

Back from the Brink: De-escalation of Conflict During the Four Crises of the Taiwan Strait

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Declaration

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

School of Social Science

SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY

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Dedication

Dedicated to Peter, Nicolas, Sarita and Koko Timza

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my supervisor, Dr Michelle Small, for her guidance and dedication to helping me push forward with this report and strive to improve my work when I felt that I could see no end in sight. Thanks to Dr Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh for the recommendations that helped me get started with my paper.

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List of Abbreviations

ADIZ	Air Defence Identification Zone
CCK	Chiang Ching-kuo
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ECFA	Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement
ICB	International Crisis Behaviour
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KMT	Kuomintang
NSC	National Security Council
NUC	National Unification Council
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	The People's Republic of China
ROC	The Republic of China
SEATO	Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation
UN	United Nations
US/USA	United States

Chapter One: Introduction

The Taiwan Strait, an enduring geopolitical flashpoint, has been characterised by escalating tensions involving the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan), and the United States (US). This chapter undertakes a thorough exploration of the historical context, delving into a series of crises that unfolded across the Taiwan Strait in 1954-55, 1958, 1995-96, and the more recent 2022-23 which will be the cases analysed in this study to answer its prevailing questions. The central inquiry revolves around understanding the factors that have averted full-scale war across the Taiwan Strait between this triad of states despite numerous instances of military brinkmanship by the PRC.

The chapter opens with a historical overview, detailing the intricate relations between the PRC and the ROC since the Chinese Civil War in 1949. The chapter will introduce the complex role of the United States in this cross-Strait conflict, citing its historical support for Taiwan. The chapter then delves into brinkmanship as a strategic tool, analysing how the PRC has utilised this approach since the 1950s to pressure the ROC for reunification and to deter US involvement. The First, Second, Third and Fourth Taiwan Strait Crises, are introduced to understand the dynamics of brinkmanship as a strategic tool for the PRC.

This chapter includes a literature review which examines scholarly works and quantitative data regarding brinkmanship and its relation to nuclear power, literature and extensive reports of the events of the Taiwan Strait Crises as well as the interplay of economic interdependence and military conflict. The chapter discusses deterrence theory as the theoretical perspective that frames this paper in the examination of brinkmanship and deterrence within the PRC-ROC-US conflict. The study's methodology is discussed to clarify how this research will ensue.

The overall aim of this chapter is to justify the study's relevance in the broader context of international relations, particularly in East Asia. The chapter concludes by presenting the research questions and aims of this paper, underscoring the necessity to identify the significant causal mechanisms averting full-scale war across the Taiwan Strait. This chapter therefore

presents the background, existing literature and the study's research methodology as a prelude to the research study.

Background

The ever-increasing tension across the Taiwan Strait has threatened to destabilise the East Asian region. In 2022, the dramatic increase in military exercises by the PRC across the Taiwan Strait following a high-profile visit from US House of Representatives speaker, Nancy Pelosi, led the global community to believe that war was imminent between PRC, the ROC and the US. Relations between the government of the ROC on the island of Taiwan and the PRC on the Chinese mainland have been contentious since Chiang Kai-shek's ROC government fled to the Taiwanese island in 1949 following his defeat to the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP) who formed the PRC thereafter.

Since Taiwan's 2020 elections in particular, tensions across the Taiwan Strait have been high. This is because of the ongoing resistance to comply with the PRC's longstanding national interests to reunify the island with the mainland under One-China policy by the ROC's current government, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).. Instead, the DPP has made clear its preference for a sovereign, independent Taiwanese state. The separation of China and Taiwan remains a point of humiliation to the PRC. The PRC sees Taiwan as a rightful part of it and perceives the fact that it remains separate from the mainland as a violation of its sovereignty by the United States. The United States have long intervened in the relations across the Taiwan Strait, and its relationship with the ROC has been preventative to the PRC's goal to reunify the Taiwanese islands with the mainland under the One-China policy. The US has frequently provided the ROC with protection from the PRC since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949.

US support for the ROC has been provided in the form of military defence and the commitment to a Mutual Defence Treaty in 1954 (Wong, 2019: 103). According to Lin and Zhou (2018: 179), the US declared that it "would not again intervene in the Chinese Civil War" and that Taiwan was "expendable" to it, however each Cross-Strait Crisis has heavily involved the US. Taiwan has since been utilised as a strategic tool for the US in its relations with the PRC, with the US sending billions of dollars to the ROC between 1953 and 1961 and heavily influencing the island's "military, economy, politics, culture and society, as well as external relations" (Lin

& Zhou, 2018: 180). The PRC's attempt to disband the ROC after the civil war was thwarted by the United States, ultimately keeping Taiwan as a separate entity under ROC governance. Even though US leadership and foreign policy have acknowledged the legitimacy of the PRC as the one true representation of China, the US maintains a separate relationship with the ROC. The PRC has made it clear that "even if it requires the use of force," (Fisher, 2020: 101), it will reunify with Taiwan and prevent the ROC from achieving sovereignty. This statement, coupled with the increased military activity across the Taiwan Strait, has alarmed the international community that war is a possibility. President Xi Jinping intends to achieve reunification of the One-China by 2049 - this year marks a century since the separation of China and Taiwan after the Civil war. International Relations scholars, policymakers and world leaders recognise that conflict between the PRC and the ROC be avoided to maintain regional and global stability, particularly in light of the rivalry between the PRC and the USA.

According to the US Department of State, its relationship with the ROC is "unofficial" as a result of the 1979 US-PRC Joint Communique. This acknowledged Beijing as the official representative of China instead of Taipei, however the US would be allowed to maintain "cultural, commercial and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan," supporting the ROC in global organisations where statehood is not a prerequisite. Taiwan is recognised officially by the majority of the global community as part of the One-China. Continued ROC resistance to reunification has created tension because the ROC withdrew its claims to the mainland in 1987 (Fisher, 2020: 109) but has refused to accept the One China policy.

As two of the world's major powers, rising tensions and competition between the PRC and the United States is an issue of great importance. The basis of brinkmanship in international relations is to employ actions that bring adversaries to the brink of war, without going to war. In brinkmanship, states cannot fully know the intentions of the other side but trusting that neither side wants to go to war. These tactics (missile tests, blockades, bombardments, deploying naval carriers outside DMZ territorial waters) aim to create a sense of urgency, fear, and potential conflict, with the goal of pressuring the other side to yield to the other's demands.

The PRC adopted a policy of brinkmanship in the 1950s in order to achieve its strategic interests. It has used brinkmanship to pressure the ROC into reunification. Simultaneously, brinkmanship has been used to prevent the ROC from pursuing its independence by inciting fear that the PRC will pursue forceful reunification efforts. In addition to using brinkmanship

to apply pressure on the ROC, the PRC has used it to deter the US from its heavy involvement in the cross-Strait conflict. In retaliation, the US has countered with its own practices of military brinkmanship to prevent the PRC from achieving its goals through force and coercion.

Between 1954 and 2000, there were three instances of brinkmanship enacted by the PRC towards the ROC referred to as the three crises of the Taiwan Strait. The First Taiwan Strait Crisis occurred in 1954 and ended in 1955. The First Taiwan Strait Crisis was triggered by the creation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), a defence agreement formed to “combat Communist inspired insurgency and aggression” (Palmer, 1966: ii) in the Southeast Asian region, naming the PRC as a “principal target of the Communist campaign” (Palmer, 1966: 1) whose danger needed to be opposed. Brinkmanship was the retaliatory response by the PRC to the possible involvement of the ROC in the SEATO agreement. Under Eisenhower, the US adopted a policy of deterrence in response to PRC brinkmanship by threatening the use of nuclear weapons against the PRC. This was done “based on uncertainty about the Chinese intentions,” whether they would attempt an invasion of Taiwan (Li, 1991: 18).

In 1958, the PRC engaged in the second instance of brinkmanship towards the ROC. Following the First Crisis, ambassadorial talks were opened up in order to improve the relationship between the PRC and the US. The second bombardment of the ROC offshore islands by the PRC followed the breakdown of these ambassadorial talks as a result of US indifference. The PRC practiced brinkmanship in order to pressure the US to resume the ambassadorial talks (Halperin, 1966: v). Bombardment continued in the aftermath of the 1958 crisis, however the crisis was considered to be over by October 1958. Since the end of the Second Crisis, there had been no other instances of brinkmanship until 1995. Zhao (1999: 496) labels the period 1979 (when bombardment of the Taiwanese offshore islands by the PRC officially ceased) to 1995 as one of “Peaceful Offence”. During this period, the PRC adopted policies to achieve its reunification goals using peaceful measures such as economic cooperation and interdependence. This period therefore coincides with increased trade volumes between the PRC and the ROC according to Tung (2004).

In 1995, the third instance of military brinkmanship arose due to increased diplomacy between the ROC and the US despite the derecognition of the ROC by the global community. The United States issued a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui who planned to visit Cornell, the US university from which he graduated. The PRC saw the granting of a visa to President

Lee as a breach of its bilateral agreement with the US that it would decrease its relations with the ROC. Resultantly, the PRC engaged in military drills and missile tests towards Taiwan. Between 1996 and 2020, there are no identifiable instances of military brinkmanship to be observed because for the majority of this period, Taiwanese leadership under the KMT had been more favourable to the PRC's One-China policy than its new leadership under the DPP's Tsai Ing-wen.

In 2022-2023 the PRC engaged in another round of brinkmanship against the ROC which, like the Third Crisis, entailed military exercises and flyovers across the Taiwan Strait by the PRC and the ROC. These military exercises, however, were regarded as more threatening to Taiwan as many of these military drills violated Taiwan's ADIZ. This form of coercive brinkmanship has been dubbed the unofficial 'Fourth' Taiwan Strait Crisis by the international community. Tensions escalated due to Taiwan's increased push for independence under President Tsai Ing-wen and the USA's consistent support for the ROC's government, yet war still has not ensued.

This study will examine instances of brinkmanship between the PRC, the ROC, and the US during the First, Second, Third, and 'Fourth' Taiwan Strait Crises from 1954 to December 2023. The US is a vital part of this triad relationship because much of the dealings across the Taiwan Strait regarding the matter of reunification have heavily involved US intervention. The aim is to identify causally significant variables that have consistently prevented the escalation to full-scale war following acts of brinkmanship across the Taiwan Strait.

Literature Review

Nuclear Power and Deterrence

Within the PRC-ROC conflict, whether nuclear deterrence and nuclear power disparities play a significant role in the escalation and de-escalation of conflict is debatable. There are two schools of thought when considering nuclear power: offensive nuclear power and defensive nuclear power. During the Cold War period, the US was able to successfully use its possession of nuclear capabilities offensively against the PRC in order to deter attempts at brinkmanship and de-escalate the First Taiwan Strait Crisis. The PRC subsequently developed defensive

nuclear capabilities after the First Crisis seemingly in response to the Eisenhower administration's use of offensive nuclear power to prevent the US from using its capabilities as deterrence to its brinkmanship. Robert Powell considers how the balance of power between nuclear states affects the capacity for nuclear deterrence and how conflicts between these states escalate, or otherwise (Powell, 2015: 589). Powell argues that balance of power between nuclear states is not significant in nuclear brinkmanship, though he states that the assertions he makes in his papers are based on assumptions rather than "deduction" (2015: 589). His research is based on nuclear states in particular. The PRC was not a nuclear state during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, and this paper argues that the disparity in nuclear power between the US and the PRC was significant in shaping the outcome of the First Crisis in favour of the US. Powell's assumption that balance of nuclear power between states can be argued for. After gaining nuclear power following the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, the PRC gained nuclear bargaining power against its adversary. While the PRC was not as powerful of a nuclear state as the US had been in 1958, its possession of nuclear weapons, even to a lesser capacity, was significant enough to greatly deter the US from making use of nuclear deterrence in the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. While the ROC has neither nuclear weapons capabilities nor statehood in the global community, having the United States as an ally against the PRC means that the ROC enjoys defence through extended deterrence from US nuclear power.

The concept of US extended deterrence is discussed by Trachtenberg (2012) who argues that there is an issue of credibility for states that extend deterrence to allies as the US has done with Taiwan. It is challenging for Taiwan to trust that the US would be fully committed to risk engaging in a "nuclear holocaust" for Taiwan's sake (Trachtenberg, 2012: 87). During a number of the Taiwan Strait Crises, the US could not commit itself to the defence of Taiwan's offshore islands where the PRC focused its bombardments in the 1950s. This presented significant doubt and tension between the ROC and the US. There have long been debates about the value of Taiwan to the US and whether defending Taiwan is worth risking conflict within the Sino-US relationship. As relations between the US and PRC improve in the post-Cold War era, US commitment to Taiwan complicates the Sino-US relationship and arguably increases the threat of war across the Taiwan Strait.

Schwarz and Sonin also refer to nuclear power in relation to the use of brinkmanship as a strategic tool. In the case of the PRC and the ROC, the PRC would be what Schwarz and Sonin refer to as the "aggressor" and the ROC as the "victim" (2007: 166). For the PRC, the act of

going to the brink of war with the ROC is a costly threat to the PRC itself because “extracting a payment from a victim is impossible” (Schwarz and Sonin, 2007: 165). This is because if war were to inadvertently be the result of brinkmanship, the PRC suffers from the costs of war and “thus, any blackmail is doomed to failure” (2007: 173). Likening brinkmanship to blackmail is an interesting perspective and ultimately, these scholars conclude that brinkmanship is costly to both sides. Nalebuff (1986) also explores the relationship between brinkmanship and nuclear deterrence. The use of nuclear weaponry in security poses threats to national security as they simultaneously can be used to achieve national and security interests, “but, the wheels of war set in motion have a momentum and the concession may come too late” (Nalebuff, 1986: 21).

Nalebuff also examines brinkmanship from Schelling’s perspective as a mathematical model. Much of the literature (Schelling, 1966; Kahn, 1960; Kissinger, 1957; Jervis, 1984; Sagan, 1993; Allison, 1971) on brinkmanship considers it a matter of nuclear power, however this research seeks to consider other variables as well. The PRC and the United States seem to have only explicitly made use of nuclear deterrence or nuclear brinkmanship to achieve interests over Taiwan during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954. Other causally significant variables for conflict de-escalation can therefore be identified. Goswami writes as though the conflict at hand is between the PRC and the US, and that the PRC’s acts of brinkmanship are a method of deterring Washington from continuing its involvement in the cross-Strait conflict (2023: 289). This corroborates largely with the events of the each of the Taiwan Strait Crises as the ROC have often been left out of negotiations, such as during the Geneva ambassadorial talks that began in 1955 which were between the US and the PRC only. This paper takes the stance that US involvement has served to exacerbate the conflict between the PRC and the ROC.

Historical Accounts

Sun (1994), Li (1991), Rushkoff (1981), Chang (1988) and Matsumoto (2012) all write detailed accounts of the events of the First Crisis of the Taiwan Strait from beginning to end. Matsumoto is the only author who makes use of archival material from Taiwan while the others use US documents as source material. This is a limitation of the source material. Language barriers, however, play a significant role in the lack of ability to find a more diverse set of historical accounts. Each of these pieces of writing are particularly useful in revealing which causal mechanisms may have been responsible for de-escalating the conflict across the Taiwan Strait in this instance and allows us to identify some independent variables for this research paper.

