

BATTLE FORCE 2025: A PLAN TO DEFEND TAIWAN WITHIN THE DECADE

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In early 2021, the former head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Phil Davidson, warned Congress that China could act against Taiwan within the next six years.¹ The chief of naval operations, Admiral Michael Gilday, and the commandant of the Marine Corps, General David Berger, agreed. Taiwanese Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng added to the sense of urgency when he stated that China will be capable of a “full-scale invasion” by 2025.² Professor Oriana Mastro, an expert on the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), warned, “Beijing is reconsidering its peaceful approach and contemplating armed unification.”³ Key to China’s changed calculus is General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping, who views cross-strait unification as the capstone of his legacy as a paramount Party leader on par with Mao.⁴

Despite these warnings, the Department of Defense (DoD) is not urgently preparing for a conflict over Taiwan. For a time, the Pentagon was starting to get it right, especially in its 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), which called for transforming American deterrence from a strategy of punishment to one of denial. Whereas a punishment strategy centers on responding to aggression through cost imposition after the fact, denial seeks to block aggression in real time, rendering the attacker’s military strategy inoperable.⁵

This approach is important because it counters what NDS author Elbridge A. Colby describes in a recent book as “Beijing’s best strategy” — an attempted *fait accompli* against Taiwan.⁶ As Colby noted, in a *fait accompli*, “the attacker uses brute force to seize part or all of its victim’s territory but tailors its use of force to convince the victim

1. Admiral Philip S. Davidson, “United States Indo-Pacific Command,” *Testimony Before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, March 9, 2021. (<https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/21-03-09-united-states-indo-pacific-command>)

2. “Taiwan says China will be capable of ‘full scale’ invasion by 2025,” *Reuters*, October 6, 2021. (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/china/taiwan-s-defense-minister-says-china-tensions-worst-40-years-n1280879>)

3. Oriana Skylar Mastro, “The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2021. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-03/china-taiwan-war-temptation>)

4. John Feng, “Xi Jinping Wants To Emulate Mao, Thinks U.S. Will Back Down on Taiwan: Ex-Australia PM,” *Newsweek*, February 16, 2021. (<https://www.newsweek.com/xi-jinping-wants-emulate-mao-thinks-u-s-will-back-down-taiwan-ex-australia-pm-1569546>)

5. Mike Gallagher, “State of (Deterrence by) Denial,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2019. (<https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Rep.-Gallagher-State-of-Deterrence-by-Denial.pdf>)

6. Elbridge A. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), page 146.

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and the victim's allies and partners that trying to reverse its gains would be some combination of unavailing, too costly and risky, and unnecessary.”⁷ With Taiwan, Beijing may calculate that if it seizes the island before the United States can effectively respond, any American president would begrudgingly accept the new reality rather than sacrifice hundreds of thousands of American lives to liberate Taiwan or use nuclear weapons.

Yet the Pentagon has not fully implemented the 2018 NDS and the balance of power continues to grow less favorable for America in the Indo-Pacific by the day. Consider the U.S. Navy, the priority service in DoD's priority theater. While Pentagon leaders have argued for years about the perfect plan for building a 355 ship Navy, the Chinese went out and built one.⁸ Or consider the Trump administration's final plan for naval modernization: Battle Force 2045.⁹ As the title indicates, the plan is based on the assumption that the Navy can afford to reach its optimal force structure in the mid-2040s, which does not make sense in light of Admiral Davidson's warning.

Compounding the problem, President Biden's first shipbuilding plan began to step away from the Navy's long-held goal of 355 ships. Early indications suggest that next year's budget will further shrink the size of the fleet.¹⁰ The Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan required the Navy to send the USS *Ronald Reagan*, its only forward-deployed carrier in Asia, from the Indo-Pacific to the Middle East. Subsequent “over the horizon” counterterrorism operations may require more Navy assets in that region. At a broader level, the Pentagon is shifting away from the 2018 NDS' call for deterrence by denial toward a new strategy of “integrated deterrence,” which posits that allies, unproven technology, and soft power will somehow substitute for hard power.¹¹

Barring urgent change, the United States will lose a war over Taiwan, either by sitting the conflict out or through defeat in combat. Yet it is not too late to change course. America can implement a strategy of deterrence by denial not by 2045 but by 2025. Rather than betting on Xi's restraint, a massive influx of new money from Congress, or technology that will not be ready for more than a decade, creativity and a sense of urgency can build a battle force that can deter, and if necessary win, a war over Taiwan that may come within the decade.

WHY DEFEND TAIWAN?

Many Americans may question why it is worth risking war with a nuclear-armed adversary to defend a small and distant nation. Political leaders in both parties need a good answer to this question. Otherwise, they will not enjoy public support for the investments necessary. The answer has at least three parts.

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7. Ibid., page 137.

