distances would be able to leverage Taiwan's IAMD C2 network.[53] For example, an IAMD sensor operated by Taiwan could link to networked joint force aircraft and warships both inside and outside the contested operating environment.[54] To take the concept even further, coupling IAMD systems with counter A2/AD capabilities could optimize threat awareness and targeting for Taiwan's air defense architecture.[55] If the joint force and Taiwan consistently showcased these advanced capabilities, it could inject uncertainty into China's calculus and possibly change its flyovers into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone.

Counter Antiaccess/Area-Denial Strategy

Taiwan should employ a counter A2/AD zone strategy to deter or resist China's use of force within the SCS. Throughout the years, A2/AD strategies have become the most widely recognized and adopted approaches to military defense.[56] While some assume that A2/AD is a new way to fight wars, it is a defense-in-depth concept that has roots that date back to early wars. For example, the US Civil War, the Cold War, and even the Yom Kippur War incorporated some aspects of A2/AD.[57] While Syria and Egypt's strategy did not topple the Israelis, it significantly impacted the war by attriting Israeli aircraft.[58] Whether in the mid-1800s at the Battle of Mobile Bay or in the Russian cyber domain during the 2008 conquest of Georgia, the successful execution of defense in depth or A2/AD strategies will continue to be a key feature of future war fighting and can help Taiwan's cause.[59]

In the Indo-Pacific, the joint force should expect China to execute an A2/AD strategy that will deny access and freedom of maneuver in the SCS. For example, the first objective of a Chinese invasion would likely consist of a blockade followed by projecting power to gain air superiority and sea control around Taiwan.[60] Currently, Taiwan does not possess enough military might to topple China in a fight, but it can disrupt the PLA from achieving air superiority and sea control by employing an effective counter A2/AD strategy before a kinetic showdown occurs. Through concerted efforts, US joint forces, Taiwan, and regional allies could showcase a counter A2/AD zone buildup that denies China access to its near seas.[61] The most significant distinction between a counter A2/AD zone strategy and a standard A2/AD strategy is that a counter A2/AD approach would not seek to regain access into China's zone of denial through brute force.[62] Ben Wermeling contends, "A counter A2/AD zone can deny China many advantages from using its A2/AD zone while applying economic pressure or high cost on China to

in order to impede, delay, or stop their freedom of maneuver."[63] While this counter A2/AD zone concept appears nuanced, it can produce significant returns on investment by disrupting China's decision matrix to strike Taiwan.

Also, in a China–Taiwan scenario, a good counter A2/AD zone strategy would involve creating a forbidden zone within the Strait of Taiwan, exploiting China's antisubmarine capabilities as a potential vulnerability. Since China has weak antisubmarine capabilities, the joint force, Taiwan, and allies can position submarines as a deterrent force that could inflict an extremely high cost to China's fleets. The use of very cheap and effective sea mines would be a good element of any sea denial course of action. However, the US Navy lacks even a threadbare capability in this warfare area. Taiwan has a modest one but probably not sufficient given the hydrography of the Taiwan Strait. Mines take some time and effort to sweep. If nothing else, this would seriously affect any time, space, and force consideration of invaders and thus make any mine laying forces an early target in a war. In addition, Beijing is heavily dependent on seaborne commerce.[64] If inbound Chinese vessels and aircraft perceive that they cannot safely navigate through Taiwan's counter A2/AD zone, it would make it extremely difficult for Beijing to receive goods. Chinese trade traveling through the counter A2/AD zone could be targeted to frustrate and pressure China economically to change its behavior in the SCS.[65]

One might question why building a counter A2/AD or defense-in-depth strategy for Taiwan is such an essential element in US-China statecraft. What is the strategic risk to the United States if China takes Taiwan by force? Strategically, Taiwan is a critical link in a series of strongholds (consisting of Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines) that block China's access to the Pacific, similar to how the British Islands once blocked the access of Germany and France to trade routes in the Atlantic.[66] Rather than being considered a rear-area threat, if China controlled Taiwan it would extend China's power projection an additional 150 nautical miles eastward.[67] The PLA would possess the ability to interdict critical air and sea lines of communication in the East China Sea, making Guam and Japan highly vulnerable targets that currently sit within the range bands of PLA missile systems.[68] Conversely, allied forces would be pushed further afield, increasing the threat to US bases.[69]