These papers identify causal mechanisms such as cooperation, nuclear deterrence, appeasement/concession and the impact of decision-making at the individual level by state leaders, leading to the de-escalation of conflict. Papers like Sun's, Chang's and Rushkoff's provide accounts of the individual impact of then-US Secretary of State, John Dulles, on the crisis. These papers largely follow his decision-making during the First Crisis as well as President Eisenhower's. These papers' focus on US decision-makers presents a challenge to this study. Heavy emphasis on particular individuals may present an incomplete picture of the events of each crisis by narrowing the lens of analysis. In addition, focusing on particular individuals may misrepresent or overshadow the impact of other actors in de-escalating conflict. Sun's paper is a long and detailed historical narrative of the events and ultimately shows that nuclear deterrence which was followed by concession by the PRC as a result of US deterrence was the mechanism for de-escalation. Chang's paper demonstrates Dulles and Eisenhower's readiness to use both conventional and nuclear weapons to deter war across the Taiwan Strait but also emphasises the importance of the lack of extended deterrence toward the PRC by the Soviet Union. This demonstrates that the PRC's lack of nuclear capabilities played a significant role in its concession. In contrast, Rushkoff only mentions the US administration's consideration to use nuclear force against the PRC once but does not attribute the nuclear threat as the mechanism that brought the First Crisis back from the brink of war. Instead, Rushkoff states that "abruptly" (Rushkoff, 1981: 479), the PRC conceded, promising to engage in negotiations with the US. In Rushkoff's account, it is difficult to conclude what caused Chinese concession in the 1955. Matsumoto briefly mentions that towards the end of the crisis, the US signalled its "willingness to use force" (2012: 90) but does not connect this with the PRC's decision to call for a ceasefire and agree to beginning talks with the US to resolve the cross-Strait conflict.

Halperin's 1966 report of the Second Crisis focuses on John Dulles' perspective of the crisis and his relationship with Chiang Kai-shek. This report is a lengthy, greatly detailed secondary account of the historical events of the crises using US government documents and records. This report shows that the US once again considered the use of nuclear weapons to end the crisis, but President Chiang was opposed to this. This paper conveys that the resumption of Sino-US talks ultimately ended PRC brinkmanship as this was what the PRC sought to gain from its bombardment. Huei's 2011 paper assesses the Second Crisis. The US considered using nuclear deterrence against the PRC once again but according to Huei, it was Eisenhower who was reluctant to threaten their use (2011: 323). Huei also asserts that the PRC was no longer

concerned about US nuclear deterrence. This may be because the PRC had procured nuclear power in 1958 following the end of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis. According to Huei, the Second Crisis was instead diffused by US willingness to engage in bilateral talks with the PRC.

The secondary nature of these reports and accounts does present a limitation. These reports are collections of secondary information gathered from official government correspondence well after the crises ended. This may lead to a variance in how authors interpreted the information found in the primary documents and make it challenging to infer significant causal mechanisms for de-escalation of conflict. It must be noted, however, that accessing the primary documents is incredibly difficult under the constraints of this particular study. This may be an area for future research.

In 2000, Ross wrote about the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis that began in 1995 and ended in 1996. He shows that negotiations took place between the PRC and the US to try and de-escalate the conflict. The PRC eventually ceased its military flyovers when the US increased its involvement in the conflict by exercising “deterrence diplomacy” towards the PRC. The US made clear its intent to defend Taiwan against PRC threat and launched a military operation near the Taiwan Strait as a counterthreat against Chinese military flyovers. In this instance, when brinkmanship was exercised by both adversaries in the conflict, the PRC became unsure of how far the US would escalate its own military force and thus, like Schwarz and Sonin posit regarding blackmail, the probabilistic outcome of war became too costly. Duke University’s ICB Project is a collection of global crisis data ranging from 1918 to 2019 and summarises and consolidates details of the events of the first three Crises of the Taiwan Strait. This database aids in selecting the relevant within-case data - instances of brinkmanship across the Strait from 1954 to 2019. It can be seen that the data on the most recent crisis of the Taiwan Strait is not included on the ICB database, so this research will compile the relevant data by consolidating timely news reports and information collected from government databases, such as Brown and Lewis’ (2023) compilation of data from the ROC’s Ministry of National Defence. This will be used to create a timeline of events to analyse in order to determine which causal factors have been significant to the avoidance of war across the Taiwan Strait from 2022 to 2023 despite there being over 3000 violations of Taiwan’s ADIZ by the PRC in this period, according to a record from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

Economic Interdependence

Zhang proposes that even when trade interdependence increases between parties like the PRC and the ROC or the PRC and the US, military force remains an attractive tool for foreign policy. Trade data from the 1995-96 crisis supports this as it shows that even though trade relations between the PRC and the ROC were increasing yearly, military brinkmanship still occurred. As data collected by the Institute of Economic Research at Hitotsubashi University shows, from 1995 to 2000, exports from China to Taiwan increased from 9.9 billion Chinese yuan to 131 billion Chinese yuan with no dips or changes in the trend of increased trade volumes around the time of the crisis. Similarly, in the same time period, imports from China to Taiwan increased from 81 billion Chinese yuan to 194 billion Chinese yuan. The lack of correlation between increased trade and increased conflict escalation suggests that economic interdependence is likely not a significant factor in the escalation or de-escalation of conflict across the Taiwan Strait. Zhang argues that “in zero-sum bargaining over territory, economic interdependence may constrain military brinkmanship, precisely because both sides are trying to avoid war” (2018: 122) but trade data does not corroborate this notion. Differently from 1995-96, when crisis erupted across the Taiwan Strait in 2022, trade relations between China and Taiwan decreased. Trade data from the Bureau of Trade in Taiwan shows a decline in trade volumes from 2021 to 2023, with annual trade dropping by 1.6% between 2021 and 2022, and more drastically, by 19.1% from 2022 to December 2023 following the increase in military drills across the Taiwan Strait. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely a major factor of this decline in trade across the Taiwan Strait. It is also possible that the conflict across the Taiwan Strait negatively impacted the economic relationship between the PRC and the ROC, but this data does not demonstrate whether Zhang’s assertion that military brinkmanship can be constrained by economic interdependence. Whether economic interdependence is a significant causal mechanism in this study will be assessed. While there is evidence that economics play an important role within the Taiwan Strait conflict, its impact on conflict de-escalation is not clear.

Theory

This paper employs the theoretical framework of deterrence theory. Deterrence theory is a central concept in international relations pertaining to how the threat of force influences the behaviour of states. Deterrence is a strategy aimed at preventing potential aggressors from taking hostile actions by convincing them that the costs of initiating conflict would outweigh any potential gains. This framework is particularly pertinent when examining the PRC-ROC-

US triad and its dynamics during various Taiwan Strait Crises because deterrence was frequently used by the US and the ROC in retaliation to the PRC's brinkmanship. Brinkmanship and deterrence are closely related, particularly within the context of the Taiwan Strait Crises. When brinkmanship is used to achieve strategic objectives, deterrence is often a retaliatory mechanism used to dissuade the continuation of conflict through brinkmanship by presenting a threat to the initial instigator of conflict such that continuing the conflict holds an undesirable risk to that state. Deterrence in the Taiwan Strait Crises has been a reason for both de-escalation and escalation of conflict among the triad.

Deterrence theory assumes that states are rational actors, carefully weighing the costs and benefits of their actions. Morgan (1977) delves into the intricacies of rational decision-making within the framework of deterrence theory. Morgan emphasises the assumption that decision-makers within states are rational actors. Rationality, in this context, implies that these actors are capable of making logical decisions based on a careful assessment of costs and benefits. According to Morgan, deterrence operates on the premise that states calculate the potential costs and benefits associated with specific actions, especially in the context of using military force. Decision-makers engage in a strategic calculus to determine whether the perceived gains of aggression outweigh the potential costs. Deterrence, from Morgan's perspective, is centred on a state's ability to influence the perceptions of costs and consequences by potential aggressors, leading them to reconsider their offensive actions. If the costs are perceived as too high or the consequences too severe, rational decision-makers would be dissuaded from pursuing aggressive actions (Morgan, 1977). Rationality comes into play when states evaluate threats and promises made by others. Stein argues that "if decision-makers are rational, then deterrence is irrelevant" because a deterring party knows that its adversary is rational enough to use just enough force for persuasion and no more than that (1979: 303). Morgan concludes that decision-makers are irrational and that it is irrationality of states that explains the existence of deterrence in international relations (Stein, 1979: 303).

States must assess the credibility of the deterrent threats and promises, considering the capabilities and motivations of the deterring state. Credibility is a crucial aspect of communication in international relations. Powell (2006) asserts that if the target state doubts the commitment of the possessing state to employ its military capabilities, deterrence is likely

to fail. According to Jervis (1978), the state can exploit another if it is able to credibly threaten its relationship with another if its demands are not met. Credibility is therefore about convincing the adversary that the deterring state will follow through on its threats. In relation to this credibility, states must actually possess the military capabilities necessary to carry out deterrent action for its threats if necessary.

Jervis (1982) highlights the inherent challenges of communication when states use deterrence, particularly the difficulties in conveying clear and accurate signals of intent. Jervis (1982) argues that because state leaders cannot see how their adversaries perceive their intentions in deterrence, and do not make any effort to do so, deterrence can fail, and deterrence strategy cannot be effectively implemented because an accurate assessment of the adversaries fears cannot be made. In the same paper, Jervis (1982) recognises that states may intentionally choose to be ambiguous in their communication of intent in order to enhance deterrence. Ambiguity can serve as a strategic tool, allowing states to maintain flexibility and keep adversaries uncertain about their true intentions. During the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises, the US was ambiguous about its commitment to the protection of Taiwan's offshore islands because these islands were not of strategic importance to it. The islands did, importantly, serve to maintain the ROC's morale at the time. The US made use deterrence by threatening its commitment to defending Taiwan in the case of a direct attack by the PRC, however it remained ambiguous about its intentions towards the offshore islands. Deterrence in this way was unsuccessful in stopping the PRC from using brinkmanship during the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crises. Its ambiguity about the protection of the offshore islands was not effective for deterrence because it allowed the PRC to bombard the offshore islands with little worry that these islands truly mattered enough to the US to defend them.

Methodology

The independent variable is the “phenomenon that bring[s] about change in the dependent variable” (Panke, 2018: 7). In this research, there is variance on the independent variable. Based on the existing literature, 2 independent variables are identified for investigation in the study. These are:

1. negotiation and cooperation,

2. military defence deterrence,

The independent variable is (theoretically) responsible for the de-escalation and retreat from the brink of war across the Taiwan Strait.

The dependent variable is the “phenomenon constituting the effect of interest” (Panke, 2018: 7). In this study, the dependent variable is the avoidance of war or de-escalation of conflict following acts of brinkmanship between the PRC, the ROC and the US.

Operationalising the variables is “making decisions on how to empirically measure the variables of interest” (Panke, 2018: 18). Simply, the dependent variable can be measured by the avoidance of full-scale warfare between the parties involved, the avoidance of an invasion or attack of one state by another state party. Further the dependent variable is measured as the ROCs ongoing separateness from the PRC.

The independent variables are operationalised as follows:

1. cooperation and negotiation between states will be measured by formal and informal measures taken by parties to resolve the conflict across the Strait diplomatically through verbal discussions and agreements;
2. military defence deterrence is measured by a party employing retaliatory measures to brinkmanship with the purpose of deterring further escalation of conflict by the initial perpetrator of violence or coercion, such as military deployment, military exercises, threat to use conventional and nuclear military power. While the employment of military deterrence can account for de-escalation of conflict, it is simultaneously a means of escalating brinkmanship by rejecting the demands of the initial perpetrator.

Identifying the causal paths that connect the IVs to the DV will allow the researcher to ascertain what mechanism has been most effect in the de-escalation of tension and conflict across the Taiwan Strait.

This research utilises mainly secondary sources as a data source. The paper also utilises news accounts of the recent events across the Taiwan Strait, both Western media and Eastern media, to gather day-by-day accounts of the events as they happened in order to form a comprehensive collection of chronological data of the Fourth Crisis of the Taiwan Strait. Government

documents from Chinese embassies, Chinese and Taiwanese government websites and Taiwanese government data that provides details of flyovers and other Chinese military activity in Taiwan's ADIZ. Information from these sources will be used in conjunction with the news reports and journal articles to form an understanding of the events of the Taiwan Strait from 2022 to 2023. Journal articles and government documents such as Halperin's paper for the US Department of Defence will be used to access detailed information about the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. This paper will look at accounts of decision-making from state leaders in the form of government reports and news reports in order to trace and identify causal mechanisms that led to the variance of outcomes within the DV of this study. There are limitations to this study, such as limited access to Chinese documents as a result of the language barrier, however some government and trade data websites written in Mandarin have been translated using Google Translate. This may slightly misrepresent some of the information gathered as direct translation from native speakers is inaccessible, but Google Translate is useful in gaining some understanding of data tables written in Chinese and official government communication.

Research Problem

The US has utilised its relationship with the ROC as a strategic bargaining tool in its dealings with the PRC. In recent decades, scholars have asserted a decline in US hegemonic power across the globe and recognised a simultaneous rise in the PRC's power economically, socially and politically within various nodes of the global community. The PRC has spread its influence to many parts of the global South through its Belt and Road Initiative, which has contributed to the construction of infrastructure development in a number of developing countries. A war waged by the PRC to reunify Taiwan with the mainland has been and remains a possible outcome of the cross-Strait conflict, and it is likely that the USA will become involved, though the degree to which they may be is unclear. The United States and the rest of the international community recognises the importance of a peaceful resolution to the PRC-ROC conflict. Taiwan's geographic location is very important strategically for many of its neighbours, and its "loss" to the PRC would have a number of implications (Mitchell, 2017: 385). According to Mitchell, the reunification of China and Taiwan would have serious implications for US hegemonic, protective maritime power over the East Asian region, breaching the "American defence arc" (2017: 385) that extends from Alaska through Japan and the ROC, all the way to

the Philippines. Japan's oil trade would be impaired by Chinese occupation of Taiwan as its imports pass "within striking range of bases located on Taiwan" (Mitchell, 2017: 385). Additionally, tensions between the PRC and Japan would likely rise as a result of realisation of the One-China policy as the occupation of Taiwan by the PRC for military purposes would "exasperate the long-standing historical animosities between the PRC and Japan and likely foster a regional arms race between Japan and China" (Mitchell, 2017: 385).

Prevention of war is unsustainable if the triad relationship across the Taiwan Strait continues to be as volatile as it has been for the past 70 years. While the interference of the US remains a significant factor of the continued tension in the Taiwan Strait, its withdrawal from the conflict would not resolve the threat of full-scale war between the PRC and the ROC. This is because the support for Taiwanese independence and the sentiment against Beijing on the island continue to grow. The ROC under President Tsai Ying-wen and several of her predecessors has made clear its resistance to the One China policy. US non-interference is therefore not a significant mechanism to prevent war across the Taiwan Strait.