8. Josh Rogin, “Trump promised a 350-ship Navy. China actually built it,” *The Washington Post*, September 2, 2020. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/09/02/trump-promised-350-ship-navy-china-actually-built-it>)

9. Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper, U.S. Department of Defense, “Secretary of Defense Remarks at CSBA on the NDS and Future Defense Modernization Priorities,” October 6, 2020. (<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2374866/secretary-of-defense-remarks-at-csba-on-the-nds-and-future-defense-modernizatio>)

10. Megan Eckstein, “Navy releases long-range shipbuilding plan that drops emphasis on 355 ships, lays out fleet design priorities,” *Defense News*, June 17, 2021. (<https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2021/06/17/navy-releases-long-range-shipbuilding-plan-that-drops-emphasis-on-355-ships-lays-out-fleet-design-priorities>)

11. Mike Gallagher, “The Pentagon's ‘deterrence’ strategy ignores hard-earned lessons about the balance of power,” *The Washington Post*, September 29, 2021. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/09/29/pentagons-deterrence-strategy-ignores-hard-earned-lessons-about-balance-power>); Thomas Spoehr, Bradley Bowman, Bryan Clark, and Mackenzie Eaglen, “What to Expect When You're Expecting a National Defense Strategy,” *War on the Rocks*, September 27, 2021. (<https://warontherocks.com/2021/09/what-to-expect-when-youre-expecting-a-national-defense-strategy>)

First, if it successfully takes Taiwan, the CCP will take all Americans economically hostage. Taiwan is the lynchpin of global semiconductor production. Semiconductors serve as the foundation of the digital economy, powering consumer devices, vehicles, and high-end military systems. Over the past three decades, as American semiconductor companies have shed capital-intensive production facilities known as fabs, Taiwanese companies such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) have filled the void, particularly with leading-edge designs. These fabs are incredibly expensive and difficult to replicate.¹² With more than 51 percent of the world’s annual 300 mm foundry capacity, Taiwan represents a single point of failure for advanced U.S. technology.¹³ Even worse, because China itself accounts for roughly 28 percent of 300 mm foundry capacity, if it were to conquer Taiwan, it would come to control nearly 80 percent of global semiconductor production.¹⁴ This would give the CCP extraordinary coercive power to withhold critical components to any company, military, or nation that dares criticize its ongoing genocide, its predatory economic practices, or its destruction of the environment.

Second, Las Vegas rules do not apply: Taiwan’s geography is such that what happens there will not stay there. Taiwan lies at the fulcrum of the first island chain, which runs southward from the Kuril Islands to the Japanese archipelago and through the Ryukyus, the Philippines, and Indonesia. This geography forms a critical defense perimeter that, in a time of war, could help prevent Chinese forces from breaking out and threatening Guam, Australia, and Hawaii. The first island chain is also home to two U.S. treaty allies. If Taiwan were to fall, America’s defense obligations to Japan and the Philippines would continue but their execution would become far more difficult. As one handbook for mid-career PLA officers argues, “As soon as Taiwan is reunified with mainland China, Japan’s maritime lines of communication will fall completely within the striking ranges of China’s fighters and bombers... Japan’s economic activity and war-making potential will basically be destroyed.”¹⁵ Failing to defend Taiwan puts America’s allies and even the American homeland in danger.

Finally, if America does not stand with its democratic friends when they are threatened by an authoritarian adversary, then America stands for nothing. Failing to defend an existing democracy from the world’s foremost authoritarian power would end America’s superpower status and suggest to other allies and partners that America will not be there when it is needed. That will result in a dramatic erosion in America’s alliances and security, emboldening both Beijing and Moscow. The worldwide gains in prosperity, freedom, and human rights enabled by U.S. leadership and strength would deteriorate. The CCP is pursuing a global strategy to replace the U.S.-led liberal order with one that favors CCP clients and authoritarian values.¹⁶ If the United States abandons Taiwan, a prosperous democracy of 24 million, the CCP would seize upon this failure to further undermine democracy worldwide while promoting the “inevitability” of its own model. Neighboring states would likely “Finlandize” toward China to avoid sharing Taiwan’s fate.

12. Rick Switzer, “U.S. National Security Implications of Microelectronics Supply Chain Concentrations in Taiwan, South Korea, and the People’s Republic of China,” as prepared for the U.S. Air Force, Office of Commercial and Economic Analysis, September 2019, page 4.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., page 10.