Unnecessary Flashpoint in the South China Sea

Opponents of the earlier outlined ideas claim that changing US policy to issue an explicit security guarantee could create an unnecessary flashpoint in US-China relations, leading to a high-end conflict. That is an understandable concern because the intentions and perceptions between these two great powers could be

easily misunderstood and backfire. The danger of a high-end conflict is most significant when a rising yet dissatisfied challenger threatens to overtake a declining and dissatisfied hegemon.[70] Moreover, policies that enable a combined military response by the United States and Taiwan could be enough kindling to create an inferno in the Indo-Pacific. First, the high cost of such a clash would be devastating to international security and the world's economy. Second, for the United States, after the disaster in Vietnam, a successful Desert Storm, and the 20-year war and disastrous pull out of Afghanistan, the American public is growing weary of hawkish policies and warmongering. Whether short or protracted, as time increases and casualties mount and pictures are shared on Twitter and Facebook of sinking US ships with thousands of US sailors perishing onboard, the American public will react poorly. Is the United States willing to die for Taiwan? Is the United States willing to kill for Taiwan? Any sustained military action taken to defend Taiwan will require the domestic support of the American people, which may be difficult to obtain.[71] As a result, policy makers must be highly cautious in revising the NSS and/or TRA and signing a new MDT to avoid public outrage and more importantly—another high-end conflict. Third, policy makers may be concerned that any attempts to guarantee explicit security for Taiwan would mean that China could not achieve its goal of unification without a fight. A failure to reunify Taiwan could diminish China's legitimacy as a world power. To save face, China would likely need to demonstrate its national strength and resolve by taking Taiwan through conventional means—possibly adding nuclear threats to increase the stakes. The conditions could set the world on its edge by creating a situation reminiscent of the Cuban Missile crisis.

Finally, others may argue that deploying a JTF with US-made IAMD capabilities to Taiwan is not a good use of limited USINDOPACOM resources, because building up coalition forces in Taiwan would be crossing an irreversible red line with Beijing. Furthermore, maintaining a constant US presence in Taiwan may cause Taipei to become overconfident and take bold actions that exceed the threshold of acceptable risk. Also, there is a grave risk of escalation if joint forces exchange fire with PLA forces or if Beijing does not back down. Finally, Taiwan could become overconfident in its ability to restrain escalation, only to find that specific actions or the sum of its capabilities begin to push the conflict up the escalatory ladder. The problem of unrestrained client states is a large concern and perennial problem with every great power.

Conclusion

The strategic importance of defending Taiwan and deterring Chinese aggression in the SCS should not be understated. The actions and concepts mentioned

throughout could lead to better deterrence, improved defensive measures, and optimized joint force interoperability with Taiwan. Neutralizing China's reclamation efforts in the SCS requires bold thinking and unconventional approaches. However, US policy makers and Department of Defense leaders must determine if the gains are worth the risk. USINDOPACOM and the joint force are outfitted with resources, capabilities, and expertise to help defend Taiwan and alter China's course in the SCS; however, it is difficult to determine if these resources would be optimized prior to an opening salvo from China.

It should come as no surprise that US national policy documents could be revised, and USINDOPACOM joint forces should assist with carrying out an explicit security guarantee for Taiwan. Taiwan is of strategic military importance within the system of Indo-Pacific island chains, and Washington cannot afford to allow Beijing to continue imposing its will on Taipei. Comprehensive sanctions would probably not be enough to stop China. Therefore, the United States should attempt to shape the PRC's understanding of the consequences of its actions. Additionally, based on previously outlined approaches, it is apparent that the defense of Taiwan rests on its initiative and ability to build up its IAMD capabilities. Furthermore, investing in interoperable IAMD systems and employing counter A2/AD concepts can be a game-changing factor for curtailing China's aggressive overtures in the SCS. The war in Ukraine should serve as a modern case study in territorial defense for Taiwan. Taiwan must plan with a sense of urgency. Finally, it is extremely challenging for a hegemon such as the United States to assist Taiwan in warding off a land grab from China without creating some regional instability. However, an explicit security guarantee, investment and posturing of IAMD capabilities in Taiwan, and the development of a counter A2/AD zone strategy, could signal a bold and unprecedented shift in US foreign policy.

Recommendations

- US leaders and USINDOPACOM joint forces should explicitly guarantee the defense of Taiwan throughout all national policy documents.
- Taiwan should leverage US joint force capabilities such as IAMD to inject uncertainty, fear, and high cost into China's calculus to seize and hold Taiwan.
- The United States should partner with Taiwan to posture an interoperable IAMD system in Taiwan.
- The United States should stand up a full joint task force in Taiwan.

- USINDOPACOM and Taiwan should employ a counter A2/AD zone strategy to deter or resist China's use of force within the SCS.

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