The recurrence of serious military crises as a result of brinkmanship and retaliatory deterrence demonstrates that war may indeed be imminent. Identifying the mechanisms for the de-escalation of conflict during the Four Taiwan Strait Crises may reveal the best, most viable ways to prevent war across the Taiwan Strait as the US has committed its support to Taiwan.

Research Questions

The research is orientated around 3 research questions:

1. What explains why the PRC-ROC-US triad avoided full-scale war during the 1954-55, 1958, 1995-96, and 2022-23 Taiwan Strait Crises?
2. What mechanisms were causally significant in the de-escalation of conflict during these crises?
3. How effective has brinkmanship been for the PRC in obtaining its strategic objections in each of the Taiwan Strait Crises?

Research Aims

This research aims to explore and identify the causal mechanisms that are most significant in the PRC-ROC-US triad avoiding full-scale war across the Taiwan Strait despite numerous instances of strategic brinkmanship.

This research aims to identify what mechanisms the PRC, the ROC and the United States have employed in the de-escalation of conflict since the 1950s. As the most recent practices of brinkmanship from the PRC towards the ROC have not been greatly explored in scholarly literature yet, this research seeks to build upon pre-existing literature and fill a recent gap in explaining which mechanisms have been most significant in stepping back from the brink of war across the Strait.

Rationale/Justification

Much of IR scholarship has sought to answer why wars occur and how peace can be maintained in the international system. This research focuses on the specific case of the Taiwan Strait Crises of 1954-55, 1958, 1995-96 and 2022-23, in order to find what diplomatic or military tools were utilised towards avoiding full-scale war. This work is relevant to IR because the East Asian region is a very critical region of the world. Significant trade routes lie within and near the unstable Taiwan Strait. The maintenance of stability and avoidance of conflict in this region is therefore crucial to regional peace and economic stability. This research is timely, it addresses the question on the prevention of war in a historically complex geopolitical region. It addresses prominent, present and pressing issues within contemporary IR.

Chapter Two will analyse the brinkmanship used by the PRC against the ROC and the US in the First Crisis in 1954, and the Second Crisis in 1958. The goal is to determine which causal mechanisms were responsible for the de-escalation of conflict across the Taiwan Strait and, ultimately, the avoidance of war.

Chapter Two: Bombardment

This chapter analyses of the First and Second Crises of the Taiwan Strait, with the primary objective of identifying the causal mechanisms that led to the de-escalation of conflict during these critical periods. Each part of the chapter begins with a historical examination of the events surrounding each crisis. There will be an exploration of the long-term and immediate causes that precipitated these crises. Particular emphasis is placed on explaining the pivotal role of US involvement, which significantly exacerbated tensions between the PRC and the ROC during both crises. Following this, the analysis will shift focus to an exploration of the employment of brinkmanship by the PRC and the US-ROC alliance. This section will look into the strategic military manoeuvres and tactics employed by these actors in order to show how brinkmanship was used as a tool for shaping the conflict across the Taiwan Strait. Concluding the chapter, there will be an analysis of the factors that contributed to the de-escalation of conflict, thereby averting full-scale war. By examining the diplomatic, military, and geopolitical decisions and events during each crisis, this analysis seeks to provide specific insights into the factors that influenced the resolution of the Taiwan Strait Crises. This chapter finds that nuclear deterrence, extended deterrence, military power imbalance, appeasement and concession were among the factors that played a significant role in de-escalating cross-Strait conflict.

The First Crisis of the Taiwan Strait (1954-1955)

1. Long-term Causes of Crisis

1.1. Ideological Cold War Context

When considering the First and Second Taiwan Straits Crises, it is important to recognise the context of these events as components of the Cold War. The Cold War was a geopolitical, ideological, and military standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union that lasted from the end of World War II in 1945 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was characterised by intense rivalry, but while the US and the Soviet Union engaged in brinkmanship during this period direct military conflict between the two superpowers was avoided. The conflict arose primarily due to ideological differences between the democratic-capitalist principles embraced by the US and its allies, and the communist ideology backed by

the Soviet Union. During this period, the global community was characterised by bipolarity, which refers to the division of the world into two major power blocs led by the US and the Soviet Union. The strategic aims of the US in its Cold War foreign and defence policy were largely shaped by the containment doctrine. The doctrine aimed to prevent the spread of communism and Soviet influence globally by supporting democratic governments, engaging in economic aid, and maintaining military alliances.

Directly prior to the beginning of the Cold War period, the Chiang Kai-shek's KMT government was a trusted ally of the United States and perceived as the legitimate representation of China (Zuo, 2018: 151). The containment of communism in this region of the world was of great importance to US foreign relations at this time, and Mao Zedong's CCP government winning the Chinese Civil war against Chiang in 1949 was a serious threat to the US containment policy. The ROC government represented a "free" China to the West (Sun, 1994: 92). Taiwan and the KMT were also viewed by the US as "the largest, active, committed, military, anti-Communist force in east Asia" capable of withstanding the spread of communism (Rawnsley, 2000 cited in Zuo: 2018: 152). There was great fear from the West of the region succumbing to communism as the Soviet Union strengthened its relationship with the CCP. Taiwan and several islands off the shore of the Chinese mainland were controlled by the KMT at the end of the Chinese Civil war, and therefore it was important to the US that these areas did not fall to CCP rule – the US policy towards Taiwan at this point was to protect it from a military takeover (Zuo, 2018: 151). It was believed that the usurpation of Taiwan's offshore islands would allow the PRC to invade Taiwan and disband the ROC.

1.2. US Interference and Protection of Taiwan

The US commitment to protecting Taiwan was not always assured. In 1950, the Truman administration sought to abandon the ROC, regardless of the perceived "'fall' of China to communism" (Sun, 1994: 92) as it did not feel Taiwan was "important enough" to justify expending "scarce military resources" (Zuo, 2018: 152). However, the beginning of the Korean War in June 1950, in which North Korea invaded the South in an attempt to unify the country under communist rule, is considered to be what "saved" (Matsumoto, 2012: 78) Taiwan from US abandonment. Truman changed US foreign policy on Taiwan by stopping the CCP from claiming the island as a part of the PRC. In July 1950, the US sent the Seventh Fleet of its Navy to the Taiwan Strait as a preventative measure. Extensive military and economic aid from the

US to the ROC continued (Matsumoto, 2012: 78). From the perspective of the PRC, the deployment of the Seventh Fleet was threatening, and it revealed US hypocrisy. Truman reneged on the US intention of not involving itself in the conflict across the Taiwan Strait. In a statement in January 1950 Truman had stated that the US would “not pursue a course which will lead to involvement in the civil conflict in China” or “provide military aid or advice” to Taiwan (Sun, 1994: 94-95).

The transition from the Truman administration to that of President Eisenhower in January of 1953 was significant as US foreign policy towards Taiwan and Chiang Kai-shek changed dramatically. The Truman administration had reluctantly continued its protection of Taiwan from the Chinese communists and carried out a policy of “neutralising” the Taiwan Strait (Matsumoto, 2012: 80). This was done by placing the US Navy’s Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait to keep conflict from breaking out. In contrast, when the Eisenhower administration took over, it *deneutralised* the Taiwan Strait by completely removing the US military blockade in the Taiwan Strait and adopted a policy referred to as “unleashing Chiang Kai-shek” (Matsumoto, 2012: 80; Chang, 1953). Chiang aimed to forcefully reclaim the mainland, so deneutralising the Taiwan Strait made the region more susceptible to conflict. It is important to note that the mainland lacked a navy after the KMT fled to Taiwan in 1949 (Yang and Mao, 2016: 9). Therefore, backed by the US, the KMT government had greater offensive and defensive capabilities in the Taiwan Strait.

The policy of “unleashing Chiang Kai-shek” was accompanied by the removal of the US Seventh Fleet from the Taiwan Strait. The Seventh Fleet had previously been responsible for ensuring that no conflict would erupt between the PRC and ROC. Its removal, according to Matsumoto, was therefore a “psychological tactic” intended to apply “indirect” pressure (2012: 80) on the PRC and its military to end the Korean War. US Ambassador to Taipei, Karl Rankin, had indicated to Chiang that the US military aid to Taiwan was to now be used in an offensive manner rather than defensive as it had been during the Truman administration. By removing the US Navy’s Seventh Fleet, there was no longer a measure in place by the US to stop the ROC from attacking the mainland (Matsumoto, 2012: 81). Additionally, in a later conversation between the Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Arthur Radford, it is suggested that Chiang’s military forces could conduct an invasion of the mainland under US command (Matsumoto, 2012: 81). According to a June 1953 conversation between President Chiang and Radford, the US was considering the logistics of executing an extensive invasion of the

mainland, and further meetings with US Vice President Nixon late in 1953 further fuelled Chiang's determination to perform an attack on the mainland (Matsumoto, 2012: 81-82). According to Li, the Eisenhower administration aided the ROC in "carrying on a war of harassment" (1991: 74) towards the PRC by supporting raids on mainland coasts, guerilla military operations, dropping propaganda leaflets on the mainland and seizing and firing at vessels going towards the mainland.

Evidently, US involvement played a significant role in exacerbating tensions and increasing the propensity for conflict across the Taiwan Strait. To the PRC, the US was interfering in its civil matters. The US asserted non-involvement in the cross-Strait conflict before the Korean War began, only to deploy the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait thereafter, and later, under the Eisenhower administration, its leadership was expressing its support of an US-backed attack of the mainland by the ROC. The US-ROC alliance was preventative to the PRC's goals of liberating the Taiwanese islands from the KMT's regime. Under the Eisenhower administration, relations between the US and the ROC strengthened significantly as the result of visits to the island by high-ranking US leaders, such as Nixon in 1953 and Dulles in 1954 (Li, 1991: 74).

2. Immediate Causes of Crisis

2.1. Mutual Defence Treaty and SEATO

There was serious consideration by the Eisenhower administration to enter into a Mutual Defence Treaty with the ROC in 1954, which coincided with the development of multilateral security treaties by the US with various south-east Asian countries in attempt to contain the spread of communism (Li, 1991: 74). Introduced here was the threat that Taiwan may be added to the new Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) that US Secretary of State John Dulles formed in 1954 – a Mutual Defence Treaty to squander "communist aggression" in Asia (Li, 1991: 74). Chiang Kai-shek was adamant that Taiwan be added to SEATO, citing the importance of the island and its offshore territories to regional defence against communist regimes and feeling threatened by the increase in conflict across the Taiwan Strait. From the perspective of the PRC, the addition of the ROC to any multilateral defence treaties was an infringement on Chinese sovereignty as well as an act of "military containment" because a Mutual Defence Treaty prevents the PRC from reclaiming the Taiwan as a part of its

representation of China (Matsumoto, 2012: 85). Additionally, the Mutual Defence Treaty between the US and the ROC would “provide the momentum for a *de jure* separation” of the Taiwanese island from the PRC-governed mainland, thus forming a “two China” system (Huei, 2010: 3). This was a threat to the national goals of the PRC. As a result of this threat, the PLA shelled the offshore island of Kinmen on 3 September 1954.

3. Brinkmanship

The timing of the bombardment of the Kinmen Island coincided with Dulles arriving in Manila to continue talks about SEATO extending its protection to the Taiwanese islands. According to PRC documents, Kinmen was bombarded by seven thousand rounds of shells that day (Li, 1991: 83). In shelling the offshore islands, the PRC was engaging in an act of brinkmanship: in order to deter its adversaries from forming a mutual defence alliance which could derail its goals to “liberate Taiwan” (Matsumoto, 2012: 84) from ROC rule, the PRC strategically bombarded offshore islands that the US had deemed unimportant and excluded from the area it committed to protecting for the ROC.

The PRC’s brinkmanship risked instigating a larger conflict between itself and the ROC and it can be argued that this is because of the willingness of President Chiang to go to war over control of the mainland. In addition, US support bolstered Chiang’s confidence that the ROC could be successful in a war with the PRC over the mainland. I argue that the PRC was willing to accept the risk of triggering full-scale war through brinkmanship because it felt that war was less likely for a number of reasons. The PRC was aware that its adversaries in the US were incredibly apprehensive about becoming increasingly involved in a conflict across the Taiwan Strait, particularly over offshore islands whose strategic importance was controversial among

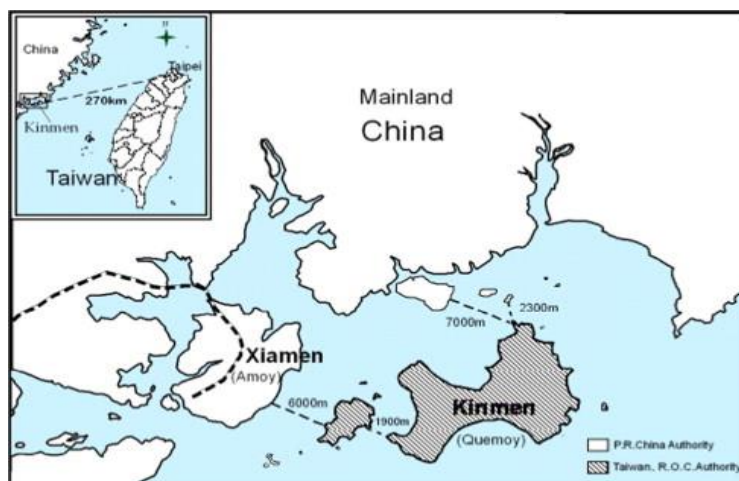


Figure 1. Kinmen, controlled by the ROC. (Tsai and Chiang, 2015)

US leadership (Li, 1991). The US had made it clear that it would only protect the offshore islands in the case that the PRC attacked the main island of Taiwan as well (Li, 1991: 164). Therefore, the PRC could bombard the offshore islands without risking US retaliation due to its policies towards the islands. In addition, the PRC felt that the islands would be exceptionally difficult for the US to defend if they did choose to retaliate because of how close they lie to the east of the mainland. Figure 1 shows the close proximity between the coast of the mainland and the offshore island of Kinmen.

Because the PRC were “ill-prepared” for an attack of the Taiwanese island (Lilley and Downs, 1997: 3), its use of brinkmanship would certainly apply pressure on the ROC and the US to re-evaluate their decision to adopt a mutual defence agreement. Prior to resorting to brinkmanship, the PRC had made efforts to communicate to the US about the Taiwan issue through diplomatic talks, such as the 1954 Geneva Conference. These attempts were met with hostility from US leadership. The power the US held within the UN also did not bode well for the PRC, with the organisation showing no interest in preventing US involvement in the Taiwan Strait issue. Neither the PRC nor the US wanted to go to war with the other as the risks of doing so could be devastating, especially in a global environment characterised by nuclear conflict. While the PRC did not possess nuclear weapons, it was perceived at the beginning of the First Crisis that the PRC would receive extended nuclear deterrence from the Soviet Union.