15. Tanner Greer, “Losing Taiwan Means Losing Japan,” *The Scholar’s Stage*, February 26, 2020. (<https://scholars-stage.org/losing-taiwan-means-losing-japan>)

16. Rush Doshi, “The long game: China’s grand strategy to displace American order,” *The Brookings Institution*, August 2, 2021. (<https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-long-game-chinas-grand-strategy-to-displace-american-order>)

A PLAN OF ACTION

Taiwan's defeat is not inevitable, but it is where America's current complacency leads. The following pages provide a plan for avoiding that fate. It offers a way to deter and if necessary defeat an invasion of Taiwan in the near-term without disrupting America's long-term defense investments, and without depending on technological or budgetary miracles. Armed with a sense of urgency, America can defend Taiwan and in the process save the free world. Here are 10 steps to build Battle Force 2025.¹⁷

1. GARRISON U.S. PACIFIC TERRITORIES AND POSSESSIONS

The Pacific is home to Alaska's Aleutian Islands, the U.S. territories of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa, along with eight U.S. possessions: Baker Island, Howland Island, Jarvis Island, Johnston Atoll, Kingman Reef, Midway Atoll, Palmyra Atoll, and Wake Island.¹⁸ Many of these islands contributed to America's defense during World War II, and they can do so again. The Pentagon should immediately review how best to use this dry ground, and should undertake the required environmental remediation and military construction to restore an American military presence in these islands.

If an operationally useful piece of land in the Pacific is under the American flag, the Pentagon should invest now in the infrastructure needed to host expeditionary airfields; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets; logistics nodes; and/or small teams of Marines equipped with ground-based missiles. As available missile technology improves, some of these islands may play a role in providing firepower that stretches to the first island chain. Even before then, these islands would make critical contributions targeting Chinese forces that venture east into the Central Pacific.

A war that starts in the territorial waters around Taiwan may not stay there. Restoring an American military presence across the Pacific is critical to creating a defense in depth, with numerous islands hosting American forces and missiles covering a wide radius. This enhanced posture would allow American forces to dominate east of the first island chain, keep critical routes open, and ensure the defense of American citizens in Guam and Hawaii.

2. BUILD SURVIVABILITY INTO EXISTING PACIFIC BASES

For years, Indo-Pacific Command's top request to Congress has been to fund a 360-degree, persistent air and missile defense capability on Guam, known as the Guam Defense System.¹⁹ As Admiral Davidson warned in his outgoing written testimony to Congress, Guam is "not only a location we must fight-from, but one we must

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17. Megan Eckstein, "Interview: Elaine Luria Says Navy Needs to Build 'Battle Force 2025' Instead of Divesting to Prepare for a 2045 Fight," *USNI News*, May 5, 2021. (<https://news.usni.org/2021/05/05/interview-elaine-luria-says-navy-needs-to-build-battle-force-2025-instead-of-divesting-to-prepare-for-a-2045-fight>)

18. U.S. Department of the Interior, United States Geological Survey, "How are U.S. states, territories, and commonwealths designated in the Geographic Names Information System?" accessed January 21, 2022. (https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/how-are-us-states-territories-and-commonwealths-designated-geographic-names-information-system?qt-news_science_products=0#qt-news_science_products)

19. Admiral Philip S. Davidson, "United States Indo-Pacific Command," *Testimony Before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, March 9, 2021. (https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_03-09-21.pdf); Mark Montgomery and Bradley Bowman, "Listen to America's Top Commander in the Indo-Pacific and Fund the Pacific Deterrence Initiative," *War on the Rocks*, March 31, 2021. (<https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/listen-to-americas-top-commander-in-the-indo-pacific-and-fund-the-pacific-deterrence-initiative>); Bradley Bowman and Mark Montgomery, "Fully Fund the Guam Defense System," *War on the Rocks*, July 29, 2021. (<https://warontherocks.com/2021/07/fully-fund-the-guam-defense-system>)

also fight-for.”²⁰ Defending Guam is imperative. It has a deep-water port, munition and fuel stores, and a critical airfield, and is home to 170,000 U.S. citizens.²¹ Hardening Guam against missile strikes should include expanded runway repair and air control capabilities, reinforced critical facilities like ammunition storage sites and command and control nodes, and security systems to prevent infiltration.

The Pentagon should also expand defenses on joint bases with allies. This includes enhancing the military infrastructure on Diego Garcia, a British territory in the Indian Ocean. While Diego Garcia has played a key role in supporting counterterrorism operations, its strategic location makes it uniquely suited for supporting allied operations in the Indo-Pacific and preventing PLA forces, particularly submarines, from harassing commercial shipping or disrupting sea lines of communication in the region. The Pentagon should work with the UK to jointly invest in the defense of Diego Garcia, including base hardening, runway repair, and integrated air and missile defense capabilities that would better support its use as an operational hub in the event of war. It should do the same with the Royal Australian Air Force at Base Darwin and Base Tindal, with the additional task of stockpiling munitions in Darwin to service American ships in the region.