In December 1954, the US signed a Mutual Defence Treaty – separate from the SEATO agreement – to demonstrate its support of the ROC. The agreement ensured that Chiang would not take any more actions of military offense against the mainland. As the PRC had begun its shelling of Kinmen as a result of the prospect of a Mutual Defence Treaty between the US and the ROC, the affirmation of a Mutual Defence Treaty only worsened the crisis. On 10 January 1955, the PRC raided the offshore island of Dachen and soon after the island of Ichiang. This led to the ROC performing retaliatory air strikes on mainland ports and shipping areas, but the US refused to aid in the protection of Dachen due to its long proximity from the island of Taiwan (Chang, 1988: 102). The PRC was careful not to attack any areas with US forces so as to avoid escalating to full-scale war or US invasion (Li, 1991: 232). In attempts to end the

crisis, the US began using brinkmanship as a way to deter PRC military activity. This retaliation and interference by the US increased the risk that the conflict could escalate to full-scale war.

On 20 January, Dulles, under the orders of Eisenhower, told the ROC Foreign Minister, George Yeh, that the US would publicly commit to defending the Kinmen Island if the ROC withdrew its forces from Dachen; this was a complete turnaround from the original US policy of not protecting any of the offshore islands, and this was a risky manoeuvre as an act of brinkmanship the US. Changing the policy could further exacerbate the crisis and lead to direct conflict between the triad over the protection of the offshore islands which were undoubtedly a part of China's sovereign territory. Eisenhower had stated that "even if his actions should be interpreted as acts of war," he would commit to protecting the vital interests of the US, which included protecting Taiwan and its most important offshore islands if the PLA's actions looked like a prelude to an attack on Taiwan itself (Chang, 1981: 103-104). Chiang agreed to withdraw from Dachen on 31 January with the private promise that the US would defend Kinmen and Matsu, evacuating twenty-five thousand military and eighteen thousand civilian personnel (Chiang, 1981: 104; Li, 1991: 237).

4. De-Escalation of Conflict

Late in 1954, Dulles had begun to plan a ceasefire with other United Nations countries to neutralise the offshore islands, however, neither the ROC nor the PRC would agree to the UN ceasefire agreement. It was only when the US began to make use of nuclear deterrence that the posture of the PRC changed. The PRC and the Soviet Union signed a thirty-year Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in 1950 which stated that if one of the participating parties were to be attacked by Japan or its allies, the other would "immediately render military and other assistance by all means at its disposal" (Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, 1950). Despite the US being an ally of Japan from 1951, according to Sun (1994: 137), Taiwan was not of strategic importance to the Soviet Union, and they did not provide the PRC with "tangible support" in the offshore crisis. It became clear to both the PRC and the US that the Soviet Union would not offer the PRC extended deterrence to counter US nuclear power (Chang, 1988: 110).

The US asserted early in 1955 that it would use atomic weapons if war broke out across the Taiwan Strait (Li, 1991: 244). While threats to use nuclear weapons could have been

inflammatory to the crisis, the goal of nuclear deterrence was to intimidate the PRC and deter them from any further aggression as well as retreat back from the brink. Reports by Li (1991) and Sun (1994) indicate that the PRC was doubtful that the US would actually risk escalating the crisis to a full-scale war for Taiwan with Mao labelling them as “paper tigers” (Sun, 1994: 137). Despite these suspicions of a lack of credible deterrence, the threats of nuclear deterrence steered the PRC’s inclination away from brinkmanship towards encouraging greater dialogue and improved Sino-US relations. In response, Premier Zhou stated in April 1955 that he was open to negotiation and discussion regarding the cross-Strait crisis (Sun, 1994: 137). Dulles soon expressed his willingness to begin diplomatic discussions with PRC leadership and several months later, ambassadorial talks between the US and the PRC started in Geneva (Sun, 1994: 138). The First Crisis of the Taiwan Strait was over at this point and attacks on the offshore islands ceased.

It is therefore evident that nuclear deterrence played an important role in ending the First Crisis of the Taiwan Strait, particularly because the PRC were aware of the dangers of nuclear weapons, had no nuclear weapons or support from the Soviet Union as a nuclear power. When the US used nuclear deterrence and threatened to escalate the conflict to full-scale war in its practice of brinkmanship, it effectively frightened the PRC back from the brink. War was avoided as a result of the threat to escalate the conflict using weapons of mass destruction with leaders such as Eisenhower assuring the global community of the US “nuclear threat” in a 16 March 1955 press conference following Dulles’ statement the day prior that the US could use “some tactical small atomic weapons” in the case that war erupted across the Taiwan Strait (Huei, 2011: 162-163). The imbalance in military power in this case effectively caused one side to retreat from the brink. The PRC’s lack of nuclear weapons and extended deterrence through Soviet support despite its Treaty of Mutual Assistance allowed the US to successfully intimidate its leaders into concession and propose bilateral negotiation to de-escalate the crisis. Further evidence to suggest that nuclear deterrence played a significant role in affecting the PRC’s concession and retreat from the brink was President Mao’s decision to develop the PRC’s nuclear weapons capabilities in 1955 following the end of the crisis (Tellis, 2022: 10). This was done to safeguard the PRC’s national security and avoid vulnerability to nuclear

attack. Mao's decision ensured that the PRC had bargaining power within the emerging Cold War order.

The Soviet Union advised the PRC to accept the UN ceasefire agreement, so it is also possible that this played a lesser role in influencing the PRC's decision to stop its bombardment of the offshore islands. This persuasion exists in conjunction with the affirmation that the PRC would not receive the support of the Soviet Union in the case of a nuclear attack from the US. It can therefore be argued that the most influential factors in preventing the conflict from resulting in the outbreak of war was US nuclear deterrence and nuclear power imbalance between states.

The Second Crisis of the Taiwan Strait (1958)

1. Long-term Causes of Crisis

1.1. Remnants of 1954-55

Shortly after the First Taiwan Strait Crisis was resolved, tensions rose across the Taiwan Strait once again in 1958. The form of brinkmanship utilised was again bombardment of offshore islands and still, there was a lack of tangible Soviet support for the PRC despite its verbal support when Soviet leaders "wish[ed] them [the PRC] success" (Sun, 1994: 173). Differently, however, the PRC had developed its nuclear capabilities. The US remained heavily involved in the cross-Strait conflict. It still viewed the protection of the Chiang's KMT government on the Taiwanese island as vital to the containment of communism in the East and provided the ROC with an average of \$260 million in military aid on an annual basis from 1955 to 1958 (Sun, 1994: 144) which consisted of military end-items, logistics and training assistance (Plischke, 1988). Scholar from the PRC, He Di, wrote in 1990 that the 1958 crisis was "a logical outcome of the first" (Huei, 2011: 5) because the issues that propelled the 1954 crisis had not been fully resolved. War was avoided during the First Crisis but the political causes of the shelling of the offshore islands were not resolved despite the ongoing Sino-US bilateral talks. Mao's still had goals of *liberating* Taiwan. Chiang seemed to still have hope for an eventual reclamation of the mainland (Sun, 1994: 145). Both Mao and Chiang were opposed to the idea of an international community with "two Chinas" in it. Similar to the First Crisis, Halperin and Tsou argue that the purpose of the bombardment by Mao was again to probe the US and the

ROC into agreeing to the terms of his strategic and national interests regarding reunification but doing so without risking full-scale war with the US (Huei, 2011: 11). As was the case with the First Crisis, the US had not explicitly ensured the protection of the ROC's offshore islands despite its Mutual Defence Treaty with the ROC.

1.2. PRC and ROC Military Attacks

As agreed at the tail end of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, the PRC and the US began ambassadorial talks in Geneva from August 1955 but excluded the ROC from participating. The global opinion of the rightful representation of the One China was beginning to shift in favour of the PRC. Although there had been a ceasefire agreement between the triad, some artillery fire was exchanged between the PRC and the ROC at "very low levels" in the period between August 1955 and July 1958, with most of the shells fired containing propaganda instead of heavy explosives (Halperin, 1966: 1). Chiang had, since 1955, "heavily reinforced the offshore islands" by positioning 100 000 of his troops and investing \$500 million (Sun, 1994: 145) likely anticipating that the PRC's reunification goals would involve attacks or invasions of the islands. Chiang occasionally carried out raids on the mainland and disrupted shipping, actions unauthorised and disapproved of by US leadership. ROC leadership was beginning to grow mistrustful of and frustrated by the US, who would not explicitly commit to protecting its offshore islands or support its goals to reclaim the mainland – the ROC sought a "violent revolution on the mainland" (Huei, 2011: 193). The US was also growing frustrated with Chiang, his resistance to wavering from his ambitions of invading the mainland, his refusal to abandon the offshore islands and his actions military raids and harassment of the mainland. The straining relationship and disagreements between the US and the ROC may have been a factor in Mao's decision to bombard the offshore islands. The PRC recognised the potential risks that could come from bombarding the offshore islands once again because it had experienced the threat of nuclear war in the First Crisis.

1.3. Mistrust, Hostility and Mounting Tension

By 1958, PRC sentiment towards US involvement led to the buildup of military power by the ROC, assisted largely by US aid, resulting in a security dilemma. In international relations theory, a security dilemma occurs when the uncertainty of an adversary's capabilities and intentions leads to suspicion of each other and continuous armament to bolster national security

which unintentionally leads to a more threatening security environment. The PRC felt mistrustful of the US leadership's commitment to the ongoing negotiations, using US prisoners of war that it harboured as leverage to keep the US at the negotiating table (Huei, 2011: 187). Doing so increased the hostility between the two sides. At this time, similar to the geopolitical climate of 1954, the PRC were still communist adversaries to the US and its reunification with Taiwan posed the threat of the spread communism throughout the East Asian region. According to Sun (1994: 148) the PRC harboured negative sentiment towards the US. It perceived the US as "imperialists" (Halperin, 1966: 21) who undermined China's territorial sovereignty, evident in a speech given by Peng Chen, the mayor of Beijing, on 17 July 1958. Chen stated that the PRC would "liberate Taiwan" from "the US imperialists" and referred to it as "our territory" (Halperin 1966: 21). During the Sino-US ambassadorial talks, the US consistently shut down proposals by the PRC to strengthen the bilateral relations between them. Each of the relationships within the triad appeared to be characterised by mistrust and hostility. This likely factored into the PRC's decision to resume brinkmanship across the Taiwan Strait. Mao began to harden the PRC's stance on the offshore islands as Chiang had feared. There was discourse within the ROC army about a "counterattack" should the PRC invade the Kinmen and Matsu islands, with belief that the US Formosa Resolution would assure US support of an ROC "counter-offensive" (Huei, 2011: 215-216). The US repeatedly urging Chiang to reduce the number of active personnel and divisions in the ROC army and focus on reserves (Huei, 2011: 216). While the US eventually publicly criticised Chiang's military buildup on the offshore islands as "foolish," (Gurtov, 1976: 68) this buildup was funded by the US itself. Therefore, despite the US disapproval of Chiang's activities, it maintained its support of the ROC regardless of the impact this had on cross-Strait tension. Chiang's plans to eventually reclaim the mainland were known to Mao, perhaps as a result of intelligence reports from the US or Taiwan. This may have impacted the PRC's mistrustful perception of the ROC's military activities towards the mainland as a threat of eventual invasion backed by US aid.

US sentiment towards the PRC was outwardly hostile. Despite engaging in ambassadorial talks, in his 1957 speech, Dulles asserted that the US had no intentions of forming "any kind of relationship with the PRC" and that the US sought "the eventual dissolution of the Chinese and all other dictatorships" (Gurtov, 1976: 68). This speech had shortly proceeded the announcement that the US would be placing tactical nuclear missiles in Taiwan and building a \$25 million air base on the island for the US and the ROC air forces to utilise (Gurtov, 1976: 68). By January 1958, "nuclear-armed Matador cruise missiles were deployed on Taiwan, less

than 200 miles from mainland China” (Norris, Arkin and Burr, 1999: 30). These offensive political and military actions are arguably a significant factor that contributed to the “provocation” (Huei, 2011: 230) of the PRC by the US and contributed to the onset of Mao planning the second bombardment of the offshore islands.

2. Immediate Causes of Crisis

2.1. Breakdown of Ambassadorial Talks

During Sino-US talks, the PRC refused to resolve conflict “without resorting to the threat or the use of force” (Huei, 2011: 187). The reason for this was US refusal to agree to the “principle of noninterference” in the PRC-ROC conflict (Gurtov, 1976: 69). The ambassadorial talks were stagnating with very little progress coming from the negotiations about the Taiwan Strait issue. By the 73rd meeting on December 1957, the US proposed that the level of Sino-US talks be downgraded (Huei, 2011: 189). The PRC was opposed to the breakdown of Sino-US talks as they were meant to be a channel through which the PRC could work towards reunification with US cooperation. The PRC repeatedly demanded that the Sino-US talks be resumed between December 1957 and August 1958, but the US delayed its compliance. The issue was that US leadership had stalled in replacing its representative for the Geneva talks after Alexis Johnson was removed from the diplomatic post and placed elsewhere. Failure to replace the representative for bilateral talks after several months and suspending the talks was perceived by the PRC as a breach of the agreement upon which the talks were founded. Mao perceived the US attitude towards the talks “as a lack of sincerity” in mending the relationship between the US and the PRC (Sun, 1994: 151). The ambassadorial talks were thereafter abandoned indefinitely. The PRC's insistence to resolve conflict through the use of force highlights their strategic orientation toward coercive tactics and reflects an offensive realist perspective where states are driven by a pursuit of power and security. The introduction of ambassadorial talks was an important aspect of de-escalating conflict during the First Crisis and improving the hostile relationship between the PRC and the US. It is therefore clear that the abandonment of the ambassadorial talks by the US was offensive to the PRC. Shortly following the abandonment of Sino-US talks, the PRC resumed its bombardment of the islands as a way to forcefully bring the US back into cooperation and risking the outbreak of full-scale war.

3. Brinkmanship and Crisis Escalation

The Second Taiwan Strait Crisis erupted on 23 August 1958, almost four years after the onset of the First Taiwan Strait, when the PRC once again began its bombardment of the Kinmen and Matsu islands, firing over 20 000 rounds of explosives (Gordon, 1985: 644). Additionally, the PRC conducted an artillery and naval attack that blockaded Kinmen in order to deprive the island of supplies and force surrender. The US believed that the PRC had been “provoked” to bombard the islands by the ROC’s military actions on the mainland (Halperin, 1966: 103) such as “commando-type raids” on the mainland in October 1957 and the firing on PRC merchant ships that passed the Kinmen islands (Halperin, 1966: 10-11). While the ROC’s military offense was a significant factor in building tension and mistrust across the Taiwan Strait, it is clear that the immediate provocation for PRC brinkmanship was the abandonment of the ambassadorial talks. According to Gurtov, one of Mao’s primary goals in bombarding the offshore islands was to “channel perceived US aggressiveness back into the diplomatic arena” (1976: 88) by drawing the US back into ambassadorial talks. Evidently, US involvement in cross-Strait relations in the 1950s played a key role in escalating tension and further dividing the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Following the initial bombardment, the US took up a more defensive military position and encouraged the ROC to do the same, sending reinforcements to the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait as a way to deter the PRC from escalating the conflict (Huei, 2011: 234). Several US forces, such as a number of F-100 aircrafts and two ships were deployed to Taiwan and the Strait (Halperin, 1966: 65). In further embedding itself in the cross-Strait conflict on the PRC’s adversarial side, the US risked escalating conflict. Their military actions are therefore regarded as brinkmanship.