The United States must also expand air defense capabilities in Japan. As retired naval officer Thomas Shugart has chronicled, the current missile defense architecture in Japan is largely designed to defend Japanese cities against modest numbers of North Korean missiles — not Japanese bases and ports that host U.S. forces from Chinese salvos.²² In light of recent statements by Japanese leaders that Japan would join the defense of Taiwan from Chinese aggression, America should prioritize expanded air defense capabilities in Japan. One way to start would be to perform combat system upgrades on the USS *Shiloh*, the USS *Vella Gulf*, and the USS *Monterey* — all ballistic missile defense-capable cruisers scheduled for retirement in fiscal year 2022. Given the costs of full modernization, a more economical option might be limited upgrades that allow the ships to perform their air defense mission while remaining in port.

3. DISPERSE LONG-RANGE MISSILES

The Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty created an opportunity to counter the PLA Rocket Force’s growing anti-access, area-denial capabilities. Conventional ground-launched missiles allow American forces to target their Chinese counterparts more economically than expensive naval or air platforms. More missiles mean increased targeting capacity for the United States while complicating targeting for the PLA. One promising concept is what defense expert Thomas Karako has called “containerized launchers,” which camouflage missiles in cargo containers for easy dispersion, concealment, and decoy purposes.²³ The United States and its allies should develop this capability to disperse both loaded and

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20. Admiral Philip S. Davidson, “United States Indo-Pacific Command,” *Testimony Before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, March 9, 2021. (https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_03-09-21.pdf)

21. Joe Gould, “Guam is a target today,’ Pacific chief pitches Aegis Ashore to Congress,” *Defense News*, March 9, 2021. (<https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2021/03/09/guam-is-a-target-today-pacific-chief-pitches-aegis-ashore-to-congress>)

22. Thomas Shugart and Javier Gonzalez, “First Strike: China’s Missile Threat to U.S. Bases in Asia,” *Center for a New American Security*, June 2017. (<https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/CNASReport-FirstStrike-Final.pdf?mtime=20170626140814&focal=none>)

23. Thomas Karako and Wes Rumbaugh, “Distributed Defense: New Operational Concepts for Integrated Air and Missile Defense,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, January 2018. (<http://missilethreat.csis.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Distributed-Defense.pdf>)

decoy launchers throughout the Indo-Pacific. Before or during a conflict, these containers can be moved to create operational unpredictability and exacerbate the associated challenges for PLA planners.

In addition to its Pacific territories and possessions, the United States should immediately negotiate with the Compacts of Free Association states (the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau) to host U.S. forces and missiles. In the face of attempted CCP coercion, President Surangel Whipps of Palau has called for the establishment of a U.S. base and expressed an openness to hosting ground-based missiles. Deployment of U.S. forces and missiles in and around Palau would deny the PLA Navy (PLAN) uncontested maneuver southeast of Taiwan. Coupled with deployments to remote Japanese islands east of Taiwan, including Iwo Jima (which hosts a major airfield), the United States and its allies can project power closer to Taiwan while boxing in the PLAN.

The Holy Grail for dispersed, hard-to-target ground-based projectiles in the Indo-Pacific is the Philippines. With more than 7,000 islands and dense jungles, the Philippines is a perfect location to conceal and disperse long-range missiles within range of contested waters around Taiwan. The administration of President Rodrigo Duterte seems unlikely to embrace the idea of American long-range missiles on Philippine territory, but the Pentagon was recently able to extend America's Visiting Forces Agreement with Duterte. Expanding access agreements, including at Subic Bay, with Duterte's successor should top the DoD and State Department Indo-Pacific priority list. The United States is treaty-bound to defend the sovereignty of the Philippines, and therefore can make a persuasive case that ground-based missiles give the Philippines the most defense at the least cost.

To augment U.S. missiles based in the Philippines, Washington could look to sell new U.S. ground-based missiles to the armed forces of the Philippines, accompanying the sale with a robust foreign military sale training package. The result could help mitigate any political sensitivities associated with hosting American missiles.

4. MAKE THE MOST OF EXISTING SYSTEMS

If war erupts within the decade, America will fight with the military it has today, not the one defense planners and technologists plan to field in the future. Victory and defeat will hinge on fielded capabilities. There are two clear implications of this reality. First, the United States cannot afford to retire or cut critical conventional assets in favor of promised and unproven future assets. This year, the Navy proposed cutting 15 ships, including seven cruisers, while buying only eight. The cruisers alone contain more striking power (measured in aggregate number of missile tubes) than all the surface combatants of the U.K. Royal Navy combined. Many of the cruisers can still contribute to the fight as carrier strike group air defense assets. With reasonable investments, the most modernized Baseline 9 cruisers could also serve as stationary air defense assets in Japan or Guam. The United States can augment these ships with Mark 41 vertical launch system cells, which it can position independently ashore or on moored platforms to add air defense capacity.