The bombardment was carefully and meticulously planned out by the PRC with its actions being “cautious and deliberate” from beginning to end; the shelling of the offshore islands was only scheduled to last a maximum of three months (Huei, 2011: 234-238). It is speculated that Mao was aware of the disagreement within the Eisenhower administration regarding the protection of the offshore islands and was confident that the US would hesitate to defend the territories as it had in the First Crisis (Gurtov, 1976: 90). Mao was also aware that Chiang was eager to take military action against the mainland and disrupt cross-Strait relations against the requests of the Eisenhower administration. The PRC seemed assured that war would not result from the bombardment, but the act of bombarding the offshore islands was a provocation, for

the purposes of achieving a particular goal, that could have escalated into full-scale war had the Eisenhower administration or the ROC military responded in a way the PRC had not anticipated.

The PRC regarded brinkmanship using the offshore islands as a “low risk” action (Gurtov, 1976: 88). The propensity for misperceptions, misunderstandings and mistrust to emerge from brinkmanship inflates the risk that war may result regardless of the PRC’s confidence that their adversaries would not risk such an outcome. For instance, there was a very real threat that the ROC could defy the US and take offensive actions towards mainland that may have resulted in an unintended escalation of conflict to full-scale war. As discussed, the relationship between the US and the ROC was beginning to strain following the First Crisis. Each had a very different stance on dealing with PRC militarism (Gurtov, 1976: 91). Chiang sought a confrontation with the PRC that would be a stepping stone towards his goal of eventually reclaiming the mainland, while the US wanted to avoid a confrontation altogether and had even tried to convince Chiang to abandon the offshore islands. The risk of conflict across the Taiwan Strait was therefore not low, as the PRC considered it.

4. De-Escalation of Conflict

Prior to the beginning of the crisis, the US were already in discussion about how to deal with an attack or blockade on the offshore islands as warnings emerging from ROC intelligence of an imminent crisis. The US National Security Council (NSC) and a study conducted by the Joint State-Defence were at odds. The NSC were opposed to using nuclear deterrence against the PRC again. It was in support of simply providing the ROC with logistical support and maintaining its “policy of strategic ambiguity” by avoiding public commitment or specification of whether it would protect the offshore islands or not (Huei, 2011: 228). The Joint Resolution of Formosa passed by US Congress in 1955 authorised the president “to employ the Armed Forces of the United States” to Taiwan and “related positions and territories of that area” if there is a security threat (Public Law 4, 1955: 7). This law does not explicitly refer to the offshore islands of Kinmen and Matsu as subject of US defence. It does, however, explicitly name the main island of Taiwan and the Pescadores islands. This ambiguity enabled the US to be selective about its commitments to the offshore islands. Strategic ambiguity can serve to worsen a security dilemma as the result of increased uncertainty and misperception when states are not explicit about their goals and intentions (Kastner, 2007). The Joint State-Defence study,

in contrast to the NSC, was vehemently supportive of the use of nuclear power (Huei, 2011: 228). The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) stated that “the use of atomic weapons was inevitable” (Halperin, 1966: 57). In contrast to the First Crisis, Eisenhower was committed to resolving the conflict peacefully without threats of a nuclear attack on the PRC. The US perceived that, in the case that the PRC committed to a heavy amphibious attack on Kinmen, it could defend the island without using nuclear weapons (Huei, 2011: 236) and therefore Eisenhower was far calmer than he had been during the First Crisis.

A tacit accommodation was offered to the PRC by the US on 6 September. The Eisenhower administration had learned from the First Taiwan Strait Crisis and restrained its response to the bombardment by manoeuvring its military with caution. It did not jump to counter the PRC’s bombardment or defend the offshore islands, adopting a policy to avoid offensive military actions towards the PRC. In addition, between the middle of September and the end of October, the US and the PRC engaged closely in negotiations which resulted in the suggestion that the Taiwan Strait be demilitarised, and the ROC would no longer take offensive actions against the mainland. After much persuasion, Chiang agreed by 23 October in a joint communique to publicly “renounce the use of force” (Gordon, 1985: 652), putting an end to the Second Crisis of the Taiwan Strait. Ultimately, conflict was avoided by all parties involved. The cross-Strait tension was diffused as the result of a few factors.

The first was the calm attitudes adopted by both sides. The belief that bombarding the offshore islands would not result in US retaliation likely contributed to the calm attitude exhibited by the PRC. The second factor was the agreement of the US to resume ambassadorial talks with the PRC to improve the bilateral relations between the two. This was an appeasement of the PRC’s primary aim in practicing brinkmanship. It can also be argued that US deterrence was a factor that successfully prevented the escalation of conflict. The placement of its military in the Taiwan Strait and near the offshore islands was a way of intimidating the PRC and keep the PLA from actions perceived as offensive. Another factor was the concession of the ROC to stop using force towards the mainland, which was one of the causes of Mao’s brinkmanship. It is evident that the concession of the US and the ROC to some of the PRC’s interests aided in the prevention of war across the Taiwan Strait.

The PRC did continue to bombard Kinmen in order to disrupt ROC-US relations (Halperin, 1966: 535), but only on “odd-numbered days” to reduce tension with the ROC (Li, 1991: 258),

allow the islands to be resupplied (Halperin, 1966) and ensure the continued bombing would not result in any casualties. Much changed in the period between 1958 and 1995, including the status of Taiwan's statehood in the international community. In addition, and significantly, leadership within all of the states in the triad changed. This means that many policies and strategic national goals changed. The type of brinkmanship employed in each of the following crises changed from bombardment to coercive military diplomacy. The next chapter will assess the causes of brinkmanship and methods of conflict de-escalation during the Third and unofficial Fourth Taiwan Strait Crises in order to determine which causal mechanisms were significant in the avoidance of war.

Chapter Three: Coercive Military Diplomacy

This chapter will analyse of the Third and Fourth Crises of the Taiwan Strait. As was the case with Chapter Two, the primary objective of analysing the Taiwan Strait Crises is to identify the causal mechanisms that led to the de-escalation of conflict during these periods of brinkmanship. First, a contextual historical summary of the political, social and economic changes that occurred between the crises will be provided. Following this, each section of the chapter will discuss the long-term and immediate causes of the crisis, emphasising the key role of US involvement in crisis escalation. Next, the way coercive diplomacy and deterrence was used as brinkmanship by the PRC and the US-ROC alliance will be discussed to assess how this impacted the conflict across the Taiwan Strait. Finally, the chapter will analyse the factors that led to the avoidance of full-scale war through de-escalation. The chapter finds that extended deterrence, conventional military deterrence, military power imbalance and negotiation were significant in the de-escalation of cross-Strait conflict.

The Third Crisis of the Taiwan Strait (1995-1996)

1. Historical Context: Between the Second and Third Crises

1.1. De-recognition of the ROC

Much had changed between the Second (1958) and Third (1995-96) Taiwan Strait Crises. The Cold War was over at this time, meaning the global security environment had changed and the rivalry of Capitalism vs Communism was a thing of the past. The global community was functioning under US hegemony while China's economic power was rapidly rising. Taiwan's global recognition as a state was renounced when it was removed from the UN in 1971 despite its status as a founding member of the organisation. A majority of the global community recognised the PRC as the one true representation of China, although many states in the global community maintained bilateral relations with the ROC. Very importantly, the relationship and agreements between the ROC and US began to dissolve and shift. Along with abandoning the Mutual Defence Treaty, in 1979, the US signed two communiqués ending its formal diplomatic relations with the ROC and withdraw its military forces from the island (Fisher, 2020: 109). Denouncing US-ROC relations was important to the preservation of Chinese sovereignty and

recognition of the PRC, as well as the agreement that Taiwan is indeed a part of China and belongs to the PRC.

1.2. Change in Leadership

Both the ROC and the PRC experienced the deaths of their prolific leaders, Chiang Kai-shek, who passed away in 1975, and Mao Zedong, passed away in 1976. Gradually, relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait greatly improved as a result of new leadership entering the arena. Without Chiang, the hopes of the KMT reclaiming the mainland swiftly dissipated, and the main intention of the ROC's military became the defence of the island against take over by the PRC and the looming threat of the use of force by the PRC to realise its goal of reunification (Dreyer, 1997:16). Deng Xiaoping rose to power in 1978 after Mao's initial successor relinquished power. Serving as paramount leader of the PRC until 1989, Deng had a very different world view to that of Mao (Dreyer, 1997: 16), adopting radical economic and political reforms.

1.3. Economic Openness and Improved Sino-US Relations

Prior to Deng's presidency, the PRC had been a closed economy. The PRC joined the largest global economic institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in 1980. The policy of economic openness meant that the PRC and the ROC began trading with one another, propelling the improvement of the ROC-PRC cooperation through greater "economic convergence" (Wong, 2014: 108) and interdependency. Friedman (2007: 124) argues that under the rulership of President Deng, the PRC seemed to prioritise peaceful cross-strait relations and economic prosperity. The PLA continued military operations on the island of Kinmen from the end of the Second Crisis in 1958 until 1979 when Deng and US President Carter met face-to-face to improve Sino-US relations (Li, 1991: 58). Thereafter, the PRC's attitude towards Taiwan became less "confrontational" (Dreyer, 1997: 17). The relationship between the US and the PRC also improved under Deng for a number of reasons: first was the recognition of the PRC as the one true China and renouncement of the ROC's legitimacy, which was a positive step towards reunification without the interference of the US. Second was the opening of the Chinese economy to American investment and military technology. While increased economic interdependence and convergence under Deng correlates with peaceful

cross-Straits relations, I argue that this development relates mainly to the type of policy Deng adopted as PRC president. This is because the onset of the Third Crisis occurred under the conditions of greater economic cooperation between the PRC and ROC. In addition, trade between the two sides increased consistently despite the ongoing conflict from 1995 to 1996. This indicates that economic cooperation is not a significant cause for conflict avoidance or de-escalation, rather, it is the policies that individual leaders adopt that has a greater impact on the dependent variable of this study.

1.4. End of Martial Law in Taiwan

From the end of the Chinese Civil War, the KMT imposed martial law over the island of Taiwan. Martial law bolstered the importance of the ROC's military in preparation for an impending invasion by the PRC as well as to prepare to reclaim the mainland from the CCP (Croissant et al., 2013: 80). Martial law was an oppressive aspect of Chiang Kai-shek's regime that ended in 1987 under the rulership of his predecessor, Chiang Ching-kuo (CCK). The end of martial law coincided with the introduction of democracy into Taiwanese politics and society and the growth of the Taiwanese identity on the island.

2. Long-term Causes of Conflict

2.1. Taiwanisation of Taiwanese Politics

On the Taiwanese island, domestic politics was rapidly changing in the wake of Chiang's death. Confidence in the KMT among Taiwanese society had plummeted as the ROC lost recognition and was abandoned by the US (Zuo, 2018: 155). The rhetoric for reunification was beginning to turn sour as "the older generation of mainlanders" began to die off and new generations of Taiwanese citizens grew (Dreyer, 1997: 17). Within the KMT, this was also the case. From 1966 to 1976, the KMT attempted to popularise a Cultural Renaissance to localise Chinese nationalist identity on the island by promoting the idea of a "kind of high Chinese culture" which the Chinese Communists on the mainland was trying to abolish (Stockton, 2002: 173). What this did was solidify the idea that there was a "distinction" between Chinese and Taiwanese. The popularity of the Chinese cultural identity (the ideological grounding of the KMT as a Chinese nationalist party) began to decrease among the Taiwanese.

CCK introduced a policy of Taiwanisation within the KMT when he saw the decrease in the popularity of Chinese culture in Taiwan (Stockton, 2002: 163). Taiwanisation perpetuated the distinction between Chinese and Taiwanese identity and ethnicity (Stockton, 2002: 163). Multipartyism and elections were introduced on the island. Elections in Taiwan increased cross-Strait tensions as political parties “play[ed] on Taiwanese identity” to drive support for Taiwanese independence as a way to secure voters and political success (Coffin, 2017: 3). Consequently, as the Taiwanese identity grew more distinct and distant from that of China, and new Taiwanese political parties garnered support, the popularity of the movement for Taiwanese independence slowly increased. The PRC’s prospects for reunification were undoubtably threatened by an independent Taiwan and this was a major cause of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. According to Hickey (2006 cited in Wong, 2014: 108), while the year 1995 marked the beginning of economic convergence between the PRC and the ROC, political divergence also increased. Figure 2 shows the increase in the number of people in Taiwan who identify as Taiwanese along with the decline of those who identify as either both Taiwanese and Chinese, and only Chinese between 1992 and 2023.

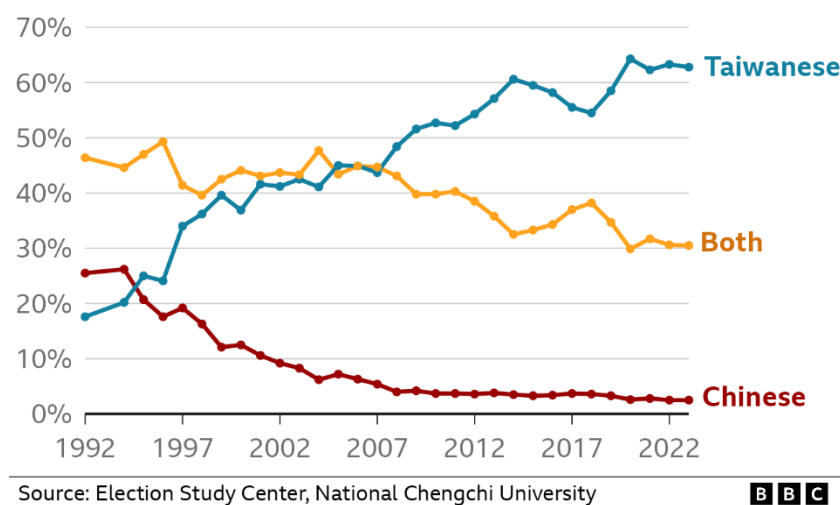


Figure 2: Identity in Taiwan 1992-2023

2.2. Taiwan’s Rejection of One Country, Two Systems

From the early 1980s, Deng and the PRC marshal, Ye Jianying, proposed the implementation of the “one country, two systems” policy, wherein Taiwan would be reunified with the mainland under CCP rulership, but “enjoy a high degree of autonomy as a special

administrative region of the PRC” by keeping its military forces and practicing local politics without the interference of Beijing (Dreyer, 1997: 19). The “one country, two systems” policy consisted of nine points, including increased talks between the CCP and KMT, the continuation of Taiwan’s socio-political system as it existed, and increased interrelations between the PRC and Taiwanese society (Dreyer, 1997: 19). During his presidency in the late 1980s, CCK rejected the proposal for the “one country, two systems” policy and established the “three nos” policy towards the PRC, which called for “no contact, no negotiation and no compromise to the CCP” (Dreyer, 1997: 20). It is unquestionable that the divergent nature of the national interests on either side of the Taiwan Strait was a factor in the culmination of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. While the PRC sought increased dependence of Taiwan on the mainland, the idea of “de facto independence” of Taiwan (Gunness and Saunders, 2022: 10) was growing popular.