Second, the Pentagon should expand existing programs of record that would be critical in a fight with China. In particular, this means expanding shipbuilding programs such as the new Constellation-class frigate, Flight 3 Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, and Virginia-class submarine with Virginia Payload Module. Even if ships bought today may not come online before a Taiwan war begins, expanded production will either replace battlefield losses after the war is over or, in the event of a protracted conflict, provide desperately needed reinforcements.

Near-term procurement should focus on existing platforms, or modifications to existing platforms, that contribute to long-range fires, sensor, or ISR capabilities. If a platform flies or floats, it should fight. A good example is the P-8

Poseidon anti-submarine aircraft, which the Navy plans to stop buying well short of its warfighting requirement of 138 planes.²⁴ With modest adjustments, the P-8 could serve as an affordable airframe to deliver a wide array of anti-surface ordnance, including anti-ship missiles such as LRASM.²⁵ While its relatively large radar cross-section makes it less survivable in high-threat areas, it can fight from afar with standoff missiles while patrolling the periphery of the theater. The Air Force’s “Rapid Dragon” program, focused on enabling C-17s and EC-130s to employ long-range cruise missiles, could also provide additional strike capacity.²⁶

To expand America’s constellation of sensing and ISR assets in the Indo-Pacific, DoD can place existing deployable, bottom-mounted passive sonar systems like the Transformational Reliable Acoustic Path System along critical passageways such as the Luzon Strait. The Navy should also purchase “bolt-on” Surveillance Towed Array Sensor System (SURTASS) kits to place on leased commercial vessels that the Navy could deploy to the South China Sea. Another way to add sensing capacity would be to buy anti-submarine warfare equipped MQ-9Bs, which could deploy and monitor sonobuoy fields while freeing up flight time for P-8s to focus on weapons deployment.²⁷ The United States can also complicate PLA anti-submarine warfare efforts by overtly deploying unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV)-based submarine decoys, including the Navy’s Expendable Mobile Anti-Submarine Warfare Training Target drone or emitters installed in larger, longer endurance UUVs.²⁸ Furthermore, UUVs can sweep and clear PLA sensors from contested waters to facilitate allied submarine operations.

To defeat Chinese aggression in the Pacific, the U.S. joint force must also possess cutting-edge airborne early warning and control capabilities. That means the Air Force should prioritize the rapid fielding of the E-7A Wedgetail to replace the rapidly aging and outdated E-3 Sentry.²⁹ The United States could also use the Navy’s E-2D Advanced Hawkeye, a similarly high-end air battle management system, to mitigate any dangerous capability gaps in the Pacific during the transition.³⁰

5. MASTER CONTESTED LOGISTICS

In any Taiwan scenario, it will be difficult for DoD to keep forward forces maneuverable, supplied, and connected while under fire. Here, the Marine Corps is making the most progress. Under its Expeditionary Advanced Basing Operations (EABO) concept, newly formed Marine Littoral Regiments (MLRs) operating within the first and

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24. Justin Katz, “Navy to stop buying P-8s 18 short of requirement to ‘free up time, money,’” *Inside Defense*, April 21, 2020. (<https://insidedefense.com/insider/navy-stop-buying-p-8s-18-short-requirement-free-time-money>)

25. Tyler Rogoway, “The Case For Stripping The P-8 Poseidon Down Into An RB-8 Multi-Role Arsenal Ship,” *The Drive*, July 22, 2021. (<https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/40859/the-case-for-stripping-the-p-8-poseidon-down-into-an-rb-8-multi-role-arsenal-ship>)

26. Mike Glenn, “Air Force hopes to boost arsenal with retrofitted ‘Dragons,’” *The Washington Times*, October 3, 2021. (<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/3/air-force-hopes-boost-arsenal-retrofitted-dragons>)

27. “GA-ASI Completes Unmanned Aircraft Anti-Submarine Warfare Demonstration of Sonobuoy Dispensing and Remote Processing,” *General Atomics Aeronautical*, January 19, 2021. (<https://www.ga-asi.com/ga-asi-completes-unmanned-aircraft-anti-submarine-warfare-demonstration-of-sonobuoy-dispensing-and-remote-processing>)

28. John Keller, “GA-ASI Completes Unmanned Aircraft Anti-Submarine Warfare Demonstration of Sonobuoy Dispensing and Remote Processing,” *Military & Aerospace Electronics*, April 15, 2016. (<https://www.militaryaerospace.com/computers/article/16715006/navy-orders-underwater-drones-that-can-mimic-the-behavior-of-quiet-enemy-diesel-submarines>)

29. Bradley Bowman, Lauren Harrison, and Ryan Brobst, “Between E-3 And Eyes In Space, The Air Force Needs A Bridge, Now,” *Breaking Defense*, October 5, 2021. (<https://breakingdefense.com/2021/10/between-e-3-and-eyes-in-space-the-air-force-needs-a-bridge-now>); Bradley Bowman and Mark Montgomery, “Time To Wedge The E-7A Wedgetail Into The US Air Force Fleet,” *Breaking Defense*, October 25, 2021. (<https://breakingdefense.com/2021/10/time-to-wedge-the-e-7a-wedgetail-into-the-us-air-force-fleet>)

30. Bradley Bowman and Mark Montgomery, “If The Air Force Buys The E-7A Wedgetail, What’s Next?” *Breaking Defense*, October 26, 2021. (<https://breakingdefense.com/2021/10/if-the-air-force-buys-the-e-7a-wedgetail-whats-next>)

second island chains would support naval maneuver and disrupt PLAN operations with an agile, dispersed, and amphibious force armed with ground-based anti-ship missiles. Getting Marines to these locations and keeping them supplied is difficult, but the Marine Corps is currently developing a Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) designed to facilitate this concept of operations.

The current LAW procurement schedule, however, does not support the Corps' mid-2020s MLR deployment schedule. Without the ground-based fires that MLRs can bring to the fight, it is hard to imagine how the United States can win a war over Taiwan. The Corps must find alternatives to facilitate EABO until the LAW is ready, including looking at the U.S. Army Transportation Command's LCU-2000 Runnymede-class, the General Frank S. Besson-class logistic support vessels, maritime prepositioning force vessels, Coast Guard vessels, airborne insertion, and available commercial options.

The United States also needs to ensure that forward forces can see, target, and shoot while the PLA is attempting to block access to communications and satellite links. If forces in the first island chain cannot see, communicate with, or receive resupply from the rest of the Joint Force, they will be unable to fight. Cyber and electronic warfare hardening should be built into all units — especially those operating forward. The United States should train these units to operate without GPS support. America needs resilient networks and a simple plan for communicating, maneuvering, and targeting when networks go down, or when Chinese forces target spaced-based assets.

6. BUILD MUNITION SURGE CAPACITY

During the 2011 NATO campaign in Libya, European militaries ran low on precision-guided munitions (PGMs) due to a combination of high rates of fire and inadequate PGM stockpiles. This should serve as a warning for American military planners. The Congressional Research Service raised exactly this point, noting that sufficient quantities of PGMs are necessary “for meeting increased demands for such weapons during an extended-duration, high-intensity conflict.”³¹

The United States will need to plan ahead to avoid bottlenecks in munitions production. On any given missile system, roughly 30 percent of the material requires extended lead times beyond a year. Defense Production Act authorities may help DoD shorten this timeline. But a simple approach to surging the availability of munitions material is to place advanced orders on long-lead items and put them into storage. DoD could start by purchasing two extra sets of long-lead components for every set of missiles it orders. This would yield DoD two years' worth of inventory of long-lead material within one year of deciding to access its surge stockpile. The Navy and Air Force should prioritize the ship-killing LRASM for this treatment.

Even with more materials, persistently small orders have made the munitions supply chain brittle. DoD should require industry to model maximum production rates to see where supply chain failures may occur. Similarly, DoD should use Defense Production Act funds to help industry build surge capacity. These additional assembly lines may sit dormant during peacetime but could make a difference in a protracted war. Congress should also draft emergency authorities that allow industry to bypass processes that could delay fielding munitions needed for a conflict over Taiwan.

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31. John Hoehn, “Precision-Guided Munitions: Background and Issues for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service*, June 11, 2021. (<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/weapons/R45996.pdf>)

7. PREPARE TAIWAN FOR A PROTRACTED SIEGE

The only short war for Taiwan would be a quick Chinese victory. Consequently, American defense planners must prepare both Taiwanese and American forces for a long war. For close to two decades, American national security leaders have been advising their Taiwanese counterparts to focus on acquiring low-cost “asymmetric” capabilities rather than prestigious but costly platforms such as submarines, tanks, and fighter jets.³² Given Taiwan’s limited defense budget, it needs large numbers of affordable capabilities such as anti-ship cruise missiles and mines that maximize its natural defensive advantage in a cross-strait conflict.³³

Even with smarter purchases, though, Taiwan’s overall defense budget does not reflect the danger it faces. While a recent defense supplemental would add nearly \$9 billion over the next five years, at only \$15 billion in 2022, Taiwan’s defense budget is still inadequate.³⁴ The United States can help by providing Taiwan with security assistance modeled on the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, offering up to \$3 billion a year to bolster Taiwan’s acquisition of U.S.-made asymmetric capabilities. However, Washington should extend this offer only so long as Taiwan demonstrates that it is carrying its share of the defense burden by increasing its spending to at least 2.5 percent of its GDP on defense.³⁵

With more resources, there is plenty Taiwan can do. This starts with enhancing the capabilities of its military in general, and its dilapidated reserve forces in particular. It includes focusing on medium- and long-range anti-ship and anti-air missile platforms and munitions. Recent arms sales have trended in this direction, but Taiwan needs to buy more, and Washington should look for ways to expedite delivery of weapons already in the pipeline.³⁶ Mine warfare, often overlooked, should be at the top of Taiwan’s defense strategy. Given signs that the PLAN could employ mines to blockade the island, Taiwan needs to be able to counter this prospective effort by employing an array of smart mines to slow and attrit the PLA amphibious invasion force.