Lee Teng-huei also rejected the proposal for a “one country, two systems” framework in 1989 when he succeeded CCK (Dreyer, 1997: 23). Differently, however, Lee asserted that he was “willing to establish channels of communication” with the PRC and “completely open up” relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in preparation to discuss matters of reunification (Dreyer, 1997: 23). Lee’s conditions to doing so were the democratisation of the PRC, the renunciation of the use of force in the Taiwan Strait, and non-interference in Taiwanese foreign relations (Dreyer, 1997: 24).

Lee’s policy decisions increased tensions between the PRC and the ROC, including the policy of “flexible diplomacy” which permitted the ROC’s participation in international organisations that the PRC was also a member of (Dreyer, 1997: 23). This policy was against the principles of the “one country, two systems” framework and went against Taiwan’s status of derecognition of statehood in the international system. In 1990, the KMT government formed the National Unification Council (NUC) headed by Lee, whose goal was negotiation across the Taiwan Strait to “together build anew a unified China” (Chi, 2004: 144). Chi (2004: 145) argues, however, that Lee’s NUC and other reunification initiatives were insincere. Reunification was never a genuine goal for Lee, rather, NUC was used as an instrument to get the PRC to the negotiating table and learn about its strategy and goal towards Taiwan (Chi, 2004: 147).

2.3. Democratisation of the ROC

CCK brought about major political change and democratisation in Taiwan during his presidency. Taiwan became a multiparty democracy after the introduction of legalisation for the allowance of opposition parties within the political sphere. From this emerged the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The introduction of the DPP in 1986 as a “pro-independence party” (Ross, 2000: 102) in Taiwan’s political landscape fuelled the separatist movement. The democratisation of the ROC made it a favourable ally of the United States as it established its position as the international hegemonic power seeking to propel its democratic ideology globally. Shared democratic values within US and Taiwanese socio-political environments helped maintain the ties between the US and the ROC, preventing total abandonment of the ROC following derecognition (Coffin, 2017: 2). Improved ROC-US relations was a significant cause of the PRC’s decision to implement its strategy of coercive brinkmanship.

2.4. US Involvement After Derecognition

As evident in the First and Second Crises of the Taiwan Strait, US involvement propelled the practice of brinkmanship and the increased tension between the PRC and the ROC. The Third Crisis is no different, but in this case, as the US had no longer recognised the ROC as a state nor as the rightful representation of China in the international system, its involvement in the Third and Fourth Crises as allies to the ROC is arguably a violation of Chinese sovereignty. There were a number of times prior to the Third Crisis that the US had violated its communiqués with China, such as an instance in 1992 when President Bush allowed the sale of US military technology to the ROC and called for greater support for the ROC in its cross-Strait relations (Ross, 2000: 92).

3. Immediate Causes of Conflict

In 1994 and 1995, the US State Department denied Lee Teng-hui a visa to enter the country in a promise to the PRC that it would not foster diplomatic relations with the ROC. US Congress, who had been flagrant in their support for the ROC amidst its democratisation process (Coffin,

2017: 2), voted almost unanimously in April 1995 to issue Lee a visa (Ross, 2000: 91). In June 1995, following the announcement that the ROC was willing to spend \$1 billion to be admitted back into the UN, Lee made a visit to his alma mater, Cornell University. The issuance of Lee's visa meant that the US had yet again been deceptive to the PRC by disregarding their bilateral agreement (Dreyer 1997: 32). During his visit to Cornell, Lee bolstered "the international status of Taiwan" (Whiting, 2001: 121) and repeatedly referred to Taiwan as the "Republic of China" which infuriated the leaders of the PRC (Dreyer, 1997: 32).

Discourse in the PRC media asserted that the purpose of Lee's visit to Cornell was to gain US support for the Taiwanese independence movement while Chinese leaders thought that US policy towards the ROC had changed to support Lee in a pursuit of Taiwan's sovereignty (Ross, 2000: 92). The US maintained to PRC officials that the issuance of Lee's visa was not a violation of any of the Sino-US bilateral agreements. Unhappy with this response, the PRC urged the US to commit to its One-China policy as a stern measure "to eliminate the disastrous effects" of allowing the high-profile visit from Lee (Ross, 2000: 94).

4. Brinkmanship

On 21 July 1995, the PLA launched two DF-15 missiles between 130km and 160km northeast of Taiwan (Fisher, 1997: 170; Ross, 2000: 95). Two more DF-15 missiles were launched in the early hours of 22 July, and another two were fired the following morning. The purpose of these missile exercises was "to warn Washington against" its continued backing of Lee and the ROC, as well as "to deter" Lee's perceived thrust toward Taiwan independence (Whiting, 2001: 121). Unlike the First and Second Crises, no physical conflict ensued. Rather, the missile launch exercises were a coercive measure that threatened the use of force in order to force its adversaries to submit out of fear of a direct attack. At the risk of provoking US military involvement or military retaliation by the ROC backed by the US, the PRC once again practiced military brinkmanship to try to obtain its diplomatic and national goals (Zhao, 2000: 497). The ROC did retaliate with its own military exercises in August 1995, further escalating the conflict through deterrence. The US, on the other hand, was much more low-key with its response to the missile exercises and no intervention or retaliation was offered.

On 1 August, US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher met with PRC Foreign Minister Qian Qichen in Brunei. The PRC still sought a commitment from the US that it would respect the One-China policy (Ross, 2000: 96). Christopher gave Qian a letter from President Clinton which stated explicitly that that his administration did not support Taiwanese independence, ROC membership in the UN nor a “two-China policy” (Ross, 2000: 96). The US tried to divert discussions with the PRC at this point away from the topic of Taiwan, though the PRC felt that bilateral talks should address the Taiwan issue until it was resolved. The assurances given by the Clinton administration were unsatisfactory to the PRC and Qian reiterated once again that the PRC valued more the US’s enactment of its assurances. From 15 to 25 August 1995, further missile exercises, involving naval offensive and defensive manoeuvres including around 60 ships and 200 air sorties (Gunness and Saunders, 2022: 16), were conducted by the PLA to apply pressure on the US. Military exercises by the PLA halted briefly after this but would resume on 5 September 1995.

As previously mentioned, the electoral cycle in Taiwan heightened cross-Strait tensions as pro-independence political parties emerged and garnered support domestically. Taiwan’s legislative elections were scheduled to occur in December 1995, and they became the focal point of the PRC’s September missile exercises. These exercises were more extensive than the preceding ones as coercive efforts intensified. The intention of the missile exercises was to influence the elections in Taiwan, condemn pro-independence sentiments and encourage support for peaceful reunification efforts on the island (Gunness and Saunders, 2022: 16). Extensive exercises continued until 23 November. It can be argued whether or not the goals of military exercises were met. On the one hand, the military exercises fell short as the DPP increased its legislative representation, and although the KMT failed to win the majority vote for the first time in history, support for the party and Lee remained significant (Gunness and Saunders, 2022: 17). On the other hand, all of the candidates from the New Party, who were pro-reunification, were elected in the legislative elections, marginally vindicating the PRC’s “forceful opposition to Taiwan independence” (Ross, 2000: 104).

The US again remained low-key in its response to the PRC’s coercive diplomacy and continued talks with the PRC that condemned the use of force but also reiterated its support of the One-China policy. The PRC sought to issue another communiqué with the US that addressed high

profile visits from ROC leaders to the US and commitment from the US to oppose Taiwanese independence (Ross, 2000: 97). The US did not agree to a prohibition of future visits from ROC leadership but reaffirmed its position on the One-China policy. The Clinton administration ignored PRC brinkmanship and issued a visa to ROC Vice President Li for his transit through the US to Guatemala in late 1995 (Ross, 2000: 106). In doing so, the US demonstrated that it did not perceive PRC military action as a serious threat that war was imminent. The US risked further escalation of the conflict by rejecting the PRC's demand that it disallows the entry of high-profile Taiwanese officials into the US. The crisis escalated once again in January 1996. The PRC conducted series of large-scale military exercises and gathered over 100 000 in Fujian province on the southeast coast of the mainland. In March, a number of DF-15 missiles were launched towards Taiwan's maritime territory.

5. De-escalation of Conflict

A stern warning from US was issued to the PRC. It stated, "any military action against Taiwan would have grave consequences" (Gunness and Saunders, 2022: 20). As a response to the March exercises, the US deployed fourteen combat ships near Taiwan in effort to deter the PRC from further use of coercion, as well as to "maintain its reputation and credibility" to the international community (Fisher, 1997: 178; Gunness and Saunders, 2022: 20). This deterrent action was the first the US took to dissuade the PRC from continuing its military exercises and was enough to de-escalate the conflict. Overall, the PRC was largely unsuccessful in achieving its intended objectives through brinkmanship. The PRC failed to instil in its adversary, the US, that it could possibly escalate the conflict to full-scale war if its demands were not met.

The Clinton administration maintained confidence throughout the crisis that the PRC was not truly preparing an attack on Taiwan or the offshore islands. It believed that the military exercises were just a coercive mechanism to influence the Taiwanese elections and independence movement (Ross, 2000: 108). US intelligence perceiving the PLA's capabilities as limited (Gunness and Saunders, 2022: 23). Following the March missile exercises, upon failing to elicit its desired response from the US and the ROC, the PRC's Vice Foreign Minister, Liu, affirmed the US assertion that there was no intention to attack Taiwan (Ross, 2000: 108). The US rightly perceived the risks of the PRC's brinkmanship as low and therefore did not

succumb to the PRC's various demands. Though the perceived threat by the US was low, Gunness and Saunders (2022: 22) state that the act of deploying its military to Taiwan could have easily escalated the conflict and led to an offensive retaliation by the PRC or encouraged the ROC to take offensive moves as it had at the beginning of the crisis with the confidence that they were supported by the US military. The US decided, however, that deploying the combat ships to areas near Taiwan and not directly in the Strait was a less provocative measure to take while sending a strong message of deterrence (Gunness and Saunders, 2022: 22).

McCready argues that the retaliatory response from the US is what ended the PRC's brinkmanship (2003: 9), with which this study agrees. US military presence near Taiwan successfully communicated the US intention to defend Taiwan in the case of PRC attack. It can be strongly argued that full-scale war was ultimately avoided through extended deterrence. In addition, the lack of intent to risk going to the brink of war greatly impacted the ability of the US to use deterrence to de-escalate conflict. With greater military capabilities, powerful allies and hegemonic power in the international system, the US was undoubtedly the most formidable adversary that the PRC could have encountered in a full-scale cross-Strait conflict. Once the US retaliated by deploying its military near Taiwan, the PRC recognised that it would have been too much of a risk to continue to escalate the conflict from coercive force to any direct military attack on Taiwan or the offshore islands. While evidently the US sought to maintain peace in the region and avoid a full-scale conflict across the Taiwan Strait by offering a low-key response to the PRC's provocation for several months, it ultimately chose to use deterrence in March when the PRC continued to escalate its military exercises.

According to Powell, if a militarily weaker state can be "more resolute" (2015: 620) than its adversary, it has more motivation to make use of doctrines and forces in a way that increases the risks of conflict in a way that dissuades the adversary from pursuing a military confrontation. The PRC seemed to be using this tactic by using brinkmanship as a coercive method. The US, however, was unconvinced that the PRC had the resolve to truly risk going to war over Taiwan making brinkmanship unsuccessful for the PRC.

In this case, cooperation and negotiation seemed to prolong the crisis and had no significant role in de-escalating conflict. While the PRC and US negotiated, the PRC escalated its military drills a number of times because it was not getting the response it sought from the US. It

therefore can be concluded that cooperation and negotiation was not a causal mechanism employed to prevent war. While the economic interdependence that was fostered within the PRC-US and PRC-ROC bilateral relationships could have been seriously devastated by a cross-Strait conflict, there is not enough evidence to be assessed in the events of the cross-Strait conflict that suggest that economic interdependence was sufficient causal factor that prevented the escalation to full-scale conflict. Economic convergence and interdependence continued into the 1990s, but conflict prevailed regardless of the strengthening cross-Strait trade relationship. I argue that the longstanding peace between the PRC and ROC prior to the onset of the Third Crisis can be attributed to President Deng's inclination towards peaceful relations as his successor President Jiang turned to brinkmanship to disrupt the ROC-US relationship. As previously discussed, the trade relations between the PRC and the ROC only grew amidst the crisis. The increase in bilateral trade was constant and does not correlate with either the escalation or de-escalation of conflict from 1995 to 1996.

The Fourth Crisis of the Taiwan Strait (2022-2023)

1. Historical Context: Between the Third and Fourth Crises

The most recent Taiwan Strait Crisis, the Fourth, has been labelled as such for the purposes of this research paper – the ongoing events in the Taiwan Strait have not officially been named the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis. This label has been utilised by some scholars and media outlets as the ongoing events in the Taiwan Strait can be categorised as a crisis because the nature of the relations across the Taiwan Strait are such that the discourse in the international community suggests that war is imminent once again. Since the Third Crisis of the Taiwan Strait, significant events have occurred that have led to another crisis across the Taiwan Strait. Since 1996, the PRC has experienced rapid economic success through its export-led development and the increasing globalisation of the international system. The global order has undoubtedly transitioned from US-led and unipolar to multipolar as a result of the successes of emerging powers within Asia and Europe – the PRC included. While the US military remains the world's most formidable military power, the PRC has built up its conventional and nuclear capabilities to challenge US military power much more than it has been able to historically (Cordesman, Burke and Molot, 2019).

On the Taiwanese island, the KMT has greatly lost favour among voters. In 2000, the DPP electoral candidate, Chen Shui-bian, won the presidential election. For the PRC, this was a major setback to its reunification prospects. According to the Office of the President of the ROC, although Chen stated in his inaugural speech that Taiwan would not “declare independence” or alter the national title under his administration, by 2007 towards the end of his second term, he announced that it was “imperative for Taiwan” to achieve independence and to “rectify its name.” Chen also felt strongly about avoiding economic “over-reliance” with the PRC (Lai, 2022: 418). President Ma Ying-jeou, a KMT representative, succeeded Chen and his administration sought to adopt policies that would “deepened economic integration” with the PRC as it was believed that greater relations with Beijing would lead to greater economic growth for Taiwan (Lai, 2022: 418). The agreement of Ma’s KMT government to sign the controversial Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) led to a series of youth protests in 2014 dubbed the Sunflower Movement. Taiwan’s youth was strongly opposed to the prospect of closer relations between the ROC and the PRC fearing the possibility of infiltration of Taiwanese society by the PRC (Wong, 2019: 100); the KMT’s sentiment towards Beijing ultimately cost them the 2016 election, losing to the current President, Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP. President Tsai, like several Taiwanese presidents before her, refused to accept the “one country, two systems” framework. Concurrently, under President Xi Jinping, who has served as president since 2013, the PRC has become more forthright about using force and coercion in order to achieve reunification with Taiwan. As aforementioned, Xi has put the deadline of 2049 as the year by which he seeks to reunify China and Taiwan under PRC rule. Therefore, as peaceful reunification efforts continually fail and pro-independence sentiment in Taiwan grows under Tsai’s presidency, the possibility that military force will be utilised to achieve reunification becomes an ever-growing concern for both Taiwan and the United States.