Additionally, Taiwan must integrate its forces and systems with its allies. The United States can help by expanding National Guard partnerships with Taiwan and rotating battalion or brigade-sized units to the islands to train, integrate, and enhance defenses, as the National Guard does with other partner nations. Critically, this partnership needs to extend beyond the military domain, including through the development of a plan to ensure the people of Taiwan have the food and water they will need in the event of a protracted blockade.

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32. William S. Murray, Revisiting Taiwan’s Defense Strategy, *Naval War College Review*, Volume 61, Number 3, Article 3, Summer 2008. (<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1814&context=nwc-review>)

33. Josh Chin and Chao Deng, “China Would Be Able to Launch Attack on Taiwan by 2025, Island’s Defense Minister Warns,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2021. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-would-be-able-to-launch-attack-on-taiwan-by-2025-islands-defense-minister-warns-11633525206>)

34. Joyu Wang, “Taiwan Plans to Bulk Up Military Budget to Contend With Chinese Pressure,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 2021. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwan-plans-to-bulk-up-military-budget-to-contend-with-chinese-pressure-11631787522>)

35. Bradley Bowman and Mark Montgomery, “Standing With the Free People of Taiwan,” *Defending Forward: Securing America by Projecting Military Power Abroad* (Washington, DC: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2020). (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/12/15/defending-forward-standing-with-the-free-people-of-taiwan>)

36. “Timeline: U.S. arms sales to Taiwan in 2020 total \$5 billion amid China tension,” *Reuters*, December 7, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-security-usa-timeline/timeline-u-s-arms-sales-to-taiwan-in-2020-total-5-billion-amid-china-tensions-idUSKBN28I0BF>)

8. ESTABLISH UNITY OF PURPOSE ACROSS THE INTERAGENCY

Despite the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, the Obama administration in 2014 had no plan in place to respond financially to Russian aggression. Consequently, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the U.S. government was forced to improvise a sanctions regime against Russia over the course of 48 hours.³⁷ Had the administration worked with Congress to prepare sanctions prior to the invasion, the United States not only could have activated them in real time, but also could have used them to deter aggression in the first place.

Learning from the Ukrainian example, the president should prompt the interagency to formulate an economic warfare strategy designed to cripple the Chinese economy in the event of war over Taiwan. This starts with bringing the Treasury Department, the Commerce Department, the U.S. Trade Representative, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation into DoD's Taiwan wargames and contingency planning, so that these non-military entities understand the role they should be prepared to play. The Pentagon has been asking for greater contingency planning from non-military federal departments and agencies for almost a decade. No administration has taken this request seriously. This must change.

The United States must also coordinate with allies and partners, particularly in Europe, to ensure that they would join economic actions against the People's Republic of China should it invade Taiwan. In short, effective sanctions require extensive legwork, and Washington should not wait for a crisis in the Taiwan Strait to begin that work.

The U.S. government has no shortage of economic tools it can leverage. Pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, the president could impose secondary financial sanctions on Chinese state-owned financial institutions and the Chinese energy sector. In the event of war, the United States should force the SWIFT international payment system and the European Union's Target2 euro-clearing system to disconnect Chinese banks. Congress too can mandate secondary sanctions during a Taiwan scenario. Since the U.S. dollar makes up 75-85 percent of all global foreign exchange transactions, these sanctions would inhibit PRC companies from purchasing components and raw materials from overseas markets. The sanctions would also prevent the companies from accepting payment for sales made overseas.

9. HARDEN TARGETS IN THE UNITED STATES

The key PLA missiles, aircraft, air defenses, and amphibious forces (to include China's growing fleet of civilian "RO-RO" ferries that Beijing modified to launch amphibious assault craft) that would be involved in a Taiwan scenario are based along the Chinese coast. Thus, an American defense of Taiwan would require strikes on Chinese territory. Consequently, America must prepare for Chinese retaliation against the homeland below the nuclear threshold. While much of the analysis of the recent Chinese hypersonic missile test has focused on potential nuclear use, a more likely scenario may be a conventional precision strike weapon against critical military and industrial targets in the continental United States.³⁸

For example, if the Chinese were able to destroy munitions plants (some of which are single points of failure for entire production lines) or other key defense industrial sites, the United States may find itself incapable of sustaining

37. Edward Fishman, "Even Smarter Sanctions: How to Fight in the Era of Economic Warfare," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2017. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2017-10-16/even-smarter-sanctions>)

38. Natasha Bertrand, "China's latest missile test raises the stakes for Biden's nuclear weapons review," *CNN*, November 3, 2021. (<https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/22/politics/china-hypersonic-missile-joe-biden-nuclear-policy/index.html>)

a protracted conventional war and forcing an unwinnable choice between nuclear escalation or surrender. In a long war of attrition, the United States must be prepared for a whole-of-society conflict, including the potential hostile use of biological weapons, and information warfare that targets domestic politics and command and control. The White House must ensure that emergency and security services have the capacity to respond to these unconventional forms of attack.

Perhaps the most vulnerable domestic target would be critical infrastructure. While the possibility of physical sabotage — such as targeting undersea cables that allow Indo-Pacific command to communicate — is a threat, the most likely form of attack is from the cyber domain. The CCP can employ cyber effects to paralyze critical sectors such as power and water in an attempt to weaken America’s will to fight. The United States should build on the Cyberspace Solarium Commission’s work to enhance domestic cyber resilience, including by codifying the concept of Systemically Important Critical Infrastructure so that entities responsible for the nation’s critical systems both benefit from federal assistance and shoulder additional security and information-sharing requirements.

The United States should also build on steps Congress took to codify sector risk management agencies to identify, assess, and manage risk across critical infrastructure sectors by codifying a national risk management cycle. Finally, the United States should take a page out of Cold War Continuity of Government planning by implementing a Continuity of the Economy plan to restore critical functions across American society in the event of a catastrophic disruption.

10. END STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

When asked in October 2021 if America would defend Taiwan, President Biden appeared to resolve decades of “strategic ambiguity” by replying bluntly, “Yes, we have a commitment.”³⁹ Administration officials subsequently walked back this statement, but the president’s comments reflect the fact that strategic ambiguity no longer serves American interests. In the past, American policy makers could delude themselves that strategic ambiguity played a role in dissuading Taiwan from taking unilateral action to disrupt to the status quo. Today, there is only one side that is poised to take unilateral action in the Taiwan Strait, and that is China.

Strategic silence only creates room for uncertainty regarding the strength of U.S. commitments. While an unambiguous American commitment to defend Taiwan may prove insufficient to deter a PLA invasion, it would at least minimize the possibility of war through miscalculation. Congress can take the lead on this front by passing the Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act not only to end strategic ambiguity but also to issue a standing Authorization for the Use of Force to defend Taiwan in the event of an invasion.

An explicit American defense commitment to Taiwan opens the door to greater military cooperation. The Pentagon should build on recent reported efforts by Special Operations Forces and Marines to train Taiwanese forces. U.S. restrictions on training Taiwanese forces are entirely self-imposed and are an outdated relic of past decades in which China’s military was less capable and aggressive. The Pentagon should regularly send senior military leaders to Taiwan to assess relevant wartime terrain with their own eyes.

39. Patsy Widakuswara, “Strategic Ambiguity’ on Taiwan Apparent as White House Walks Back Biden Comments,” *Voice of America*, October 23, 2021. (<https://www.voanews.com/a/strategic-ambiguity-on-taiwan-apparent-as-white-house-walks-back-biden-comments-teaser-after-the-president-says-the-us-is-committed-to-defending-the-island-beijing-warns-the-us-against-encouraging-taiwan-independence-/6282502.html>)

Most importantly, the Pentagon should build the operational planning structures it will need ahead of time. This includes re-establishing Joint Task Force 519 under Indo-Pacific Command to run contingency planning in the region. At the same time, the Pentagon should also re-establish the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Command, which integrated wartime planning from the mid-1950s through U.S. recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1979. A re-established JTF 519 and joint defense command, with invitations to allies like Japan and Australia to join both, would greatly expand military interoperability and coordination while allowing coalition forces to fight far more effectively side by side.

CONCLUSION

While the United States has suffered ignominious defeats in Vietnam and now Afghanistan, the American military has historically won when the stakes have been highest. But past performance in great power conflict is a poor predictor of future success. If the United States can lose small wars, it can lose big wars, too. Unless U.S. policy changes, America is on track to lose World War III, either through a failure to compete or through defeat on the battlefield. The United States may hope the day never comes, but the more it fails to prepare, the more it will be prepared to fail.

America has the capacity to choose, resource, and implement a strategy of deterrence by denial vis-à-vis a PLA fait accompli against Taiwan. America can do it by building Battle Force 2025, which draws upon its inherent strengths. It has the territory and the allies to support a dispersed posture. It has the weapons and warriors to deny the adversary's attempted conquest. It has the economic power to impose costs and counter CCP coercion. What America needs now is a sense of urgency, prioritization, and purpose.

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