2. Long-term Causes of Conflict

2.1. The Decline of Sino-US Relations

2016 marked the beginning of US President Trump’s administration under which Sino-US relations suffered greatly. Sino-US relations under the Trump administration became highly competitive on the military and economic fronts as opposed to cooperative. Early in his

presidential term, Trump challenged the One-China policy and adopted a “pro-Taiwan position” (Wong, 2019: 195). He advocated for Taiwan’s full international participation and criticising past presidents for their willingness to sacrifice Taiwan in the name of improved Sino-US relations (Wong, 2019: 195). Simultaneously, President Trump increased the sale of defensive military equipment to the ROC (Wong, 2019: 197). On 29 June 2017, the Trump administration sold a “\$1.42 billion arms package” to the ROC to improve its defensive capabilities (Wong, 2019: 197). Throughout his presidency, Trump bolstered the sentiment that the PRC was an economic adversary of the US. The US imposed tariffs on \$370 billion worth of Chinese products, starting a trade war with the PRC (Economy et. al, 2020). Even following Trump’s departure from the White House, many of the tariffs placed on Chinese products during the Trump administration were not reduced by Biden’s administration despite the PRC’s expectations that this would be the case (Haenle and Sher, 2022).

The US position on reunification and the One China policy remained in question under President Biden. President Xi stated that the US was “playing with fire” by strengthening its relations with the ROC and asserting that the US would defend the island in the case of an attack by the PRC (Haenle and Sher, 2022). The Biden administration continually asserted its commitment to the One-China and support of peaceful reunification efforts across the Taiwan Strait but has not renounced US interference and involvement in the cross-Strait conflict. In 2022, Biden made it abundantly clear that the US would defend Taiwan, as per extended deterrence, if there were to be “an unprecedented attack” by the PRC (Mao, 2022).

2.2. Re-election of President Tsai

President Tsai won Taiwan’s 2020 presidential election to serve for a second term. On 14 January 2020, when interviewed by the BBC, Tsai responded strongly to questions regarding Taiwan’s independence, stating that Taiwan is “an independent country already” with no need to declare independence, and that the Taiwanese hope to “have [their] own sovereignty” as the topic of PRC-ROC relations is brought up (Office of the President ROC, 2020). Following the airing of this interview from 18-19 January, a total of 37 violations of Taiwan’s ADIZ were recorded (Brown and Lewis, 2023). The re-election of President Tsai was perceived by the PRC as being against the interests of reunification.

2.3. Longstanding Military Exercises

The PRC and the ROC had both conducted a number of military exercises in 2015 and 2016, though according to Cozad, these exercises were not coercive nor the practice of brinkmanship – rather, they were training exercises in preparation for future “military struggle” (2016: 4). These exercises were not conducted near Taiwan’s maritime territory and never violated Taiwan’s ADIZ. On the contrary, however, Westcott and Wang (2018) reported for CNN that the PRC’s 2015 exercises were in fact an intimidation tactic leading up to Taiwan’s 2016 elections. By the end of 2017, military exercises became more indicative of an imminent invasion of the island as the PLA were practicing “encirclement” manoeuvres in close proximity to the island (Chan, 2017). In the whole of 2017, the PLA conducted 16 military exercises near Taiwan (Davies, 2017). In April 2018, following the Trump administration increase arms sales to the ROC and increasing tensions in the South China Sea dispute, military exercises intensified with live ammunition drills conducted as a warning to the ROC to “not go further” in its defiance of the One-China policy (Westcott and Wang, 2018). The ROC retaliated to these military exercises with its own live ammunition drills in Kinmen near the southeast coast of the mainland. 2019 saw similar retaliatory activities between the PRC and the ROC, with a number of large-scale military exercises occurring throughout the year. While the PRC seemed to have been using coercive military diplomacy and brinkmanship prior to the 2022-2023 crisis, these activities were not regarded as crises. This may be for a number of reasons. One may be that the frequency of the military exercises was not significant enough to constitute crisis. Another may be that the PRC did not violate Taiwan’s ADIZ in its flyover manoeuvres.

The extent of the military exercises from the PRC escalated drastically in September 2020. Brown and Lewis (2023) recorded that the first military exercises to violate Taiwan’s ADIZ occurred around 9 September 2020. Figure 3 shows a drastic increase in the number of military exercises over the Taiwan Strait by the PRC from the numbers recorded in 2017 to those recorded in September 2020. In September 2020 alone, a total of 69 flyovers over Taiwan’s ADIZ were recorded by Brown and Lewis (2023) compared to the 16 flyovers that occurred in 2017. The September military exercises did little to alarm the US and the ROC as the following month, the two parties signed a cooperative infrastructure development deal which sought to

increase Taiwan's ties with countries that had strong official diplomatic relations with the PRC (Glaser, 2020: 4). By April 2021, the number of ADIZ violations increased to 107 (Brown and Lewis, 2023). In 2022, US involvement was once again the subject of a crisis related to the PRC's brinkmanship across the Taiwan Strait.

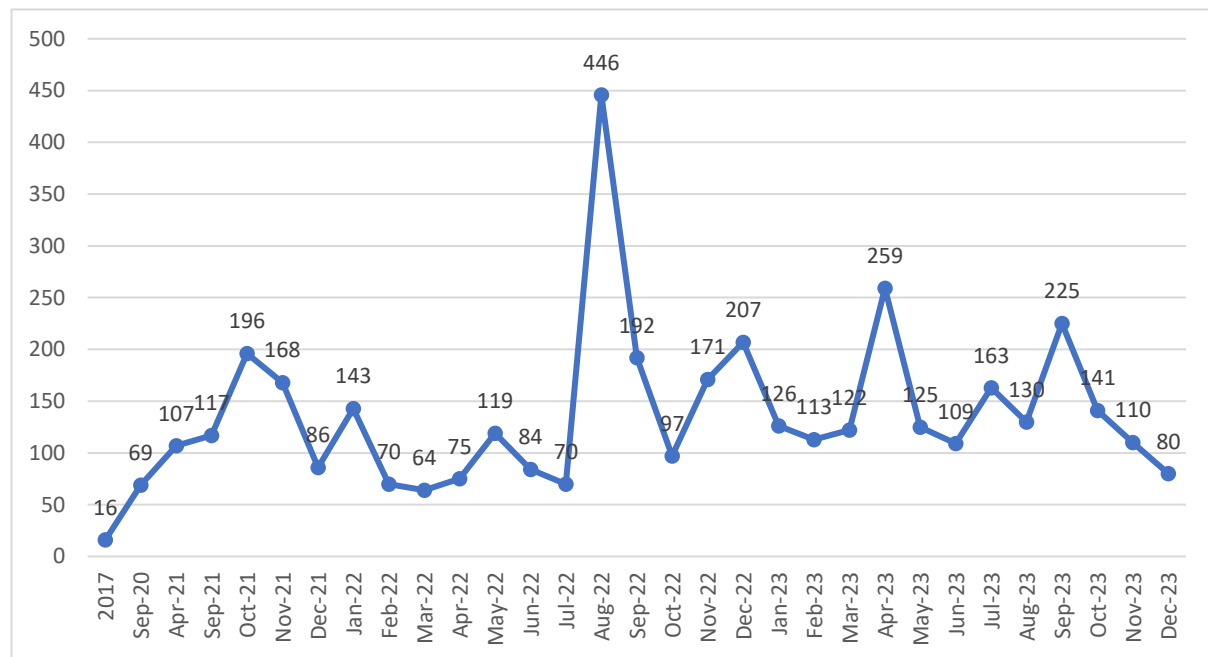


Figure 3: A graph of the number of military exercises from 2017 to December 2023 (Brown and Lewis, 2023)

3. Immediate Causes of Conflict

The visit of US House of Representatives Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, on 2 August 2022 marks the beginning of the Fourth Crisis of the Taiwan Strait. Pelosi's visit has been the most high-profile visit of a US official to Taiwan and the most inflammatory event of the cross-Strait conflict since the events of the 1995-96 crisis. The visit followed Pelosi's statement that "the world faces a choice between autocracy and democracy" and "we must stand by Taiwan" in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 (Knickmeyer, 2022). Following Pelosi's visit, 446 Taiwan ADIZ violations by the PRC were recorded in August 2022 by Brown and Lewis (2023). These exercises occurred closer to Taiwan than ever before, with a ballistic missile fired over Taiwan's capital, Taipei (Keegan and Churchman, 2022: 99). These events alarmed the international community and discourse of another Taiwan Strait crisis permeated the international landscape. In 2022, there were approximately 1738 violations of Taiwan's ADIZ

and 1555 from January 2023 to November 2023. This is a significant increase from the estimated 972 violations in 2021.

As evident in Figure 3, the most extensive coercive military exercises that violated Taiwan's ADIZ in a single month occurred as a result of Pelosi's visit, marking the beginning of the Fourth Crisis. These exercises were not met with retaliation from either the ROC or the PRC. The PRC were evidently trying to increase its coercive power by escalating the propensity for conflict across the Taiwan Strait and trying to force the ROC and the US to align with its reunification interests. Conducting its military exercises in such an extreme manner so close to Taiwan risked the escalation of conflict to full-scale war. Following Pelosi's visit, President Xi made it clear that the PRC will make use of force to achieve reunification. A visit from a US official as high-profile as Pelosi was evidently perceived to be a great enough offense to the PRC to a war. These large-scale exercises are considered brinkmanship because the US had made clear its commitment to defending Taiwan in the case of PRC attack. The extent to which the PRC violated the island's ADIZ could have easily elicited a panicked deterrent or defensive response from the US and possibly escalating to war.

Military exercises following Pelosi's visit continued at a high frequency, with noticeable spikes in activity in December 2022, April 2023 following President Tsai's transit through the US, and September 2023 after PRC leadership cited "arrogance" of and "provocation" by Taiwanese separatists (The Guardian, 2023). It is evident that the PRC's military exercises tend to escalate in reaction to perceived unwelcome activities within Taiwan's domestic politics and the reinforcement of diplomatic and military ties between the US and the ROC. The increase in separatist "provocation" in September 2023 is likely linked to an increase pro-independence sentiment on the island preceding Taiwan's next presidential elections approaching in 2024 and a disdain for increased Chinese coercion in 2022 and 2023. Despite the high tensions across the Strait, the frequency of military exercises that violated Taiwan's ADIZ largely decreased at the end of 2023, indicating that there may be mechanisms or factors that have led to the de-escalation of tension at this time.

4. De-escalation of Conflict

As of 15 November 2023, President Xi and President Biden have resumed military-to-military talks to discuss pressing issues within Sino-US relations; the two had last met just over a year prior to this (Peterson, Sperzel and Shats, 2023: 3). The resumption of talks correlates with the sharp reduction of military exercises by the PRC in both November and December 2023, with 110 and 80 ADIZ violations respectively. This is a notable reduction from the 225 violations that occurred in September 2023. Clear correlations can be drawn from periodic increases in PRC violations of Taiwan's ADIZ in conjunction with high profile visits or a perceived rise in support for Taiwanese independence from Taiwanese and US leadership. Similarly, significant decreases in ADIZ violations by the PRC may be attributed to events. These talks therefore can be considered as a likely causal mechanism responsible for the de-escalation from the brink of war during the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis. This study can speculate other causal mechanisms for de-escalation by relating certain events with a significant reduction of ADIZ violations recorded by Brown and Lewis (2023). On 1 September 2022, for instance, following the height of the crisis, the ROC demonstrated its defensive capabilities and practiced retaliatory brinkmanship when its forces shot down a Chinese drone. This was the result of President Tsai's orders to "take forceful countermeasures against" the PRC's coercive brinkmanship (Tsai and Register, 2022). Resultantly, the number of violations in September (192) was significantly less than August (446). Therefore, military deterrence by the ROC may have been a significant cause of de-escalation of inflamed tensions across the Taiwan Strait in this instance. It is difficult to determine whether this is true, however, because the number of ADIZ violations recorded account for a whole month while particular events can be traced by date.

The PRC has used coercive diplomacy for several years during Xi's presidency, though it has not been effective in bringing about reunification, deterring pro-independence sentiment in Taiwan or coercing the US into abandoning its strong relationship with the ROC. The Fourth Crisis of the Taiwan Strait is not resolved yet, although diplomatic talks between the US and the PRC have resumed and have seemingly led to the reduction of tension across the Taiwan Strait as of November 2023. President Joe Biden met with President Xi on November 15 2023 for a Summit in California. Biden communicated to Xi that the US has not abandoned the One China policy and "called for restraint in the PRC's use of military activity in and around the

Taiwan Strait” (Readout of President Joe Biden's Meeting with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, 2023). The assertion by Biden that the US do indeed respect the One China policy, coupled with the request to reduce tension across the Taiwan Strait may have been causally significant in persuading the PRC to de-escalate conflict. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning’s speech the following day demonstrated that the PRC believed that the US had made a “statement of not supporting Taiwan” (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning’s Regular Press Conference, 2023). This perception resultant from the resumption of bilateral talks may have led to the decision to reduce the quantity of military drills exercised by the PLA. It is possible that the brinkmanship between the PRC and the ROC may escalate once again, and that if it does escalate enough, the US may intervene and make use of retaliatory deterrence in the cross-Strait conflict.

This study recognises an area for future research that arises from the ongoing nature of the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis. The PRC continues to conduct military drills near Taiwan and has not ceased at the time of writing this paper. Much of the available information about the ongoing crisis is secondary in nature. News and secondary reports of communications are the most dominant and most accessible sources. Future studies can consider the use of field research to obtain more in-depth primary data in order to draw conclusions. US involvement has significantly impacted the PRC’s ability to obtain its intended objectives through brinkmanship. It is evident that brinkmanship has not been effective for the PRC in achieving reunification with Taiwan. Whether brinkmanship has been effective in the PRC’s attempts to shape its relations with and the domestic politics in the ROC and the US as intended can be examined. The next chapter will assess the methods of brinkmanship in order to determine the effectiveness of the practice in meeting the PRC’s strategic goals in each of the Taiwan Strait crises. In addition, the next chapter will also discuss each of the mechanisms responsible for the de-escalation of conflict in order to consolidate all of the evidence collected in Chapter Two and Chapter Three to finally answer each of the research questions presented in Chapter One.

Chapter Four: The De-Escalation of Conflict Across the Taiwan Strait and the Effectiveness of PRC Brinkmanship

This chapter will ultimately aim to answer the research questions posed in Chapter One:

“What explains why the triad avoided full-scale war during the 1954-55, 1958, 1995-96, and 2022-23 Taiwan Strait Crises? What mechanisms were causally significant in the de-escalation of conflict during these crises? How effective has brinkmanship been for the PRC in obtaining its strategic objections in each of the Taiwan Strait Crises?”

The chapter will discuss the significant events of each Taiwan Strait Crisis in chronological order and identify the causal mechanisms responsible for the de-escalation of conflict in each of the Taiwan Strait Crises. There will then be an assessment of the effectiveness of PRC brinkmanship at obtaining its strategic objectives during each of the crises. This chapter finds that brinkmanship has been largely unsuccessful as a tool for the PRC in obtaining its objectives.

Firstly, this study has demonstrated the significant role US involvement has played in the Taiwan Strait Crises. US involvement has largely been the cause of PRC brinkmanship against Taiwan and has shaped the trajectories and outcomes of each of the Taiwan Strait Crises. I argue that, had the US abandoned Taiwan in the early 1950s during the Truman administration, it is likely that the PRC would not have practiced brinkmanship but had conducted a full-scale attack on Taiwan instead. Whether they would have been successful in reunifying China and Taiwan under CCP rulership is a very different discussion. Nevertheless, even though the PRC’s military capabilities lacked the prowess of that of the ROC then, the Chinese civil war might have seen some kind of resolution, albeit forceful, far sooner. Continued US involvement has both increased tension across the Taiwan Strait and contributed to the maintenance of the status quo, preventing the escalation of tension to full-scale war between the PRC and the ROC. US involvement is therefore an independent variable for this study.

Brinkmanship is a tool that the PRC has used to 1) try and achieve its national objective of reunification of Taiwan under the One-China policy; 2) to deter the US involvement in what it perceives as a civil matter. The ROC has retaliated to the PRC’s military brinkmanship with

its own defensive military exercises. Brinkmanship is assumed to be more effective when one side is more willing than the other to risk going to war. The PRC has not demonstrated in any of the Four Taiwan Strait Crises that it is more willing to risk going to war than its adversaries. PRC brinkmanship across the Taiwan Strait has incited a frequent deterrent response from the US and the ROC, which has both led to the de-escalation of conflict and the escalation of military activity by the PRC in order to elicit its desired response.

During the First Crisis from 1954-1955, the balance of nuclear power between PRC and the US was important in the outcome of the conflict. The catalyst for the First Crisis was the commitment of the US to protect Taiwan from PRC invasion, the possibility that the ROC could be included in the SEATO alliance as well as the impending US-ROC Mutual Defence Treaty. The PRC attempted to use military brinkmanship to deter the strengthening of US-ROC relations and US involvement. There were several unsuccessful attempts made at deterring PRC brinkmanship by the ROC and the US. The ROC reacted to the PRC's bombardment of Kinmen and Matsu by performing air strikes on ports and shipping areas on the mainland. These actions did nothing to dissuade the PRC from executing its military brinkmanship and conflict escalated instead. The United States' credible threat of using nuclear weapons played a significant role in dissuading the PRC from escalating the conflict to a full-scale war. The US made it clear that it would employ atomic weapons to protect Taiwan and its strategic interests in the region. Without any nuclear capabilities, the PRC had no second-strike capabilities to counter US nuclear deterrence and stay resolute against the threat of a nuclear attack from the US. In addition, the PRC did not have the extended deterrence of the Soviet Union in the case of a nuclear attack by the US.

Deterrence theorists, Jervis (1978), Morgan (1977) and Powell (2003; 2006) all emphasise the importance of credibility in the practice of deterrence. If a state practicing deterrence cannot make its target believe that it will employ its deterrent capabilities, there cannot be success in deterrence. The US had demonstrated its nuclear capabilities towards the end of World War II when it decimated Hiroshima and Nagasaki with its atomic weapons. Its threat to use nuclear weapons in response to the PRC's bombardment of the ROC's offshore islands was a credible threat that immediately led to the de-escalation of conflict. The PRC swiftly stopped its bombardment of the offshore islands and proposed opening channels for communication

between itself and the US. In doing so, the PRC momentarily shifted its strategy for achieving reunification from forceful military brinkmanship to cooperative bilateral talks with the US.

The Second Taiwan Strait Crisis was the shortest of all four of the crises, spanning around 9 months in duration. Because the PRC had developed its nuclear capabilities and possessed second-strike capabilities, nuclear deterrence was not as desirable an option to the US as it had been during the First Crisis. While the leadership within the triad had not changed from the First to the Second Crisis, the responses of US leadership to PRC brinkmanship were much different. While the First Crisis consisted of frantic and panicked decision-making, US leaders were reported to be much calmer and less reactive during the Second Crisis. The PRC's objective in using brinkmanship was to force the US back into ambassadorial talks, which had been abandoned shortly before the crisis began against the PRC's requests. As the US had still not made its commitment to the offshore islands clear, the PRC believed that war would not result from its bombardment. In addition, there seemed to be no evidence that the PRC would escalate the conflict beyond bombardment and a blockade of the islands to full-scale war with the US and the ROC. This is the only instance where concession to brinkmanship was the outcome of the crisis. The US agreed to resume the ambassadorial talks with the PRC.

One of the long-term causes of the Second Crisis was the ROC's use of force towards the mainland wherein the ROC carried out military raids on the mainland. The US leadership was able to persuade President Chiang to agree to stop these activities in order to decrease the tensions across the Taiwan Strait. While this action was not the aim of PRC brinkmanship, the raids by the ROC on the mainland were a concern for President Mao. Coupled with US concession to resume Sino-US talks, the actions of the US leadership in this instance show how influential the US have been on cross-Strait relations and how important its involvement was to the de-escalation of conflict in the 1950s. On the other hand, however, it is abundantly clear that US involvement in the cross-Strait conflicts has simultaneously caused the escalation of conflict.

Similar to the Second Crisis, the Third is marked by the US perception that the PRC did not truly intend to risk engaging in a full-scale war with the US over Taiwan. The Third Crisis was

caused by the perceived strengthening of diplomatic relations between the US and the ROC. The PRC chose to engage in coercive military brinkmanship by launching missiles 130km-160km northeast of Taiwan. To de-escalate the crisis, the US successfully used conventional military deterrence to end PRC brinkmanship. The US demonstrated credibility in its intent to defend Taiwan by deploying its forces to the Taiwan Strait, leading the PRC to reconsider its coercive actions. It can be speculated that increase in economic relations between the PRC and the ROC and the increased global status of the PRC may have contributed to the PRC's lack of intent to risk full-scale war.

In addition to de-escalating the conflict through deterrence, the PRC also engaged in diplomatic talks with the US, seeking commitments on issues related to Taiwan. During this crisis, negotiation and cooperation did not play a significant role in ending the crisis. Negotiation and cooperation have been identified as the causal mechanisms responsible for the de-escalation of conflict during the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis. Military deterrence by the ROC may have also led to de-escalation in September 2022, though this is more difficult to confirm.

The effectiveness of PRC brinkmanship to achieve its strategic, political goals can be assessed based on the outcome of each Taiwan Strait Crisis. Brinkmanship during the cross-Strait crises was largely unsuccessful for the PRC and therefore ineffective. This is the result of the successful use of deterrence employed by the ROC and, most importantly, the US.

The objectives of brinkmanship during the First Crisis were to deter the increasing involvement of the US in the Chinese civil war and to prevent the strengthening of US-ROC relations. This was not achieved by the PRC through brinkmanship. The bombardment of the offshore islands by the PRC during the First Crisis abruptly ended as the result of credible US nuclear deterrence, which led the PRC to conceding against its adversaries. It is therefore evident that brinkmanship was ineffective during the First Crisis of the Taiwan Strait.

The Second Crisis of the Taiwan Strait is the only case in which brinkmanship was effective as it led to US concession to PRC demands. The US held a different attitude during the Second

Crisis and ultimately it did not have as much resolve to overpower its adversary as it had in the First Crisis. It could no longer use nuclear deterrence to dissuade PRC brinkmanship without putting itself at risk of the PRC's second-strike nuclear capabilities. As a result of brinkmanship by the PRC, the US leadership was willing to return to the negotiating table and resume ambassadorial talks over the issue of Taiwan, which was the main objective of the PRC. In addition to conceding PRC's demands, the US persuading Chiang to cease his military harassment of the mainland which was likely perceived as a victory for the PRC. Ultimately, the US response to PRC brinkmanship shows its effectiveness in achieving diplomatic, political and national goals.

Similar to the First Crisis, the brinkmanship used during the Third Crisis of the Taiwan Strait was employed to deter the US from supporting Taiwan, particularly following its derecognition of statehood. The derecognition of the ROC made the reunification of China and Taiwan under PRC rule seem most opportune. The US maintained and even strengthened its ties to Taiwan despite acknowledging the PRC as the one true representation of China and officially ending diplomatic ties with the ROC. Brinkmanship was therefore used by the PRC to deter US support for Taiwan and to influence Taiwan's domestic politics. Neither of these goals were obtained through brinkmanship as, once again, the US utilised credible deterrence to end the PRC's military exercises near Taiwan. Brinkmanship was largely ineffective as the relations between the US and the ROC remained unchanged by the crisis and the KMT failed to win the majority vote in the Taiwanese elections showing growing support for the independence movement on the island.

Lastly, while the Fourth Crisis is ongoing, it can be stated that brinkmanship has been thus far ineffective in achieving the PRC's strategic goals. The PRC remains unable to assert its claims over Taiwan even with the use of coercion. As a result of the increased support for Taiwan by high-profile US leaders, the PRC began extensive military drills and hundreds of flyovers that violated Taiwan's ADIZ. What this has led to is the fortification of US support for the ROC and the assertion that the US will intervene if President Xi makes use of force to reclaim Taiwan. While US diplomatic deterrence has not ended the PRC's military drills and ADIZ violations, ROC deterrence using its defensive capabilities did lead to the decrease in flyovers in September 2022. The resumption of talks between President Xi and President Biden towards

the end of 2023 have drastically decreased the extensiveness of PRC military coercive brinkmanship. The increased tension across the Taiwan Strait, caused by PRC brinkmanship, has been effective in opening up cooperation between leaders. Cooperation is one way the PRC may be able to realise its goal of reunification with the ROC as brinkmanship has thus far been ineffective. This cooperation between leaders, however, does not involve President Tsai. This could limit its effectiveness as the sentiment for independence grows in Taiwan.

While brinkmanship had been used to deter US involvement in cross-Strait relations from the 1950s to the 1990s, in the most recent Taiwan Strait Crisis, the PRC has also attempted to utilise US involvement to propel its national goal of reunifying China and Taiwan. As mentioned, while US involvement has been a major source of PRC brinkmanship and general tension across the Taiwan Strait, it has simultaneously aided in de-escalating conflict between the PRC and the ROC. Because brinkmanship by the PRC has been largely unsuccessful in forcing its adversaries to comply with its strategic goals, perhaps cooperation with both the US and the ROC together will be the most effective way to achieve its objective of reunification without resorting to the use of force. On the other hand, because brinkmanship has largely been unsuccessful as the result of credible deterrence, the PRC may feel the time has come to escalate conflict passed the brink of war in order to finally achieve its goal of national reunification.

The independent variables significant to the de-escalation of war across the Taiwan Strait can be listed as such: credible nuclear deterrence, extended deterrence, multilateral cooperation and negotiation, US involvement and intervention, appeasement and concession, and economic relations.

Conclusion

The practice of brinkmanship across the Taiwan Strait is a concern to the international community as there is a worry that Xi will move towards using force to achieve the PRC's goal of reunification with Taiwan. It is clear that the diplomatic and military mechanisms used to de-escalate conflict from the brink of war vary between the Four Taiwan Strait Crises. The most risk-averse mechanisms are concession, or appeasement, and diplomatic cooperation and negotiation. Appeasement means that brinkmanship is abandoned because one side does not participate in a retaliatory or deterrent nature, but rather agrees to the terms of the executor. When the US agreed in 1958 to resume ambassadorial talks, the PRC no longer needed to continue its bombardment because its immediate objective was met. Though the US did deter the PRC from escalating the conflict by adopting a defensive military stance, the crisis was averted when the US agreed to resume bilateral talks. Regarding cooperation and negotiation as a de-escalatory mechanism, although talks can breakdown and parties can misunderstand or misinterpret one another, negotiation is a way that each side steps away from its frontiers and looks for solutions to end the conflict without military force. This was an effective way to de-escalate conflict in November and December 2023, as well as to help improve bilateral relations.

Nuclear deterrence and conventional military deterrence served to de-escalate conflict across the Taiwan Strait, however, these methods have the propensity to escalate brinkmanship to full-scale war because they are threatening to the security of the executor and could inflame the tension, eliciting a mild to violent retaliatory response to what has been perceived as a threat. Nuclear deterrence was used to force the PRC back from the brink during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis; it was effective because the PRC had no defensive capabilities to challenge a nuclear attack, causing them to concede out of fear of the destruction that the US's atomic weapons had already caused in Japan. Nuclear deterrence has a greater propensity to cause the escalation of conflict if both sides have nuclear capabilities. This is likely why nuclear deterrence has not been used since the First Crisis after which the PRC began developing its nuclear capabilities. For the US, the PRC's second-strike capability increases the risks it would incur from making use of nuclear weapons against the PRC.

Conventional military deterrence was effective against the PRC during the 20th century as its military capabilities were truly no match for that of the US. The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis is evidence that conventional military deterrence has effectively de-escalated conflict across the Taiwan Strait. It has only been used notably in a defensive manner by the ROC to reduce the frequency of military brinkmanship exercises conducted by the PRC during the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis. US deterrence against the PRC in defence of Taiwan in the 21st century is considerably riskier than it once was as the PRC's military and nuclear capabilities are more sophisticated than it was in the 1950s and 1990s thus there is a greater threat that conflict will be escalated to full-scale war by US deterrence and defence of Taiwan.

Overall, brinkmanship has been largely ineffective when used by the PRC to achieve its strategic objectives, particularly of decreasing US interference in the cross-Strait conflict and forcing the ROC to comply with the reunification of China and Taiwan under PRC rulership. President Xi has not grown any closer to achieving reunification than his predecessors; in fact, the Taiwanese identity and sentiment towards independence on the island have only increased as the two sides of the Taiwan Strait grow further apart. His assertion that the PRC is prepared to use force to realise its goal of reunification remains a concern to the international community, especially because he has attached a deadline for the One China goal. By analysing the events of the Four Crises of the Taiwan Strait, it is evident that a wide variety of mechanisms have been employed to de-escalate conflict because the leaders within the triad have had varying attitudes towards the interrelations of their states and towards the cross-Strait conflict itself.

This study has examined the most recent cross-Strait crisis, the events of which scholars have yet to consolidate into pieces of academic writing. As events unfold within the China-Taiwan conflict, it will be important to consider which mechanisms can be used to prevent a full-scale war over Taiwan by looking back at previous factors that caused conflict and how conflict was de-escalated across the Taiwan Strait.

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